

Defending the faith: The case against apologetics (part one)



Highland Views

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Guest columnist

A reader suggested I address the subject of Christian Apologetics. Once an Evangelical Christian myself, I have vivid memories of hearing speakers and reading books presenting “proofs” for our faith. We wanted to be prepared with all the “facts” to debate the “unsaved,” to respond to any hard questions coming from a non-believer. I don’t remember convincing anyone. I’ve heard all the arguments for Christianity and used them myself. Freethinkers aren’t likely to be persuaded by the arguments of those who defend their faith.

What are the “proofs” of the Christian faith? I’m not going to spell them out here, but the foundation for the arguments tends to be the resurrection of Jesus. As we used to say, why would all those early Christians — or later believers — die for a lie? If they knew the bod-

ily resurrection of Christ was not a real historical event they wouldn’t have accepted death, martyrdom for their Lord. The apostle Paul sure stood on that argument. Read carefully how his defense of the gospel is explained in First Corinthians 15:

“For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised up on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to [Peter], then to the twelve, then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, the majority of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as it were to one born at the wrong time, he appeared also to me...Therefore whether I or those, in this way we preached, and in this way you believed.”

Notice the progression. Paul is passing along what he has heard from others who heard, or claimed to see, and his own personal testimony of hearing and seeing his Lord. We would call this

“hearsay,” and clear credulity — a willingness to believe without proof. He writes about (mystical?) “appearances” of Jesus of Nazareth, now called Christ. How is a personal “vision” any proof something is true? We never hear anything from the “five hundred” he refers to. He has preached his amazing story of appearances/apparitions and “in this way you believed.” Those in the church of Corinth heard these stories, apparently passed down for years, and chose to believe the hearsay.

Also notice that he refers to the authority of other writings, older scriptures. “According to the scriptures.” What are those “proof-texts” and what if a person doesn’t accept the authority of those writings? Were those ancient verses really written about Jesus? Many biblical scholars don’t think there are prophecies about Jesus in the Hebrew Bible (“Old Testament”). The passages apologists claim are prophecies foretelling the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were clearly talking about people and events long before the time of Jesus.

Paul continues his questionable apologetical defense:

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. And also we are found to be false witnesses of God...But if Christ has not been raised, your faith is empty; you are still in your sins...If we have put our hope in Christ in this life only, we are of all people most pitiable.”

This is why apologists from the time of Paul have desperately stood firm on the “proof of the resurrection.” If Jesus was not raised, faith falls. Let me just say, in my view, this is unfortunate. To erase the entire life and message of Jesus just because he died and stayed in the tomb, dishonors the life of a great teacher in history, someone I will always respect.

The resurrection is the foundation for apologetics, but there’s something much more at the heart of this: faith itself. “I believe” — a personal credo — is where it all begins and ends. One question would naturally arise: how can you

See HIGHLAND, Page 2C

Highland

Continued from Page 1C

“prove” faith, God or Christ? “Look how I read my Bible, pray and go to church.” That doesn’t seem too convincing. “See how I show compassion toward other people.” Still not quite sufficient. “God speaks to me

and I follow the guidance of the Spirit.” I can’t see how that proves anything.

Listening to one apologist speaking of his own conversion, he said that after he became a believer, he discovered many arguments showing Christianity was “true.” Listen closely. He believed — and then found reasons to believe that conveniently support his chosen faith (classic “confirmation bias”). This is where apologies for faith live and die.

“I believe, therefore my faith is true” is certainly not a defense to stand upon.

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