

BOOK THREE

EVIDENTIALISM IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

SUMMARY OF BOOK THREE

Evidentialist apologetics is a system stressing the evidential value of facts observed in nature and history. Substantial probability, not the certitude of faith, is the level of proof expected as the result of this method. Colin Chapman distinguishes four verifiable ways in which God has revealed truth: the universe, the nature of man, the Bible, and the person of Christ.

Use of natural theology and the critique of nontheistic world views play some role in evidentialist apologetics, but the main emphasis is on history as a divinely ordered process that can be known objectively. When allowed to tell its story, without the artificial constraints of historico-critical theory, history endorses the claims of Christianity. Critical theories of the biblical record are exceptionable because they are based on the prior, speculative assumption of the untruth of the record. The resurrection of Jesus is a leading case of this kind, and several theories that discount the actuality of the resurrection have been effectively rebutted by evidentialists. The principles of the reliability and inspiration of the Bible have been treated in extensive studies dealing minutely with the issues of this problem. Appeals to the phenomena of Israel's historical perseverance as a present miracle, and to other fulfilled prophecies, are effectively used by evidentialists. Scientific endeavor is encouraged by evidentialists, but the metaphysical conclusions and world views of much secular science are rejected as unwarranted by facts.

John H. Gerstner, Clark H. Pinnock, and Josh McDowell are contemporary evidentialists. However, John Warwick Montgomery's evidentialism warrants special consideration. Philosophy, says Montgomery, makes only a negative contribution to apologetics by exposing the problems of trying to reach absolutes by analyzing the human situation. Some theistic proofs have value as inductive rather than deductive arguments. Christianity is a historically fulfilled world view whose truth claims are subject to empirical evaluation; historical events carry their interpretation with them. Sin has not destroyed man's ability to rationally evaluate the truth of the gospel. Any limited impediment to faith, however, is overcome by grace. Without special revelation, any number of world views may be surmised, but general revelation is a compelling reality to which Montgomery appeals. Certainty, based on empirical evidence, is high probability; but certitude is the absolute persuasion of the Holy Spirit. The laws of logic and science are not affected by metaphysics; these commonly observed laws provide an apologetic point of contact. Faith is a matter of will and intellect, not of the emotions. Evidences of the truth of Christianity can be perceived at face value, regardless of philosophical position, as long as there is openness to the conclusions of the evidence. The same reasoning that validates ordinary experience will also lead to Christian faith.

CHAPTER 1

THE EVIDENTIALIST DEFENSE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

This study defines evidentialist apologetics as a Christian apologetic system which stresses the evidential value of facts derived from an empirical approach to knowledge, including historiography and the scientific method, for the establishment of a substantial probability for the truth of Christianity. The basic issues in this apologetic system will be discussed under the two major headings of Christian empiricism and biblical defense.

Evidentialism in Christian apologetics is dependent to a large degree upon an empirically oriented epistemology as it seeks to demonstrate the truth of the Christian world view by reason of its factuality. Ramm in his Protestant Christian Evidences classifies the scope of Christian evidences under the three categories of material fact (historical events, documents, archaeological artifacts), supernatural fact (events or phenomena which can only be explained by "invoking the category of the supernatural"), and experiential fact (individual and social phenomena).¹ This empirical approach makes use of a wide variety of concrete evidences, although some, like the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ, are more extensively developed and emphasized. Some critics regard this kind of cumulative approach to argumentation as a series of

¹Bernard Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), pp. 16-32.

leaky buckets, but evidentialists prefer to use the analogy of a rope as does Irwin H. Linton in A Lawyer Examines the Bible: "It is a commonplace that while one thread of a three stranded rope may possibly be broken, the three strands twisted together and each multiplying the strength of the others may produce a tensile strength beyond the power to overcome."²

Theology as an Empirical Science

In 1925, Douglas Clyde Macintosh wrote in The Reasonableness of Christianity that "the arguments upon which the older apologists placed chief reliance have lost for the modern mind their convincing power."³ He proposed instead that the reasonableness of the Christian faith can be tested as one would test a working hypothesis.⁴ In a similar vein, Alan Richardson in his Christian Apologetics regarded theology as "an investigation at the level of empirical science of the facts involved in the existence of the believing, worshipping and witnessing Christian community."⁵ Richardson maintained that theology can be reckoned as an empirical science because it "makes use of its own categories of

²Irwin H. Linton, A Lawyer Examines the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1943), p. 195.

³Douglas Clyde Macintosh, The Reasonableness of Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 2.

⁴Ibid., p. 18.

⁵Alan Richardson, Christian Apologetics (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1947), p.55.

scientific classification and interpretation," and because there has been a shift since the nineteenth century to a more inductive method in theology.⁶

Ian Ramsey also anchored Christian theology in empiricism. In his Christian Empiricism, Ramsey developed the systematic elusiveness of the concept of "I" and used the subjectivity of the "I" as a paradigm of the theological mystery of God's hiddenness and yet openness to comprehension.⁷ He developed a model to articulate the cosmic disclosure in the phenomenon of subjective transcendence so that he could combine description (empirically relevant discourse) with disclosure (significance and mystery).⁸ Like Richardson, Ramsey drew a number of parallels between science and theological method, noting that science involves intuition and disclosure and that large-scale scientific hypotheses demand metaphysics. Jerry H. Gill in The Possibility of Religious Knowledge also contended that the logic of "I" is the most helpful parallel for understanding the logic of "God."⁹ Concerning the relationship between the two, Gill wrote:

Knowing God, like knowing oneself, is an awareness-activity which can never be made fully explicit. Thus God-talk and I-talk exist on the

⁶Ibid., pp. 55-58.

⁷Ian Ramsey, Christian Empiricism (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 1-75.

⁸Ibid., pp. 76-96.

⁹Jerry H. Gill, The Possibility of Religious Knowledge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 210.

threshold between tacit and explicit knowledge. Although one must seek to be as articulate as possible about such knowledge (mysticism to the contrary notwithstanding), its most basic aspects can never be made explicit (positivism to the contrary notwithstanding). . . . The religious person is convinced that the language-game known as "theism" provides the best overall conceptual map.¹⁰

The Empirical Approach to the Philosophy of Religion

Although evidentialists usually focus on specific and concrete facts, they have not avoided the issues related to the philosophy of religion. Floyd E. Hamilton's The Basis of Christian Faith¹¹ exemplifies the type of broad apologetic approach that begins with theistic proofs and a critique of competing world views as prologomena to the treatment of Christian evidences. A number of evidentialists have also been influenced by Edgar Sheffield Brightman's A Philosophy of Religion,¹² a highly empirical examination of the phenomena of religious experience.

Empirical Verification

In Christianity on Trial, Colin Chapman distinguishes four ways in which God has revealed truth to humanity: through the universe, the nature of man (especially as a moral being), the Bible, and the person of Christ. As an evidentialist, Chapman stresses that these forms of revealed truth are open to

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 222-23.

¹¹Floyd E. Hamilton, The Basis of Christian Faith (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927).

verification. This includes scientific, historical, and philosophical verification as well as verification in personal relationships.¹³ Just as the scientist begins with certain presuppositions, considers the available evidence, and attempts to find the theory which best accounts for what he observes, in the same way the Christian apologist begins with presuppositions, examines the relevant evidence, and tries to find the theory that best fits the facts. Just as the historian asks questions about events, interprets events, is influenced by his presuppositions, and does not arrive at complete certainty, in the same way the Christian deals with the events in the Bible which he recognizes are not immune from historical inquiry. Chapman also develops the parallels between verification in philosophy and personal relationships and Christianity's openness to verification and falsification. These forms of verification provide a probable, not a certain knowledge, but evidentialists hold that the step of personal commitment to Christ is nevertheless a step into the light, not into the dark.

Evidentialists also support their apologetic methodology by appealing to biblical examples.¹⁴ But most admit that "no matter how sound the evidence and clear the Scriptural exposition, a person who is unwilling to believe cannot

¹²Edgar Sheffield Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940).

¹³Colin Chapman, Christianity on Trial (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1975), pp. 23-36.

¹⁴Henry M. Morris, Many Infallible Proofs (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1974), pp. 1-7.

be argued into believing. . . . No matter how strong and irrefutable the evidence, it is always possible for the skeptic to find some new reason for not believing."¹⁵

Natural Theology

Evidentialists have always looked favorably upon natural theology as an apologetic tool. The inductive approach of eighteenth-century apologists like William Paley (Natural Theology)¹⁶ and Joseph Butler (The Analogy of Religion)¹⁷ to theistic argumentation exerted a lasting influence.¹⁸ Wilbur M. Smith, for example, developed a scientific apologetic for Christianity from the creation of the world in his Therefore Stand,¹⁹ and J. Oliver Buswell Jr. in his Systematic Theology approved the "inductive probability reasonings" in

¹⁵Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁶William Paley, Natural Theology (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., n.d.).

¹⁷Joseph Butler, The Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature, 23rd ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1900 [1736]).

¹⁸E.g., Thomas Chalmers, Discourses on the Christian Revelation, 5th ed. (Glasgow: John Smith and Son, 1817); D. B. Baker, The Nature of the Proof of the Christian Religion (London: J. G., and F. Rivington, 1832); Ebenezer Dodge, The Evidences of Christianity (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1872); John R. Phillips, Remarkable Providences and Proofs of a Divine Revelation, 2nd ed. (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1876); Charles Ernest Luthardt, Apologetic Lectures on the Fundamental Truths of Christianity, 7th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888); James H. Potts, Faith Made Easy; or, What to Believe (Detroit: Hunt & Eaton, 1888); John S. Banks, Scripture and its Witnesses: Outlines of Christian Evidence (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1896).

Aquinas' theistic arguments.²⁰ Nevertheless, natural theology plays a secondary role to history in evidential apologetics.

Critique of Nontheistic World Views

As a rule, evidentialists are not as rigorous in their critique of nontheistic world views as are rationalistic apologists, but they have not ignored this area. Christianity for the Tough Minded, for example, a compendium of "essays in support of an intellectually defensible religious commitment," offers a Christian critique by evidentialist apologists of a number of nontheistic positions in the areas of philosophy, science, ethics, religion, psychology, and literature.²¹ This includes the rationalistic humanism of Bertrand Russell, the evolutionary humanism of Julian Huxley, the agnosticism of Franz Kafka, and the objectivism of Ayn Rand as well as existential psychology and fundamental Buddhism. Such evidentialist critiques of nontheistic positions are designed to show how the Christian position makes better sense of the relevant scientific, moral, historical, and experiential data than the interpretations derived from alternate world views.

¹⁹Wilbur M. Smith, Therefore Stand (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974 [1945]), pp. 272-358. Henry M. Morris did the same in his Many Infallible Proofs (pp. 98-117).

²⁰J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 1:72-101.

²¹John Warwick Montgomery, ed., Christianity for the Tough Minded (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1973).

Historiography

Evidentialists regard history as a medium of revelation; "to Jews and early Christians the direct experience of God in history was much weightier than any mere argument from inference."²² They defend history as a discipline and emphasize that the Christian faith takes history very seriously. Arlie J. Hoover in The Case for Christian Theism notes that history avoids rationalism which overlooks the subjective element in faith and history and mysticism or subjectivism which overlooks the objective element. According to Hoover, history

. . . has enough rationalism to keep subjectivism from degenerating into sheer superstition, yet enough mysticism to keep objectivism from evaporating into the air of intellectualism. History and faith go hand and hand, because together they combine the best elements of rationalism and mysticism. They create a subtle balance between knowledge and hope, a beneficent tension between reason and will, analysis and choice, head and heart, logic and axiologic.²³

Richardson also stresses the historicity of the Christian faith,

. . . in the sense that it is more than the mere intellectual acceptance of a certain kind of theistic philosophy; it is bound up with certain happenings in the past, and if these happenings could be shown never to have occurred, or to have been quite different from the biblical-Christian account of them, then the whole edifice of the Christian faith, life and worship would be found to have been built on sand.²⁴

²²Arlie J. Hoover, The Case for Christian Theism (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 117.

²³Ibid., p. 123.

²⁴Richardson, Christian Apologetics, p. 91.

"Scientific history," the establishing and collecting of "facts" is only part of the historical process; these facts must be selected, classified, and interpreted according to principles which must be sought outside history. But Richardson does not "assent to a dichotomy of event and interpretation, regarding the former as objective and the latter as subjective."²⁵ For him, "Christian faith supplies the necessary principle of interpretation by which the facts of the biblical and Christian history can be rationally seen and understood."²⁶

Evidentialists stress the primary historical value of the eyewitness accounts of the New Testament and decry the kind of biblical criticism which attempts to separate the historical facts from their apostolic interpretation to arrive at "what really happened." They maintain that the denial of this apostolic interpretation to arrive at a Jesus who did not work miracles and was not resurrected leads to an inconsistent and incoherent understanding of the accounts.

