



“The texts here assembled are ‘classics’—not in the sense that they answer all legitimate questions about Christianity, but that, when they were written, they made their readers think hard about the faith, and that they continue to do so today. This is a most worthy collection.”

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Chuck Colson, Founder, Prison Fellowship

“For years I have wanted a book of primary sources in apologetics to use in my classes. Now we have an excellent one in this volume. Editors Edgar and Oliphint have made good choices in the selections used. A number of them are fascinating pieces rarely considered today, but timely, such as Raymond Lull’s critique of Islam.”

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“Understanding apologetics as explicating, affirming, and vindicating Christianity in the face of uncertainty and skepticism, Edgar and Oliphint have skillfully selected the best pre-Reformation sources to introduce us to this ongoing task. Their volume, the first of two, fills a gap in scholarly resources and highlights the strength, wisdom, and solidity of defenders of the faith in earlier times.”

J. I. Packer, Board of Governors Professor of Theology, Regent College

CHRISTIAN
APOLOGETICS
PAST AND PRESENT

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A PRIMARY SOURCE READER

(VOLUME 1, TO 1500)

Edited by

WILLIAM EDGAR
K. SCOTT OLIPHINT

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Introduction to the Two-Volume Work

In this two-volume work we present an anthology of texts in Christian apologetics from the early church down to the present. Apologetics is a historic discipline, a genre that goes back to the ancient world. In the Christian context the word *apologetics* means defending and commending the faith. The apostle Peter tells his readers always to be ready to make a defense to anyone who calls them to account for their hope (1 Peter 3:15). Such an account or argument will look different from one age to another, although the gospel message remains the same.

Why is a two-volume collection of texts in apologetics important for our time? Though historical assessment is sometimes done when a certain exhaustion sets in or when the vitality of a movement is gone, that is not the current state of apologetics. And while historical studies can be dry, purely empirical data—little more than a record of a past over and done with—we believe the present work is nothing of the kind.

Indeed, apologetics today is flourishing in many quarters, and we hope these volumes will serve as a guide to this burgeoning field. The twentieth century saw both significant development in apologetics and a measure of decline.

A few examples of renewed interest include the following: France witnessed a revival of interest in apologetics beginning in the nineteenth century. The remarkable Roman Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel (1861–1949) developed what he called the “method of immanence,” by which he meant that if we listen to our very best personal insights, the question of God will be there. We may then follow up our inquiry and find that God has made abundant provision to answer our aspirations. A little later were Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) and Étienne Gilson (1884–1978), who contributed much to the revival of Thomistic apologetics.

From Great Britain came a number of unique apologists. G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) argued creatively for the faith, using, among other things, paradox to keep unbelievers off balance. It is *because* the Christian faith combines optimism

and pessimism, crusades and peacemaking, poetry and prose that it is true, unlike atheism, which is mathematical and one-dimensional. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) is arguably the most influential apologist of the twentieth century. In *Miracles*, *Mere Christianity*, and fantasy literature such as the *Chronicles of Narnia*, his clear, imaginative presentation of the basics of the Christian faith shows it to be not only true, but the only safeguard against *The Abolition of Man*. His influence continues to be felt today.

The list could go on. In America, we can think of J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937), Presbyterian defender of the faith against liberalism and so-called modernism.

At the same time, strangely enough, one can observe in the twentieth century a decline in the belief that apologetics serves any healthy purpose. The loss of zeal for the defense of the faith has a number of causes. The onslaught of the Enlightenment, followed by Romanticism, presented numerous challenges to the church. While human reason was celebrated by certain branches of the Enlightenment, serious doubts set in about whether humanity is capable of accomplishing anything without faith in something transcendent. Yet neither the newer use of reason nor the newer faith was quite the same as what the church had taught in previous centuries. Reason was now much more assertive than it had been, and faith much less rational.

This shift left the church with less common ground with the surrounding culture than previously, and thus with the conviction that it needed to take another look at the whole enterprise of theology. Many questions arose: How can Christians exercise the newly touted faculty of reason without betraying its dependence on the authority of revelation? How can faith appropriately deal with Enlightenment skepticism—for example, that of Voltaire—without denying the reality of evil, often the basis for disbelief? Is God really so well defined as in our theology books? Is Christianity the only true faith? The answers to these questions seemed elusive to many. Naturally Christian apologetics became much more problematic.

