

Christian Apologetics Manifesto 2003: Sixteen Theses

By Douglas Groothuis

This is a manifesto to ignite the holy fire of apologetic passion and action. It is not a sustained argument or a development of themes. (I have written and lectured about these matters elsewhere). It is, rather, a short series of interrelated propositions crying out for both immediate and protracted action. These challenges issue from convictions formed through twenty-five years of apologetic teaching, preaching, debating, writing, and Christian witness.

Because of (a) the waning influence of the Christian worldview in public and private life in America today, (b) the pandemic of anti-intellectualism in the contemporary church, and (c) the very command of God himself to further divine truth, I strongly advise that the following statements be wrestled with and responded to by all followers of Jesus Christ.

1. Christian apologetics involves the public presentation and defense of Christianity as true, reasonable, knowable, and existentially pertinent to both individuals and entire cultures. Apologetics involves rebutting unbelieving accusations against Christianity as well as giving a constructive case for Christian theism.

2. The fundamental issue for apologetics is not how many apologists one has read, or what apologetic method one embraces (although that must be worked out). Rather, the fundamental issue is whether or not one has a passion for God's truth—reasonably pursued and courageously communicated—and a passion for the lost because of the love of God resident in one's life.

3. One must be convinced of the truth, rationality, pertinence, and knowability of the Christian worldview—derived from Holy Scripture, logically systematized, and rightly harmonized with general revelation (truth knowable outside of Scripture).

4. In light of (1), (2), and (3), fideism—the claim that Christian faith has no positive connection to reason or evidence—should be rejected as unbiblical and harmful to the great cause of Christ's truth (Matthew 22:37-39; Romans 12:1-2).

5. Any theology, apologetics, ethics, evangelism or church practice that minimizes or denigrates the concept of objective, absolute, universal and knowable truth is both irrational and unbiblical. As such it must be rejected and repented of.

6. Any intellectual discipline or church practice that minimizes or denigrates the importance of apologetics is unbiblical and must be repented of (Acts 17:16-34; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3).

7. The artificial separation of evangelism from apologetics must end. Many evangelistic methods die when those evangelized ask questions related to apologetics. Therefore, all evangelistic training should include basic apologetic training as well.

8. Apologetics is meant just as much for believers with doubts and questions as it is directed toward unbelievers. Therefore, Christians with doubts should not be shunned or shamed, but given good apologetic arguments (as well as pastoral care) in dealing with

their intellectual struggles (Matthew 11:1-11; Jude 22).

9. Since all Christians are called and commanded to have a reason for the hope within them (1 Peter 3:15), Christian teachers, pastors, mentors and educators of all kinds are remiss if they avoid, denigrate, or minimize the importance of apologetics to biblical living and Christian witness.

10. Those outside of the leadership positions mentioned in (9) should request that apologetics be made a constitutive part of these institutions if this is not already the case.

11. In light of (9) and (10), Christian colleges, seminaries, and churches should incorporate apologetics into their institutional/educational life, mission, and vision. Specifically, every Christian college, university, and seminary should require at least one class in apologetics for every degree in their curriculum. Moreover, every discipline should be taught from a Christian worldview, since all truth is God's truth. This has significant apologetic value in and of itself.

12. Because apologetics is meant to be the public presentation and defense of Christianity as true, reasonable, pertinent, and knowable, apologists should attempt to offer their arguments in as many public venues as possible. Therefore, qualified Christian apologists should learn to become public intellectuals: thinkers who have mastered their material and are willing and able to enter public discourse and debate in a way that challenges and engages the non-Christian mind as well as galvanizes other Christians to hone their apologetic skills. Areas of engagement include the following:

- a. Letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines.
- b. Op-ed pieces for newspapers.
- c. Calls to talk radio programs.
- d. Public debates and dialogues on religious and ethical issues.
- e. Apologetic contributions to interactive web pages.
- f. Lectures on college campuses on apologetic themes.
- g. Books oriented to those outside the typical evangelical market, published by secular publishers if possible.
- h. Any other creative outreach—drama, poetry, cinema, and more.

13. Young Christians with an aptitude in philosophy and academic pursuits in general should be encouraged that these disciplines are just as spiritual as anything directly church-related. For example, being a Christian philosopher at a secular college or university is just as godly and spiritual than being a pastor, missionary, or professor at a Christian institution (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17). One may prudently apply one's apologetic skills in these settings and extend the Christian witness.

14. All apologetic endeavors should manifest the virtues of both humility and courage through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. If we have been bestowed by Almighty God with truth to defend rationally, this is because of God's grace, not our own goodness. There is no room for pride. If we have been bestowed by Almighty God with truth to defend rationally, we should take it to the streets and not shrink back from appropriate encounters with unbelief. There is no room for cowardice.

15. Apologetics must be carried out with the utmost intellectual integrity. All

propaganda, cheap answers, caricatures of non-Christian views, and fallacious reasoning should be avoided. One should develop competent answer to searching questions about the truth and rationality of Christian faith. This demands excellence in scholarship at all intellectual levels, even the most popular. This cognitive orientation takes time, money, and sustained effort. It will not happen by watching television or by otherwise wasting our limited time.

16. All apologetics ventures—whether in writing, speaking, or dialogue—should be backed by personal prayer by the apologist and supporting prayer of the church (Ephesians 6:18).

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