In The Idea of History, R. G. Collingwood refuted the positivistic approach to history in part because of its reduction of the historical process in which the past lives on in the present, to a natural process in which the past dies

²⁵Ibid., p. 147.

²⁶Ibid., p. 150.

when the present is born.²⁷ Similarly, Ian Ramsey noted that while Christianity is founded in spatio-temporal facts, these must come alive in existential response.

... the Christian faith cannot be content merely with historical facts, nor can it do without them. But no more can love or trustworthiness or any "existential" human situation, be content to regard persons as no more than their overt behaviour. Neither can it seriously pretend that the love and trustworthiness could still exist if there were no visible behaviour at all.²⁸ Evidentialists consistently emphasize the centrality of the historical resurrection of Jesus in the authentication of the Christian world view. This emphasis on historical verification is clear in this statement by Christian apologist Robert A. Sabath:

If God exists--the kind of personal creator God most Christians and theists talk about--he must exist independent of my subjective experience of him; his existence must therefore be validated by a criterion other than my own private experience. The uniqueness of Christianity is that there is such a criterion in the personal invasion of God himself into the public world of our objective experience. Christian existential experience is rooted in objective, external works of God himself, fleshing out his life in space and time in the person of Jesus Christ and showing himself to be God by his resurrection from the dead.²⁹

²⁷R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 171.

²⁸Ramsey, Christian Empiricism, p. 203.

²⁹Robert A. Sabath, "LSD and Religious Truth," in Montgomery, Tough Minded, p. 199.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVIDENTIALIST DEFENSE OF THE BIBLE

Evidentialists employ a wide variety of arguments to support the Christian world view in general and the revealed authority of the Bible in particular. Marshalling evidences from a number of directions, they seek to build a cumulative case for the person and work of Christ. These evidences will be classified under the following headings: the historical reliability of the Bible, the phenomenon of Israel, fulfilled prophecy, miracles, the resurrection of Christ, the claims and credentials of Christ, the uniqueness of the Bible, Christian experience, general Christian evidences, inspiration and authority of the Bible, and science and the Bible.

The Historical Reliability of the Bible

This is a crucial area for evidential apologetics because it entails the relationship between biblical theology and history, Old and New Testament higher and lower criticism, the transmission of the biblical documents, the question of canonization, and the bearing of archaeology on the biblical data.

Christian apologists have drawn in recent years from a growing scholarship in defense of the reliability of the biblical documents. For example, F. F. Bruce's The Books and the Parchments, The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament, Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament, The

New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?, and New Testament History³⁰

have been widely used by evidentialists in their defense of the New Testament documents in the areas of date, attestation, extra-biblical support, and canonicity. Evidentialists refer to a number of New Testament authorities in their defense of the gospels in the face of redaction criticism, form criticism, and attempts to demythologize the accounts of Jesus.

Archaeology also plays a significant role in evidential apologetics. While evidentialists acknowledge that archaeology cannot be used to "prove" the authority of the Bible, they maintain that it provides a great deal of corroborative evidence that illustrates and authenticates the accuracy of hundreds of Old and New Testament passages. Books like The Stones and the Scriptures³¹ by Edwin Yamauchi and Rocks, Relics and Biblical Reliability³² by Clifford A. Wilson trace the bearing of archaeological finds on the biblical accounts of the patriarchal period, the Egyptian bondage, the conquest of Canaan, the period of the judges,

³⁰F. F. Bruce, The Books and the Parchments, 3rd rev. ed. (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963); The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959); Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974); The New Testament Document Documents: Are They Reliable?, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960); New Testament History, Anchor Books (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969).

³¹Edwin Yamauchi, The Stones and the Scriptures (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1972).

³²Clifford A. Wilson, Rocks, Relics and Biblical Reliability (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977).

the united and divided kingdoms, the Babylonian captivity, and the post-exilic period in the Old Testament and the gospels and epistles of the New Testament. Evidentialists maintain that mounting historical, documentary, and archaeological evidence supports the accuracy of the biblical accounts and often vindicates these accounts in the face of critical theories. They frequently point to significant reversals of negative critical opinion as a result of discoveries from archaeology and secular history (e.g., the existence of the Hittites and the reign of Belshazzar).

The Phenomenon of Israel

A number of apologists regard the phenomenon of Jewish existence throughout the ages to the present day as a "standing miracle"³³ without even a single remote parallel in the history of other nations. The persistence of the Jewish people "has long been recognized as important evidence of the truth of the biblical interpretation of history."³⁴

Looking back into Israel's inception, apologists refer to archaeological discoveries and authorities (e.g., William F. Albright, The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra, From the Stone Age to Christianity, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan; Kenneth A. Kitchen, Ancient Orient and Old Testament; G. Ernest

³³Richardson, Christian Apologetics, p. 141.

³⁴Ibid., p. 142.

Wright, Biblical Archaeology)³⁵ to authenticate the historicity of the biblical accounts of the times of Abraham and Moses. They note that these accounts fit well against the backdrop of the first and last halves of the twentieth century B.C. Evidentialists also compare the religion of Israel with other ancient Near Eastern religions. They contend that there were extraordinary differences between the ethical monotheism of Israel's religion and the religions of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan in terms of ethics and moral standards, ceremonies and religious practices, and theology. These differences include the Creator-creation distinction versus the gods of nature, unrepresentable Yahweh versus representable gods, Yahweh as beyond sex versus gods and goddesses, infinite Yahweh versus finite gods, purposeful history versus the cycle of nature, and contrasts in divine morality.³⁶ Apologists argue that the God of Israel could not have evolved from the radically different polytheistic religions of that entire period and claim that the uniqueness of Israel's religion is best explained by special revelation.

³⁵William F. Albright, The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963); From the Stone Age to Christianity (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957); Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966); Kenneth A. Kitchen, Ancient Orient and Old Testament (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966); G. Ernest Wright, Biblical Archaeology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

³⁶David W. Diehl, "Historical Apologetics" (class syllabus, The King's College, 1974), pp. 30-36.

Fulfilled Prophecy

The argument from the fulfillment of Old Testament general and messianic prophecy has always been a mainstay of evidential apologetics. This has been especially so since the nineteenth century when books like Alexander Keith's Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion Derived from the Literal Fulfilment of Prophecy went through many editions.³⁷

Evidentialists note that "fulfilled prophecy was part of the means of establishing Old Testament religion."³⁸ The purpose, method, and scope of biblical prophecy is unique. It pervades the entire Bible in a continuous, coherent, and theological way, and it is distinctive in its characteristic clarity and detail. Christian apologists contrast this graphic quality of many biblical prophecies with the vague and cryptic character of prophecies in extra-biblical literature, noting that the fulfillment of many specific biblical prophecies is unequivocal and ambiguous. They often list dozens of Old Testament prophecies and fulfillments concerning nations and especially concerning the Messiah to build a cumulative case for the supernatural origin of these prophecies. Some apologists also assign generous probability estimates to

³⁷Alexander Keith, Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion Derived from the Literal Fulfillment of Prophecy, 6th ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841); cf. Charles Pettit M'Ilvaine, The Evidences of Christianity, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Smith, English & Co., 1867 [1832]); Mark Hopkins, Evidences of Christianity (Boston: T. R. Marvin & Son, 1909 [1846]); John Kennedy, A Popular Handbook of Christian Evidence (London: Sunday School Union, 1880).

³⁸Ramm, Protestant Christian Apologetics, p. 85.

several of these prophecies and multiply the probabilities to show that they could not have been fulfilled by chance. For instance, if specific messianic prophecies like the birth in Bethlehem are each assigned a probability of 0.5, the probability that 50 such Old Testament predictions (there are about 300) would be accurately fulfilled is one in 2^{50} . In addition, they argue that Jesus could not have engineered the fulfillment of most of the messianic predictions.

Most evidentialists are aware of the standard arguments against prophecy (e.g., vague language, misinterpretation, artificial fulfillment, prophecies written after the events or at the time of the events) and offer counterarguments to each. David W. Diehl writes in "Historical Apologetics":

Although there are claims to supernatural prediction in extra-biblical literature, there is no prophetic literature that comes anywhere near to comparing with Biblical prophecy in its numerous cases of prediction that have been shown to be fulfilled. The Bible seems to have no rival in history in the kind of prophecy in which case after case can be checked out in historical detail to see if the predictions came to pass.³⁹ Apologists claim that the use of messianic prophecy to prove that Christ is the Messiah "was not invented by Christians for apologetic purposes after the New Testament books had been written. . . . Jesus continually interpreted his mission in the light of messianic prophecy."⁴⁰ Thus they build a case by multiplying messianic predictions and documenting their fulfillment in the life of Christ to

³⁹Diehl, "Historical Apologetics," p. 52.

⁴⁰Hoover, Christian Theism, p. 208.

show that the thesis that Jesus Christ is the Messiah makes more sense out of the Old Testament than any other hypothesis.

Miracles

Evidentialists believe that miracles, like fulfilled prophecy, can be used in the verification of the supernatural. They respond to the naturalistic objections to miracles (e.g., miracles are a violation of the laws of nature, miracles destroy the uniformity of nature and introduce an element of arbitrariness and irrationality into nature) and to the objections from religious "modernism" that miracles are either inconceivable or improper for God to resort to because they would show an imperfection in his creative work.⁴¹ They also reply to the historical objections to miracles (e.g., they happened so long ago that they could not be valid data for a contemporary world view, the problem of human observation and accurate reporting, and Hume's objection on the basis of human experience).

A number of apologists believe that miracles cannot be given a fair trial unless they are viewed in their total system. Hoover wrote that "the miracles of Christ are meaningless if studied in isolation from Biblical prophecy about Christ, the claims Christ made, and the character and personality of Christ."⁴² Evidentialists focus on the miracles of Christ because of their number, publicity, variety, and consistency, and because of the ease, altruism, and restraint with

⁴¹Diehl, "Historical Apologetics," p. 42; Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences, pp. 70-80.

which they were performed.⁴³ They also point to the large number of witnesses of the miracles of Christ which included both believers and skeptics.

Another central issue with regard to the use of miracles by evidentialists relates to the historical reliability of the New Testament documents. Many critics of the New Testament have advanced the hypothesis that the miracles of Jesus were a mythical fabrication of the early church. Apologists respond to this myth hypothesis, asserting among other things that such an evolution in the picture of Christ could not have occurred in the time span allowed for it. They contend that miracles are an integral part of biblical history and are appropriate to the Christian world view as sensible events that strongly and clearly support the presence of the supernatural within a redemptive context.⁴⁴

The Resurrection of Christ

The historical resurrection of Jesus is the foundational issue in evidential apologetics; all the arguments in this apologetic system point in this direction, and the evidential case for Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection. Many books like C. R. Morrison's The Proofs of Christ's

⁴²Hoover, Christian Theism, p. 152.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 157-62.

⁴⁴Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences, pp. 125-26.

Resurrection,⁴⁵ Frank Morison's Who Moved the Stone?,⁴⁶ Michael Green's Man Alive!,⁴⁷ Merrill C. Tenney's The Reality of the Resurrection,⁴⁸ and Gary R. Habermas's The Resurrection of Jesus⁴⁹ are entirely devoted to this subject.

Several approaches are taken by evidentialists in their defense of the resurrection of Jesus, but most begin by developing the historical facts of the case, both preresurrection and postresurrection. This closely relates to the reliability of the gospel accounts, and most resurrection apologetics include at least a brief discussion of the New Testament documents as primary historical accounts. Having established the basic facts of the case, apologists examine the alternate schemes that have been proposed to account for the facts. There are several explanations regarding the data concerning the tomb, including: (1) the theory that the location of the tomb was unknown, (2) the disciples went to the wrong tomb, (3) Jesus' resurrection was spiritual and not physical, and (4) someone who looked like Jesus was crucified. Those who acknowledge that the tomb was empty have proposed these alternatives to the resurrection: (1) friends of Jesus

⁴⁵C. R. Morrison, The Proofs of Christ's Resurrection (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1882).

⁴⁶Frank Morison, Who Moved the Stone? (London: Faber and Faber, 1930).

⁴⁷Michael Green, Man Alive! (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1967).

⁴⁸Merrill C. Tenney, The Reality of the Resurrection (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

stole the body, (2) enemies stole the body, (3) Jesus swooned on the cross but did not die, and (4) Hugh Schoenfield's theory in The Passover Plot. Apologists for the resurrection criticize each of these theories to demonstrate that none of them accounts for the historical data concerning the tomb, the appearances of Jesus, and the changed lives of the disciples after the resurrection. They also consider the explanations of the postresurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples, including: (1) the claim that all of the witnesses of the resurrection lied about the appearances of Jesus, (2) the witnesses merely hallucinated these appearances, and (3) the biblical accounts are legendary.

