

It is common in today's West to see religion as something childlike left over from a pre-scientific age and to view God as an old man sitting in the sky, stroking a long gray beard. Others recognise this as a silly anthropomorphism but still view religion as a product of evolutionary progress for humans to find meaning, comfort, and explanations for natural phenomena. Some find other natural explanations for the existence of religion. This is caused by several factors, but a major influence is the philosophical assumption of naturalism. It claims that only physical and observable forces operate in our world, thus leaving out any possibility of something supernatural. Philosophical, and ever so much even theological, discussions often have an underlying metaphysical assumption that only the natural exists. The natural sciences have for decades, if not centuries, already assumed naturalism in studies, research, and teaching, opting out of supernatural explanations and treating them with disregard if not even contempt.

For example, prominent atheist scholar Richard Dawkins writes in the preface to his book *The Selfish Gene*: “Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence.”

Often religion is seen as a narrative that comes crashing down once the light of scientific progress is shown upon it. This view is reinforced by the media and our education system and later maintained by culture and discourse in social circles. For Christians this creates a need to defend the faith and answer questions raised by critiques of religion and Christianity: Is this true? What is truth? Can we explain religion? If we can, what religion is true? Apologetics, the philosophical defence of faith, aims to answer these questions and many like them by articulating the rational basis for faith.

A global and connected society also brings challenges not faced by Christians in the past. A Christian apologist should be equipped to engage in dialogue with people representing a wide range of religions and worldviews, including philosophical movements like modernism or postmodernism and religious movements such as Islam, New Age religions, progressive theology, and Latter-day Saints. This requires not only a deep knowledge of theology but also an understanding of church history, philosophy, classical languages, and the sciences.

This might seem like a massive undertaking, something suitable only for a certain type of person. However, Scripture calls every single Christian to be prepared to make a defence for the faith. Scripture does not present evangelism or defending the faith as tasks set aside for an intellectual elite, but as responsibilities for every believer. As 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) reads: “*but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.*” Our Lord also commands us to go and make disciples of every nation. Matthew 28:19–20 (ESV): “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them*

*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

It is clear that every Christian is not only called but commanded by God to evangelize. Apologetics is not optional in this. Christianity presents truth-claims, and Christians ought to be ready to defend these not only with Scripture but also with creation. The Greek term for “*defence*” in 1 Peter 3:15, *apologia*, is the source of the word *apologetics*. Therefore, apologetics is the reasoned defence of the faith. It is not intellectual arrogance or aggression, nor a replacement for evangelism or catechesis, but a necessary aspect of the Christian calling. As seen in the verse mentioned above, Christians are called to do the defence “*with gentleness and respect.*”

However, the concept of defending the faith can be further categorized into five functions. These functions of apologetics include defence, acclamation, formation, evangelism, and pastoral care.

Defending the faith using philosophy is the clearest function of apologetics. This can mean anything from the defence of the existence of God with logic and science to giving arguments supporting the resurrection or divine inspiration of the Scriptures. For example, classical apologetics with its rational proofs (cosmological, moral, teleological) for the existence of God would be very useful in defending the faith.

Acclamation is closely tied to defending the faith. It would be presenting Christianity positively as true, coherent, and beautiful. For example, cultural apologetics would be very useful in this by showing how cultures shaped by Christianity have superior moral, intellectual, and social outcomes.

Apologetics also helps believers understand their own faith and the underlying claims and assumptions. It is unfortunate how many Christians inherit beliefs in a passive way, never thinking through what or why they actually believe in something. This can mean that when facing critique of said beliefs they are unable to properly explain or teach what they believe. And so apologetics forms the Christian worldview in several ways. It offers coherence of beliefs. When an individual learns to understand why the resurrection is such a major thing or why God is necessary for morality, it allows them to gain a unified system of belief and not just a set of isolated dogma. It also helps a Christian to gain a deeper, epistemic understanding of why they believe something and not just what they believe.

Apologetics also has an important part in an evangelism context. By clearing out intellectual barriers it clears a way for the proclamation of the Word of God. Apologetics works as a tool for us to be able to plant seeds that will later, *Deo volente*, grow into something to be sown.

However, not only unbelievers have intellectual barriers to faith. Sometimes Christians start doubting the logic or rationality of their faith and then apologetics serves a pastoral function.

It is important to note that while apologetics is a powerful tool for growing in the faith and for removing obstacles to Christianity, it will not convert anyone. As the Bible clearly states in several verses (e.g., Eph. 2:8–9 or 1 Cor. 12:3) faith is a gift from God. So while Christians are called to give a reasoned defence of the hope within them (1 Peter 3:15), human reason alone cannot convert somebody's heart (1 Cor. 2:14, John 6:44, or 2 Cor. 4:6). God alone can bring about new life through His Word and Spirit.

As a field of study apologetics stretches back to the early church, even though it was known back then as Christian philosophy. Even in the book of Acts (Chapter 17) we see St. Paul engage in apologetic reasoning in his sermon on the Areopagus in Athens. A bit later on the apostolic fathers, like Ignatius of Antioch or Polycarp, defended the orthodox faith against heresies. For example, Ignatius attacks docetism in his letter to the Smyrnians, warning the church against these heresies, and Polycarp references 1 John 4:3, calling Gnostics antichrists.

During the second century, figures like Justin Martyr used Greek philosophy to argue the rationality of the Christian faith. Not everyone in the early church loved the use of pagan philosophy to defend Christianity. For example, at the end of the second century Tertullian questioned the integration of Greek ideas into Christian philosophy. Antiquity also gives us other major names including Augustine of Hippo and Origen.

The medieval era gives birth to versions we know in the modern day of many defences for the existence of God. In the beginning of the second millennium Anselm of Canterbury wrote his *Monologion* and *Proslogion*, creating the Ontological Argument. Thomas Aquinas reintroduces the concept of the Cosmological Argument with his Five Ways.

The Reformation caused apologetics to focus more on denominational defence, with apologists making arguments for and against the Roman Catholic Church and different Protestant movements. It also had a renewed interest in biblical languages and the humanist movement had the expression “*Ad fontes*” meaning back-to-the-sources. These led to translations more faithful to the original Biblical texts.

The modern period saw apologetics respond to new challenges, including evolutionary theory, historical criticism of the Bible, and new philosophical movements (e.g., communism, existentialism). This era sees the emergence of three distinct schools of apologetic thought: evidentialism using historical and scientific

evidence to defend Christianity; classical apologetics using philosophy; and presuppositionalism arguing for the necessity of the Christian worldview as a foundation for rationality and experience.

In conclusion, apologetics is a tool for a Christian to fulfil the commandment in 1 Peter 3:15 to always be prepared to make a defence. It will not create faith, as this is something done by God, but even so it has been used since the very early church. Apologetics defends truth-claims against critics, it forms the worldview of believers and acts as an acclamation commending the beauty of the faith, and it has a function in the personal spiritual lives of Christians working in a pastoral context.

In a world saturated by different worldviews and narratives, the highest purpose of apologetics is to show how the Christian narrative is not crashing down, but is the narrative upon which all human purpose, hope, logic, and reason will finally rest.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*



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