

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY ‘COME’: APOLOGETICS AND THE WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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In a word, Christian apologetics is a *defense* of Christian theism. The Greek word *apologia* may refer to the kind of reasoned case a lawyer provides in defending the innocence of an accused person. Or, more broadly, the word may refer to any line of argument showing the truth of some position. 1 Peter 3:15 contains the instruction to Christians: “Always be prepared to give an answer [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”¹

1. Testimony: human and divine

Within the four Gospels one finds a heavy emphasis on human testimony in helping others come to beliefs about Christ. For example, St. Luke opens his Gospel by explaining to its recipient, Theophilus, that he is writing “an orderly account” of the life of Jesus “so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” Luke describes himself as drawing together a written account of things “just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word.”² As Richard Swinburne remarks, “it is hard to read the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and 1 Corinthians without seeing them as claiming that various historical events (above all, the Resurrection) occurred and that others can know these things on the testimony of the apostles to have seen them.”³

This passing down of apostolic testimony continued through the next generations of the early Christian Church. Ignatius, in contending for the bodily resurrection of Jesus, emphasized that the disciples “touched him and believed.”⁴ Later Church fathers frequently appealed to Ignatius and to such other early fathers as Clement of Rome and Polycarp, who also were reputed to have been taught directly by the apostles. So, for example, Irenaeus appeals to the teachings of Polycarp, whose word can be trusted because he was “instructed by the apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ.”⁵

Alongside this eyewitness testimony preserved and proclaimed by the Church, the Christian tradition affirms a complementary form of testimony that is essential for bringing people to faith in Christ, namely, the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of John, while recording Jesus’s prayer “for those who will believe in me through their [the disciples’] message”,⁶ also contains Jesus’s promise that the Father will send the Holy Spirit, who “will teach you all things” and who will “guide you into all the truth.”⁷ Likewise, the writer of Hebrews, in corroborating his own summation of Jesus’s teaching, remarks that “the Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this.”⁸

So God’s plan for helping people form beliefs about Jesus Christ involves dual streams of testimony—human and divine. Jesus expressly indicated this when he told his disciples that the

¹ All quotations from the Bible taken from NIV.

² Luke 1:1-4.

³ Swinburne 2004, 536-37.

⁴ Ignatius 1950, §3.

⁵ Irenaeus 1950, 3.3.4. Irenaeus in both 3.3.3 and 3.3.4 traces chains of testimonial succession involving Polycarp, Clement of Rome, and others.

⁶ John 17:20.

⁷ John 14:26, 16:13.

⁸ Heb. 10:15.

Holy Spirit “will testify about me. And you must also testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”⁹ We also see this dual witness invoked in early Christian preaching. When the apostles were called before the Jewish leaders to account for their actions as they continued to proclaim Christ despite being ordered not to do so, they appealed to the resurrection of Christ and to the demands God had placed on them as witnesses of that signal event. “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”¹⁰

There are important theological reasons why God would include his followers in his outreach to others. Not only did God reveal himself most dramatically and decisively by entering the stream of human history in the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ, but this revelation is the supreme ground of Christian *fellowship*, as we together join Christ in his work of reconciling the world to God. The author of 1 John testifies to this fellowship: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”¹¹ As we faithfully pass on this testimony ourselves, we participate in bringing others into this eternal fellowship of love. “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”¹²

All this is not to say that the Holy Spirit will in *every* case utilize human testimony in communicating to an individual. A person need not have heard the Gospel message from other humans in order to receive a private revelation from God. Further, even where a person *has* received human testimony, this testimony may be incidental to the testimony of the Holy Spirit. That is, the Holy Spirit may not *utilize* this human testimony when himself testifying. Even so, our concern in this essay—discussing the role of apologetics—will be cases in which the Holy Spirit does in some way utilize, ratify, or confirm, human testimony.

In one sense, Christians will affirm the work of the Holy Spirit as always *preceding* any human work. The Second Council of Orange (529 A.D.) established as Christian orthodoxy that any movement humans make toward God is in fact *initiated* by God, who endeavors to draw people to himself. This includes the Christian’s efforts—which are prompted by the Holy Spirit—to help lead others to Christ.

Still, if God is to afford his followers a role in jointly testifying to others who are still outside the faith, it does seem appropriate to speak in terms of the Holy Spirit *joining* his testimony to the testimony of his followers. Perhaps an analogy is instructive. Consider a case where a teenage girl has a strained relationship with her parents, and even doubts their love. The father, in an effort to repair their relationship takes her to a movie in which the lead character is a mother who loves her children sacrificially. As the lead character attests to the joys and sorrows of loving others deeply, her heart tends to soften as she and her father share the emotion of the story. Later, over dinner, as they discuss the film, its message and emotional impact are enlarged when he notes that the mother in the film depicted the very sort of affection that he and her mother feel for her.