After concluding that there are no naturalistic ways of accounting for the empty tomb or for the many postresurrection appearances of Jesus to individuals and groups, some evidentialists further solidify their case by appealing to several circumstantial evidences. These include Christ's predictions of his resurrection; the lack of a refutation of the resurrection by the Jewish leaders; the complete, permanent, and unanimous transformation of the disciples after the resurrection; the success of the early Christian church in spite of fierce opposition; the shift from Saturday to Sunday as the day of worship for the early Jewish Christians; the institution of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist in the early church; the complete disregard for the tomb of Jesus by the first-century church; and the conversions of James and Paul.

⁴⁹Gary Habermas, The Resurrection of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Baker

Gary Habermas in The Resurrection of Jesus builds a five-step apologetic for the validity of the Christian world view upon the historical resurrection of Jesus. In his first step, he establishes ten accepted and "core" historical facts, refutes the naturalistic theories that discount the resurrection, and offers ten positive evidences for the resurrection.⁵⁰ In his second step, Habermas develops three theistic arguments to show that a theistic paradigm is the most probable option with regard to Jesus' resurrection. In this way, he argues prospectively from God's existence to Jesus' resurrection. He also argues retrospectively in this step by combining Jesus' resurrection with his dominical claims to show that God exists.⁵¹ In his third step, Habermas uses Jesus' resurrection to validate his entire message concerning his person and his other teachings.⁵² Fourth, he deals with Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom of God in its present and future aspects, and shows that "the center of Jesus' teaching was confronting men with the kingdom of God and the message of its entrance requirements of salvation."⁵³ This leads to the fifth step in which Habermas turns to the personal decision "which Jesus asserted was necessary for

Book House, 1980).

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 21-42.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 43-75.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 77-89.

⁵³Ibid., p. 99.

admittance to and participation in the blessings of eternal life in the kingdom."⁵⁴ Thus, he begins with the resurrection as a historical event and concludes with the need of a personal response of commitment to Christ.

Jean Guitton, a Catholic apologist, also focuses his Christian defense on the resurrection. In The Problem of Jesus, he presents the difficulties of the critical and mythical approaches to the New Testament. He follows this with an extended treatment of the relationship of the resurrection to the divinity of Jesus before moving into the evidence for the resurrection itself. Guitton argues prospectively because he believes that "For contemporary man the examination of divinity should precede that of resurrection."⁵⁵

The Claims and Credentials of Christ

Evidentialists use a wide variety of approaches when arguing from the person and character of Christ. In The Finality of Jesus for Faith, Alexander Martin developed a Christocentric apologetic based on the life and teachings of Jesus.⁵⁶ Similarly, F. Godet built his Christian apologetic upon the miracles, holiness, and divine claims of Christ in Lectures in Defence of the Christian

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 102.

⁵⁵Jean Guitton, The Problem of Jesus (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1955), p. 58.

⁵⁶Alexander Martin, The Finality of Jesus for Faith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1933).

Faith.⁵⁷ Some evidentialists ask the question, "If God became incarnate, what kind of man would he be?" and proceed to compare theoretical expectations derived from this question to the life of Jesus Christ. In Protestant Christian Evidences, Bernard Ramm lists several such expectations: (1) his human life would be sinless (absence of moral blemish), (2) he would be holy (positive presence of spirituality), (3) his words would be the greatest words ever spoken, (4) he would exert a profound power over human personality, (5) there would be supernatural manifestations in his life, (6) he would manifest the love of God, (7) he would be unique and incomparable, and (8) his personality would be true humanity.⁵⁸ After comparing these expectations with the life of Jesus, Ramm concludes that since these attributes characterize Jesus' life and teachings, they are evidences of his divinity.

Many evidentialists build a case for the uniqueness of Jesus by tracing certain aspects of his life in chronological sequence. They look at his birth, personal claims, miraculous life, death, and resurrection, and tie these strands of evidence together to form a cumulative apologetic for the person of Jesus. Some apologists focus on particular aspects of Christ's life, as did G. Gresham Machen

⁵⁷F. Godet, Lectures in Defence of the Christian Faith, trans. W. H. Lyttelton, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883).

⁵⁸Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences, pp. 163-77.

in The Virgin Birth of Christ.⁵⁹ Another example is The Truth of God Incarnate, edited by Michael Green,⁶⁰ a rebuttal by five theologians of a symposium called The Myth of God Incarnate. This book seeks to refute recent historical skepticism about Jesus and illustrates the responsiveness of Christian apologists to contemporary challenges to various aspects of the Christian world view.

Standard among evidentialists is some development of the dual themes of Christ's unique claims and the substantiation of these claims in his words and works. John R. W. Stott in Basic Christianity develops these twin themes by beginning with a presentation of Christ's direct and indirect claims to be God, to forgive sins, to bestow life, to teach the truth, and to judge the world.⁶¹ He then seeks to show that the character of Christ authenticates these claims in that Christ stands in a moral category by himself. Other apologists like Whitcomb (Christian Evidences and Apologetics),⁶² Diehl (Historical Apologetics),⁶³

⁵⁹G. Gresham Machen, The Virgin Birth of Christ (New York: Harper & Row, 1930).

⁶⁰Michael Green, ed., The Truth of God Incarnate (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977).

⁶¹John R. W. Stott, Basic Christianity, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1971), pp. 21-34.

⁶²John C. Whitcomb, Jr., "Christian Evidences and Apologetics" (class syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, n.d.), pp. 2-5.

⁶³Diehl, "Historical Apologetics," pp. 72-79.

Hoover (The Case for Christian Theism),⁶⁴ and Chapman (Christianity on Trial)⁶⁵ also develop the evidence from the person and work of Christ and focus on his teachings, miracles, and resurrection.

Another aspect of this Christocentric apologetic is an exposition of the only options about Jesus Christ in view of his claims and credentials. Jon A. Buell and O. Quentin Hyder devoted a book to the discussion of these options. In Jesus: God, Ghost or Guru? these authors examine Jesus' words, his behavior, and the responses of his audience to establish that "Jesus claimed to be Messiah-God, the logos, or message to mankind from beyond the natural realm."⁶⁶ Like other evidentialists, they consider the question of the historical reliability and accuracy of the New Testament documents by looking at the manuscript evidence and archaeological finds as well as literary criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism of the gospel accounts. Buell and Hyder then reduce the options about Christ to three: (1) he lied about his identity, (2) he was deluded about his identity, and (3) he was correct about his identity.⁶⁷ After a discussion of motive and opportunity in addition to relevant psychological and sociological factors, they conclude that the only viable option is the third.

⁶⁴Hoover, Christian Theism, pp. 169-205.

⁶⁵Chapman, Christianity on Trial, pp. 391-443, 484-98.

⁶⁶Jon A. Buell and O. Quentin Hyder, Jesus: God, Ghost or Guru? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 39.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 81-119.

The Uniqueness of the Bible

Some apologists like Whitcomb and Ramm⁶⁸ argue that the uniqueness of the Bible provides another line of evidence for the truth of Christianity. They discuss the external phenomenology of the Bible's translation, circulation, influence on culture, and survival through time, persecution, and criticism. They also expound on the internal phenomenology of the Bible including its unity in diversity, the scope of its contents, its historical core, and its realism. The Bible is unique in its production, preservation, and product, and these apologists also assert that it is unique in its teachings about the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of salvation.

Christian Experience

Some evidential apologists appeal to Christian experience as corroborative evidence of the validity of the biblical world view. Wilbur H. Smith in Therefore Stand quotes with approval this statement by the nineteenth-century German apologist Theodore Christlieb:

In fine, only life can beget life. Where we wish to defend the Word of Life, our own life can not be separated from the Word. The strongest argument for the truth of Christianity is the true Christian, the man filled with the Spirit of Christ. The best means of bringing back the world to a belief in miracles is to exhibit the miracle of regeneration and its power in our own life.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Whitcomb, "Christian Evidences," pp. 6-22; Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences, pp. 224-49.

⁶⁹Smith, Therefore Stand, p. 512.

Some writers make use of biography as an apologetic tool to illustrate various ways in which people struggled with and finally embraced Christianity as a world view. One such biographical apologetic is These Found the Way,⁷⁰ the personal accounts of thirteen people of diverse backgrounds and interests and the personal experiences that led them to convert to Christianity.

Apologists who use Christian experience in this way do not embrace philosophical pragmatism as a whole but acknowledge one substantial point from pragmatism: "Whatever passes as true must have direct tangency with life and experience."⁷¹ If Christianity is true, it will be relevant to all aspects of reality including human experience. Christian experience is subjective, but apologists maintain that it is based on objective historical fact (viz., the resurrected Christ). They add that Christian experience solves the problem of guilt and fear and provides moral energy without stultification of the intellect.⁷²

General Christian Evidences for Biblical Reliability

In addition to the lines of evidence listed above, some supplemental evidences are developed by a few apologists to make their case more comprehensive. One such evidence is the conversion of Saul, the pharisaic persecutor of the incipient church, to Paul, the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles.

⁷⁰David Wesley Soper, These Found the Way (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951).

⁷¹Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences, p. 208.

In Christian Evidences and Apologetics, Whitcomb weighs the evidence and concludes that "(1) Paul was not an impostor deliberately proclaiming what he knew to be false with intent to deceive; (2) he was not imposed upon by an overheated imagination; and (3) he was not deceived by the fraud of others."⁷³ Whitcomb claims that on the basis of the rules of evidence, the account of Paul's conversion as the result of the appearance of the resurrected Christ to him on the road to Damascus must be accepted as historically true.

Some writers like E. W. Bullinger (Number in Scripture)⁷⁴ and R. W. Grant (The Numerical Structure of Scripture)⁷⁵ appeal to the arithmetical and geometrical phenomena in the Bible as an evidence of supernatural design. This approach, however, has been criticized by most biblical scholars.⁷⁶ Along similar lines, Joseph A. Seiss (The Gospel in the Stars),⁷⁷ Duane E. Spenser

⁷²Ibid., pp. 214-23.

⁷³Whitcomb, "Christian Evidences," p. 14.

⁷⁴E. W. Bullinger, Number in Scripture (London: Lamp Press, Ltd., 1952).

⁷⁵R. W. Grant, The Numerical Structure of Scripture (New York: Loizeaux Bros., n.d.).

⁷⁶E.g., John J. Davis, Biblical Numerology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), and Oswald T. Allis, Bible Numerics (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961).

⁷⁷Joseph A. Seiss, The Gospel in the Stars (Philadelphia: Castle Press, 1884).

(Mazzaroth),⁷⁸ and others seek to demonstrate that the Mazzaroth, or twelve signs of the Zodiac, illustrate the redemptive program of the Bible. Morris states in Many Infallible Proofs that

. . . there is good reason to believe that the various star groupings and their symbolic counterparts were originally used, and perhaps even designed, for the purpose of conveying a continuing message to people of all places and times, that message consisting essentially of God's plans and promises concerning man's redemption.⁷⁹

Like biblical numerology, this astrological approach is rejected by most evidential apologists.

Inspiration and Authority of the Bible

The apologetic for the historical reliability of the Bible discussed above is the underpinning for the evidentialist's defense of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. On this level, writers like B. B. Warfield (The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible),⁸⁰ Merrill C. Tenney (The Bible--The Living Word of Revelation),⁸¹ Earl D. Radmacher (Can We Trust the Bible?),⁸² J. I. Packer

⁷⁸Duane E. Spenser, Mazzaroth (San Antonio: Word of Grace, 1972).

⁷⁹Morris, Many Infallible Proofs, p. 336.

⁸⁰Benjamin B. Warfield, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948 [1892-1915]).

⁸¹Merrill C. Tenney, ed., The Bible--The Living Word of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968).

⁸²Earl D. Radmacher, ed., Can We Trust the Bible? (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979).

("Fundamentalism" and the Word of God and God Has Spoken),⁸³ and James Montgomery Boice (The Foundation of Biblical Authority)⁸⁴ deal with the issues of authority, faith, and reason as they apply to the Old and New Testaments and consider the question of inspiration and inerrancy in light of modern objections. Because of the unique authority the Bible claims for itself, these objections have been manifold. William F. Arndt's Does the Bible Contradict Itself?⁸⁵ and Gleason L. Archer's Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties,⁸⁶ for example, deal specifically with the problem of alleged historical and doctrinal contradictions in the Bible. Other apologists for the inspiration of Scripture focus on the contribution of higher criticism to biblical studies (e.g., the documentary hypothesis and Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis of the Pentateuch, and New Testament source, form, and redaction criticism).

