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M01A1 Introduction

It would seem that if we must make an apology tor our Christian beliefs then there would be something wrong with our religion. This viewpoint reflects the French origin of the word apology as it is most frequently used in English. But apology also derives from the Greek word “apologia” where it’s meaning was to defend or explain a viewpoint challenged by others. This meaning seems to come into play in defending Christianity. People of other religions and people with an antagonization against religion, or especially Christianity sometimes challenge Christianity as preposterous.

I attended Seventh-day Adventist schools from 2nd grade through college. I’ve never experienced opposition to Christianity in the terms of belief like many people do. Any opposition I’ve faced has been in terms of hypocrisy, saying one thing and not living up to it. We as Christians think of the church as a hospital for sinners but the mud slinging opponent of Christianity, even if he loses the high ground on ideology then fights the low ground war of ridiculing the believer in Christ’s high standards because the believer hasn’t yet attained these standards completely. This kind of challenge I’ve faced. And of course there are church goers who attend primarily for social reason or commercial contacts. They want the advantages of Christianity without seeking to live a life of committed uniqueness of living differently. They seek to wear the Christian shirt on the broad path they hope to lead to heaven but instead leads to destruction. Matthew 7:13.

 I typically find friends who recognize my commitment to my faith and probably not seeing this commonly around them are curious about how I as a Christian view contemporary events. I usually can discuss this without coming across as better than they, but with a perspective on life and world events not ordinarily seen. Many Christians try to blend in unseen as different by others around them.

My wife studied biology with an evolution emphasis in a state university. She completed assignments and exams with evolutionist reasoning. But she always explained that she believed in Christian creation instead. She then successfully tested out of the second term from a national service. Later the university denied her these credits. She spoke with her professor who said he remembered her diligence and alternate beliefs and gave her standard university credit for this advanced class without retaking it. Our attitude towards people challenging our Christian beliefs is essential. Winning the debate is less important than losing the person. Paul talks about being careful to avoid unnecessarily offending our friend (although he may have been talking of eating food from the temples).

Dr. Philip and Dr. Cherian say “An apologist can give answers to a good number of their problems, and can then teach them the basics of the humanistic philosophy.” This suggests that kindness and mutual respect and perhaps sharing is essential for successful Christian apologies. We want to win the person at least as much as win the debate. I certainly agree with the authors of this article that we need not avoid conversations of faith simply because we personally don’t know all the answers. It is however essential that we not shy away from challenging opportunities to share our Christian faith with doubting friends. Avoidance makes God appear weak in the chaos of differing beliefs or no beliefs.

We may not be theologians or scientists but God doesn’t leave us with nothing to say in regard to His power and I’d say His goodness. J B Phillips says in Romans 1:20 “Since the beginning of the world the invisible attributes of God, e.g. his eternal power and divinity, have been plainly discernible through things which he has made and which are commonly seen and known, thus leaving these men without a rag of excuse.” I could extend this to also mean we haven’t a rag of excuse to remain silent when “others” deny God. Or even when others deny the goodness of God for we have beauty and everything we need available to live well.

Jesus refused Pilate and Herod, rulers in Judaea, miracles to quench their curiosity, but He healed all the sick who came to Him in the villages. Mark 6:56. He heals today. A government study in the USA, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2802370/ , found that studies are unclear on the benefits of prayer on healing. Some studies showed improvement in outcomes while others showed no statistical differences. Still, something as nebulous as prayer would seem to be irrevelant and yet it isn’t consistently so. I knew a teenaged girl injured in a motorcycle accident. Neurogical scans showed no meaningful brain activity after two weeks. The parent’s resisted hospital recommendations to withdraw life support. Yet days later this girl reconnected my wife, her teacher, and a year later she asked me for help in algebra after school. God still heals! In a since He raised her to life.

