

Introduction to Apologetics

APOLOGETICS

Origins of Apologetics

The Greek root words are apo, meaning "from," and logos, meaning "word, logic, or reasoning." The word for apologetics comes from the Greek word apologia, which is used in 1 Peter 3:15, and refers to giving a reason or reply for our faith. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;" (1 Peter 3:15) This word is a legal term that describes what a lawyer would do in defending his client. "Apologetics offers each person evidence and reasons for believing in the truth of Christianity."

Definition and Purpose

Theological studies encompass a wide array of disciplines, each dedicated to exploring and understanding different aspects of faith and spirituality. Among these disciplines, apologetics holds a unique position, serving as the branch of theology primarily concerned with defending and proving the truth of Christian doctrines. In essence, apologetics involves presenting well-reasoned arguments and evidence in support of Christian beliefs. It seeks to establish the validity and credibility of these beliefs, often in response to challenges or objections.

One key aspect of apologetics is the defensive approach, which involves responding to criticisms and doubts raised against the Christian faith. This approach aims to provide reasonable explanations and counterarguments, addressing specific issues or objections that may arise. An example of this approach can be seen in the writings of St. Paul the apostle, who frequently defended his beliefs in the face of persecution and opposition: "just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace." (Philippians 1:7). St. Paul and all the apostles are often seen in defense of the faith. They are beaten, they are rejected, sent to prison, so they are often found needing to defend and justify why they accept such circumstances.

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In contrast, the offensive approach in apologetics focuses on proactively presenting the Christian faith as a compelling and intellectually satisfying worldview. It involves engaging in discussions and dialogues with others, aiming to demonstrate the coherence and rationality of Christian beliefs. As St. Paul mentions, "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience

of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5). This approach seeks to initiate conversations and challenge prevailing assumptions, ultimately inviting others to consider the truth of the Christian message. Letting no thought simmer without an answer, rooted in Christ.

It is important to note that apologetics is not merely an intellectual exercise or a debate tactic. Rather, it is rooted in a deep desire to share the transformative power of the Christian faith with others. Apologists recognize that faith is not solely based on blind belief but can be supported by reason and evidence. By engaging in apologetics, they aim to provide a bridge between faith and reason, allowing individuals to explore the depths of their spiritual convictions.

Moreover, apologetics plays a vital role in fostering a deeper understanding of Christian doctrines and beliefs. By examining and defending these doctrines, the study helps to clarify, articulate, and refine them. This process contributes to the ongoing development and enrichment of Christian theology, ensuring its relevance and adaptability in the face of changing cultural and intellectual landscapes.

Biblical Foundation for Apologetics

In the beautiful history of Christianity, apologetics has been an enduring thread, interwoven into the very fabric of our faith. From the words of our Lord Himself to the writings of the apostles and the enduring legacy of early Church fathers, the call to defend and proclaim the truth of the Gospel has resonated through the ages. Our Lord Himself engaged in apologetical argument when He appealed to His miracles as proof that He was sent by the Father; "but the Father who dwells in Me does the works" (John 14:10) Additionally when st. Luke said "it seemed good to me... to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed," (Luke 1:3–4) He was defending the information being spread regarding the miracles, etc.

In the book of Luke, in the Holy Bible, we are told, “now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say.” (Luke 12:11) When Jesus instructed His disciples not to worry about how or what to answer when brought before authorities, He was preparing them for the challenges they would face in defending their faith. The early Church embraced this call with zeal, as evidenced by the bold preaching of apostles like St. Paul, who reasoned and persuaded in synagogues and marketplaces, sharing the message of the Kingdom of God with unwavering conviction, “as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.” (Acts 17:2) and “he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.” (Acts 19:8)

We must remind ourselves through tribulations and afflictions that defending our faith is one of the highest honors that could be appointed to anyone in this life: “some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.” (Philippians 1:15-17) Apologetics is a vital aspect of Christian discipleship. When we engage in apologetics, we are not simply defending abstract theological concepts, but rather the very foundation of our faith.

Famous Christian Apologists

In the early centuries of Christianity, a number of influential apologists emerged, defending the faith against pagan critics and heretics. These apologists played a vital role in shaping the development of Christian thought and doctrine.