Another area that is relevant to the question of biblical inspiration and authority is that of ethical problems. While the high ethical standards of the Bible have been used as an evidence of biblical inspiration, it is in the area of

⁸³J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958); God Has Spoken (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

⁸⁴James Montgomery Boice, ed., The Foundation of Biblical Authority (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978).

⁸⁵William F. Arndt, Does the Bible Contradict Itself?, 3rd ed. rev. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1946).

⁸⁶Gleason L. Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).

ethics that critics have challenged such inspiration. One major ethical problem is that of slavery in the Bible. A number of biblical apologists like J. Barton Payne (The Theology of the Older Testament)⁸⁷ and John Murray (Principles of Conduct)⁸⁸ have responded to criticism in this area and concluded, in effect, that "the Biblical situation is not a matter of dehumanizing slavery versus love and respect for humanity, but rather a question of whether or not all men in ancient times should have been granted economic and social independence."⁸⁹ Another ethical problem is Israel's genocide of the Canaanites. Apologists like H. E. Guillebaud (Some Moral Difficulties of the Bible)⁹⁰ and Clark H. Pinnock (Biblical Revelation)⁹¹ respond to this objection in several ways, emphasizing the uniqueness of this event in the context of Israel as a theocracy, and the judgment of Yahweh upon the immorality and idolatry of the Canaanites.

Science and the Bible

The technological revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have made this a significant issue in Christian apologetics. Some evidentialists

⁸⁷J. Barton Payne, The Theology of the Older Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962).

⁸⁸John Murray, Principles of Conduct (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964).

⁸⁹Diehl, "Historical Apologetics", p. 108.

⁹⁰H. E. Guillebaud, Some Moral Difficulties of the Bible (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1941).

focus on the antiscientific objections which have arisen from the scientific method as these relate to the concept of natural law and the unscientific nature of miracles. They discuss the nature and limitations of the scientific method, concluding that "the categories of science are adequate within the goals of science (the quantitative, the stable, the predictable, the observable, the general), but not for the comprehension of the sum of all experience, or reality, or the universe."⁹² Their problem is not with science but with the metaphysical conclusions of scientism, a naturalistic world view.

In The Christian View of Science and Scripture, Ramm cites the biblical use of phenomenological language and the biblical view of nature and cosmology as sources of potential conflict between Christianity and science.⁹³ Like other apologists, he maintains that a proper perspective of both science and the Bible can dispel such conflict. Many books have been written in defense of biblical theology with respect to the areas of astronomy, geology, biology, and anthropology, but while these books agree on the who of creation, they do not agree on the how of creation. Some apologists defend the idea of a young earth and interpret geology from the standpoint of a global Genesis flood. These

⁹¹Clark H. Pinnock, Biblical Revelation (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971).

⁹²Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences, pp. 52-53.

⁹³Idem, The Christian View of Science and Scripture (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), pp. 45-85.

writers include Henry M. Morris (Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science),⁹⁴ The Genesis Flood,⁹⁵ and Scientific Creationism)⁹⁶ and Joseph C. Dillow (The Waters Above: Earth's Pre-flood Vapor Canopy).⁹⁷ Others accept the standard geochronology and support the validity of the Genesis account from this perspective (e.g., Davis A. Young, Creation and the Flood).⁹⁸ Some apologists focus on a defense of the creationist position in biology, such as Wayne Frair and P. William Davis (The Case for Creation),⁹⁹ James F. Coppedge (Evolution: Possible or Impossible?),¹⁰⁰ Bolton Davidheiser (Evolution and Christian Faith),¹⁰¹ and A. E. Wilder Smith (Man's Origin, Man's Destiny),¹⁰² while others

⁹⁴Henry M. Morris, Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1970).

⁹⁵Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, Jr., The Genesis Flood (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961).

⁹⁶Henry M. Morris, ed., Scientific Creationism (San Diego, California: Creation-Life Publishers, 1974).

⁹⁷Joseph C. Dillow, The Waters Above: Earth's Pre-flood Vapor Canopy (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981).

⁹⁸Davis A. Young, Creation and the Flood (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977).

⁹⁹Wayne Frair and P. William Davis, The Case for Creation, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

¹⁰⁰James F. Coppedge, Evolution: Possible or Impossible? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973).

¹⁰¹Bolton Davidheiser, Evolution and Christian Faith (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969).

concentrate on the fossil record (e.g., J. Kerby Anderson and Harold G. Coffin in Fossils in Focus).¹⁰³ Not all of these writers agree on the process of creation that has led to the diversity of plants and animals in the fossil record and today. There are several creationist models which range from strict creationism (young earth) to progressive creationism to theistic evolutionism (old earth). But as L. Duane Thurman notes in How to Think About Evolution,¹⁰⁴ each of these models is a theistic attempt to harmonize the data of science and Scripture as opposed to nontheistic evolutionism which arises out of a naturalistic world view.

Anthropology, psychology, and sociology are also related to the "science and the Bible" issue, and there has been a growing trend among Christian apologists to offer perspectives on these disciplines that comport with the Christian rather than the naturalistic world view. In psychology, for example, Mark P. Cosgrove (The Essence of Human Nature¹⁰⁵ and Mental

¹⁰²A. E. Wilder Smith, Man's Origin, Man's Destiny (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1968).

¹⁰³J. Kerby Anderson and Harold G. Coffin, Fossils in Focus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977).

¹⁰⁴L. Duane Thurman, How to Think About Evolution (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1978).

¹⁰⁵Mark P. Cosgrove, The Essence of Human Nature (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977).

Health: A Christian Approach),¹⁰⁶ Donald M. MacKay (Human Science and Human Dignity),¹⁰⁷ and Paul C. Vitz (Psychology as Religion)¹⁰⁸ critique materialistic psychological theories about human nature, especially determinism, and develop a Christian alternative. In a similar way, writers like Arthur C. Custance (Man in Adam and in Christ)¹⁰⁹ and David Lyon (Christians and Sociology)¹¹⁰ explicate a Christian approach to anthropology and sociology.

¹⁰⁶Mark P. Cosgrove and James D. Mallory, Jr., Mental Health: A Christian Approach (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).

¹⁰⁷Donald M. MacKay, Human Science and Human Dignity (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

¹⁰⁸Paul C. Vitz, Psychology as Religion (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977).

¹⁰⁹Arthur C. Custance, Man in Adam and in Christ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975).

¹¹⁰David Lyon, Christians and Sociology (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1975).

CHAPTER 3

RECENT EVIDENTIALIST APOLOGISTS

John H. Gerstner

Gerstner, a widely known evangelical theologian, is the author of a standard evidential textbook entitled Reasons for Faith.¹¹¹ After a brief presentation of the theistic argument from cause and effect, Gerstner, like most evidentialists, begins his apologetic with a defense of the historical reliability of the Bible and avoids the mere assumption of its inspiration. His defense of the Bible as the revelation of God includes "internal proof from its answers to nature's questions" and "external proof from the authority of Christ."¹¹² Using the claims and credentials of Christ to build a case for his deity and authority, he moves to the conclusion that the Bible is inspired because Christ certified it as such. Gerstner maintains that this line of reasoning is not circular:

We are not arguing from the authority of the Bible to the authority of Christ and from thence to the authority of the Bible. If we were, we would be in a vicious and futile circle. We do not beg the question by beginning with the assumption that the Bible is inspired, proceed to prove from that that Christ is divine, and then return fortified by His authority to prove that the Bible is inspired. Rather, we begin with the Bible without assuming its inspiration. This is the very point in question, and we do not beg it at the

¹¹¹John H. Gerstner, Reasons for Faith (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967).

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 69-88.

outset. We begin with the Bible, not as inspired, but merely as a trustworthy document historically speaking.¹¹³ Gerstner goes on to discuss the miracles of the Bible and the prophecies of the Bible, and he summarizes the contribution of archaeology to the vindication of its historical accuracy. Other lines of evidence used by Gerstner are the uniqueness of Christianity among the world's religions (concerning the nature of God, man, and salvation), the influence of Christianity in the world during the past twenty centuries, and the witness of the Christian martyrs. He concludes by examining and answering objections from evolution and anthropology, from determinism, from biblical criticism, and from the shortcomings of the church. Gerstner defends the inspiration and authority of Scripture in other works as well, using additional arguments like the uniqueness of the Bible in its unity and diversity.¹¹⁴

Clark H. Pinnock

Pinnock is a well-known proponent of evidentialist apologetics whose approach to the defense of the Christian faith has been unusually diverse. His Set Forth Your Case¹¹⁵ focuses on the philosophical and cultural movements that have shaped twentieth-century thought to expose the inadequacy of non-

¹¹³Ibid., pp. 85-86.

¹¹⁴Idem, "The Message of the Word," in Tenney, The Bible, pp. 165-76; "Warfield's Case for Biblical Inerrancy," in God's Inerrant Word, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 115-42.

Christian world views. 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's Live Now, Brother¹¹⁶ looks at the metaphysical and moral crisis in human values, moves to the concept of the grounding of values in a supernatural revelation, and presents the person and work of Christ with special emphasis on the resurrection as a historical fact to authenticate the Bible's revelatory claims. Reason Enough¹¹⁷ offers a "comprehensive evidential picture" by developing five circles of evidence for the truth of the Christian faith. This book looks at the pragmatic basis for faith (existential needs), the experiential basis for faith (religious intuitions), the cosmic basis for faith (rational scrutiny), the historical basis for faith (historical evidence), and the community basis for faith (moral necessities). Like other evidentialists, Pinnock uses several lines of evidence as "reasonable probabilities" that combine together like strands in a rope, as opposed to the "leaky bucket" approach.¹¹⁸ "Like legs of a table, each shaft of evidence does its part to support the weight of the case for Christianity.

¹¹⁵Clark H. Pinnock, Set Forth Your Case (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1968).

¹¹⁶Idem, Live Now, Brother (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

¹¹⁷Idem, Reason Enough (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1980).

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."¹¹⁹ He 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."¹²⁰ 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."¹²¹ Pinnock supports this position in contradistinction to presuppositionalism in "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," a chapter in Jerusalem and Athens.¹²² Here 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."¹²³

Another major aspect of Pinnock's apologetic approach is a defense of biblical revelation, inspiration, and hermeneutics in view of the challenges of

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 18, 120.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 120.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 88.

¹²²Idem, "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," in Jerusalem and Athens, ed. E. R. Geehan (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 420-27.

modern theology and higher criticism. This is the primary thrust of A Defense of Biblical Infallibility¹²⁴ and Biblical Revelation, as well as his article on "The Inspiration of the New Testament" in The Bible--The Living Word of Revelation,¹²⁵ his article on "The Inspiration of Scripture and the Authority of Jesus Christ" in God's Inerrant Word,¹²⁶ and "Critical Conservatism" in Christianity Today.¹²⁷

Josh McDowell

McDowell's books have enjoyed a wide circulation due to his popular approach to evidential apologetics. His first book, Evidence That Demands a Verdict,¹²⁸ is an organized compilation of quotations from hundreds of sources. The first section defends the trustworthiness of the Bible by looking at the uniqueness, the canon, and the historical reliability of the Bible. This section makes extensive use of manuscript evidence and archaeological confirmation. The second section presents a case for the deity of Christ by examining his claims

¹²³Ibid., p. 425.

¹²⁴Idem, A Defense of Biblical Infallibility, International Library of Philosophy and Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972).

¹²⁵Tenney, The Bible, pp. 143-61.

¹²⁶Montgomery, God's Inerrant Word, pp. 201-18.

¹²⁷Clark H. Pinnock, "Critical Conservatism," Christianity Today, 1 January 1982, p. 66.

¹²⁸Josh McDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict (Arrowhead Springs, California: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972).

and character and posing the "liar, lunatic, or Lord" trilemma. McDowell also applies the proposition, "If God became man, then what would he be like?" to the life and work of Jesus. This section culminates with a detailed presentation of Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecies and the historical evidence for his resurrection. The third section documents the fulfillment of nonmessianic biblical prophecies and concludes with an appeal to the uniqueness of Christian experience.

More Evidence That Demands a Verdict,¹²⁹ McDowell's second book, concentrates on the issue of biblical criticism and begins with an in-depth critique of the documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch. This section traces the development of and presuppositions underlying this hypothesis and examines the evidence traditionally used to support these presuppositions (e.g., divine names, repetition of accounts, incongruities, and stylistic differences). The remainder of this book analyzes the tenets of form critical theories of the gospels and offers alternative answers to the assumptions upon which these theories are grounded.

More Than a Carpenter¹³⁰ briefly treats a number of issues surrounding the person of Jesus Christ, including his unique claims, the biblical records about

¹²⁹Idem, More Evidence That Demands a Verdict (Arrowhead Springs, California: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975).