Besides such challenges in the realm of ideas, various social forces had the effect of making arguments for the faith implausible, that is, not so much false as incredible. Pluralization, the multiplication of people and cultures from different horizons in one place, as well as globalization, in which borders are increasingly porous, have made belief in one truth less likely, at least on the surface. In a day of greater awareness of other religions, the exclusivity or superiority of one creed simply sounds arrogant.

Another factor that puts doubts in our minds about the positive contributions faith can bring is the perceived connection between faith and violence. Many critics of religion point out that where there is religious certainty, there is often conflict. To many it would seem safer and more tolerant to leave faith out, or to make it so private as to allow it no palpable social effect.

Not surprisingly, several theological trends began to emerge out of these circumstances, trends that shied away from persuasive arguments for faith. One of these is *fideism*, the view that inquisitive reason is not needed for verification of belief and may even be counterproductive. Building on the heritage of Immanuel Kant, fideism (literally, “faith-ism”) seeks to spare faith any interaction with proofs or the use of evidences. Arthur James Balfour (1848–1930), famous for the declaration of 1917 supporting a Jewish homeland in Palestine, was also a lay theologian who advocated faith based on authority, not argument. For him instinct, custom, and the like were the way to God, rather than abstract reasoning.

Much of the impetus for the recent decline in apologetics can be credited to Karl Barth (1886–1968), perhaps the most powerful theological voice in the twentieth century. Barth sensed that the liberal outlook of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) had done the faith a disservice by making it far too compatible with science and philosophy in order to appease its “cultured despisers.” Barth retorted that Christian faith is not a *religion*, wherein humans aspire upward in the search for God, but rather a *revelation* of the “wholly other” God in Christ. In his *Church Dogmatics* he states that the only effective apologetics has been the “unintended one,” which he describes as that which “took place when God himself sided with the witness of faith.”¹ We cannot go into all the nuances of Barth’s approach here. Suffice it to say that while his intention was to allow pride of place to divine sovereignty, the effect was to put into doubt any serious attempt to engage with unbelief by means of intellectual persuasion.

Other forces have contributed to the eclipse of apologetics in the twentieth century. Today as we move well into the twenty-first century, we see many signs of a renewed interest in this discipline. Not all of it works off of the same agenda, of course. Indeed, the picture is complex.

1. A number of initiatives in apologetics are connected to evangelism and missions. The recent best seller *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, by New York-based pastor Timothy Keller, is a good example of the revival of popular apologetics. Keller not only tackles some of the perennial challenges to the gospel—exclusivity, freedom, evil, and so on—but he stresses the vitality of the Christian faith as a path toward meaning. He presents the cross of Christ as “a reversal of the world’s values.”²

2. One subject of concern, often in the Anglo-Saxon world, is the relation of Christian faith to science. John Polkinghorne, Thomas F. Torrance, Alister McGrath, John C. Collins, David Livingstone, Stanley Jaki, and many others have

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2nd ed., trans. Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 1/1:31.

2. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 197.

written extensively on the way the authentic findings of science may be compatible with Christian faith. Particularly in North America, critiques of macroevolution and arguments for “intelligent design” (ID) have produced a veritable cottage industry of materials. But other approaches put such arguments into question. There has appeared in our day a significant revival of appeals to natural law. Apologetics both Protestant and Roman Catholic has developed a view pleading for a recognition by the conscience of laws imbedded in nature that supersede positive laws created by society.

3. Philosophical apologetics has returned to a prominent place in many circles as well. Christian philosophers have recently risen to prominence in the academy. In contrast to previous generations in which positivism reigned—that is, the view that only hard facts empirically verified could be believed—today through the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff, Paul Helm, William Alston, Eleanor Stump, and others faith and philosophical reasoning are joined once again.

One of the most prominent philosophers in any circle is Alvin Plantinga (1931–). In his earlier works, such as *The Nature of Necessity* and *God, Freedom, and Evil*, he used a variant on Anselm’s ontological proof. More recently he has argued that belief in God is “properly basic,” without needing outside evidence. No analytical philosopher today, of whatever persuasion, can ignore his work.