One of the most famous apologists was Justin Martyr, who lived in the 2nd century AD. Justin was a convert to Christianity from paganism, and he was known for his willingness to engage in dialogue with pagans and to defend the faith in public debates. Prepared to die for his faith and join our Lord in the Kingdom of Heaven, all to defend his faith, wrote “but since we do not place our hopes on the present [order], we are not troubled by being put to death, since we will have to die somehow in any case.” (The Apologies of Justin Martyr) He additionally spoke on heretical religions, such as that of the Greeks as, “they said that Athena was the daughter of Zeus not from intercourse, but when the god had in mind the making of the world through a word, (logos,) his first thought was Athena.” (Justin Martyr) Here, Justin Martyr uses the thinking of the time to justify the creation, or make an apologetic correlation to the creation.

Another famous apologist was St. Clement of Alexandria, who lived in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. St. Clement was a prolific writer, and his works covered a wide range of topics, including theology, philosophy, and ethics. In his writings, St. Clement emphasized the importance of faith and reason, and he argued that Christianity was the perfect synthesis of the two. “I call him truly learned who brings everything to bear on the truth, so that from geometry, music, grammar, and philosophy itself, culling what is useful, he guards the faith against assault.” Clearly, St. Clement here directs us to use anything and everything in our surrounding to defend and present the faith.

St. Augustine of Hippo was another influential apologist who lived in the 4th and 5th centuries AD. St. Augustine was a brilliant theologian and philosopher, and his writings have had a profound impact on Christian thought. In his writings, St. Augustine defended the faith against a variety of heresies. He insisted “if you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself.”

These are just a few of the many famous Christian apologists who have made significant contributions to the defense and development of the faith. Their writings continue to be studied and debated by Christians today, and they provide a valuable resource for understanding the history and theology of Christianity.

Why Study Apologetics?

God generally calls upon His people to use reason, “come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord” (Isaiah 1:18) to know spirit truth and that of error, “we are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error,” (1 John 4:6) and to discern right from wrong, “but solid food belongs to those who are

“always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” (1 Peter 3:15)

of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Hebrews 5:14). God's call for His people to use reason, discern truth from error, and distinguish right from wrong demonstrates the importance of intellectual and moral growth in our spiritual lives. We must also aim to achieve the ability to use reason as part of the image of God in man. (Gen 1:26) Reason, a fundamental aspect of the image of God in man, allows us to critically analyze information, make informed decisions, and engage in meaningful dialogue. By cultivating our reasoning abilities, we can better understand and appreciate the truths of our faith and defend them against opposing arguments.

Regarding God's command, we are told to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." (1 Peter 3:15) There are numerous examples of God's people using reason to navigate complex situations and make wise choices. St. Paul speaks of his mission as "defending and confirming the gospel." (Phillipians 1:16) He adds in verse 17, "I am put here for the defense of the gospel." As St. Paul emphasizes in his mission, defending and confirming the gospel is a crucial task for church leaders and servants. By engaging in apologetics, we can effectively communicate our beliefs, address misconceptions, and foster a deeper understanding of the Christian faith among ourselves and others: "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." (Titus 1:9). Holding fast to the faithful word, as Titus 1:9 instructs, implies that our apologetic stance is reflected in our daily lives. By living out our faith with integrity, compassion, and love, we provide a compelling witness to the transforming power of the gospel.

Holding fast to the faithful word shows that apologetics extends even to our actions! There are many important qualities needed in a Church, servant or leader, however a gentle and patient approach, is a critical aspect of the service, as "a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth." (2 Tim 2:24-25) Engaging in respectful dialogue, listening attentively, and seeking to understand the perspectives of others creates a conducive environment for meaningful conversations and potential conversions.

Ultimately, the study of apologetics also enables a personal strengthening of the faith in knowing that it is founded on facts and truth. In the Letter to Diognetus, regarding the Word at hand, we are told how our faith separates us from a crowd: "for the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life." (Epistle to Diognetus, Chapter 5)

The Importance of Reason in Our Life of Faith

Our faith is only as valid as the object in which it is placed. St. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:14 that, "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also empty." In other words, what

makes faith have merit is the object of that faith. Why did Christ have to be one to die? Why do we use the sign of the cross? Do we really need communion? Does God really care about the details of our lives? The existence of evidence often precedes and supports faith. Rational individuals typically rely on some form of evidence or reasoning before trusting a situation or system, such as entering an elevator. There are two types of belief: "belief that" and "belief in." "Belief that" provides evidence and a rational basis for confidence, which is necessary for establishing "belief in." Once evidence-based belief is established, one can have faith in it.