¹³⁰Idem, More Than a Carpenter (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1977).

him, the evidence for his resurrection, his fulfillment of messianic prophecies, and the changed lives of the disciples. The Resurrection Factor¹³¹ is McDowell's most detailed presentation of the historical evidence for the resurrection, and includes an examination of all the attempted explanations of the empty tomb, the postresurrection appearances, and the transformation of the disciples.

McDowell's Answers to Tough Questions¹³² is a compendium of brief answers to a wide variety of questions concerning the Bible, Jesus Christ, God, miracles, Bible difficulties, world religions, Christianity, and believing faith.

¹³¹Idem, The Resurrection Factor (San Bernardino, California: Here's Life Publishers, 1981).

¹³²Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, Answers to Tough Questions (San Bernardino, California: Here's Life Publishers, 1980).

CHAPTER 4

THE EVIDENTIALIST APOLOGETICS OF JOHN WARWICK MONTGOMERY

John Warwick Montgomery's approach to Christian apologetics has exerted "a significant influence on many in the Christian community."¹³³ His 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.

Montgomery's apologetic system is strongly empirical, with an emphasis on the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. He regards apologetics as a species of evangelism in that it is designed to overcome objections to the soteriological message of the gospels. This he seeks to do 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 openly examine the evidence without prejudging it on the basis of antismiraculous bias. This line of argumentation leads to the authentication of Jesus' dominical claims on the basis of his resurrection and the consequent authority of his affirmation of the revelatory character of Scripture.

¹³³Ronald H. Nash, "The Use and Abuse of History in Christian Apologetics," Christian Scholar's Review 1 (Spring 1971):217.

Although Montgomery affirms the objective character of historical evidence, he acknowledges that since historical judgments are based on available records, this kind of argumentation for the truth of Christianity can provide only probable, not certain conclusions. He also recognizes that historical evidence is limited in force as well as scope; objective grounding does not necessarily produce subjective belief.

Historical Apologetics

Empirical Verification

As an evidentialist, Montgomery emphasizes the use of empirical verification and criticizes apologetic approaches that rely solely on rational criteria for the affirmation or denial of a world view. He takes issue with Carnell's truth test of systematic consistency and asks, "What happens if internal consistency is incompatible with the fitting of the facts?"¹³⁴ In view of antinomies like predestination and free will and the nature of the Trinity, Montgomery maintains that multiple truth tests break down when conflict arises in the different aspects of the multiple test; a higher test must arbitrate at this point. Given the choice between fitting of the facts and logical consistency as the ultimate test of a world view, Montgomery opts for the former, noting that "the

¹³⁴John Warwick Montgomery, Faith Founded on Fact (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1978), p. 233.

greatest of the world's madmen have held the most consistent delusions."¹³⁵ In a critique of Gordon H. Clark's coherence test of the truth of a presupposition, Montgomery writes,

. . . it should be painfully clear that to blast other systems for internal inconsistencies does not necessarily destroy them, since in a real sense life is bigger than logic (the paradoxical wave-particle character of light does not destroy the empirically established evidence of light's characteristics or the physics that investigate it--and the paradoxical character of the Trinity surely doesn't destroy the Biblical evidence for God's trinitarian nature or the validity of Christian faith in the Triune God!).¹³⁶

Since the Bible is a historical object, its content can only be properly evaluated when objective history is taken seriously. Montgomery quotes with approval George I. Mavrodes's statement, "Whenever the Bible forms a link in an epistemological chain, then sensory contact with the Bible must form the very next link."¹³⁷ Sensory, synthetic experience and the investigation of historical evidences constitute the thrust of Montgomery's epistemological approach. The inductive method is the "only entree to verifiable knowledge of the external world."¹³⁸ In a discussion on the philosophy of history, Montgomery writes: "To disregard or try to circumvent inductive method in studying the past is to

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Idem, "Clark's Philosophy of History," in The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968), 387.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 385.

destroy all possibility of objective knowledge of man's history, and therefore to eliminate in principle a Christian philosophy of history."¹³⁹ Nevertheless, he recognizes that there is actually a complementary interplay of deduction and induction in investigative operations, as well as a second level of induction which Pierce calls imaginative retroduction or abduction. This involves an interaction between concepts, hypotheses, and theories and facts, observations, and experiments through imagination and logic.¹⁴⁰

Montgomery believes that contemporary analytical philosophy's verification principle makes an "inestimable contribution to epistemology" because the implementation of this principle means that "vast numbers of apparently sensible truth-claims can be readily identified as unverifiable, and time and energy can thereby be saved for intellectual pursuits capable of yielding testable conclusions."¹⁴¹ Rational and pragmatic arguments for the truth of a religion are inadequate because they fall short of true verification. "Objective empirical evidence for Jesus Christ and his message is the only truly valid

¹³⁸Martin Batts, "A Summary and Critique of the Historical Apologetic of John Warwick Montgomery" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977), p. 46.

¹³⁹John Warwick Montgomery, "Toward a Christian Philosophy of History," in Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 236.

¹⁴⁰Idem, The Suicide of Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1971), p. 274.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 100.

Christian apologetic possible, for it alone is subject to the canons of evidence employed in other fields of endeavor,"¹⁴² and this empirical ground is the historical resurrection of Jesus. A non-evidential apologetic is self-contradictory, because for Montgomery, a true defense of a position must depend on factual evidence. Thus, he regards evidential apologetics as "the epistemological handmaid of genuine Reformation theology."¹⁴³ To support his position on a biblical base, he lists four types of apologetic arguments in Scripture: miracle (especially the resurrection), prophecy, inner experience or subjective immediacy, and natural theology.¹⁴⁴ He also makes use of biblical texts that illustrate the evidential use of the resurrection in the Christian apologetic of the first-century church. These include Acts 2:22-36; 26:26; and John 20:24-29:

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

¹⁴²Idem, Faith Founded, p. 98.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. xii.

¹⁴⁴Idem, "Existence of God," in Sensible Christianity (cassette tapes, vol. 2, tape 1; Santa Ana, California: One Way Library, 1976).

Methodological Presuppositions

Montgomery acknowledges the empirical method in historical inquiry because the heuristic presuppositions of empiricism assume as little as possible and provide, as in science, the optimal conditions for objective discovery.

Properly, we should start not with substantive, "content" presuppositions about the world (e.g., the axiom of revelation), which gratuitously prejudge the nature of what is, but with heuristic, methodological presuppositions that permit us to discover what the world is like--and (equally important) what it is not like. Such are the a prioris of empirical method, which are not only heuristic but unavoidably necessary in all of our endeavors to distinguish synthetic truth from falsity.¹⁴⁵

Thus, he begins with presuppositions of method rather than presuppositions of substantive content which already assume a body of truth.

In our modern world we have found that the presuppositions of empirical method best fulfil this condition; but note that we are operating only with the presuppositions of scientific method, not with the rationalistic assumptions of Scientism ("the Religion of Science").¹⁴⁶

These empirical presuppositions are threefold: (1) epistemologically, knowledge is possible; (2) metaphysically, the universe is regular, and (3) ethically, the results of empirical investigation will be reported honestly.¹⁴⁷ These presuppositions are used to justify the investigation of the universe rather than to deduce world views. Beginning with this methodological base, Montgomery seeks to build an objective apologetic for Christian truth claims that provides a

¹⁴⁵Idem, "Clark's Philosophy," p. 388.

¹⁴⁶Idem, The Shape of the Past (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), p. 141.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 266.

higher degree of probability than any other option in today's pluralistic society. Unlike most rationalist apologists, Montgomery contends that the number of philosophical options is virtually limitless. Therefore, the Christian apologist must provide an objective basis for experientially trying the Christian faith before all other options. "Absolute proof of the truth of Christ's claims is available only in personal relationship with Him; but contemporary man has every right to expect us to offer solid reasons for making such a total commitment."¹⁴⁸ The apologetic task is not a rational substitute for faith but a ground for faith.

Historiography

Montgomery's historical apologetic is most fully developed in The Shape of the Past, Where Is History Going?¹⁴⁹ and History and Christianity.¹⁵⁰ He repeatedly draws a distinction between historical events and the human records or interpretations of them, and defines history as "An inquiry focusing on past human experience, both individual and societal, with a view towards the production of significant and comprehensive narratives embracing men's actions and reactions in respect to the whole range of natural, rational, and spiritual

¹⁴⁸Idem, Faith Founded, p. 40.

¹⁴⁹Idem, Where Is History Going? (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1969).

¹⁵⁰Idem, History and Christianity (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1965).

powers."¹⁵¹ The whole process of defining and interpreting history leads to the realm of ultimate religious concern according to Montgomery, because of the problems of human nature and significance. The historian's conception of what is humanly possible and thus credible stems from his religio-philosophical beliefs. Similarly, the historian's value system, which determines what he regards to be significant and affects the kind of history he writes, is also related to his world view. What passes for "unbiased" history is "often no more than a mask covering presuppositions of a most gratuitous sort."¹⁵² History should be written from a definite point of view because "the most dangerous historians have not been those with definite convictions, but those who have been unaware of their convictions."¹⁵³

In The Shape of the Past, Montgomery critiques modern historical thought before developing what he believes to be the Christian alternative. He focuses on the historiography of Hegel, Comte, Dilthey, von Ranke, Marx, Burckhardt, Spengler, Toynbee, Beard, and Collingwood. He bifurcates these nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians into scientific and relativistic camps and concludes that both approaches are inadequate:

¹⁵¹Idem, The Shape, p. 13. Montgomery's unpublished essay, "The Quest for Absolutes: An Historical Argument," provides a summary of the development of his historical argument in The Shape of the Past.

¹⁵²Idem, The Shape, p. 41.

¹⁵³Ibid.

. . . the scientific historian is right that history demands a meaningful explanation, but he errs when he claims that secular philosophy or science can provide that explanation; and the relativistic historian is right in pointing out that scientific explanations of history are unsuccessful, but he makes the mistake of concluding that no definitive explanation is needed and one "sovereign decision" is as good as another.¹⁵⁴

Montgomery maintains that the Christian world view provides a way out of this labyrinth, but that the solutions it provides are of no real value unless they rest on a demonstrable foundation. He uses six basic steps to empirically validate the truth of the Christian world view:

1. On the basis of accepted principles of textual and historical analysis, the Gospel records are found to be trustworthy historical documents--primary source evidence for the life of Christ.
2. In these records, Jesus exercises divine prerogatives and claims to be God in human flesh; and He rests His claims on His forthcoming resurrection.
3. In all four Gospels, Christ's bodily resurrection is described in minute detail; Christ's resurrection evidences His deity.
4. The fact of the resurrection cannot be discounted on a priori philosophical grounds; miracles are impossible only if one so defines them--but such definition rules out proper historical investigation.
5. If Christ is God, then He speaks the truth concerning the absolute divine authority of the Old Testament and of the soon-to-be-written New Testament; concerning His death for the sins of the world; and concerning the nature of man and of history.
6. It follows from the preceding that all Biblical assertions bearing on philosophy of history are to be regarded as revealed truth, and that all human attempts at historical interpretation

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 95.

are to be judged for truth-value on the basis of harmony with Scriptural revelation.¹⁵⁵

This historical argument is the core of Montgomery's apologetic system. With this evidential defense of the Christian revelation, Montgomery next deduces ten principles of historiography which reflect a Christian philosophy of life. These ten principles are divided into four groups: metaphysical (principles one to three), ethical (principles four and five), anthropological (principles six to eight), and redemptive (principles nine and ten). These can be summarized as follows:

1. The entire historical process is meaningful, for it is the result of God's creative activity and has been hallowed by God's appearance in human flesh in the person of Christ and by His death for the sins of the whole world.
2. The decisive event ("Kairos") in the history of mankind is the act of God in Jesus Christ, and the ultimate criterion of historical significance for other events ("kairoi")--all of which are unique--lies in their relation to the Christ-act.
3. Final judgment on the historical process rests in the hands of God, not of men, and will be made manifest on the last day, when all history is brought to a close with the return of Christ.
4. There exists in the universe an absolute moral law (revealed in the Holy Scriptures and fulfilled in Christ) and an absolute ethical ideal (the Agape-love of God incarnated in Christ).
5. Truth in the most real sense is to be identified with personality, not with impersonal factors or forces.
6. Human nature is constant.
7. Fallen human nature is sinful, i.e., self-centered, and this self-centeredness extends to all human activities in every age.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 138-39. Footnote references deleted.

8. Because all human decisions are made in a sin-impregnated human environment, all decisions must be evaluated historically in terms of the lesser of two or more evils.

9. To God, history is "totum simul"--an eternal present--and in the sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross His love goes out to all men of all ages.