Other Christian philosophers, coming from quite different points of view, have gained notoriety. For example, William Lane Craig (1949–) has revived the *Kalam* form of the cosmological proof (from Islamic dialectics). The argument says, (1) everything that has begun to exist must have a cause, (2) the universe began to exist, and (3) therefore the universe must have a cause. Richard Swinburne (1934–), a British Anglican turned Eastern Orthodox, defends the existence of God in a manner not unlike the scientific method. Using what he calls “arguments to a good explanation,” he explains how the facts point to God as a metaphysical necessity.

4. Somewhat different concerns are expressed by an amorphous group that focuses on worldview and presuppositions. In essence, this view holds that if we begin with a truly transcendental Origin, the God of the universe, then every part of life—from the intellect to politics to the arts to the family—holds together in an overarching understanding of the creation, the fall, and redemption. Though not uninterested in philosophical arguments, this group represents a more Continental type of sensibility than Anglo-Saxon. The modern origin of this view owes some debt to Immanuel Kant, although the more Christian appropriation of it was largely in the work of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). A link to apologetics was established by Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987), considered the founder of presuppositionalism as such.

Francis A. Schaeffer (1912–1984) should be credited with popularizing the significance of worldview for commending the gospel to an entire generation.

Others have sought to extend worldview thinking to apologetics by engaging in cultural analysis and making use of disciplines beyond theology or philosophy, such as psychology, the sociology of knowledge, intellectual history, and the like. A pioneer of this wider awareness for apologetics is Os Guinness (1941–), whose prolific speaking and writing have challenged the present generation to recognize the way the social dimensions of various trends, such as secularization and postmodernism, all play major roles in belief.

Neither Kuyper nor some of his followers were enthusiastic about applying this worldview thinking to apologetics, at least in their interpretation of the discipline.³ Today, even philosophers in the analytical approach of the Anglo-Saxon tradition are applying presuppositionalism to their work. We modestly refer the reader to the recent work of K. Scott Oliphint, particularly his *Reasons for Faith*.⁴

5. One important trend to note, because it has changed the way apologetics has operated, is a shift in opposition to Christian faith: from rationalist or even atheist to a *religious* opposition. Thus, the rise of Islam and other religious antagonists to Christianity has caught many Christians in the West off guard. While accustomed to debating humanists and rationalists—from the older radical atheists like Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Jean-Paul Sartre, to the so-called new atheists, including pundits like Samuel Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens (whose titles include, *The God Delusion* and *God Is Not Great*)—now apologetics must address the claims of Muslims or Hindus or even New Age views, which are fairly different from the claims of atheists.

Interestingly, for example, Muslims consider Christianity too loose, whereas the typical atheist will think it too strict and, indeed, conducive to violence. Thus Christian apologists will need to understand how the spiritual commitments of others must be taken seriously without considering all such commitments to be out of the same cloth. In any case, world religions and other forms of “faith,” even the vague mix-and-match varieties of spirituality, are becoming far more prominent on the world stage than classical atheism.

6. For another example, apologetics is now wrestling with various forms of postmodernism.⁵ Arguments against the postmodern condition are often thoughtful refutations of the sophisticated forms of relativism set forth by postmodernists.

3. Thus, the “Amsterdam School,” which includes Herman Dooyeweerd, D. H. Th. Vollenhoven, and Hendrik G. Stoker, has focused on philosophical critique, historiography, and the like. The Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto has developed this approach in further detail in areas such as ethics, political science, and aesthetics. While there have been sympathies among apologists and philosophers, in general they have not worked closely together.

4. K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006). We know of no other work quite like it, applying the principles of presuppositional apologetics to the standard problems in philosophy.

5. This is not the place to discuss the claims and counterclaims surrounding the question of the origins, the nature, and the propriety of this vast and nearly unmanageable concept. For those

More common are various attempts to correlate postmodern spiritual aspirations with aspects of Christian theology. This latter approach owes considerable amounts to Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and his heirs.

For example, Jean-Luc Marion (1946–), the French Roman Catholic philosopher, has proposed *God without Being*, a defense of the existence of God, not as a kind of metaphysical necessity, but as a force of love. Reality for him is a veil or a screen. God manifests himself from beyond the screen through signs whereby we sense his presence.