Given that the Holy Spirit does not have physical vocal chords like the parent from our example, what does the Holy Spirit *do* as a way of joining his own testimony to the testimony of humans? Most straightforwardly, the Holy Spirit may ‘speak’ in a “still, small voice” that a

⁹ John 15:26-27

¹⁰ Acts 5:32. It is worth noting that the book of Acts is pervaded by references both to the witness of the Holy Spirit to the gospel and to the human witness, which sometimes takes the form of arguing, giving persuasive reasons, and so on. See Acts 1:8, 22; 4:31-33; 6:10; 17:2-4, 17; 18:4; 19:8-10; 24:25.

¹¹ 1 John 1:3.

¹² John 15:12. Consider the implications of this command in light of John 17:24 and 15:9.

person recognizes as in fact the voice of the Holy Spirit.¹³ A person ‘hears’ an inner voice that resembles an audible voice, that is almost as if one has heard a vocal utterance. Origen remarked that “if anyone ponders over the prophetic sayings...it is certain that in the very act of reading and diligently studying them his mind and feelings will be touched by a divine breath and he will recognize that the words he is reading are not the utterances of men but the language of God.” (Princ. 4.1.6). One interpretation of this depiction is that hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit has a unique phenomenology, akin perhaps to recognizing the tenor of a friend’s voice. Such recognition may be because the perceived tone of voice resembles the voice one has already come to believe is the voice of the Holy Spirit. And perhaps one’s prior beliefs about the voice of the Holy Spirit and how it might be discerned were due to evidential considerations that the prophetic and apostolic writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Or, one may simply find herself believing that the voice she is hearing is the voice of God—without being able to offer any reasons why she should have this belief.

Alternatively, the Holy Spirit may causally influence a person’s belief, without the person recognizing that the Holy Spirit has in any way communicated or otherwise acted. Perhaps a person hears a Christian proclaim that Jesus died for the sins of the world. Following Alvin Plantinga, the person may find that “what is said simply seems right; it seems compelling; one finds oneself saying, ‘Yes, that’s right, that’s the truth of the matter.’”¹⁴ In this case, the person need not have any idea that the Holy Spirit is causally influencing her belief. But it certainly would be within the power of the Holy Spirit to exert this causal influence.

The details of such causal influence may vary. If a person hears human testimony about God, the Holy Spirit could directly incline the person to believe that testimony. More indirectly, the Holy Spirit may remove obstacles that would otherwise prevent the person from believing. For example, the Holy Spirit may provide healing of damaged *emotions*, stemming from an abusive earthly father, so that the proclaimed Good News that Jesus reconciles us to our heavenly Father is recognized as in fact good news. The Holy Spirit may exert causal influence on a person’s *will* by prompting the person to attend more closely to the human testimony she has heard. The Holy Spirit may cause the person to have a *new desire*, say, for the Gospel message about Jesus to be true (leading more readily to the belief that it *is* true).¹⁵ Or, the Holy Spirit may help cause the person to see some truth in a new light, with the person’s *existing* desires being roused.¹⁶

This last point about seeing truths in a new light raises the further point that doxastic changes may result from the Holy Spirit’s activity, even if these changes do not amount to a change in beliefs about specific, propositional statements. Human testimony about God has often come in the form of art: paintings, literature, film, even architecture. These forms of communication have a distinctive power to produce changes in our doxastic *orientation* even if these changes cannot readily be reduced to a list of new propositional statements that are now believed.

¹³ Cf. Elijah’s encounter with the voice of God in 1 Kings 19:11-13.

¹⁴ Plantinga 2000, 250. On the epistemic justification associated with it seeming that the content of someone’s testimony is true—including the testimony of the Holy Spirit—see Dougherty 2014.

¹⁵ Francis Bacon observed that “in innumerable ways, and those sometimes imperceptible, the affection tinges and infects the Intellect.” (Bacon 1855, Bk I, §xlx.) While Bacon’s concern was primarily how affections can *negatively* affect one’s belief formation, we will note later how some truths can only be seen if affection is already present.

¹⁶ Think of how a daughter might announce her engagement to her father, who then views his future son-in-law as the person with whom his daughter wants to share his life. The father may now find he has deep affection for, and a desire to help and protect, his son-in-law—with this new desire being a kind of extension of his existing desire to help and protect his daughter.

Having noted how the Holy Spirit's causal influence on people's beliefs, will, desires, and emotions may serve to complement and build upon human testimony, it is difficult to offer more details of this causal story. It remains a mystery *how* it is that the Holy Spirit can cause people to attend, or can cause people to have desires, or can present himself to people so as to cause feelings of peace. Yet, the mysterious nature of this causal story is no more mysterious than any other story about how an immaterial God can cause physical or mental events in our world.

2. Testimony and Apologetics

An interesting question, though not to be pursued here, is how much of the above work of the Holy Spirit should be thought of as genuine instances of *testimony*. Must testimony always come in some linguistic form? Must it be expressible in propositional form? However one answers such questions, it seems clear that the previously described work of the Holy Spirit will extend well beyond what would naturally be called testimony. All the same, this variety of causal influence is understandably needed as the Holy Spirit engages the whole person, as part of God's work of drawing people to himself.

