

THE INADEQUACY OF THE NEW EVANGELICALISM AND THE NEED FOR A NEW AND BETTER METHOD

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This article has not been written simply to criticize the vision and zeal of the New Evangelicals. The writer feels himself to be much closer to them than perhaps to any others who are attempting to face the problems of modern man and who start from a Christian standpoint. Rather, it has been written as a challenge, because we see the New Evangelicals as the one present viable hope. But it is our desire to encourage them to press ahead and develop a better methodology. Failing this, an entirely new movement is the only hope in our present apologetic crisis.

This article is divided into three parts. First, there is a brief study of five historical steps in the development of modern apologetics. This section would demand an entire book to do it full justice (I hope to find the time after my forthcoming retirement to do so, Lord willing). For the sake of brevity, I have omitted both the names of the leaders—except in two cases—and of their books. Most of you will recall enough about them to fill in some details of your own.

Second, there is a brief study of a “new method.” In it we have outlined an eight-point method of analysis and answer.

Third, there is an example of how the Christian answer can be developed.

I. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN APOLOGETICS

Let me first of all point out that the evangelical apologetic has three aspects: (a) *defensive*—it has a responsibility to maintain and defend our Christian position; (b) *offensive*—it has the duty of destroying mistaken and false positions and views; and (c) *regenerative*—one of the most important purposes of a good apologetic is to win people to Christ. Paul gives us a beautiful example of apologetics used in a defensive, an offensive, and a regenerative manner as he defends himself before Agrippa in Acts 26.

And now let us examine carefully five historical steps in the development of modern apologetics.

1. *The Biblical answer.* This was used by the early fundamentalists. It remains valid and important in our own time. Therefore, we ought not to jeopardize our own system of analysis by despising or rejecting the fundamentalists. They have much to contribute. We are actually

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carrying on the type of work that they did as we bring the Scriptures into focus and develop Biblical answers to man's problems. God used the fundamentalists, particularly before the other approaches were fully developed.

2. *Biblical scholarship.* Old Testament and New Testament scholarship as developed by the Old and New Testament departments of evangelical theological seminaries appeared in the late 1920's and through the 1930's. It has been, and still is, the main emphasis of the Evangelical Theological Society during its entire existence. To this should be added the wonderful work done in the area of archaeology. Sound Biblical scholarship forms the backbone of the thoroughly scholarly apologetic needed in our day.

3. *Presuppositionalism.* This was developed and applied by two men in particular: Cornelius Van Til, and Gordon Clark. It stresses the need to find the assumptions on which the unbeliever and the agnostic base their systems and to show how and why these lead into the sands of despair. It goes on to present the assumptions of Christianity and to show how they alone can lead to deliverance and hope. These men stress two things in particular. First, there are no "brute facts"—that is, no truth (whether scientific or not) has simply developed on the basis of chance. All knowledge and all truth originate in the first place with God. Secondly, there are only two basic approaches that man can take. One is autonomous, in which man makes himself the source of all knowledge and law; the other is theonomous, in which man sees God as the source of all knowledge, truth and law.

For some reason presuppositionalism, as presented by Van Til and Clark, has evoked a strong reaction on the part of many evangelical scholars. This is to be regretted. Why did it happen? I would like to offer some suggestions that may evoke further questions.

Was it that the method appeared to be a form of Christian scholasticism? If so, this was certainly not the intent of its originators. Was it that the approach failed to deal with specific problems? Was it too general? Was it perhaps the terminology (e.g., no "brute facts")? I myself would appreciate the observations of my readers. Perhaps the next step in the development of an analytic modern apologetic will give us some clues.

4. *Individualized specific presuppositionalism.* This has been developed by Francis Schaeffer. It differs from Van Til's presuppositionalism, but this is largely due to the fact that it has carried his chief point further. Schaeffer insists that each person must be examined and dealt with as a specific individual case. The general critique worked out by Van Til is correct and true, but it falls short, according to the writer's opinion, at several points.

(1) He does not take the time to analyze the individual's own specific views. At this point his system fails to take full cognizance of the

dignity of man. Each person deserves his day in court. His particular problem demands a specific answer.