On the Protestant side one could think of the post-secular theology known as Radical Orthodoxy. The movement began in Cambridge, England, and has spread to the United States and beyond. Its best-known advocate is John Milbank, but one must also think of David Bentley Hart, the Eastern Orthodox thinker, and James K. Smith, a Pentecostal theologian. Among the contributions by this group, there is the emphasis on theology as having direct influence on society (“public theology”). Divine beauty should have a strong impact on our times. The idea is to contribute both “Christian counter-history” and “counter-ontology” to the social space we live in, in order that it not be pagan or secular social space.⁶

We believe that in the midst of this revival of apologetics, few things could be more useful than an acquaintance with how Christian faith was defended down through the ages. While the intellectual and social milieus of past authors were different from ours, deep down most of the basic challenges to the faith have been the same. Access to both historical and contemporary texts gives us fresh insight into how our fathers in the faith responded to the questions facing them. We thus can learn from their strengths and weaknesses. Reading them can also better inform us about how to be “in the world but not of it.” The great apologists, in varying degrees and with various postures, found themselves using the language of the day without wanting to succumb to the basic systems behind that language.

We hope in the end that the discovery of so many approaches will nurture and enhance our confidence in commending the faith at a time when so much is in flux on our planet.

While we know of no comparable anthology, several histories of apologetics are available. Easily the finest to date is by Avery Cardinal Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, a rich investigation of the foremost people and trends over two millennia.⁷ It is a pleasure to read, rendering what could be a laundry list of names and books into lively history. While a strong Roman Catholic believer, he man-

interested in exploring the issues in relation to apologetics, a good place to begin is Myron B. Penner, ed., *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).

6. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 321.

7. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005.

ages to include many, if not most, of the significant Protestant figures, though with some omissions. He chooses not to explore the rich literature interacting with heresies, presumably for lack of space, limiting his works to interaction with unbelief. The survey by L. Russ Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics, A.D. 100–1800*, is helpful but quite limited in scope.⁸ It presents the texts of historic figures, which is our approach here, but they are heavily edited. Encyclopedias too can be of use. The best in our opinion is the *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, which has numerous articles on individuals, as well as general surveys of apologetics history.⁹

In twenty-one centuries the church has produced an abundance of authors and texts. Our greatest challenge was to select them. To go about the task, we asked a number of questions. The first is historiographical. What are the major eras? Is there a reasonable periodization? Since generally one can identify commonalities among authors in given time frames, and often those correspond to acceptable groupings, we have chosen the eras according to their overarching characteristics.

The second question regarding the choice of readings is one of priorities, that is, which materials to select, and how extensively. Some choices are obvious. No anthology of apologetics would make sense without Augustine's *City of God*, Anselm's *Proslogion*, Pascal's *Pensées*, Schleiermacher's *On Religion*, Van Til's *Defense of the Faith*, C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, and the like. More difficult is deciding which of the lesser-known authors to include. Our approach was to keep several elements in balance. Regarding the major divisions in the Christian church, we have chosen to feature generous representation from Protestantism and somewhat less from the Roman Catholic Church as it emerged after the sixteenth century. We feature considerably less from Orthodoxy, mostly because far less material exists. One reason for this is that Orthodoxy either conquered the countries it was in, or it was under persecution, with little opportunity for free expression.

Our presentation is quite simple. We want the texts to speak for themselves. Thus, we provide an introduction to each major historical section. Then each chapter introduces its featured author, highlighting any significant fact bearing on the person and the text. Along with the readings themselves we provide a few footnotes for the sake of clarification when such is needed. We also offer diagnostic questions at the end of each text, to prompt reflection or discussion. These are only suggestive, and instructors may wish to provide their own.

The texts themselves are virtually untouched, including now-unconventional punctuation, though quotation marks have been Americanized, and the ligatures

8. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.

9. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

æ and *œ* are rendered *ae* and *oe* to match modern typography. Occasionally we have changed a word or two simply to harmonize spelling conventions. Where texts in the public domain use Elizabethan English, including *thees* and *thous*, we have kept the original. Headings in readings are modified in form for greater uniformity, but not in content. Material appearing inside brackets represents earlier editorial additions.