Likewise, human testimony about Jesus is narrower than the project of apologetics—though there is also a sense in which human testimony is broader. It is broader in the sense that only select kinds of testimony may be relevant to apologetic efforts. Maturing Christians may share with one another their experiences of God as encouragement or as part of Christian accountability; but testimony here is not intended as a reasoned defense of the Christian faith. At the same time, testimony remains narrower than apologetics in that a Christian's testimony may comprise only one part of her apologetic arsenal.

A Christian apologist may, for example, employ fictional stories as a means of pointing others to truths about God—following Jesus's use of parables. Or an apologist may ask probing questions of others, or share a piece of art that kindles benevolent sentiments, or simply stand with others during their times of crisis. It would again stretch the concept to say that the apologist is offering *testimony* in all these cases.

3. The scope of apologetics

The wide range of activity of the Holy Spirit and of the apologist, in leading people to God, also brings up the point that their shared, ultimate purpose is not merely that a person might come to hold *beliefs* about God—at least, as this term is used in the modern sense of intellectual assent. Christians affirm that God draws us toward a *relationship* with him in which we find our ultimate fulfillment. However the distinction is to be drawn between 'belief' and a relational commitment marked by 'faith', the latter is obviously the final aim of the Holy Spirit's work in a person's life.

Equally, it is the final aim of the apologist. With the instruction in 1 Peter 3:15 to "always be prepared to give an answer [*apologia*]," we are told to "do this with gentleness and respect." The wider context here is the goal to "live such good lives among the pagans" that they "may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."¹⁷ The goal of the apologist is thus the unbeliever's standing before God, or relationship with God. The cognitive element of belief may play an essential role in this relational dynamic, but the goal of the apologist is not mere belief; it

¹⁷ 1 Pet. 2:12.

is rather a relationship, which Christians historically have described as a relationship marked by faith.

The goal of the apologist is close to, yet distinguishable from, the goal of the evangelist. Evangelists extend in Christ's name the invitation to follow him, to relate to him as lord. Apologists work to clear obstacles that would impede a positive response to this invitation. Apologists defend the coherence and truth of Christian theism; and they work to correct misunderstandings. They commend the Christian life to others. And they perform the important work of translating the Gospel message into a vocabulary and conceptual framework that others will understand.

Jesus compared his kingdom to a great feast.¹⁸ The Christian evangelist proclaims that Jesus Christ says to all, "Come and eat," urging hearers to respond. The apologist, again, prepares people for this invitation. As Alister McGrath puts it, in the example of the feast "apologetics can be thought of as explaining to people that there really is going to be a feast. It invites them to reflect on what they might find there—the food and drink. How wonderful it would be to be invited!"¹⁹

4. Pascal's stages of the apologetic process

If the Christian apologist, then, joins in the work of the Holy Spirit in preparing others to respond positively to God's invitation to a relationship, how might we categorize this work? That is, what are the more immediate goals which the apologist should adopt, as a means of realizing this ultimate goal of apologetics? The apologist again is simply joining the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in others' lives. And so insight into the work to which the apologist is called will give us insight into the kinds of work the Holy Spirit is already doing to draw unbelievers to God.

Blaise Pascal is often a favorite voice among Christian apologists, and for good reason. Pascal's collection of thoughts—or *Pensées*—offers profound insight into the human condition and into the work that God must do to draw people to himself. One well-known passage offers a succinct summation of the task of the apologist, in helping move others toward Christian faith: "make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is."²⁰ Three elements can be found in this short instruction. There is the directive to endeavor to show that Christianity is true. Before that, there is the condition that others should wish it were true. And before that, a contextual qualification is given that this process requires that others be in some sense good.

We can note here that some theologians reject in principle the apologetic method of finding points of common ground with unbelievers and then moving with them through inductive reasoning to conclusions about the truth of Christian theism. Concerns about this methodology include: that we end up with a picture of God (a 'god of the philosophers') removed from the biblical picture; that we undermine God's sovereign choice to reveal himself to those he chooses; that any evidence not grounded in personal, religious experience will simply not lead to a change in belief; and that reason improperly becomes the "higher court" in which we creatures assess with hubris the merits of God's self-disclosure to us.²¹

¹⁸ Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24.

¹⁹ McGrath 2012, 23.

²⁰ Pascal 1966, 187.

²¹ Barth 2010, 10. Barth in fact seems to have all these concerns.

While space does not allow us to respond to these concerns, we do note that the bulk of the Christian tradition clearly has thought it a worthwhile enterprise to find common starting points with unbelievers and then to lead them through inferential reasoning to the conclusion that Jesus is truly who he claimed to be. Indeed, this method is seen in scripture itself. The writer of the Gospel of John recorded the miraculous signs of Jesus so “that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.”²² And Peter begins his speech at Pentecost by commending Jesus as one who was “accredited by God to you by miracles.”²³ The appeal here is clearly to inductive reasoning: that the divinity of Jesus is the best explanation for the data we have of his life among us.