(2) Van Til seems to exclude the possibility of all common ground. This, however, is not so since he admits that because of the inconsistency of man some common ground must always exist. Most of us would add that a properly developed approach always contains a large area for real dialogue. Is this not to be included in common ground? Of course, there is also the work of the law written on the human heart and the seed of religion on which all agree

(3) When Van Til and Clark state that their Christian view is also based on presuppositions, this can, many feel, weaken the Christian's case. The Bible never asks man to accept God or the Bible as presuppositions—it simply states that the Bible is a revelation from him and that he does exist. Why then should we start out by saying that our position is based on presuppositions?

5. *The New Evangelicalism.* This movement, which started in earnest about 1960, insisted on the need to know the assumptions on which a person bases his view. However, in later New Evangelicalism this is totally ignored. Why? I believe that it is a part or result of the reaction against Van Til's particular use of his method. When the New Evangelicals dropped the stress on assumptions, they lost a very important step in the advancement toward an improved modern apologetic. As a result, they seriously weakened their approach at this point.

New Evangelicals also stressed the values present in the views of their opponents. This was something new. It was done in order to expand and develop an area of common ground. The intent was certainly good, but it has had serious effects. In a sense it occurred because these men did not see the importance of starting with and stating the assumptions of their opponents. One will not say that there are values in erring systems if he begins by analyzing its presuppositions. Why? If the presuppositions are wrong, then all that is developed from them is wrong. This leads us to the conclusion that it is a mistake to say "I find values" in the systems of such persons as Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Emil Brunner, and so on.

The New Evangelicalism also reacts very strongly against fundamentalism. This is sad, because it reveals the fact that they fail to see that there is a cumulative progress in the development of modern apologetics. Each of the movements mentioned above, as well as that which follows, is needed since they all contribute irreplaceable parts to an adequate new apologetic. Furthermore, God has used each.

We are now ready to consider what is good in each of the above steps in the development of a modern defense of the Christian faith. As we do so, the following conclusions emerge.

Each step has something to contribute. Each one forms a branch in the army of God for the defense of the faith. In order to form an ideogram or paradigm by which to grasp the form of the needed new

apologetic, let us see what part each historical step listed above actually can contribute.

1. *The Biblical answer.* This will form the Q.E.D.—that is, the final argument and answer in an adequate apologetic.

2. *Biblical scholarship.* This will always remain as the final defense for the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible. Without it the whole case will be lost.

3. *Presuppositionalism.* This gives us the most important clue as to how we are to handle rational and intellectual attacks on the Christian faith. It also enables us to expose the real errors behind a person's thinking and to show him that he cannot live with his view.

4. *Individual specific presuppositionalism.* This was a real advance and must not be overlooked. The New Evangelicals throw out the baby with the bath water when they fail to include the contributions of Van Til and Clark. Pure suppositionalism does the same when it fails to see the advances that Schaeffer has made.

5. *The New Evangelicalism.* New Evangelicals see a certain lack in Van Til's apologetic, namely an inability to establish enough common ground in order to initiate real dialogue. This is their great contribution to modern apologetics.

The next development needed in a modern apologetic ought to be one that uses the advances made by each of the above five steps, on the one hand, but avoids the weaknesses and errors that have appeared in each from time to time, on the other hand.

II. A NEW APOLOGETIC METHOD

The term "new method" is in a sense a misnomer, since what we are about to present is really only a combination and extension of the five historic steps mentioned above.

Its claim to newness consists of two things. The entire apologetic is developed in a logical manner, the first half developing common ground and dialogue and the second an analysis and Christian answer (logically, philosophically, credally, and Biblically).

Furthermore, the original and basic problems faced by the person with whose problems or system we are dealing are set forth first of all. This problem, or these problems, must be answered if the apologetic is to be effective. We must not end up with answers to answers, as has been the case with Kierkegaard, Barth and Neo-orthodoxy up to this point. In the case of each of these, the presuppositions used to extend and answer their problems have been attacked, but not the original basic problem. Let us illustrate by considering the case of Karl Barth.

Barth's problem stems from Kant's philosophically-determined assumption that God must be timeless and spaceless. Kant argued that there appear to be three infinities: God, time, and space. This, however, is impossible because one infinite must exclude the other two if it is to remain infinite. Since God must be infinite, then, he reasoned, time and

space are created and finite. God, in turn, must be timeless and spaceless.

