

## Session #1: Apologetic Method

### Series Introduction (see, Resource #1)

### Session Introduction

#### 1. The Nature of Christian Apologetics

- a. The term 'apologetics' (*apologia*) & its meaning
- b. The history of Christian apologetics & apologists (see, Resource #2)
- c. Clarification – apologetics & evangelism

#### 2. The Purpose(s) of Christian Apologetics

- i. bolster the faith of believers
  - ii. aid in the evangelism of unbelievers
- 
- a. negative / defensive
  - b. positive / offensive

**3. The Method of Christian Apologetics**

a. the complexity – variety & a glossary of terms (see, Resource #3)

b. the controversy – epistemology (*fides quaerens intellectum*)

**Exercise** (see, Resource #4) – complete & discuss

c. the candidates

**i. The Subjective School**

anti-apologetics (Lessing's 'ditch')

apologetics of the absurd (Kierkegaard's 'leap')

new Reformed (Calvin's '*sensus divinitas*')

**ii. The Objective School**

fideism (Barth's '*Nein!*')

evidentialism (classical, rational, cumulative)

**4. Your method – in practice?**

**Apologetics Survey**

**1. What doubts / questions do I have?**

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**2. What doubts / questions do I hear?**

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**3. What objections do I face?**

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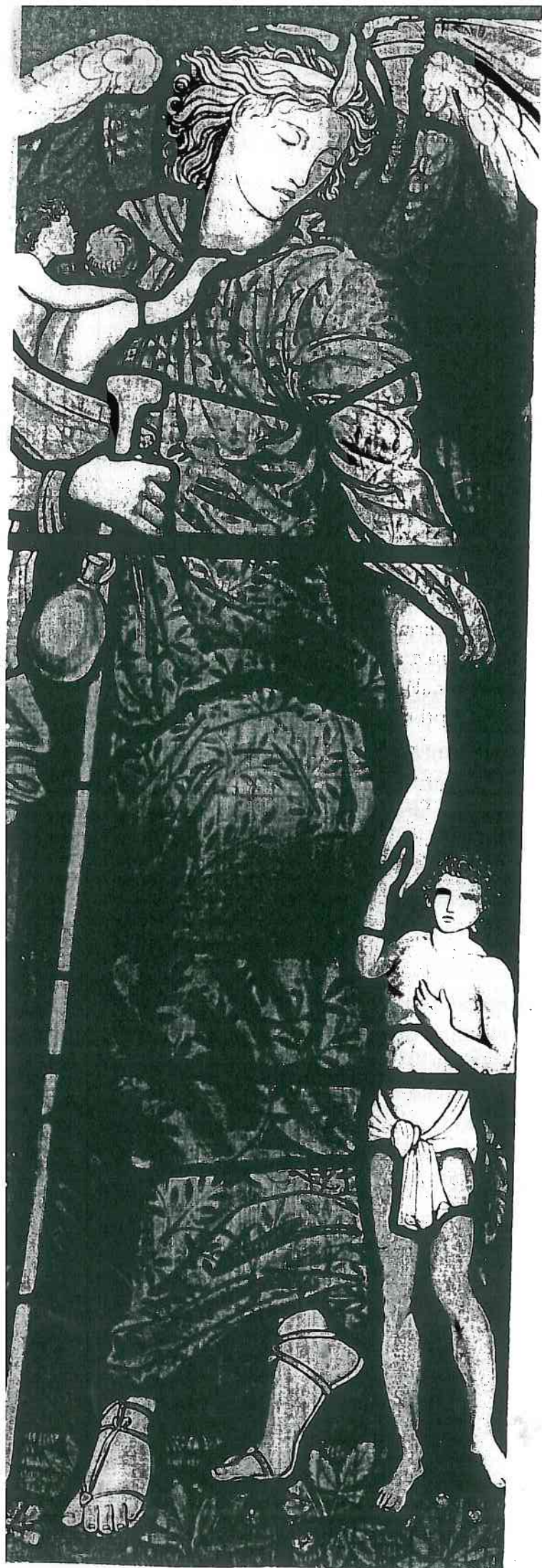
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## Resource #2

taken from 'The Christian Theology Reader'  
2<sup>nd</sup> editn. - ed. by Alister E McGrath  
(Blackwell Publishing: Malden MA; 1995, 2001)