The task of apologetics is not to reason someone into the kingdom. Apologetics can never actually force someone to make a decision for Christ. Christ said in John 6:65, "no one can come to me unless it has been granted him from the Father." The Holy Spirit must additionally work in their heart to move them towards faith in Christ. Therefore, faith and reason must work hand in hand to effectively reach others for Christ. Apologetics can help someone to "believe that" Jesus is the Christ, but can never force one to "believe in" Him. We are lowering people's intellectual barriers so that the Holy Spirit can penetrate their heart.

The Apologetic Approach

The call to apologetics is not reserved for a select few; it is a responsibility shared by all believers. Whether we are engaged in formal debates, sharing our faith with friends and family, or simply living out our daily lives with integrity and grace, we are all called to be ambassadors of the Gospel, proclaiming the truth of Christ to a world in desperate need of hope. We must then approach "meekness and fear" (1 Pet 3:15) being mindful of how we point out the inconsistencies of other views. We need to come across as "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread," as well as remain patient and virtuous in our lives, as we strive to be devout Christians.

***"We need to come
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Our lives serve as a powerful apologetic to the truth of Christianity. We have probably heard the expression, "you may be the only Bible that someone ever reads." St. Clement of Alexandria says "Let us haste, let us run, my fellow men—us, who are God-loving and God-like images of the Word—let us haste, let us run, let us take his yoke, let us receive, to conduct us to immortality, the good charioteer of men. Let us love Christ." In the same way, apologetics enhances the testimony of our lives, which is most likely what non-Christians will see first.

Embrace thus the challenge of apologetics with renewed zeal, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us. As we stand firm in our faith, may we always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks us about the hope that is within us.



Review Questions

1. What are the two main approaches to apologetics?
 - a. **Defensive and offensive**
 - b. Biblical and theological
 - c. Logical and rhetorical
 - d. Empirical and rational
2. The root words of apologetics are ____, meaning “from,” and ____, meaning “word, logic, or reasoning.”
 - a. **apo and logos**
 - b. logos and theos
 - c. logos and eidos
 - d. theos and logos
3. The purpose of apologetics is to ____ and ____ the truth of Christian doctrines.
 - a. **defend and prove**
 - b. explain and clarify
 - c. justify and substantiate
 - d. all of the above
4. Apologetics is important because it provides a ____ basis for the Christian faith.
 - a. rational
 - b. intellectual
 - c. evidential
 - d. **all of the above**
5. Who are some famous Christian apologists?
 - a. Justin Martyr
 - b. Tertullian
 - c. Origen
 - d. **All of the above**
6. Why is it important for Christians to be able to defend their faith?
 - a. Because it is a requirement of the Bible.
 - b. Because it helps to strengthen their faith.
 - c. Because it helps to witness to others.
 - d. **All of the above**
7. The Bible tells us that we should be prepared to give a defense for our faith. This is because
 - a. **It is a duty of all Christians to be prepared to give a defense for their faith.**
 - b. Apologetics is a waste of time and energy.
 - c. Christians should only focus on their own personal faith and not worry about defending it to others.
 - d. None of the above
8. The word "apologetics" comes from the Greek word "apologia," which means
 - a. **"To give a reason or reply"**
 - b. "To defend"
 - c. "To provide a rational basis"
 - d. All of the above
9. Apologetics is a branch of theology that seeks to
 - a. Defend the Christian faith against objections and challenges
 - b. Provide a rational basis for the Christian faith
 - c. **Both A and B**

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- d. None of the above
10. Which of the following is not a characteristic of good apologetics?
- a. It is intellectually honest
 - b. It is respectful of the other person's beliefs
 - c. It is persuasive
 - d. **All of the above**



Books & References

1.  Apologetics_SUS , accessed 25 March 2024,
<<https://suscopts.org/resources/literature/546/apologetics/>>