Turning now to a fuller discussion of the three segments of Pascal’s apologetic process, a few preliminary points are worth noting. In each of the three segments there are further distinctions we might make in cataloging the work of the Holy Spirit. Certain works of the Holy Spirit might be described as ‘negative’ work in the sense of mitigating *against*: a growing orientation toward the bad, an increase of desires toward that which competes with God, and a confidence that there is evidence that points decisively away from Christian theism. Correspondingly, there is ‘positive’ work in orienting a person *toward* the good, in cultivating desires *for* God, and in giving clarity of vision to appreciate the evidence in Christian theism’s favor. In each of the three apologetic segments there are also *cognitive* effects from the Holy Spirit’s activity, as well as *non-cognitive* effects.

5. Orienting toward the Good

i. mitigating work

Jonathan Edwards, following John Calvin and others, maintained that the structure of our world attests clearly to being the workmanship of God; and an understanding of many divine, eternal things are implanted within us. So why does not everyone form beliefs about the truth of theism in general, and even Christian doctrines in particular? Edwards’s answer is that “if men have not respect to ‘em as real and certain things, it cannot be for want of sufficient evidence of their truth.”²⁴ Instead, the reason involves the corrupt state from which one views this evidence: “The mind of man is naturally full of enmity against the doctrines of the gospel; which is a disadvantage to those arguments that prove their truth, and causes them to lose their force upon the mind.”²⁵

Edward’s statement here is far too sweeping in that *all* instances of unbelief, even when one is clearly presented with the Gospel message, cannot simply be assumed to be the result of *motivated* errors in reasoning.²⁶ Rational people seeking truth can come to different conclusions. And even when a belief is irrationally held, a person can be open to the truth and make an (unmotivated) error in reasoning. Still, Edwards is right to draw our attention to the possibility

²² John 20:30-31

²³ Acts 2:22.

²⁴ Edwards 1970, III, 157.

²⁵ Edwards 1970, II, 307. Cf. Calvin’s remarks: “How can the idea of God enter your mind without instantly giving rise to the thought, that since you are his workmanship, you are bound, by the very law of creation, to submit to his authority?—that your life is due to him?—that whatever you do ought to have reference to him? If so, it undoubtedly follows that your life is sadly corrupted” (Calvin 1996, I.2.2).

²⁶ Edwards’s claim is grounded in his theology, which offers a very pessimistic account of the moral dispositions of fallen humanity.

of being willfully *blind*, unable to see the truth of Christian theism even if the evidence for it lies plainly for those with eyes to see it.

If this state of spiritual blindness is indeed to be *willful*, then seemingly it will have been the result of some sort of active self-deception. It is questionable whether a person can literally deceive herself—as this requires a person (as deceiver) to believe one thing, while at the same time to fail (as deceived) to believe that same thing. However, it is clear that people can actively avoid uncomfortable truths, with this active avoidance affecting what a person does or does not come to believe.²⁷ When this process prevents a person from holding beliefs about God’s existence and one’s standing before him, then the process can rightly be called a case of willful spiritual blindness.

Modern psychologists have shown that humans have devised a variety of overt and subtle ways to avoid truths about themselves. They can remind themselves and others that their behavior really does not hurt anyone, or that their peccadillos are not among the more serious ones, or that everyone has some such faults, or that their own failures are temporary and uncharacteristic lapses. The list goes on. People can sabotage the efforts of friends so that their own behavior appears good by comparison. They may seek to avoid conclusions about their own behavior and motives by taking performance-inhibiting drugs such as alcohol so as to handicap their own performances and thereby create a ready-made, external explanation for their moral failings. They may even in certain cases embrace the diagnosis of a mental or physical illness because the conclusion “I’m unwell” is more comfortable than the conclusion “I’m willfully engaged in unacceptable behavior.” If these strategies fail, there is always the option simply to *pretend* to have the moral character that sits well with one’s conscience. Sadly, modern psychology has also documented that humans are remarkably adept at (very quickly) coming to believe that they possess the character and dispositions which they were once merely pretending to have.²⁸

Pascal saw how the desire to avoid uncomfortable truths blinds us to certain truths about ourselves.

We are not satisfied with the life we have in ourselves and our own being. We want to lead an imaginary life in the eyes of others, and so we try to make an impression. We strive constantly to embellish and preserve our imaginary being, and neglect the real one (1966, 806).

Accordingly, we will be attracted to false beliefs—about others, about the world, about God—that reinforce our own favored views of ourselves.