The Christian can see the fallacy of Kant's reasoning at this point. Kant applied a quantitative definition to the infinite when he should have applied a qualitative one. The Shorter Catechism illustrates this beautifully as it speaks of God as a Spirit "infinite ... in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." There are seven infinities in God, but no one excludes the others since they are all qualitative in nature. If God is qualitatively infinite rather than quantitatively, then time and space can be infinite along with God. God's omniscience is not limited by time, nor is his omnipresence limited by space. In any event, the time and space of which man is thinking was created when God made the worlds by his own fiat command.¹

Once this major problem is solved, Barth's whole system collapses. After all, it is only a logical development of the assumption that God is timeless and spaceless. I shall merely draw attention to the fact that all of eastern mysticism, like all of Neo-orthodoxy, starts with the assumption that God is timeless and spaceless and *develops its arguments logically from this assumption*. In the case of Barth, as also in the case of eastern mysticism, the answers presented have only been answers to answers.

This does not mean that we will not benefit from studying and answering another person's problems. Actually we will profit in two ways: (a) We will often see for the first time the intensity and reality of the problem being faced by our everyday man only as we study his answers; (b) we will have to study such areas as history, economics, psychology, philosophy, and sociology before we can, with much prayer, bring into focus those parts of Scripture that offer the real Christian answer. This we shall illustrate in some detail when we come to the eighth step of our analysis.

Let me list the eight points that I see as required for an adequate analysis.

1. State the person's basic problem or problems.
2. Describe what he teaches fully and carefully, asking him to correct you if you have made any mistakes.
3. Set forth the assumptions you have found as you have studied his views.
4. List the values that he claims for his system. Because he has started from faulty assumptions, his solutions will themselves

¹The failure to define and answer Kant's problem with the infinities has deeply hurt the evangelical cause. When Kierkegaard and Barth's problem was left unsolved, it caused many to lose confidence in presuppositionalism. Without the study of Barth's presuppositions the New Evangelicals, for example, cannot detect the fallacy of all that Barth teaches. They therefore speak of finding values in Barth. But without an answer to his problem, the Neo-orthodox cannot accept the Christian answer! He sees Van Til and Clark as starting just where he does and assuming God is timeless and spaceless. For him, the Christian throws away this assumption just as soon as he turns to his Bible, while he, the Neo-orthodox, in all honesty retains it. As a result, he remains unevangelized.

- also be faulty. They can therefore have no value for the Christian.
5. Show how the assumptions made lead to illogical, ridiculous, or immoral conclusions, and prove that the person holding such views logically ends up in the sands of confusion.
 6. Show how the person's system or view fails theologically (e.g., with regard to God, creation, man, the fall, sin, and salvation).
 7. Show how it denies the Christian creeds.
 8. Give a good Christian answer.

III. THE CHRISTIAN ANSWER

As an example of our proposed approach, let us discuss briefly the possibility of a synthesis of Christianity and Communism.

The question as to how the Christian is to have a part in the solution of man's economic and social needs has become acute because of the situation in Western Europe and in Central America. In both of these areas, large landed estates and wealthy capitalists own nearly all of the land and other means of production. The resultant social and economic class distinctions between the wealthy and poor have generated tremendous tensions.

How is the Christian to approach a study of this problem? There are two alternatives: a free-enterprise system, or Marxism. The real dilemma, then, is between a synthesis of Christianity and free enterprise—as seen in the Old Testament theocracy and present up till the rise of Communism in Russia—and a synthesis of Christianity and Communism.

How do we approach such a dilemma? Are we to try to find values in Marxism and endeavor to identify these with Christianity? This poses a real temptation for many Roman Catholics and even for those Protestants who attempt to find values in opposing systems. Though well intended—namely, as a way in which to develop common ground and establish dialogue—this method of establishing contact is, as we have already seen, self-defeating. When a simplistic study of Scripture is added, the resultant solution can lead to open involvement in revolution. It can end with the Communists seizing power and then turning around and destroying the Christian Church (as in Russia, China, Albania, and Cuba). Why should we expect that Communism will change in the future, since up to this point it has been a bitter enemy of Christianity? What the Christian ought to do is to go to the trouble of thoroughly studying the economic situation and the alternatives that are open. This will necessitate a fourfold preparation, namely in history, economics, sociology and, last but not least, philosophy.