# 1

## Getting Started: Preliminaries

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Starting to study Christian theology involves exploring a whole range of issues. Some of these center on the identity and characteristics of theology itself. For example, what is theology? And how did it develop? How does it relate to other areas of life, such as philosophy or culture? How does our way of talking about God relate to our everyday language? To what extent – and in what ways – can the existence of God be proved?

The present chapter provides readings which explore all of these issues, some in depth. The following general themes are especially recommended for study.



1 The patristic debates over the relation of philosophy and theology. The early church witnessed an especially interesting and important discussion of the extent to which theology should interact with secular philosophy.

2 Since the Middle Ages, Christian theology has found itself dealing with the issue of whether God's existence can be proved. A number of approaches have been set forward, particularly by Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas. Exploring this debate is an excellent way of engaging with some issues of fundamental theological importance.

3 A third area of considerable interest is the way in which theology makes use of language and imagery, including the question of whether theological language is analogical or metaphorical in character. The following readings introduce these important themes.

### The Patristic Debate on the Relation of Philosophy and Theology

- 1.1 Justin Martyr on Philosophy and Theology
- 1.2 Clement of Alexandria on Philosophy and Theology
- 1.3 Tertullian on the Relation of Philosophy and Heresy
- 1.4 Augustine on Philosophy and Theology

### Can God's Existence be Proved?

- 1.7 Anselm of Canterbury's Proof for the Existence of God
- 1.8 Gaunilo's Reply to Anselm's Argument
- 1.9 Thomas Aquinas on Proofs for the Existence of God
- 1.15 René Descartes on the Existence of God
- 1.16 Blaise Pascal on Proofs for the Existence of God
- 1.18 Immanuel Kant on Anselm's Ontological Argument
- 1.20 John Henry Newman on the Grounds of Faith
- 1.24 Ludwig Wittgenstein on Proofs for the Existence of God

### Theological Language and Images

- 1.10 Thomas Aquinas on the Principle of Analogy
- 1.13 The Heidelberg Catechism on Images of God
- 1.23 Ludwig Wittgenstein on Analogy
- 1.26 Paul Tillich on the Method of Correlation
- 1.27 Sallie McFague on Metaphor in Theology
- 1.29 Brian A. Gerrish on Accommodation in Calvin's Theology
- 3.36 Jacques Ellul on the Theology of Icons

## 1.1

## Justin Martyr on Philosophy and Theology

In his two apologies for the Christian faith, written in Greek at Rome at some point during the period 148-61, Justin sets out a vigorous defense of Christianity in which he seeks to relate the gospel to secular wisdom. Justin has an especial concern to relate the Christian gospel to the forms of Platonism which were influential in the eastern Mediterranean region at this time, and thus stresses the convergence of Christianity and Platonism at a number of points of importance. In particular, Justin is drawn to the pivotal concept of the "Logos" (the Greek term means "word"), which plays a key role in both Platonic philosophy and Christian theology – for example, see John 1:14 which affirms that "the Word became flesh, and dwelled among us." A central theme in Justin's defense of the Christian faith is the idea that God has scattered "the seeds (*spermata*) of the Logos" throughout the world before the coming of Christ, so that secular wisdom and truth can point, however imperfectly, to Christ. See also 1.2, 1.3, 1.4.