Equally, as William Wood puts it, “we are unlikely to be attracted to beliefs—like the belief in God—that threaten to destabilize our false self-understanding. According to Pascal, such is our situation.”²⁹ The previously discussed reframing strategies of humans, while by no means an exhaustive taxonomy, nevertheless provides some indication of the multipart task the Holy Spirit may undertake in helping a person face up to the truth that “no, I’m not the person I’ve been picturing myself as being.” While the apologist, following Pascal, may draw others’ attention to

²⁷ See Mele 1987, chpt. 9 as to why this process merits the description ‘self-deception’.

²⁸ For a summary of psychological literature on these strategies, as well as their potential connection to theistic beliefs, see Kinghorn 2007.

²⁹ Wood 2004, 525. Cf. Pascal: “Man is . . . nothing but disguise, falsehood and hypocrisy, both in himself and with regard to others. He does not want to be told the truth” (1996, 978).

this human condition, it remains the role of the Holy Spirit, Jesus made plain, to convict the world of sin.³⁰

The effects of the Holy Spirit's communication here may be cognitive or non-cognitive. Cognitively, a person may find herself with the belief that she indeed stands guilty of wrongdoing, that she has sought to justify her bad choices, that she has sought to understand the world in a way that amounts to a kind of 'curving in on oneself.'³¹ The apologist may perhaps point these things out, attesting to the common human condition. But in keeping with Christian doctrine, it is again the Holy Spirit who convicts here—that is, who causally influences in some way the person's coming to believe that all this is so.

Non-cognitive effects of the Holy Spirit's influence can also be noted. Humans often attest to feeling shame, even if they cannot articulate precisely what has gone wrong with their lives and why they should feel shame about it. To be sure, feelings associated with shame or guilt or dishonor can be illegitimate—as when a person is scapegoated by other people in their own attempts to deflect blame. Still, these kinds of feelings may at times be a (non-cognitive) prompt from the Holy Spirit, impeding the continued, self-deceptive pattern of justifying oneself as one is.

ii. positive work

Along with this 'negative' work of the Holy Spirit in helping turn a person *from* an orientation unduly toward self, there are varieties of influence possible from the Holy Spirit—again both cognitive and non-cognitive—in orienting a person *toward* the good. Given the Christian affirmation that God is the source of life, love, and all that is good, becoming oriented toward the good involves moving toward the dispositions and commitments that reflect the loving, self-giving relationships within the Trinity. The more our characters are formed in this manner, the more we will be disposed to embrace Jesus's call to follow him as lord, surrendering all aspects of our lives to God.

The Holy Spirit may enable a person to form beliefs that help move him toward self-giving patterns of action. For example, a person may find himself believing that it is right to respect his neighbor's wishes, or that it is his duty to care for his sick aunt, or that he is obliged to keep a promise to his colleague. The Christian scriptures contain references to God's "law being written" on the human heart.³² Plausibly, we can unpack this notion partly in terms of moral beliefs the Holy Spirit prompts people to have that help orient them toward the good.

An affective element also exists within this prompting from the Holy Spirit. Calvin emphasized that, apart from the activity of the Holy Spirit, any *beliefs* a person might form about God will not motivate him to *obey* God.³³ In moving a person toward a pattern of self-giving actions, the Holy Spirit must rouse our desires: for that which helps others, for that which is noble, for that which is good and right.

The non-cognitive effects of the Holy Spirit, orienting one toward the good, may not require any new beliefs at all about God or about specific people. For example, upon reading the substitutionary act of Sydney Carton at the end of *A Tale of Two Cities*—the "far better thing"

³⁰ John 16:8.

³¹ Cf. Pascal, "The nature of self-love and of this human self is to love only self and consider only self" (1996, 978).

³² Jer. 31:33, Rom. 2:14-15, Heb. 10:16.

³³ "Even if [Scripture] wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit" (1996, I.7.5).

that he is doing—a person may find herself with new feelings we associate with nobleness or open-handedness. Although the person cannot readily identify any specific person she should address, or any specific behavior she should now change, her new generosity of spirit may affect upcoming decisions when she does face choices about how to relate to others. The feelings she has—whether we think of them as emotions or as desires with no specific objects—are serving to orient her toward the good, toward the life of God (which is characterized by self-giving love) into which the Holy Spirit draws us.

The apologist may help facilitate these kinds of non-cognitive influences. Christians can communicate elements of God’s character through works of fiction, through poetry, through music, through paintings, and so forth. Christians are not alone in identifying a connection between beauty and goodness.³⁴ And even while Christian art may only point suggestively at that which answers fully to our aesthetic inspirations and longings, it is again not always necessary that a change in specific beliefs accompany an instance of being oriented in some way toward that which is good.

6. Desiring Christianity to be true

i. mitigating work

The second segment of Pascal’s apologetic process is that we should “make good men *wish* that it is true.” The first segment had to do with orienting others toward the good in some way. We see the importance of this when we reflect on the nature of the offer Jesus extends to us, and why a person might be attracted to it. An eternal relationship with God in heaven is not the kind of opportunity that would be attractive to just anyone. The relationships among the redeemed in heaven mirror the loving, *self-giving* relationships among the Trinity. The invitation to an eternal relationship with God and others is an invitation to *serve* others in love. Of course, the great paradox of the Christian religion is that, when we ‘lose’ our lives in service to God and others, we actually *gain* a life of ever-deepening relationships in which our ultimate well-being is alone found.

