[1964. In Encyclopedia of Christianity. Edwin A. Palmer, ed. Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education.]

APOLOGETICS. In the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr, soon followed by other Christian authors, undertook the defense of Christianity against the slanders of its ignorant or malicious enemies and against the more sober criticisms of pagan philosophy.

The crudest charges were that the Christians were incestuous and cannibalistic. Cannibalism may have been an inference from Christian statements about the eating of Christ's flesh and the drinking of His blood. A more reasonable charge was that of treason, or at least of poor citizenship, for Christians refused to worship the emperor and, as pilgrims and strangers, could not share the approved attachment to the state. Their refusal to sacrifice to the gods, as well as to the emperor, was considered atheism. And talk of a final judgment and the destruction of the world by fire gave them the reputation of revolutionists and incendiaries.

Of a more doctrinal nature were discussions of the virgin birth, the incarnation, the scandal of a crucifixion, and the resurrection, both of Christ and of believers. The resurrection with its emphasis on the body was incompatible with Plato's theory of the soul and also ran into other troubles; for example, if a martyr was eaten by a lion, and then the lion was roasted and eaten by a man, how could the martyr's body be resurrected?

The Christian attempt to answer these objections is the beginning of apologetics. Since apologists address themselves to the questions of their times, the content of apologetics tends to vary. Second-century and 20th-century objections to Christianity are not exactly the same. Because of this variation and because even the objections of a single century do not form a self-consistent complex, apologetics gives the impression of being a sort of haphazard composition, apologetics, as an cise subject matter, as does geometry, for example.

Without entirely escaping this haphazard composition, apologetics, as an academic seminary course, as or a theme for published books, has tended to center on a few major problems. Archaeological confirmation of the historical truth of the Bible is classified under *Evidences*, while apologetics is restricted to more philosophical material. Ideally, apologetics should develop into and coincide with philosophy; and this is the case in Roman Catholicism. But Protestants have willing to answer each objection separately and, therefore, haphazardly. A thoroughly systematic procedure is still lacking.

Depending on particular situations, therefore, the subject matter of apologetics may include arguments for the existence of the soul, in opposition to ancient materialism or contemporary behaviorism. A topic of long standing is the possibility of miracles, in opposition to inviolable natural

law. More recently there have been debates over evolution and creation. But in all centuries a basic question has been the existence of God, in opposition to pantheism and atheism. Arguments on God's existence have also required a discussion of he limits of human reason. How extensive is our knowledge of God? Do we even have a concept of God? Perhaps the finite mind of man is incompetent to discover the infinite God. To these questions various and intricate answers have been given, and on these maters apologetics centers.

Acknowledging the place and importance of behaviorism, evolution, and the rest, we may virtually identify apologetics as concerned with the basic question: Is knowledge of God possible?

It is a justifiable simplification to classify Christian apologetic methods as either Thomistic or Augustinian. In the former, man is born with a blank mind and knowledge originates in sensation. In the latter, there are innate ideas, and observation of the physical world is of little apologetic importance. It might be added that the latter also takes a more serious view of sin and grace than the former; but since the problem of God's existence could have arisen with Adam before the Fall, the effects of sin, while they complicate the present predicament, do not alter the two types of apologetics.

Thomas Aquinas, though he denied that we can know God's essence, and though he confined or knowledge of God to negations and analogies, asserted that human intellectual finitude does not prevent the formulation of a valid demonstration of God's existence. Starting with sensory experience, in particular the observation of motion, as Aristotle explained, one can argue to a single, eternal, immaterial First Mover.

David Hume, who also based all knowledge on sensory experience, showed why all such “cosmological” arguments are invalid. Aside from other difficulties which Kant explained more clearly, an argument from the world, as an effect, to God, as its cause, is invalid for at least two reasons. First, there is no sensory experience that the world is an effect. Second, our experience is always finite, and a finite object cannot be shown to require an infinite cause. David Hume, to be sure, was an enemy of Christianity, but if he has disabused our minds of fallacious arguments, he has done us a service.

The second type of apologetics is Augustinian. Here the argument does not start with a blank mind and proceed by observation of nature. It begins with innate truth. All men know that two plus two are four and that happiness ought to be sought after. These are necessary, eternal truths. And as necessity cannot be abstracted from any finite experience, these truths must be superior to every human mind. Hence there must be an eternal Mind “which lighteth every man” who thinks at all.

From a logical points of view, this is not really an *argument* for God's existence. In an argument, the conclusion is deduced from premises, as Thomas deduced God's existence from observation of motion. But here God has become the premise on which all other knowledge is based.

Calvin at the very beginning of his *Institutes* asks whether a man first knows himself or first knows God. Recognizing that the priority of self-knowledge is plausible, he nonetheless concludes that a man must first know God before knowing what he himself really is.

At the present time it is not so much the existence of God as it is the possibility of knowing God that requires defense. The neo-orthodox theologians assert that God eludes intellectual comprehension. Human language is inadequate for theology, truth is subjective, and religion is a matter of passionate devotion. Like the Thomists, they reduce knowledge of God to negations and analogies.

There are plausible arguments for such assertions, but they depend on a non-Christian assumption. For if it be maintained that in the beginning was the Word, the eternal Reason of God, there can be no superrational "truth." One could no longer allege a divine logic in opposition to a so-called human logic. Two and two would be four for God as much as for man. And if God gave man the gift of language for the purpose of understanding a verbal revelation, then language is divinely adequate for all theology.

It will be of great help in actual debate to notice that not only secular arguments, but also Romish and neo-orthodox arguments, plausible as they may seem, are based on some premise other than God. These philosophies are therefore anti-theistic. Since the latter two are unintentionally so, they should choose between Augustinianism or secularism. Secularism, intentionally anti-theistic, is reduced to skepticism by its inability to justify universal and necessary truths, including the forms of logic. This leaves Augustinianism as the only choice-worthy philosophy.

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