We have been taught that Christ is the firstborn of God, and we have proclaimed that he is the Logos, in whom every race of people have shared. And those who live according to the Logos are Christians, even though they may have been counted as atheists – such as Socrates and Heraclitus, and others like them, among the Greeks. . . . Whatever either lawyers or philosophers have said well, was articulated by finding and reflecting upon some aspect of the Logos. However, since they did not know the Logos – which is Christ – in its entirety, they often contradicted themselves. . . . Whatever all people have said well (*kalōs*) belongs to us Christians. For we worship and love, next to God, the Logos, who comes from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since it was for our sake that he became a human being, in order that he might share in our sufferings and bring us healing. For all writers were able to see the truth darkly, on account of the implanted seed of the Logos which was grafted into them. Now the seed and imitation (*mimēma*) of something which is given on the basis of a person's capacity to receive it is quite different from that thing itself, of which the communication and imitation are received according to the grace of God.

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 Comment

Note how Justin argues that Jesus Christ *is* the Logos. In other words, the foundational philosophical principle of the Platonic system, according to Justin, is

not an abstract idea which needs to be discovered by human reason, but something which has been made known to humanity in a specific form. What the philosophers were seeking, has been made known in Christ.

It follows that all true human wisdom derives from this Logos, whether this is explicitly recognized or not. Justin argues that philosophical contradictions and tensions arise through an incomplete access to the Logos. Full access to the Logos is now possible, however, through Christ.

Justin then asserts that anyone who honestly and sincerely acts according to what she knows of the Logos can be reckoned as being a Christian, including Socrates.

It thus follows that what is good and true in secular philosophy can be accepted and honored by Christians, in that it derives from the Logos.

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### Questions for Study

- 1 Why do you think Justin wanted to stress the convergence of Christianity and Platonism?
- 2 What attitude to secular philosophy results from Justin's understanding of the Logos?
- 3 What difficulties arise from the assertion that the pagan philosophers Socrates and Heraclitus can be regarded as Christians?

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## Clement of Alexandria on Philosophy and Theology 1.2

The eight books of Clement's *Stromata* (the word literally means "carpets") deal at length with the relation of the Christian faith to Greek philosophy. In this extract from the *Stromata*, originally written in Greek in the early third century, Clement argues that God gave philosophy to the Greeks as a way of preparing them for the coming of Christ in more or less exactly the same way as he gave the Jews the law of Moses. While not conceding that philosophy has the same status as divine revelation, Clement goes beyond Justin Martyr's suggestion that the mere seeds of the Logos are to be found in Greek philosophy. See also 1.1; 1.3; 1.4.

Thus until the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it assists those who come to faith by way of demonstration, as a kind of preparatory training (*propaideia*) for true religion. For "you will not stumble" (Proverbs 3: 23) if you attribute all good things to provi-



dence, whether it belongs to the Greeks or to us. For God is the source of all good things, some directly (as with the Old and the New Testaments), and some indirectly (as with philosophy). But it might be that philosophy was given to the Greeks immediately and directly, until such time as the Lord should also call the Greeks. For philosophy acted as a “custodian” (*epitaxōnēi*) to bring the Greeks to Christ, just as the law brought the Hebrews. Thus philosophy was by way of a preparation, which prepared the way for its perfection in Christ.

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### Comment

It is clear that Clement is concerned to explore the ways in which Greek philosophy can be thought of as preparing the way for the gospel. Clement argues that the Old Testament prepared the way for the Jewish people to receive the Christian faith; Greek philosophy, he argues, served a similar function for the Greeks.

Clement clearly regards philosophy as having a continuing positive role for Christians. It has not been made irrelevant by the coming of Christ; it remains a way by which sincere and truth-loving people can make their way to faith.

Christ is seen as the perfection and fulfilment of philosophy, just as he is also to be seen as the perfection and fulfilment of the Old Testament.

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### Questions for Study

- 1 Read the following verse from Paul’s Letter to the Galatians: “Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3: 23–4). The Greek word here translated as “custodian” is the same word that Clement uses to refer to the role of philosophy. There is no doubt that Clement intended his readers to pick up on this parallelism. What points does Clement hope to make? You may find it helpful to begin by asking what role Paul appears to assign to the law in this Galatians passage, and then compare this with the role assigned to philosophy by Clement.
- 2 “Christ is Logos and Nomos.” This summary of the relation of Christ to both Greek philosophy and the Old Testament is often encountered in the literature, and was first proposed by the noted German historian of Christian thought Adolf von Harnack. “Logos” is, as we have seen, the Greek word for “word,” and has important overtones for Platonic philosophy. “Nomos” is the Greek word for “law,” and picks up on the important role assigned to the law in the Christian faith by Paul. So what points are made by the statement “Christ is Logos and Nomos”? And why would writers such as Clement or Justin want to make such points in the first place?