10. Redemption from self-centeredness takes place in the presence of Christ, and is available to anyone who puts his trust in Him.¹⁵⁶

Montgomery makes use of "Wittgenstein-inspired analytical philosophy" to defend objectivity in historiography against the charge by historical relativists like Wilhelm Dilthey that the historian's own subjectivity defeats any attempt to obtain a genuinely objective view of the past.¹⁵⁷ He cites the analytical approach to historiography that is reflected in the work of William H. Dray, C. G. Hempel, and J. A. Passmore, and considers the biblical implications of this recovery of confidence in historical and literary objectivity. In contrast to the distinction between the suprahistorical (Geschichte) and the ordinary historical (historische) realms and the Bultmannian claim that historical events do not have any meaning apart from the present existential experience of salvation in personal encounter with the Christ of faith, Montgomery argues that "if historical judgments cannot be anchored in the bedrock of objective reality, then the events which are the focus of those judgments become secondary and

¹⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 145-52.

¹⁵⁷Idem, The Suicide, pp. 367.

for all practical purposes useless."¹⁵⁸ Using the concepts of verifiability and meaningfulness as developed in analytical philosophy, he charges that subjectivistic approaches to biblical inspiration are technically meaningless, "for they are still maintained by the modern theologian regardless of the errors he purports to find in Scripture and regardless of the untestability of subjective experience."¹⁵⁹

Concerning the question of historical interpretation, Montgomery takes issue with Clark's view that "empirical history is inherently impossible" and with Ronald H. Nash's claim that "there is no necessary connection between any alleged fact and its interpretation."¹⁶⁰ In contrast, he asserts that "The conviction that historical facts do carry their interpretations (i.e., that the facts in themselves provide adequate criteria for choosing among variant interpretations of them) is essential both to Christian and to general historiography."¹⁶¹ Elsewhere he writes that "a Christian philosophy of history has to begin with the assumption that there are objective events which do indeed carry their interpretation with them. This is true not only of the events of biblical history but of the events of

¹⁵⁸Dennis Roy Hillman, "The Use of Basic Issues in Apologetics from Selected New Testament Apologies" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 41.

¹⁵⁹Montgomery, The Suicide, p. 369.

¹⁶⁰Nash, "The Use and Abuse of History," p. 223.

¹⁶¹Montgomery, "Clark's Philosophy of History," p. 375.

history in general."¹⁶² In support of this position, he refers to the apostolic proclamation and interpretation of Christ's resurrection as an objective truth to those whose world view was inhospitable to such facts and interpretations. Montgomery naturally acknowledges that historians disagree in their interpretations of historical events but claims that the difficulty is not located in the inability of historical facts to speak clearly apart from philosophical commitments. Instead, he says that "the trouble with secular philosophy of history is not that it has looked into history instead of to aprioristic first principles in endeavoring to understand the past; it is that the secularists have been deflected by their extra-historical commitments from looking at history objectively--and particularly from looking at the Christ of history objectively."¹⁶³ He contends that if the facts recorded in the New Testament had been merely civil occurrences, historians would not have called into question the testimony by which they are established. It was the importance annexed to them (e.g., the salvation of humanity) that raised a cloud in their minds and created disproportionate doubts.¹⁶⁴ In a similar vein, Montgomery uses Simon Greenleaf's The Testimony of the Evangelists to vindicate the interpretation of

¹⁶²Idem, Where Is History Going?, p. 203.

¹⁶³Idem, "Clark's Philosophy of History," p. 376.

¹⁶⁴Idem, Faith Founded, p. 104.

the events in the life of Christ in the four gospels in light of the rules of evidence administered in courts of justice.¹⁶⁵

Resurrection Apologetic

Montgomery's defense of history as an objective tool of inquiry leads to his defense of the truth of the Christian world view on the basis of the historically verifiable resurrection of Christ. In History and Christianity, he examines the historical evidence for the life and claims of Jesus, agreeing with Millar Burrows that "the historic revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth must be the cornerstone of any faith that is really Christian."¹⁶⁶ In this book he seeks to refute four errors commonly committed by historians and theologians who reject the New Testament portrait of Jesus: (1) exclusive reliance upon the judgments of radical critics in dealing with the question of the reliability of the New Testament documents, (2) neglect of the primary historical documents themselves, (3) begging the question with respect to the miraculous, and (4) the assumption that the early Christians transformed a human Jesus to a divine Christ because of messianic expectations.¹⁶⁷ Without assuming inspiration or infallibility, he begins with an assessment of the New Testament documents using the

¹⁶⁵Idem, The Law Above the Law (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), pp. 91-140.

¹⁶⁶Millar Burrows, More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls (New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 55.

¹⁶⁷Montgomery, History and Christianity, pp. 16-22.

bibliographical, internal, and external tests of historical documents proposed by C. Sanders in Introduction to Research in English Literary History.¹⁶⁸ After analyzing the textual tradition, manuscript support, internal eyewitness claims, external conformity to independent historical evidence, and the assumptions of form criticism, Montgomery concludes that on the basis of the accepted canons of historical method, the New Testament documents can be relied upon to give an accurate report of Jesus:

. . . the documentary attestation for these records is so strong that a denial of their reliability carries with it total skepticism toward the history and literature of the classical world. We found the New Testament to contain eyewitness testimony to the life and claims of Jesus, and to have been in circulation while friends and foes who had known Jesus were still alive and able to refute exaggerated, inaccurate or unwarranted statements about him.¹⁶⁹

He emphasizes that this line of argument rests solely upon historical method, not theology. Using the New Testament as a collection of primary historical documents, he concludes that "Jesus regarded himself as no less than God in the flesh, and that his disciples, under the pressure of his own words and deeds, came to regard him in the same way."¹⁷⁰ He completes his case by refuting the only three alternatives to the interpretation that Jesus is divine: (1) he was a charlatan, (2) he was a lunatic, and (3) the disciples were charlatans, lunatics, or

¹⁶⁸C. Sanders, Introduction to Research in English Literary History (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952).

¹⁶⁹Montgomery, History and Christianity, p. 43.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p. 49.

naive exaggerators. After demonstrating that none of these options is consonant with history, psychology or reason, he states that "by process of elimination, we are brought to affirm Jesus' deity not only as a claim, but also as a fact."¹⁷¹ For Montgomery, the resurrection is the supreme apologetic because it provides the only adequate explanation of the historical facts surrounding Jesus and the disciples.

Flew and Wisdom's parable of the invisible gardener may reflect the religious claims of many people, but it does not apply to the Christian affirmation of God, because "central to the Christian position is the historically grounded assertion that the Gardener entered the garden: God actually appeared in the empirical world in Jesus Christ and fully manifested his deity through miraculous acts in general and his resurrection from the dead in particular."¹⁷² Montgomery holds that the resurrection takes on its fullest meaning in the context of Christ's claims, and that on this basis, event and interpretation are conjoined. Because of the overarching significance of death and the human quest for immortality, it would be foolish, he argues, to write off the resurrection event as trivial. The resurrection is significant not simply because it is a miracle but because this miracle effectively deals with "the most fundamental area of man's

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁷²Idem, The Suicide, p. 261.

universal need, the conquest of death."¹⁷³ Thus, the resurrection points to the truth of Jesus' claim to Godhead, and "cannot be left on the plane of an inexplicable anomaly requiring no inferential judgment."¹⁷⁴

Montgomery defends his resurrection apologetic against a number of philosophical and historical objections. A primary objection challenges the whole concept of the miraculous. In Faith Founded on Fact, Montgomery systematically deals with the standard philosophical criticisms of miracles: (1) miracles require law but law negates miracles; (2) the defender of miracles holds to uniform law while denying it; (3) miracles even if provable do not prove deity; (4) miracles can always be reduced to natural events, and (5) science requires us to reduce miracles to natural events.¹⁷⁵ He maintains that empirical evidence of the unique and nonanalogous should not be ruled out a priori by antinaturalistic presuppositions or rigid conceptions of natural law.

A second objection concerns the use of presuppositions of historical method and an implicit interest in the Christian faith.¹⁷⁶ Montgomery notes that all arguments and systems begin with presuppositions, and maintains that it is better to begin with presuppositions of method rather than presuppositions of substantive content. He justifies his investigation of Christianity before other

¹⁷³Idem, Faith Founded, p. 61.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 48-72.

religions with the claim that "it is the only religion which purports to offer external, objective evidence of its validity. All other religions appeal to inner experience without any means of objective validation."¹⁷⁷

A third objection is that the resurrection was not a historical but a transhistorical, eschatological event. This appeal to the realm of suprahistory or metahistory is a Pyrrhic victory because it makes the resurrection unverifiable and thus meaningless.¹⁷⁸

Another objection is that Jesus rose spiritually, not bodily. Montgomery replies that "apart from the New Testament materials, no one can say anything significant about the resurrection, and these documents insist on a physical resurrection."¹⁷⁹

Montgomery frequently acknowledges that his evidential apologetic for the resurrection leads only to a "high level of probability," but he adds that the demand of absolute certainty leads only to pure formality rather than a knowledge of the real world.¹⁸⁰ His argument from the resurrection to the truth of the biblical assertions bearing on philosophy and history "is not a rational

¹⁷⁶Idem, The Shape, p. 140.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Idem, "Having a Fuddled Easter?" Christianity Today, March 31, 1972, pp. 41-42.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁸⁰Idem, Where Is History Going?, p. 137.

proof in the sense of a demonstration in pure mathematics or formal logic; rather, it is an empirical argument based upon the application of historical method to an allegedly objective event. Thus it provides no more than probable evidence for the truth of the Christian world view."¹⁸¹ For Montgomery, apodictic certainty stems only from self-evident axioms in the analytic realm. But while synthetic proofs fall short of certainty, all factual decisions in life are based on such proofs and thus "cannot be summarily dismissed just because a vital religious question is at issue."¹⁸² Synthetic persuasiveness becomes the basis for a reasonable faith that will jump the gap from plausibility to certainty. Montgomery does not argue that empirical verifiability automatically produces subjective commitment, but he does claim that objective verifiability constitutes the difference between genuine and blind faith.¹⁸³

Theistic Apologetics

Contingency Argument from the Second Law of Thermodynamics

Although Montgomery's apologetic thrust is primarily historical, he does offer his own version of some of the theistic proofs. For him, the fundamental argument is what F. C. Copleston called the argument from contingency. In essence, this argument states that existence cannot be accounted

¹⁸¹Idem, The Shape, p. 139.

¹⁸²Idem, Faith Founded, p. 59.

for without a meaningless infinite regress unless there is a being which contains within itself the reason for its existence, that is, a self-existent being. Montgomery uses the second law of thermodynamics to support and illustrate this contingency argument, maintaining that the entire universe can be viewed as a closed system which left to itself will go to a state of maximum entropy.¹⁸⁴ Without a divine intervention, this irreversible process will lead to the heat death of the universe at a finite time in the future. Thus, if the universe were uncreated and eternal, it would already have reached maximum entropy. Montgomery adds that "this a posteriori argument from contingency is empirically grounded in testable experience; it is neither a disguised form of the highly questionable ontological argument, which asserts a priori that God's essence establishes his existence, nor an attempt at allegedly 'synthetic a priori' reasoning."¹⁸⁵

Theistic Argument from the Semi-Transcendent "I"

Noting that no person can be fully comprehended as an object, Montgomery builds upon the empirical groundwork that led Ian Ramsey to conclude that there is a sense in which humans transcend their contingency. The effort of hyper-objectivists to deny human subjectivity and free will leads to their own epistemological evaporation. In Montgomery's assessment, this concept of a

¹⁸³Idem, The Suicide, p. 355.

¹⁸⁴Idem, ed., Christianity for the Tough-Minded (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), pp. 26-27; The Suicide, 256-58.

"semi-transcendent I" establishes the possibility of metaphysical assertions and legitimate language about God. There is an analogy between the way "I" integrates a galaxy of perceptions, emotions, and assertions and the way "God" acts as a contextual presupposition for the universe.¹⁸⁶

Transcendental Ethics

In addition to his role as a theologian and historian, Montgomery is also a lawyer. In this capacity, he builds a case for "higher law" in The Law Above the Law and Situation Ethics.¹⁸⁷ He states that in the Code of Professional Responsibility of the American Bar Association, the doubtful assumption is made that society will somehow maintain the high standard of this document. Conscience is conditioned by environment, and morals on the individual and public levels can vary and degenerate. The problem of arriving at a transcultural and transtemporal moral system is illustrated by the argument of the defendants in the Nuremberg trials who complained that they were being tried under ex post facto laws. Since their behavior was consistent with the principles of National Socialist Germany, the Tribunal had to appeal to permanent values that transcended those of individual societies. In short, they appealed to a "law above the law." The quest for the Grundnorm, the basic norm which "gives coherence

¹⁸⁵Idem, Tough-Minded, p. 26.