What does history tell us about the development of the free-enterprise system? Here we must study the development of the

poor laws and of social legislation to regulate hours of labor, workmen's compensation, the rise of unions, and so forth, during the 1800's in Great Britain and down to our day. As we do so, we shall see the tremendous advances made in social legislation in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, on the one hand, and the appearance of various problems, on the other. Let us give one illustration. Up till the 1920's the world suffered a series of disastrous financial and economic crises. Time after time, a period of prosperity would be followed by a panic. In the 1920's Great Britain developed a system of cushions—workmen's compensation, the dole, and so on—which so effectively controlled its financial crises that it had fully recovered and was in a period of the highest prosperity in 1937. In contrast the United States, which did not have these cushions, was still struggling to get out of its Depression. However, the United States adopted these cushions in the 1940's, though only after it had seen the effectiveness of the same in Great Britain. We have had no panics in the United States since that time—only recessions!

Next, we need to study both the free-enterprise and Communist systems economically in order to see what each has to offer. Here we can compare the conditions present in the free nations today with those present in Russia. A brief study of the restrictions on freedom imposed by every Communist state, in contrast to the freedom present under free enterprise, is sufficient to reveal the dangers inherent in Marxism.

Then we must study the alternatives philosophically. Free enterprise has existed since Old Testament times, Communism only since 1917. The latter bases everything on Hegelian dialectic. Marx adopted Hegel's triadic theory of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis and changed his dialectical ontology into a dialectical materialism that was totally atheistic in nature. The Christian who studies the dilemma of free enterprise versus Communism (Marxism) needs to understand triadic dialectic thoroughly, its assumptions and its consequences. He cannot have the God of the Bible along with Marxism. The one excludes the other. He cannot have the freedoms that we have under free enterprise in a Marxist system.

All in all—historically, economically, and philosophically—there can be no synthesis between Christianity and Marxism. Marxism, because of its atheism, must swallow up Christianity. What, then, is the answer? It is a return to our study of the free-enterprise system as taught in the Old Testament and by Christ, and a frank and honest appraisal of the problems that arise with a capitalistic system. A good example for the Christian, at this point, is a careful restudy of the devastating panics already mentioned, during the 1800's, and their solution by the introduction of a series of insurance systems in the United States in the 1940's to prevent such economic collapses. Workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance, social security, and the like are simply insurance systems set up by the government to care for a nation's economic crises, just as fire, life, health, and auto insurance are set up by private insurance companies to care for a man's own and his family's economic and other crises.

This leads us to a different and more realistic approach to such a recession as we are now facing. Once we classify our present-day social benefits as forms of insurance, we automatically admit the need of their establishment on a carefully-worked-out actuarial basis. Each one of us has fire insurance for his home, life insurance for his family, health insurance and auto insurance, and we are constantly reminded, by the change in policy rates, that such insurance is based on thorough actuarial studies. The same ought to be true of workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance, and social security. Sad to say, this is not the case. The government has not maintained its insurance policies on an actuarial basis, nor has it invested its funds so that they could bring forth earned interest (as in the case with all forms of private insurance). This is leading to bigger and bigger national deficits and can, if not corrected, eventuate in total financial collapse.

Along with this, we face the problems that have arisen with indigency cases and the establishment of benefits that encourage indigency rather than work. Such problems are only intensified when socialism takes over. This leads us into the area of the social sciences, in which much study needs to take place.

Since the Christian lives in the secular world and not in the theocracy of the Old Testament, some of our problems can be solved by a study of God's laws for Israel in the Old Testament but others demand an extension of our thinking to cover free enterprise as it works in a highly sophisticated secular atmosphere.

We have seen that solutions do appear as we study history, economics, sociology, and philosophy. The same will prove true as the sociologist studies the questions of a work ethic on the part of labor and a relief ethic on the part of the state. That the author does not have all the answers at this point, he readily admits. However, he calls on his Christian friends who have studied sociology—as he has studied history, economics, and philosophy—to apply themselves and work out this final part of the answer to modern man's economic and social needs.

The New Evangelical has awakened many Christians to the fact that the Church must not only present the plan of salvation, but also do its part to solve man's economic and social problems. For this we ought to thank him!

As I close this article, I must admit that the topic deserves a much fuller and more detailed study than has been possible. Nevertheless, I pray that this brief essay may encourage our friends among the New Evangelicals, as well as each of the rest of us, to take heart and to develop thoroughly scholarly Christian answers.