It is our hope that this anthology will provide inspiration for many readers. Whether it serves as a textbook, a reference book, or a guide for personal use, we trust it will encourage everyone in the knowledge that we are “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1).

PART ONE

The Early Church

The Struggle for Vindication

Part 1 Introduction

The Christian church emerged out of a Jewish background and from within the Roman Empire. Theologically, it drew much of its thought from the Old Testament, deepened and fulfilled in the New. Mostly, the church emerged as a people defined by the person and work of Jesus Christ. The foundation of the church was the work of his disciples. Jesus recast covenant life as the kingdom of God, the realm of God's rule and righteousness. He and his followers ordered this kingdom into a truly global people, who would move out into all parts of the world, making disciples and drawing its inhabitants from all sorts and conditions of men into the one universal church (Matt. 28:16–20).

The Exile as Background to the Church and Its Apologetics

The immediate background for the rise of the church was the Jewish exile. The two book sets, Kings and Chronicles, describe the downfall of Israel after the last days of King David (ca. 970 BC) until the Babylonian exile some four centuries later. The northern kingdom, known as Israel, and the southern kingdom, known as Judah, had parallel though different histories. The northern kingdom, whose capital was Samaria, was invaded by the Assyrians, and its population deported in about 722 BC. The southern kingdom was conquered, Jerusalem sacked, and the Jews deported into Babylon around 586 BC. While the two kingdoms were reunited under Hezekiah (715–686), nevertheless living under foreign rule would be a permanent feature of Jewish life.

The Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and to parts of their former land in various episodes. Under Cyrus, the people came back to Judah from 559 to 530 BC. Darius allowed them to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem in 516. Ezra was allowed by Artaxerxes I (465–424) to return with more exiles, while many remained in Babylon. Living successively under the Persians, the Greco-Macedonians, and the Romans, the Jews developed a way of dealing with their oppressors that would carry over into New Testament times. And,

of course, this meant that apologetics was woven into the fabric of Christian consciousness.

In the Old Testament, apologetics was practiced in various forms. One of them was the prophetic reminder of God's sovereignty over creation and his power in delivering the people from Egypt. Over and over, the prophets appealed to the exodus experience not only as proof of God's power, but also as a reminder of their true identity (Isa. 10:26; Amos 2:10; Mic. 6:4, etc.). Much Old Testament apologetics centers on this argument from God's power. A striking case in point is Jeremiah's appeal to the Jews to compare God's work among the nations to the potter's handling his clay (Jer. 18:1–11). Just as the potter is free to throw away any bad clay, so God will judge the nations by his sovereign judgment. At the same time, if the nation repents, then God will relent and spare them disaster (v. 8).

A separate Jewish religion developed in contradistinction to the Christian church, and a distinctive apologetic character grew out of this Judaism. While the Old Testament heritage was still present, important changes emerged among Jewish apologists. Hellenistic Jews in particular developed an argument for the superiority of the Mosaic revelation over against paganism and Greek wisdom, but it was more rationally based than the authoritative appeal to the exodus. Jewish apologetics presented three kinds of answers to Greek philosophers. Their answers are somewhat strange to our ears: (1) they argued that Plato actually depended on Moses; (2) they contended that Mosaic revelation was more ancient than the wisdom of the Greeks; and (3) they sometimes maintained that God revealed his wisdom to the Greeks as a special gift.¹ Some of these arguments would make their way into the earliest Christian apologists, as we will see.

Whereas many of the Jews living in the period, known as the Second Temple, were expecting a political messiah to come and overthrow the Roman rulers, what Jesus did was far more radical. He took an exiled people and formed them into the City of God, a community far more powerful and enduring than the Romans or any other rulers could muster. Within a short time, Gentiles became the principal members of this community and took the message worldwide.

The New Testament Writers as Apologists

The New Testament authors present quite a robust apologetics. The heart of the message of the New Testament is the reality of Christ's coming to establish the kingdom of God. Accordingly, apologetics in the New Testament era functioned to persuade people of the truth and saving power of this kingdom. The four gospels are, each in its own way, filled with apologetic elements.