3. The New Testament often identifies two broad audiences for the gospel: "Jews and Greeks." Read the following brief extract from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1: 22-4). In what way does Clement develop and extend Paul's concerns?

## Tertullian on the Relation of Philosophy and Heresy

1.3

Tertullian was noted for his hostility toward the intrusion of philosophy into theology. Philosophy, he argued, was pagan in its outlook, and its use in theology could only lead to heresy within the church. In his *de praescriptione haereticorum* ("On the Rule of the Heretics"), written in Latin in the first years of the third century, Tertullian sets up a celebrated contrast between Athens and Jerusalem, symbolizing the tension between pagan philosophy and the revelation of the Christian faith. Tertullian's basic question concerned the relation of Christian theology with secular philosophy, especially Platonism. The Greek city of Athens was the home of the Academy, an institution of secular learning founded by Plato in 387 BC. For Tertullian, Christian theologians inhabited a completely different mental world to their pagan counterparts. How could there be a dialogue between them? See also 1.1; 1.2; 1.4.

For philosophy provides the material of worldly wisdom, in boldly asserting itself to be the interpreter of the divine nature and dispensation. The heresies themselves receive their weapons from philosophy. It was from this source that Valentinus, who was a disciple of Plato, got his ideas about the "aeons" and the "trinity of humanity." And it was from there that the god of Marcion (much to be preferred, on account of his tranquility) came; Marcion came from the Stoics. To say that the soul is subject to death is to go the way of Epicurus. And the denial of the resurrection of the body is found throughout the writings of all the philosophers. To say that matter is equal with God is to follow the doctrine of Zeno; to speak of a god of fire is to draw on Heraclitus. It is the same subjects which preoccupy both the heretics and the philosophers. Where does evil come from, and why? Where does human nature come from, and how? . . . What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? between the Academy and the church? Our system of beliefs (*institutio*) comes from the Porch of Solomon, who himself taught that it was necessary to seek God in the simplicity of the heart. So much the worse for those who talk of a "Stoic," "Platonic" or "dialectic" Christianity! We have no need for

faith and reason; (2) a particular apologetic methodology that focuses primarily on historical evidences in constructing an argument for Christianity (à la Habermas in this volume); or (3) an epistemological theory that claims that it is irrational to believe any proposition without sufficient evidence (i.e., the archenemy of Reformed epistemology). Pay careful attention to which of these three senses of evidentialism is being used at any given point in this book.

**externalism.** A theory of epistemic justification that claims that what justifies a particular belief for a person is external to the person and not necessarily accessible to him or her. For example, an externalist might claim that a particular belief B is justified for some person S because B happened to be produced by S's reliable or properly functioning belief-forming mechanism. Externalism is the alternative to *internalism* (which see).

**foundationalism.** An epistemological theory that claims that knowledge is ultimately based on certain foundational beliefs that are acquired and known independently of other beliefs. That is, these foundational or "basic" beliefs are acquired directly or immediately from experience (or in some cases, reason). *Classical* foundationalism is a particular theory for distinguishing such basic beliefs from nonbasic beliefs (i.e., beliefs that are derived from other beliefs). Classical foundationalism says that a belief is basic if and only if it is either self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses.

**internalism.** A theory of epistemic justification that claims that what justifies a particular belief for a person is internal to the person, that the person has "internal access" to the conditions that make it justifiable for him or her to believe the belief in question. Internalism is juxtaposed to *externalism* (which see).