The differentiation between APOLOGETICS AND POLEMICS is interesting on two points. First, the most difficult discussions can be between Christians who understand the Bible differently. Apparently this is polemics which may be related to apologetics except that here both parties claim the same inspired rule book of standards and beliefs. Passages of Scripture can be understood differently. As Christian brothers we are to seek to respect each other and yet our reaction can easily degenerate into the frustrated response of “how can you be so stupid to fail to see it as I do.” We so easily become entrenched into our rightness and your wrongness… We can act like estranged siblings in the family of God where Jesus is the brother to both of us. Second, since I am Seventh-day Adventist, I sincerely pray that this doesn’t happen between my family at Trinity and myself. I looked at the statement of beliefs at the ITDEF website before enrolling and didn’t recognize a problem. Of course it seems I’m enrolled instead into Trinity and I’ve not yet looked at the statement of beliefs there. And now I’m a little afraid to look.

God’s followers have always had distractors, inside and outside the church. Jesus faced the Pharisees who looked inward instead of upward while nominally adhering to scripture but not sufficiently understanding Messianic prophecies. Sadducees didn’t even believe in the heavenly hereafter. Earlier, citizens and priests followed the example of kings, sometimes for good but often towards idolatry. In the early days of Christianity, charismatic and/or ambitious men splintered the church. Paul’s epistles sometimes addressed these issues. It multiplied after the apostles died. Yet the church continued to grow.

Constantine, to an extent, stabilized the church, giving it the chance to breath after Diocletian’s severe persecution. Yet, Constantine was never a fervent Christian. He found that melding pagan experiences and Christianity provided national stability. Christians felt safer and they didn’t revolt. This gave the Church of Rome an opportunity to strengthen and over time become dominant.

The Church of Rome came to so dominate that little freedom of religion or state could exist. This church taught that only the clergy could understand the Bible. Few people could afford a hand written Bible anyway. Then God, shall we say, inspired Gutenberg and mass printing enabled reformers like Luther to effect a change that slowly brought religious freedom. Religious freedom isn’t easily available without the Bible available. The reformation, while enabling regrowth of a strong Christianity, also enabled a growth of denial and thinkers like Voltaire.

The invention, shall we say, of evolution allowed these deniers to ditch the creation of God. This evolution theory, often taught as scientific fact, anchors denial of God’s existence among many today. It even creeps into Christian churches. Debates among even my church’s professors conflict some in the SDA church to the point that in 2010 the world general conference session voted to reaffirm our traditional creation beliefs.

George McCready Price was an early Adventist apologist reviving the flood as an explanation for the geologic layers espoused by evolutionists to deny creation. Price credited the Sabbath for saving Adventists from evolution. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\_McCready\_Price

Seventh-day Adventists and evangelicals I believe are today’s strongest adherents of creationism, at lease in the USA.

This article concludes with an apology (defense) of apologetics. Not all Christians qualify to be apologists. Some are New Testament Christians who lose the story of creation, although the New Testament has references to God as the creator, such as the first angel’s message in Revelation 14. It seems here that the message of God in the last days begins with teaching “God the creator”. The evolutionary process found in theistic evolution seems brutal to me. Satan is the author of death. Brutality belongs to him. I fail to see real Christianity finding Jesus as God having the character of love relying on survival of the fittest to create a people who have the capability to love. True religion is a religion that teaches the importance of love; “the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13.

Some Christians doubt, or explain away parts of Scripture. To be the word of God it must by it’s nature be entirely true, whether we understand all of it or not. We cannot defend what we call God’s Word if parts of it might be in error. We have heaven to finally learn to understand what we don’t yet understand.

Those who never have to face attacks probably don’t know how to fully defend their faith. When I began my summary I indicated I’ve not faced the challenges of those not so exposed to attacks. I haven’t faced much cause for fierce apologetics. The unchurched who ask me questions don’t fiercely attack. They seek to understand me, what makes me tick as a different kind of person. And keeping the seventh day Sabbath conscientiously prohibits me from hiding my faith at work. I leave work early on the short daylight Fridays. But they kindly remind me when it gets time. I don’t fault them for different practices. I worked 32 1/2 years with a wonderful group of work colleagues and friends before retiring. Twice I was threatened by less tolerant managers to be laid off, but each time it was the manager who after two years managing were laid off instead. God has been good to me many times in many ways. My co-worker friends always heard my confidence in God during hard times.

When it comes to apologizing/defending our wonderful Savion and Creator we must not fear so speak because we may not defend well. If we wait until we’re good at it, we’ll wait forever in inaction.

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