1. See Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 1:38–63.

Matthew, probably written for converts from Judaism, contains critiques of the Jewish response to Jesus as well as affirmations of the right interpretation of the Old Testament. Mark was written to sum up the salient features of Jesus' life and message in order to persuade his readers of God's power in the gospel for all audiences. Thus he focuses on Christ's ministry both in Gentile territory (Galilee) and in Jewish territory (Judea and Jerusalem). Luke, together with the Acts, famously begins with his stated purpose: to write an orderly account of eyewitness reports about the good news, so that his readers (named here Theophilus) may "have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1–4). And John's gospel goes even further, written to persuade his readers that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son, and that through him they may have life eternal (John 20:31).

Similarly, the authors of the New Testament Epistles are driven by apologetic purposes. Paul boldly proclaims to the Romans: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Rom 1:16–17). Paul practiced the art of apologetics everywhere he went. Acts 17:16–34 records an extended speech given to a mixed group in the Athens marketplace. The discourse is both a refutation of idolatry and a commendation of God as Judge through Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews is an apologetic for Jesus Christ as God's final revelation. The last book of the Bible, known as the Revelation, is a powerful apology for the sovereignty of God through Christ over all of the conflicts in history, and for the assurance of an outcome in which a new heaven and new earth would replace the fallen world as we know it.

The apologetics found in the New Testament served to convince and then to ground people in the faith. Much of it was developed in the face of opposition. Peter's famous words in 1 Peter 3:15, which give us the directive to practice apologetics, are clearly pronounced in the context of hostility against believers. The book of Hebrews, the Revelation, and many other documents are a call to persevere in the face of persecution.

Some of the apologetics, too, was developed in order to correct variant teachings spread abroad in the church. Colossians was written to oppose certain Gnostic tendencies in the new church. Gnostics believed in an elitist knowledge of God and favored special spiritual disciplines, ones that freed them from the body or from the creation, rather than honoring the creation as good and the gospel as freely offered to all. Indeed, one of the constant themes defended in the New Testament is the goodness of creation. All foods are good because they come from the earth, which is the Lord's (1 Cor. 10:25–26). Marriage is to be held in honor everywhere (Heb. 13:4). We belong to Jesus Christ, who is the Mediator of all creation, including powers and authorities (Col. 1:15–23). Thus, even

governments are appointed by God, and so we must obey them as they carry out God's will in the *polis* (Rom. 13:1–7).

Apologetic Challenges beyond the New Testament

When we move beyond the New Testament period, the church continues to encounter challenges within the complex world of the Roman Empire. The church in Palestine eventually dwindled, and with it much of the early Jewish church, so that the center of gravity moved to the Gentile church, which spread beyond Jerusalem into the heartland of the Roman Empire. On the whole, Christians represented every walk of life. They were farmers, soldiers, highborn, working people, slaves, fathers and mothers, children and adults. Three challenges presented themselves, requiring an apologetic response.

Persecution

First, there was persecution. As in the first century, there continued to be opposition from various quarters. Until the time of Emperor Constantine, Christianity was a *religio illicita*, an unlawful religion, and so always under threat. There were two major periods that included at times hard persecution and at other times extended periods of peace. The first general period spanned from Nero (ca. AD 64) to Decius (ca. AD 250). The second was from Decius until Constantine, who declared Christianity a *religio licita* in AD 313 in the West, and in 323 in the eastern part of the empire. In 392 under Theodosius I, Christianity was declared the official religion of the empire, and pagan religions were forbidden. Finally, the Roman Empire fell, which provoked a monumental crisis in the ancient world, one that would generally favor the presence of the Christian church.

Later, as we will see, the church gradually developed two great sections that had differing sensibilities and faced somewhat different challenges, one in the West (using the Latin language) and the other in the East (using Greek). A schism occurred in 1054 after a long and complex estrangement between the two.

The causes for persecution varied, but most often revolved around the refusal of Christians to participate fully in a social system centered in the emperor as a demigod. Although they fully honored the government, believers refused to participate in various ceremonies and games that were endemic to the system. For this they were considered not only atheists but treasonable, provoking the gods to wrath. Other accusations against them included cannibalism, since their central sacrament involved symbolically partaking of the body and blood of Christ, and incest because they met at night and greeted one another with a “holy kiss.”