**kalam cosmological argument.** A theistic argument (which see). Specifically, a version of the cosmological argument that appeals to philosophical and scientific data to show that (1) the universe began to exist (i.e., it is not eternal), (2) the beginning of the universe was caused, and (3) the cause of the universe was God.

**metaphysics.** A branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of reality or of what exists. The term *ontology* (study of being) is often used synonymously.

**naturalism.** The worldview that claims that the natural, physical world is all that exists. *synonymous with atheism*

**natural theology.** A term that primarily refers to knowledge of God acquired without the aid of special revelation but derived instead from God's self-revelation in nature. The term is also used to designate the formal process of discovering and explaining the content of natural revelation. As one can be described as "doing" theology, one can also "do" natural theology. Natural theology is closely associated with the construction of *theistic arguments* (which see).

**necessary.** A term that refers to beings or states of affairs whose existence is necessary. A necessary being is one that *must* exist, that cannot not exist.

**noetic effects of sin.** The detrimental effects of sin upon the mind. The term "noetic" comes from the Greek *nous* ("mind").

**pantheism.** The worldview that claims that everything is God or a part of God. Often monistic, claiming that the only thing that exists is God, and that everything else (the physical world, the individual self, etc.) is an illusion.

**probability calculus.** A formal method for calculating the probability of a certain hypothesis relative to given background information. *Bayes' Theorem* is a specific thesis in probability calculus that the reader will encounter at several points in this book. Though we initially wanted to avoid the kind of technicality represented by Bayes' Theorem, it became evident in the course of this project that discussion could not proceed in any fruitful way without it. The reader should not become frustrated, because Bayes' Theorem is really not that difficult. Borrowing from Craig's response to Habermas (p. 125), let R stand for "the resurrection hypothesis" (i.e., the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead), let B stand for one's background knowledge (such as the existence of God), E stand for specific evidence for R (e.g., the empty tomb and resurrection appearances), and  $A_i$  stand for various alternative explanations (e.g., the disciples stole the body of Jesus or Jesus simply swooned on the cross), with  $\Sigma_{i=1}^n$  representing the collective probability of these alternative explanations. Using these symbols, Bayes' Theorem looks like this:

$$\Pr(R/B\&E) = \frac{\Pr(R/B) \times \Pr(E/B\&R)}{\Pr(R/B) \times \Pr(E/B\&R) + \Sigma_{i=1}^n \Pr(A_i/B) \times \Pr(E/B\&A_i)}$$

**FAITH- FORMATION****1. Faith flies in the face of reason/evidence.**

Faith is not a matter of reasons and evidence – and certainly not of proof! We are not given reasons and evidence, precisely because the gospel is to be accepted by faith. And faith is a risk; it is an act of the will, often in the face of contradictory evidence. The virtue of faith is that it is not grounded in proof and evidence.

**2. Faith comes independent of reason/evidence.**

a) Reasons and evidence won't convince a person that the gospel is true. The gospel proves itself to be true; that is, it is self-authenticating. It does not need to be propped up, supported or validated by us. Just listen to the message, read it – and pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to see that it is true. And when you do, then you will know that it is true.

b) Reasons and arguments and evidence ought not to be presented as a way of defending and confirming the gospel. The very request and demand for proof is itself an expression of human sinfulness – always wanting to be the master of our own life, forever trying to domesticate God and his self-revelation. Rather than setting yourself over God's revelation, to judge Him and it according to your own self-serving standards of rationality – you really ought to humble yourself, submit before him, repent and believe the good news.

**3. Faith rests on reason/evidence.**

Faith is a matter of reasons and evidence. The gospel is the story of God's activity in our world, in space-time history. If there were no evidence for any of this having occurred that would be a real problem; but of course there is. And a simple, clear presentation of this evidence is the normal and natural process whereby faith is stimulated and formed.

**Exercise**

1. Which one of these descriptions best captures the way people come to faith as far as you are concerned?
2. How would you mount a case for your position from the Scriptures?
3. What are the implications of this: for the Christian life, in general? and for evangelism, in particular?