¹⁸⁶Idem, The Suicide, p. 259.

to the plurality of legal principles" in a system, is in fact a quest for a transcendental ethic.¹⁸⁸ Montgomery criticizes the traditional answer to this dilemma in the theory of Natural Law, arguing that the search for ultimate values will be fruitless apart from a revelation from God, the ultimate source of morality. He claims that "Biblically revealed 'higher law' offers the only reliable guide to personal and national health, and thus to the preservation of individual and corporate life."¹⁸⁹

Biblical Apologetics

Biblical Revelation

Montgomery lays great stress on the epistemological need for revelation, the third way of knowing. Reason and experience alone are not in themselves able to provide answers to the fundamental philosophical questions. Similarly, the principal theme in his book, Where Is History Going? is that secular historiography cannot provide an answer to the question posed in the title. After examining the proposed solutions to this problem in the works of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Spengler, Toynbee, and others, Montgomery concludes that

¹⁸⁷Joseph Fletcher and John Warwick Montgomery, Situation Ethics (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972).

¹⁸⁸Montgomery, The Law Above the Law, p. 32.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 47.

the answer must come from outside the historical process.¹⁹⁰ Part of the human predicament is a lack of absolute historical perspective, and this can only be provided by a revelation from god "who created both the process and the people who take part in it."¹⁹¹ He adds that the central contention of the Christian religion is that God entered human life in the person of Jesus the Christ, and it is the biblical revelation in connection with the events that lead up to and point back to the incarnation that "firmly joins 'spiritual' truth to historical, empirical facticity."¹⁹²

For Montgomery, this revelational basis for theological theorizing has a single source rather than multiple sources (the Bible plus tradition, reason, and experience). Multiple-source views of the subject matter of theology are unstable, because when two or more are not in accord, one ultimately emerges as the final criterion of judgment, leading to a single-source interpretation. Montgomery argues that the Bible is the source by which reason, church tradition, and religious experience must be theologically evaluated. He also maintains that Scripture is perspicuous; if it is not self-interpreting, yet a higher revelation would be needed to provide interpretive canons for it. The issues of revelation and hermeneutics are inextricably bound.

¹⁹⁰Idem, Where Is History Going?, pp. 17-34.

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁹²Idem, The Suicide, p. 284.

Biblical Criticism

Part of Montgomery's apologetic thrust is his defense of the integrity and historical validity of the Bible in light of radical biblical criticism. He contends that such criticism is inspired more by cultural pressure than by new discoveries of empirical fact which force modifications of traditional thinking. Just as the critical issue in the Patristic age was Christological and the crisis in the Medieval and Reformation churches was soteriological, the problem in Christian dogmatics today is epistemological. Montgomery notes that "Jesus considered the Old Testament to be fully revelatory and totally reliable," adding that if Jesus was indeed God incarnate as attested by his divine claims and resurrection, his testimony to the revelatory character of Scripture "outweighs any and every counterargument from particular difficulties."¹⁹³ He also argues that the Dibelius-Bultmann formgeschichtliche Methode (form-critical method) depends on rationalistic anti-miraculous presuppositions and subjective interpretations as to which forms underlie the New Testament materials. Furthermore, "the time interval between the writing of the New Testament documents as we have them and the events of Jesus' life which they record is too brief to allow for communal redaction by the early church."¹⁹⁴ Montgomery claims that the historical-critical method is scientistic, not scientific, because it yields results in accord with its

¹⁹³Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., p. 127.

philosophical assumptions rather than in accord with the objective historical materials at hand.

Biblical Inspiration and Inerrancy

Beyond the issues of biblical revelation and criticism is the question of the character and extent of biblical inspiration. There is far from universal agreement among those who accept the authority of the Bible as to what inspiration means and whether biblical assertions on historical and scientific matters are inerrant. Montgomery consistently argues that the concept of an errant inspired Scripture is analytically meaningless, and marshals the tools of classical scholarship and archaeological findings to support his position of plenary inspiration. In response to those who claim that inerrancy has not survived the assault of modern historical and scientific scholarship, Montgomery writes:

The strangeness in this line of argumentation lies in two principal considerations: (1) The alleged factual errors and internal contradictions in Scripture which are currently cited to demonstrate the impossibly archaic nature of the inerrancy view are themselves impossibly archaic in a high proportion of instances; and (2) the most recent scholarly investigations and intellectual trends bearing on the validity of biblical data have never been more hospitable to inerrancy claims.¹⁹⁵

He discusses a number of alleged discrepancies, asserting that these have been recognized for centuries and have been dealt with in a variety of effective ways.

Contemporary critics of biblical inerrancy are citing objections that have been

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 318.

adequately dealt with over and over again. Montgomery claims that the issue is not empirical but philosophical; that is, "there has been an alteration in the philosophical Zeitgeist which, apart from the question of particular factual evidence, makes scriptural inerrancy offensive to much of contemporary theological thought."¹⁹⁶ This shift has been in the direction of metaphysical dualism which claims that the Absolute cannot be fully manifested in the phenomenal world, and theological existentialism which minimizes propositional facticity and objective validity in favor of subjective relationships. Montgomery applies the techniques of analytic philosophy to the anti-inerrancy view of Scripture which is derived from this dualistic and existential perspective.¹⁹⁷

Montgomery has written numerous articles on the topic of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, and he is the editor of an international symposium on the trustworthiness of Scripture called God's Inerrant Word.¹⁹⁸ His chapters entitled, "Biblical Inerrancy: What Is at Stake?," "Lessons from Luther on the Inerrancy of Holy Writ," and "The Approach of New Shape Roman Catholicism

¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 321.

¹⁹⁷Idem, "The Relevance of Scripture Today," in The Bible--The Living Word of Revelation, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), pp. 201-18.

¹⁹⁸Idem, ed., God's Inerrant Word (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974).

to Scriptural Inerrancy: A Case Study" stress his view that bibliology is foundational to the rest of theology.

Theological Critiques

In a paper entitled, "The Theologian's Craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology,"¹⁹⁹ Montgomery draws a comparison between scientific and theological methodologies using Popper's work on models and conceptual fabrics. The theologian, in this view, is one who engages in forming and testing theories concerning the divine, and the source of revelational data for this kind of model formation is Scripture. The cognitive process involves not only induction and deduction, but also what C. S. Pierce calls "retroduction" or "abduction." This is the imaginative formation of conceptual Gestalts or networks of ideas which render data intelligible. These theological models are used to achieve epistemological vividness, and as they grow they must be repeatedly tested by Scripture as understood through a sound hermeneutical grid. Montgomery develops a structural model of theological explanation that incorporates the scientific, artistic, and sacral levels in the movement from the objective (scientific) level to the semi-transcendent (subjective or artistic) level to the transcendent (sacral) level.

Building on these theological criteria, Montgomery offers a number of critiques of nontheistic world views and of theistic approaches that do not

¹⁹⁹In Montgomery, The Suicide, pp. 267-313.

comply with historical Christianity. In The Suicide of Christian Theology, he traces the shift in Christian theology since the eighteenth century away from a revelatory base to current subjective uncertainty. After an examination of the influences of deism, naturalism, and humanism on early twentieth-century Protestant and Catholic modernism, he discusses Barth's attempt to restore Christian doctrine through a dialectic of yes and no and the subsequent developments in the theologies of Bultmann and Tillich. In the same book, Montgomery critiques the theothanatological or death of God movement as represented by Gabriel Vahanian, Harvey Cox, Thomas J. J. Altizer, William Hamilton, and Paul M. van Buren. His analysis of these five theologians is summarized in these words:

. . . in all of these thinkers the theological center shifts away from a God whose transcendence causes him to become more and more indistinct, until finally, in van Buren, he passes into the realm of analytic meaninglessness. And for all of these morticians of the Absolute, God's vague or vacated position on the theological stage is replaced by Man--literary man (Vahanian), urban man (Cox), mystical man (Altizer), social man (Hamilton), ethical man (van Buren). Correspondingly, the Christ of these "Christian atheists" moves from divine to human status: his kenosis becomes continually more pronounced until finally the divine "hiddenness" in him is absolutized, yielding a humanistic Jesus with whom modern man can truly and optimistically stand in "I-You" partnership in a world of secular challenge and dynamic change.²⁰⁰

As in all his critiques, Montgomery's proposed alternative appeals to the application of the verification principle to the historical incarnation and resurrection of Jesus. The New Testament affirmation of the existence of God lies

within the realm of empirical testability, and Montgomery defends the historical reliability of the New Testament documents and the need of a sound view of revelation and inspiration without which God becomes eclipsed by a misty transcendence.

Montgomery criticizes process theology, pantheism, humanism, agnosticism, and skepticism in The Suicide of Christian Theology and Christianity for the Tough-Minded,²⁰¹ and in The Shape of the Past he critically examines rationalism, positivism, materialism, romanticism, and realism as modern approaches to historiography.²⁰² In Where Is History Going? he evaluates the Barthian divorce between theology and history as well as Tillich's approach to ultimate concern and theonomous history.²⁰³ His two-volume work, Crisis in Lutheran Theology,²⁰⁴ concentrates specifically on the current theological situation in the Lutheran Church with respect to biblical and doctrinal authority. Damned Through the Church²⁰⁵ is a theological critique of ancient and modern misconceptions of the Christian church, and The Shaping of

²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 91.

²⁰¹Ibid., pp. 124ff.; Tough-Minded, pp. 10-25.

²⁰²Idem, The Shape, pp. 66-95.

²⁰³Idem, Where Is History Going?, pp. 100-140.

²⁰⁴Idem, Crisis in Lutheran Theology, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973).

America²⁰⁶ provides a critique of American ideological issues from the historical Christian perspective.

Other Apologetic Approaches

While Montgomery's primary epistemological vindication of the Christian Weltanschauung is based upon the empirical contribution of historiography, he does not limit himself solely to this approach, but employs several secondary lines of evidence. One of these, the use of myth and allegory, reflects the influence of G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Dorothy Sayers on his thinking. Tolkien's essay, "On Fairy-Stories," in Essays Presented to Charles Williams²⁰⁷ examines the four elements of fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation that are found in fairy-stories and associates the concept of "eucatastrophe" with the element of consolation.²⁰⁸ While Tolkien affirms the historicity of the gospel accounts, he nevertheless sees a mythic dimension to them as well and affirms that "Legend and History have

²⁰⁵Idem, Damned Through the Church (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970).

²⁰⁶Idem, The Shaping of America (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976).

²⁰⁷J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in Essays Presented to Charles Williams, ed. C. S. Lewis (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966 [1947]), pp. 38-79.

²⁰⁸Ibid., p. 81.

met and fused" in the birth and resurrection of Christ, the "eucatastrophe of Man's history."²⁰⁹ According to Tolkien,

The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels -- peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving: "mythical" in their perfect, self-contained significance; and at the same time powerfully symbolic and allegorical; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe.²¹⁰

Tolkien, Lewis, and other "apologists of eucatastrophe,"²¹¹ believe that the archetypal dimensions that are found in myth and other forms of literature reflect fundamental elements in the human consciousness, including deep human desires that go beyond the strictures of time and culture. In "The Descent and Ascent of God," Montgomery states that "The genuine historicity of the Gospel does not prevent it from being at the same time genuinely mythical--in the special sense of a story that cuts to the heart of man's subjective need."²¹² He believes with Tolkien that

. . . the myths and legends and tales of the world that give symbolic expression to man's fundamental needs (Carl Gustav Jung called them "the archetypes of the collective unconscious") serve as pointers to the reality of the Christian message in which they are historically fulfilled.²¹³

²⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 83-84.

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 83.

²¹¹John Warwick Montgomery, ed., Myth, Allegory, and Gospel (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), p. 11.

²¹²Idem, "The Descent and Ascent of God," in The Suicide, p. 492.

²¹³Ibid., p. 493.

Montgomery appeals in Myth, Allegory, and Gospel to the use of these archetypes in creative literature as an alternative approach to Christian apologetics that can be especially meaningful for the more aesthetically and less rationalistically oriented. After discussing the problematic nature of most approaches to subjectivistic apologetics, he states that "The universal or near-universal appeal of great literature to Christian and non-Christian alike holds out the possibility of a more solid Subjective bridge by which unbelievers might pass into the Kingdom."²¹⁴ This can be approached from a negative and a positive side. Concerning the former, Montgomery writes,

Here an effort is made to show that secular literary classics (1) depict the sinful, fallen condition in exact accord with biblical anthropology, and (2) demonstrate that all contemporary secular ways of salvation are deceptive and unable to solve man's dilemma. By process of elimination, then, the reader is brought to a consideration of the Christian answer as the only, or at very least the most meaningful, solution to his fallen condition.²¹⁵

Montgomery illustrates this process by alluding to Camus' The Plague, Orwell's 1984, Kafka's The Trial, Golding's Lord of the Flies, and Beckett's Waiting for Godot.