The most important apologists from these early centuries fully engaged with these attacks. Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165) took the emperor to task for failing to pursue the accusations against Christians with the same integrity he was reputed to bring into other contexts. A similar approach was employed by Athenagoras

(d. ca. 185), who centered his arguments on the resurrection of the dead, countering typical opponents who accused Christians of atheism, cannibalism, and licentiousness. A more basic accusation came from people seeking a scapegoat.

The fall of the Roman Empire was gradual, punctuated by dramatic moments. Theodosius I died in 395, the last time the Roman Empire would be politically united. In 410, Alaric and his Visigoth hordes sacked the city of Rome. At the time, many people blamed the disfavor of the gods, particularly their refusal to protect a city where Christians lived and worshiped a unique Creator, who refused to participate in the pantheon. Aurelius Augustine (354–430), the greatest theologian in the late Patristic period, answered in his massive *City of God* (AD 413–426) that pagan religion cannot sustain human welfare.

Heresy

The second occasion for apologetics was the problem of heresy. The world of the first centuries AD was concerned with redemption. State religion was cold. Philosophy was for the elite. Nature religions seemed unable to attract the increasingly civilized peoples. As a result, the more appealing *mystery religions* emerged. These were secret societies that practiced various pagan rites that offered communion with the gods. One of the most influential of the mystery religions was Mithraism, which the Roman armies especially favored.

In the second century, a powerful religious movement from the East, and with strong resemblance to Greek thinking, joined the mystery religions and became *Gnosticism*. These sects claimed to have “knowledge” (*gnōsis*) of the nature and destiny of mankind. It was a secret knowledge about redemption. A rather complicated mixture, Gnosticism had roots in at least three cultures: Jewish (which gave it a semblance of monotheism), Babylonian (from which it derived its preoccupation with astrology), and Iranian (providing in addition a dualistic superstructure to the whole).

Gnosticism was basically a religion claiming that humans are divine souls trapped in a material world. Release may come from knowledge, which brings direct contact with God. Gnosticism is syncretistic, mixing in elements from the gospel with a largely pagan philosophy. The details are often complex. It had many exponents, including the influential Valentinus (100–160). Interestingly, we know more about Gnosticism from Christian champions of the faith than from its original adherents, not only because the apologists’ documents have been preserved, but also because they were careful to describe it fairly. Irenaeus (120–202/3) was doubtless the most articulate and thorough of those who refuted Gnosticism.

Other heresies included Marcionism, which, like Gnosticism, was dualistic, but which attempted to drive a wedge between Paul’s interpretation of the gospel and the Jewish influences from the Old Testament. We will further explicate

some of these heresies when we look at the appropriate apologists. Still another major struggle in the Patristic era was with the heresy of Manichaeism. Mani (ca. 210–276) was a scholar from the Persian Empire whose thinking was enormously influential in the third through the sixth centuries. Though complex, its core idea is dualism. There are two powers, good and evil, and although ultimately goodness will triumph, God is good but not all-powerful. The battleground for the conflict is the human being, whose soul tends toward the good, but whose body is evil.

Challenges from heterodoxy were not only significant for apologetics, but often the occasions for formulating the most significant Christian doctrines. For example, the legacy of the fourth century on the doctrine of the Trinity resulted from long discussion culminating in a settlement at Nicaea in 325, along with Constantinople in 381. One factor causing concern was the teachings of Arianism. Arius (250/256–336) got into a dispute (ca. 318) with Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria, over the nature of Christ. Arius believed that before Jesus was begotten by the Father, he did not exist. Nor was he consubstantial or coeternal with the Father. Instead, he had a human body and a divine soul. In the long and involved series of debates that followed, several apologists distinguished themselves.

Thus, the line between mainstream theology and apologetics is not a thick one. For example, Eusebius of Caesarea (263–ca. 339) and Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 295–373) defended, in an apologetic vein, the full deity of Jesus Christ in the controversies leading up to Nicaea. Then, again, Augustine entered the picture. He wrote on many of the foundational doctrines, including creation, the church, faith and reason, the Trinity, free will, and good works. Himself a former Manichaean, he argued that this worldview did not take sin seriously enough, and it could not really help people in their ethical lives because it did not credit God with the grace and power of the gospel.