But an eternity of sharing the joys of mutual love will not be attractive to someone who is oriented fully toward self. And so the discussion in the previous section emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit—and of the apologist—in orienting others in some way toward the good, which is realized through self-giving love. How might this work then move to focus on cultivating specifically a desire for Christian theism (including the “great truths of the Gospel,” as Jonathan Edwards and others have put it) to be true?

As with the previous segment, there is ‘negative’ work that the Holy Spirit can do in cultivating this desire. The Christian scriptures reference God as sometimes frustrating people’s desires, undermining their projects, in an effort to turn their hopes and plans toward him.³⁵ Interestingly, the scriptures also reference God in some contexts giving people what they want, while knowing that the satisfaction of their wants will not in fact bring lasting joy and peace. The familiar adages “Be careful what you wish for” and “It’s not what it’s cracked up to be” attest to the frequent gap between what people *think* will make them happy and what will actually make them happy.

So as a way of prompting people to set their hopes and desires on God, the Holy Spirit may at times frustrate people’s attempts to realize their desires, as a way of prompting them to put their

³⁴ Cf. the way Plato links the Beautiful with the Good in his *Republic* and *Symposium*.

³⁵ Cf. Gen. 11:1-9, Ps. 33:10, Job 5:12.

hope in God. Or, the Holy Spirit may at times actually work to advance people's existing desires, as a way of enabling them to realize the diminishing returns of projects that do not involve God—again as a means of communicating to them the folly of trusting one's existing desires as a guide to where one's ultimate flourishing lies.

Although the apologist may need careful discernment from the Holy Spirit before knowing which approach is the more effective tactic in a particular situation, the apologist is at all times still able to join in the work of the Holy Spirit by adding another human voice to Augustine's testimony: "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee."³⁶ Alister McGrath on this point finds an apologetic resource in the writings of existential thinkers such as Heidegger and Sartre, who explored the various aspects of *angst*, a "deeply rooted fear of meaninglessness and pointlessness, a sense of the utter futility of life, even sheer despair at the bewildering things that threaten to reduce us to nothing more than a statistic—ultimately a mortality statistic."³⁷ As the witness of the Holy Spirit is added to the apologist's testimony that God alone satisfies the deepest desires we have, the influence on the unbeliever will (typically at least) include a cognitive element: a belief that what the apologist says is true. But whether any specific belief is formed, the ultimate work of the Holy Spirit here is to weaken those desires an unbeliever has that lead her away from a pursuit of God.

ii. positive work

In addition to this negative work of moderating a person's desires (for ends apart from God), we can also note positive work the Holy Spirit may do in cultivating a desire *for* God. As Augustine stated, the reason the pursuits of this world never finally satisfy is that we were made for fellowship with the one who transcends our world. As the Holy Spirit arouses a person's innate desire for God, the effects on an unbeliever might again fall into both cognitive and non-cognitive categories.

Especially in recent times, Christian apologists have emphasized an approach toward unbelievers that is neither clearly a cognitive nor clearly a non-cognitive one. Specifically, they have emphasized engaging an unbeliever's *imagination*. We humans already spend a great deal of time imagining, as part of our ongoing quest to make sense of the world and of our role in it. We also employ imagination as a means of decision-making: imagining what life would be like if we attended this university, or worked at this job, or married that person. So an appeal to unbelievers' imagination seems on the surface a promising way of engaging them. Further, in Pascal's apologetic approach the apologist is seeking to stir a person's desire for God *before* that person has any settled beliefs about God. Helpfully, it remains within an unbelievers' voluntary control—even for those with settled beliefs *against* God's existence—to imagine what life might look like if Christian theism is true.

C. S. Lewis (following George MacDonald) did much to rekindle Christian apologists' interest in the area of imagination. While Lewis's fiction books are well known, he also commented on the way in which poetry has the potential to give people insight into the nature of experiences they themselves have never had. Lewis remarked,

³⁶ Augustine 2008, bk. I, 7. Cf. Aquinas: "God only satisfies and infinitely exceeds man's desires; and, therefore, perfect satiety is found in God alone" (Aquinas 1939, art. 12, 74); and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it" (pt. III, sect. I, chpt. I, art. II, II, §1718).

³⁷ McGrath 1993, 43.