On the positive side, Montgomery believes that there are many literary examples, especially from mythology and folktale, in which

. . . redemptive knowledge would surface not in a direct fashion but by way of symbolic patterns--visible not only to the sensitive psychoanalyst, but also to the folklorist whose material "bubbles up" collectively from the

²¹⁴Idem, Myth, Allegory, and Gospel, p. 21.

²¹⁵Ibid.

subconscious of the race. Literature in this special sense could therefore reflect the Christian story in an objective sense and trigger conscious acceptance of it.²¹⁶

It is in this context that Montgomery appeals to the theological novels of Chesterton, the "numinous novels" of Williams, the "allegorical myths" of Lewis, and the deep myths of Tolkien as a valid literary apologetic from a subjective orientation of the truth of Christianity.²¹⁷

Another secondary apologetic approach to the defense of Christianity employed by Montgomery follows a very different line of evidence. In his Principalities and Powers,²¹⁸ he makes extensive use of occult phenomenology to argue against materialistic reductionism of supernatural manifestations to the level of the paranormal and the further reduction of the paranormal by rationalists to the normal. The aprioristic explanatory constructs used by the opponents of occult and religious supernaturalism hinder an openness to the empirical evidence which can be derived from controlled investigations. Montgomery believes that such constructs can be useful only when investigators are willing to accept new facts even when their attempts to explain them prove inadequate.²¹⁹

²¹⁶Ibid., p. 26.

²¹⁷Ibid., p. 29.

²¹⁸Idem, Principalities and Powers (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973).

²¹⁹Ibid., pp. 44-46.

In Principalities and Powers Montgomery overviews the history of occultism, and focuses on the Cabala, the Hermetic tradition, astrology, and the Tarot, concluding in part that these are manifestations of a counterfeit spirituality. However, he concludes that "a negative attitude toward all that is occult can blind us to the overwhelmingly important truth . . . that wandering in the occult labyrinth may be halting attempts to find the way of life."²²⁰ The occult quest for the philosopher's stone ultimately leads to despair and delusion, because the quest cannot be fulfilled in the esoteric, but only in what has become exoteric (i.e., Christ). Montgomery writes that the Christ of history is the only adequate foundation; "All others are chimerical: the castles of occult experience built upon them will turn to mist when the Sun of righteousness shines upon them."²²¹

In The Quest for Noah's Ark,²²² Montgomery explores another secondary line of evidence for the historical veracity of biblical Christianity. In this volume, he provides a detailed account of the expeditions to Ararat in pursuit of the ark (including his own) along with a history of the ancient and modern reported sightings. He believes that the "artifact" hidden under the ice on Ararat may well be the remains of the ancient Noahic vessel, and that there

²²⁰Ibid., pp. 170-71.

²²¹Ibid., p. 175.

²²²Idem, The Quest for Noah's Ark (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972).

would be apologetic significance in the unqualified demonstration of its existence. In The Quest for Noah's Ark, he builds an extensive case from a wide variety of sources to establish a reasonable probability for the existence of this artifact.

How Do We Know There Is a God?²²³ represents another supplemental approach in Montgomery's defense of Christianity. This is a question-and-answer format in which he briefly addresses questions taken from the whole range of historical, philosophical, scientific, moral, and theological objections to the Christian faith.

Ten Issues in Apologetics

The major distinguishing features of John Warwick Montgomery's apologetic system will be summarized by a concise presentation of his approach to the ten critical issues listed in Bernard Ramm's Varieties of Christian Apologetics.²²⁴

The Relationship Between Philosophy and Christianity

Montgomery believes that philosophy has profound limitations as a tool of inquiry, especially in the quest for permanent and universal principles. When philosophy is unaided by revelation, it can only reach tentative

²²³Idem, How Do We Know There Is a God? (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973).

conclusions because it is forced to examine the ever-changing human situation from within. He does, however, think that philosophy can make a valuable contribution, albeit a negative one. He states that "Philosophy has served its purpose when it has shown the logical errors in attempts to reach absolutes by analyzing the human situation" ²²⁵ For him, philosophy in and of itself does not provide answers, but it does expose the problems.

It is in this negative sense that he uses philosophy to examine critically the logical inconsistencies of non-Christian world views such as pantheism, humanism, and agnosticism. ²²⁶ He does not follow such philosophical refutations with a philosophical defense of Christianity, but turns instead to an empirical defense of the Christian world view.

Montgomery's conviction is that "there are an infinite number of possible philosophical positions" ²²⁷ and that "an appeal to common facts is the only preservative against philosophical solipsism and religious anarchy." ²²⁸

The Value of Theistic Proofs

²²⁴Bernard Ramm, Varieties of Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), pp. 17-27.

²²⁵Montgomery, "The Quest for Absolutes," p. 1.

²²⁶Idem, "Is Man His Own God?" in Tough-Minded, pp. 21-34.

²²⁷Idem, "Once Upon an A Priori," in Faith Founded, p. 119.

²²⁸Ibid.

Montgomery holds that theistic argumentation has value, provided that it is inductive rather than deductive. He is thus opposed to any use of the ontological argument, but believes that the issue of contingency in the cosmological argument can be used as a valid approach to the affirmation of God's existence. He uses the implications of the second law of thermodynamics to establish the contingency of the universe, but does not systematically employ this as a part of his primary apologetic thrust.

Similarly, he draws a theistic argument from Ian Ramsey's concept of the semi-transcendent "I"²²⁹ and also uses the special problems associated with history and the law to show that answers to ultimate questions are not possible unless this is a theistic universe.

The Theory of Truth

As an evidentialist, Montgomery lays stress on Christianity as a historically-fulfilled world view whose truth claims are subject to empirical validation. Thus, he believes that it is improper to cogitate a metaphysical system on an aprioristic foundation. Instead of beginning with a set of metaphysical presuppositions, he begins with the methodological assumptions proper to scientific inquiry in the belief that an a posteriori approach to facticity is superior to rationalism and presuppositionalism. The assumptions of the

²²⁹Idem, The Suicide, p. 259.

empirical method "are few, self-evident, and more generally agreed upon than those of any other system."²³⁰

Montgomery applies these assumptions to the study of history and states that "a Christian philosophy of history has to begin with the assumption that there are objective events which do indeed carry their interpretation with them. This is true not only of the events of biblical history but of the events of history in general."²³¹ In his empirical approach to truth, Montgomery seeks to minimize the biases associated with the substantive presuppositions of different world views by appealing to the objectivity of the historical evidence in the context of solely methodological presuppositions.

In distinguishing his empiricism from the rationalistic approach to truth, Montgomery writes,

It might seem that since empirical method is based on intuitive premisses [sic], even empiricism is a variety of rationalism. Strictly speaking this is true, but the distinction between the two methods lies in the fact that whereas rationalists attempt to deduce their world-views from their presupposition(s), empiricists use their presuppositions only to justify investigation of the universe--this investigation providing the data for their world-view.²³²

The Noetic Effects of Sin

²³⁰Idem, The Shape, pp. 265-66.

²³¹Idem, Where is History Going?, p. 203.

²³²Idem, The Shape, p. 266.

Montgomery does not deny that sin has to some degree clouded human intellect, emotion, and will. This does not mean, however, that the human capacity to examine evidence and draw valid conclusions has been lost, though he would acknowledge that there is a spiritual rebellion which can only be overcome by divine grace. This grace includes the conviction of sin and a recognition of a need in one's life for the appropriation of the redemptive work of Christ. In Montgomery's view, there is no tension between the apologetic task and the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, this is a manifestation of the joint role of human responsibility and divine sovereignty. Thus, the Spirit of God can work through apologetics and proclamation to convince people of God's truth. The image of God in man has not been distorted to the extent that people are unable to weigh the evidence for and against Christianity when it is clearly presented and draw reasonable conclusions.

The Character of Revelation

In his defense of theism, Montgomery appeals to the evidences of general revelation in nature, but acknowledges that the knowledge of God which is manifest in creation is inherently limited. This is why he holds that there is no end to the number of world views which can be surmised in the absence of special revelation. It is to this form of revelation that his primary apologetic thrust is directed, and for him the clearest manifestation of special revelation from God was in the person and work of Jesus. The biblical witness to Jesus as

Messiah was provided in the context of spatio-temporal history, and Montgomery emphasizes the validity of the gospels as primary historical documents prior to any personal commitment to their message.

The Question of Probability Versus Certainty

The Christian faith, according to Montgomery, offers the same kind of certainty that can be achieved in other judgments that involve reasonable evidence. As an empiricist who employs the assumptions used in the scientific method, he admits that

. . . nothing is certain (other than the presuppositions of empiricism and the data with which the empiricist works, by definition). Thus one must make his decisions on probability, for the conclusions of empirical method are always hypothetical (to varying degrees, of course, depending upon the strength of present evidence and the probability of relevant new evidence arising).²³³

Like many apologists, Montgomery accepts the distinction between certainty and certitude. The former relates to the epistemological status of the evidence for Christianity, and can at best be probable, not absolutely certain. Despite this reality, a Christian can still enjoy a genuine inner certitude because of the assurance provided by the Holy Spirit. Thus, "the epistemological route by which one arrives at biblical truth does not determine the value of that at which

²³³Ibid.

one arrives--any more than the use of a less than perfect map requires one to reach a city having corresponding inadequacies."²³⁴

The Problem of Common Ground or Point of Contact

For Montgomery, there is a substantial common ground between the Christian and the non-Christian. This extends to general revelation in which nature in its contingency points beyond itself to a creator, and also to the realm of moral and aesthetic experience which finds its highest meaning when grounded in an absolute. Montgomery's principal appeal to common ground, however, lies in his methodological presuppositions of scientific inquiry as applied to historical investigation. The laws of logic and the rules of scientific procedure are not colored by metaphysical positions and provide a significant point of contact for the apologetic enterprise.

The Character of Faith

Montgomery relates faith to the intellect and to the will rather than to the emotions. Faith rests on fact rather than feelings or presuppositions. If Jesus' salvific claims are rejected by an inquirer, "it will not be because of a deficiency of evidence but because of a perversity of will, leading, as J. R. R. Tolkien has so well observed, 'to sadness or to wrath.'"²³⁵ The intellect must embrace the facts, but the latter must also be acknowledged by the will. The apologetic task is

²³⁴Batts, "A Summary," p. 78.

directed to the intellect, but it requires the divine enablement of God to bring a person to the point of willfully acknowledging against his own bias that he has been wrong in his assessment of the claims and credentials of Christ, particularly insofar as these claims impinge upon his own life.

Montgomery argues that historical facts carry their own interpretations, and that facts "ultimately arbitrate interpretations, not the reverse, at least where good science (and not bad philosophy) is being practiced."²³⁶ Faith, then, results from a response to facts. But this does not mean that Montgomery defines biblical faith simply as intellectual assent. It begins here but also involves volitional trust in the person of Christ.²³⁷

The Status of Christian Evidences

According to Bernard Ramm, the evidentialist "accepts Christian evidences as the God-given means of certifying the Christian faith to ordinary people and apart from sophisticated arguments."²³⁸ Montgomery essentially fits this description in that he believes that evidences can be perceived at face value in spite of one's philosophical predisposition as long as one is willing openly to

²³⁵Montgomery, Faith Founded, p. xx.

²³⁶Ibid., p. xxii.

²³⁷Idem, "What Must a Man Do to Be Saved?," in Spectrum of Protestant Beliefs, ed. Robert Campbell (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1968), pp. 59-60.

²³⁸Ramm, Varieties, p. 26.

consider them regardless of where they may lead. The evidence for the person and work of Christ is tied into the historical process and is available for all to examine. "The empirical, historical evidences in behalf of Christian revelation are not absolute (no synthetic proof can be), but they are sufficiently powerful to bring us to the feet of a divine Christ who affirms without qualification that Biblical revelation is trustworthy."²³⁹

The Relationship Between Faith and Reason

Biblical faith, according to Montgomery, is eminently reasonable; the same reasoning that sensibly accounts for ordinary experience when applied to the truth claims of Christianity affirms their validity. He states that "everyone--non-Christian as well as Christian--must employ inductive procedures to distinguish fact from fiction" and that "both those out of relation with God and those in proper relation to Him can compare alternative interpretations of fact and determine on the basis of the facts themselves which interpretation best fits reality."²⁴⁰ In the final analysis, intellectual obstacles to Christianity can be overcome, but this is no guarantee that when this is accomplished the hearer will be positively responsive. It is at this point that the issue moves out of the intellectual and into the volitional arena.

²³⁹Montgomery, "Clark's Philosophy of History," p. 390.

²⁴⁰Idem, Faith Founded, p. 122.