Unbelieving Jews

A third issue for early apologetics, one that would manifest itself off and on throughout the first few centuries, was the unbelief of the Jews. The subject is delicate, particularly for us today, on this side of the Holocaust. The charge of anti-Semitism means different things to different people. While there was often forceful pleading with Jews who would not accept the gospel of Christ, some of it expressing frustration, yet there is a world of difference between the early church's posture toward unbelieving Jews and the systematic and racist kind of anti-Semitism of ideologues inspired in part by the theories of Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), who, himself not particularly anti-Semitic, nevertheless set forth the influential idea, later taken up by the Nazis, that racial admixture would stymie cultural development. So, for example, many have thought John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407) to be anti-Semitic, particularly because of his series of eight sermons

titled *Homilies against the Jews*. We will look more closely into Chrysostom's case later in this volume, and we will discover that things are not so simple.

Jewish opposition to Christian faith in the Patristic period was both political and theological. Politically, having won a degree of privilege under Roman rule, the Jews were anxious not to lose their status. Despite a number of conflicts, including the Roman-Jewish wars in Judea (66–73 and 132–135), by the second part of the first century the Jewish presence in the Roman Empire was fairly well established. The number of Jews in the city of Rome exceeded ten thousand. As the Christian religion became more and more prominent and appeared to the outsider to have much in common with Judaism, there was guilt by association. By the fourth century, despite official toleration, the status of the Jews degenerated and would know many ups and downs thereafter.

Theologically, Jews reacted against the claims of Christians for the divinity of Christ. They were also anxious not to abrogate the Mosaic law, particularly the ceremonial law, in the way Christians appeared to be doing. From the second century BC onward, a synthesis had been achieved between Jewish thought and Hellenistic philosophy. Thus, Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–AD 50) used elements from the Stoics and combined them with both Plato and Aristotle, all to the service of defending Judaism. The insights of the Greeks into doctrines such as the sovereignty of God, the power of his revelation through the *logos*, the divisions of the soul, and the triple dynamic of reason, courage, and desire were taken to be so many indications that Mosaic religion, which had said these things better and earlier, was true and original.

Christian apologetics to the Jews would thus respond to both of these aspects, the political and the theological, and not always separately, but in the same text. Thus Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (ca. 160) recounts his own conversion by reading the Old Testament in the light of the New, and argues that Christ is the true meaning of the Mosaic law. He also accuses the Jews of spreading calumnies against Christians throughout the empire. Christians did argue, some vigorously, and others more generously, as was the case of Augustine, against Jewish unbelief. But they also borrowed from Jewish apologetics in their opposition to pagan religion. Thus, one can find similar arguments against polytheism or idolatry as were set forth by Jewish thinkers, who themselves absorbed elements from Greek philosophy, as we have seen.

On the whole in this first period, the Patristic era, the apologists were clearly moving into new territory. Many of them new converts, they exhibited in their writings a strong degree of enthusiasm and courage. Their strengths include assaults against Gnosticism and pagan religions, their ability to marshal various parts of Greek philosophy for their arguments, and a growing understanding that the Bible centers on the reality of Jesus Christ. Under persecution many

apologists defended not only the truth of the Christian faith, but the fidelity of believers to their earthly authorities. Somewhat less use was made of miracles than would be evident in later periods.

During this early period a number of basic approaches to apologetics were developed that became models for later apologists, even up to the present. For example, Justin Martyr's argument that Christians must be guided by a "rule of faith," which is something like the Christian story of creation, fall, and redemption, is reflected in many of his successors. His suggestion that the *logos* of John 1:1 was in some way active in Greek philosophy became a precedent for the integration of Greek thought into Christian apologetics. Another example is Tertullian, whose sharper distinction between Jerusalem and Athens worked its way into subsequent apologists who argued for the contrast between the heavenly and the earthly cities. The culmination point of all of these approaches to apologetics was, again, Augustine. Perhaps more than any other, he argued that the church is the great repository of God's actions. Famously, he upheld the church as a place where God was truly at work, whether or not every member was exemplary.²

Courageous, erudite, and also deeply spiritual, the apologetics of the Fathers continue to inspire their successors down to the present day. As Augustine surmised, the church would go on to make great strides during the ensuing centuries, despite serious flaws and setbacks.

2. See, Augustine, *Of the Morals of the Catholic Church*, chap. 75.