This is the most remarkable of the powers of Poetic language: to convey to us the quality of experiences which we have not had....Many of us have never had an experience like that which Wordsworth records near the end of *Prelude* XIII; but when he speaks of “the visionary dreariness,” I think we get an inkling of it.³⁸

Lewis in his own life attested to the power of poetic words to stir a desire for something which one does not yet understand. In his spiritual autobiography, he reflects on an early reading of Longfellow’s *Saga of King Olaf*:

I idly turned the pages of the book...and read
I heard a voice that cried,
Balder the beautiful
Is dead, is dead—

I knew nothing of Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote) and then...found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it.³⁹

Lewis later was able to name the object of his long-felt desires. In reflecting on his initial encounter with George MacDonald’s *Phantastes*, Lewis remarked, “I should have been shocked in my teens if anyone had told me that what I learned to love in *Phantastes* was goodness.”⁴⁰ And in another reflection on MacDonald’s works, “I had tried not to see that the true quality which first met me in his books is Holiness.”⁴¹ What Lewis’s comments point up is that, even when our imagination leads us to objects and experiences we do not yet understand, our desires for such things can be powerfully stirred.

Interestingly, scripture records that a common avenue for the Holy Spirit to communicate to people is through *dreams*. Within at least some of our dreams are heavy elements of imagination and of suggestive language or imagery, which may in the case of unbelievers serve to stir their desires for God—even if they cannot yet identify the object of their desires as in fact God. The apologist can of course join in offering suggestive language and imagery, perhaps adding at key times an articulation of the Christian view that such desires are both from God and can only be satisfied by God.

A more tangible Christian witness to unbelievers involves the witness of the *Church*, which is intended by Christ to serve as his ‘body’ in the world. By reflecting the Trinitarian relationships of love, and by exhibiting spiritual fruit such as peace and joy as it does so, the Church stands as witness that the things of God are indeed desirable.

7. Showing Christianity to be true

i. mitigating work

The final segment of Pascal’s apologetic strategy—showing others that Christianity is true—follows only after an unbeliever’s desire for God has in some way been stirred. A Christian

³⁸ Lewis 1981, 169.

³⁹ Lewis 1955, 17.

⁴⁰ Lewis 1964, 12.

⁴¹ Lewis 2015, 66-7.

epistemology will not view subsequent Christian belief as the result of irresponsibly wishful thinking. Rather, certain truths about God can only be seen through the eyes of love for God. We recognize this phenomenon in art: certain qualities of a painting can only be seen by one who loves that painting. After all, a knowledge of art history or brush techniques does not by itself prompt a person to stare at the same painting day after day after day. Similarly, we recognize that certain qualities of another person can only be appreciated by a spouse or parent or someone else who truly sees that person through the eyes of love. Knowledge of God is ultimately *personal* knowledge, an awareness of God's *self*-disclosure to us. The apologist may offer supporting evidence that God exists and became incarnate in the person of Jesus. But this evidence will have limited value, in terms of helping lead to knowledge of God, unless an unbeliever has some affective attitude toward God (or at least toward the possibility that God exists).⁴²

Turning now to the kinds of evidence that the apologist might offer, arguments that undermine the position of atheism (and of non-Christian theism) are well-rehearsed in the Christian tradition. Often, such arguments amount to *reductio ad absurdum* arguments: for example, if we suppose that God does not exist as a necessary being, then this contingent world of ours could never have come to exist; or if we suppose that God did not create us and give us our moral intuitions, then we lose any plausible explanation for our clear sense that we do have obligations that do not depend on any human structures; or if we suppose that the resurrection of Christ did not occur, then we are left with no plausible explanation of the behavior of his disciples. If the Christian apologist's 'negative' arguments intended to undermine atheistic conclusions do not take this form, they will probably take the form of showing that positive atheist arguments—from the presence of evil, from religious diversity, and so forth—are not so forceful as one might initially think.

ii. positive work

Also well-rehearsed are positive arguments for Christian theism: the teleological argument for God's existence; historical evidence for Christ's resurrection, arguments from miracles or religious experience, and so forth. Following Alvin Plantinga and other so-called Reformed Epistemologists, we might view such arguments as not always (or even usually) serving as *evidence* for an unbeliever, but instead serving (in the way that preaching or scripture reading does) as the *occasion* on which the Holy Spirit prompts a person to form various beliefs about God. The claim here, drawn from Calvin, is that, typically, Christian beliefs are (rationally) formed under the influence of the Holy Spirit in a way that does not involve inferential reasoning from evidence.

But Pascal and the majority of apologists historically have understood their positive arguments for Christian theism indeed to serve as evidence for the unbeliever. This role for reason by no means renders the influence of the Holy Spirit unnecessary. Hence, while Richard Swinburne meticulously lays out inductive arguments for Christian theism according to Bayesian probability assessments,⁴³ he nevertheless appeals to the enabling power of the Holy Spirit: "we may need grace to help us to see that the arguments work."⁴⁴ Thus, the Holy Spirit may exert causal influence in helping a person attend to, and understand, the apologist's argument. Or the

⁴² Cf. 1 John 4:8: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

⁴³ See Swinburne 2003; Swinburne 2004b.

⁴⁴ Swinburne 2004a, 538.

Holy Spirit may help a person overcome an unwillingness to admit that a certain conclusion does indeed follow from the argument.

How probable a conclusion should the apologist expect to reach, reasoning alongside the unbeliever? Pascal's estimation is that "The prophecies, even the miracles and proofs of our religion, are not of such a kind that they can be said to be absolutely convincing....But the evidence is such as to exceed, or at least equal, the evidence to the contrary, so that it cannot be reason that decides us against following it" (1966, 835). The implication is that the Holy Spirit's witness will not run contrary to human reason properly functioning. Also, the limited goal identified by Pascal frees the apologist from an undue pressure of needing to establish very high probabilities for Christian theism, if the confirming testimony of the Holy Spirit is to operate in harmony with the apologist's work.

One *action* the Holy Spirit and the apologist may encourage an unbeliever to take, as a way of showing Christian theism to be true, is to take up aspects of the Christian way of life. This was Pascal's encouragement to those who found the evidence for Christianity ambiguous and did not yet believe. Here again Christ's body, the Church, may play a vital role in that, as an unbeliever participates within the community of Christians, she comes to see that the feast God has been described as offering is not only desirable, but is indeed *here* and available. Pascal's vision of how an unbeliever might form Christian beliefs *after* participating in the Christian life allows us to see very clearly how the dual streams of human and divine testimony can work together as witness to the world.

8. *Grace: resistible, prevenient and synergistic*

Having noted the need for divine grace in enabling belief either through or outside inferential reasoning, two final, related matters might be considered, if only briefly for present purposes: (1) the extent to which the enabling, prompting work of the Holy Spirit is *irresistible*; and (2) the kinds of influence from the Holy Spirit that are prevenient versus synergistic. On the first matter, Augustine was a key figure in shifting the majority view in the Western Church—until at least the time of Duns Scotus—to one of the irresistible nature of God's grace, if we fallen humans are to be moved to embrace God. Prominent Reformers in the Protestant tradition followed Augustine on this point, and this pattern continues today in some of these traditions.⁴⁵

Within the Eastern Church God's grace has rarely been viewed in this way. And the Roman Catholic position, seemingly before Augustine and certainly sometime after Duns Scotus and continuing today, is summed up by the Council of Trent. While affirming that humans cannot escape their sinful state without being "aroused and assisted by divine grace,"⁴⁶ the Council also affirmed that a person can respond to this grace "by agreeing to, and cooperating with His grace, which he could resist."⁴⁷ John Wesley, for one, is representative of those in the Protestant tradition who insist that God *enables* us to embrace him, but does not *causally necessitate* our doing so. Against the idea of God irresistibly moving (elect) people to turn to him, Wesley insisted on an account of God's mercy in which God is "offering salvation to every creature, actually saving all that consent thereto, and doing for the rest all that infinite wisdom, almighty

⁴⁵ Against Chrysostom and the other "Greek fathers," Calvin described the prompting of God's grace as "one which affects us efficaciously"—in contrast to "a movement which thereafter leaves us the choice to obey or resist it" (1996, II.3.10).

⁴⁶ *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1957: 798.

⁴⁷ *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1957: 1791.

power, and boundless love can do, without forcing them to be saved, which would be to destroy the very nature that he had given them.”⁴⁸

Wesley also offered a rich account of God’s *prevenient grace*, understood as God’s communication and enabling power extended to all people, even those who are actively resisting him. In contrast to this witness of the Holy Spirit that precedes any positive human response, there also are influences from the Holy Spirit that can only come about as we accept the ongoing work of the Spirit in our lives. Tracing the previous discussions of this chapter with an eye toward how the variety of works of the Spirit in an unbeliever’s life may expand or shift focus, as one cooperates with the promptings of the Spirit, would be an interesting (though complex!) exploration. Such a study would have to take account of the real differences between traditions just outlined.

9. Conclusion

The dual witness we have been discussing, and the various aspects of that witness, underscore the vital point that Biblical apologetics is a holistic enterprise. While some recoil from anything labeled apologetics because they see it as a one-dimensional activity that reduces faith to intellectual assent, relying sometimes on weak arguments and exaggerated claims to certainty, others are equally leery of talk about the witness of the Holy Spirit, suspecting it is an attempt to do an end run around our rational faculties. The account of apologetics we have sketched here is one in which the Holy Spirit is the primary witness to the truth of the gospel, but that witness is addressed to, and works in concert with, the full range of our rational faculties and the testimony of human witnesses.

It is worth emphasizing again that the objective of apologetics is nothing less than persuading human beings to enter into a relationship with the Supreme Lover, a relationship that constitutes the highest possible good for them. As such, it elicits from us a loving response that encompasses our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. The Biblical model of apologetics, then, far from being a narrowly intellectual engagement, is a highly personal encounter in which God himself witnesses to the truth about his Son, his love for us and the eternal life he offers us. Our part in the encounter, though secondary, is a vital ministry of love.

⁴⁸ Wesley 1996, 276.