

## WHY CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS MATTER TO THE CHURCH OF GOD

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Does God exist? Is the Bible the word of God? Can miracles happen? Is the theory of evolution true? Why does a good God allow evil to exist? Did the New Testament's doctrines come from paganism? All of these questions are answered by Christian apologetics, which is composed of the literature that defends Christianity as being historically and philosophically true. Why should these writings matter to us in the Church of God? After all, assorted fundamentalist, evangelical, and Catholic scholars and writers have written almost all of it, not members of the Sabbatarian Churches of God. But just as we depend on the world's scholars to translate the Bible for us and write various Bible "helps" such as concordances, lexicons, etc., we also rely on the (conservative) Christian world's scholars to find evidence favoring the Bible's truth, and to write defenses of it. Although we frequently can't accept their interpretations of Scripture, we can and do accept their translations of it and their defenses of it. And as the world around us becomes ever more secularized and/or paganized (i.e., the New Age movement, witchcraft, spiritism, etc.), we, including our teenage and college-age children, need to be always "ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (I Pet. 3:15).

We in the Church of God have to remember that our theological historical heritage comes from an organization led by a man (the Worldwide Church of God as humanly led by Herbert W. Armstrong) who took a remarkably rationalist hard-line on the subject of Christian apologetics. When HWA was being called, and had been almost simultaneously challenged on the Sabbath question and the theory of evolution, he concluded that he had proven God's existence by using human reason (Mystery of the Ages, 1985, p. 21):

But now I had, first of all, to prove or disprove the existence of God. It was not casual or superficial study. . . . Suffice it to say here that I did find irrefutable proof of the existence of God the Creator—and I found proof positive of the fallacy of the evolutionary theory. . . . I had proved the reality of the great Majestic God.

Similarly, concerning Scripture itself, HWA taught that the Bible could be proven by human reason to be the word of God (The Bible Superstition or Authority? . . . and Can You Prove It? (1985), pp. 1-2:

Have you ever proved whether, as the book itself purports, it is the authoritative Word of the Creator God? Rather, have you not simply assumed, from what you have heard, read or been taught, that it is either authentic [or mythological]? . . . A world famous evangelist [Billy Graham?] has confessed publicly that he accepted the authority of the Bible without having seen it proved. Even though he had seen no real

proof that the Bible is the authentic word of God, he had decided to accept it as such on sheer faith. But the Bible quotes God as saying: ‘Prove me now herewith . . .’ and again: ‘Prove all things.’”

During one of his early (1935) evangelism campaigns in Eugene, Oregon, HWA used effectively the argument from fulfilled prophecy as proof of the Bible’s inspiration. He shook the secular faith of the local secretary of the Communist Party by using the fulfillment of the prophecy in Dan. 11. Within two weeks, after further discussions, she repented and was baptized. HWA also successfully put on the defensive a man, also an atheist and Communist, introduced to him by this woman, by using basic philosophical arguments for God’s existence. (See the Autobiography, 1986, vol. 1, pp. 580-85).

HWA may never have read the writings of Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), the great medieval Catholic theologian and philosopher who wrote of the “five ways” to prove God’s existence by using human reason in his magnum opus, Summa Theologica. But HWA could be called a Thomist when it came to proving God’s existence. In his use of Christian apologetics to defend belief in God and the Bible, HWA was merely being consistent with his stand of challenging his readers, listeners, and/or viewers to prove his teachings by looking them up in the Bible.

We may have assumed, overlooked, or discounted this doctrinal heritage. I know of three WCG members who attended Michigan State University who all denied that God’s existence could be proven despite having been raised in the church. Importantly, the fact that Tkach administration became “soft” in this area has gathered remarkably little attention despite its foundational importance. Have we unknowingly and mistakenly picked up “soft” ideas on Christian apologetics during the past decade? As documented in my essay, “The Changing Views of the WCG on Christian Apologetics” (find it online at [ucgaa.org](http://ucgaa.org)), the WCG under Mr. Tkach started saying God’s existence couldn’t be proven, the theory of evolution couldn’t be proven false, and that the Bible couldn’t be proven to be the word of God. The WCG had begun to adopt fideism, which is the belief that God’s existence can’t be proven, but is to be accepted only by faith.

So why should we and our children be well grounded in Christian apologetics? Since we’ll inevitably encounter skeptics who attack belief in God and the Bible, especially while attending college, we Christians must be ready to give intelligent replies to criticisms of our beliefs, or otherwise many of us will be shaken in our beliefs. Some seemingly good skeptical arguments can readily be shot down, but only if the Christian has a command of the arguments involved. Recently, we had some fall away in the Church of God because a few, from a Jewish perspective, claimed Jesus was a false Messiah and the New Testament’s doctrines came from paganism. Had we emphasized Christian apologetics more, such shipwrecks of faith might have been avoided. Furthermore, children raised in the COG need to be grounded in the basic arguments favoring Christianity found in the writings of such men as Josh McDowell, Don Stewart, Henry Morris, and C.S. Lewis, or otherwise their faith might be shattered when attending a secular college. For have we, and they, really **PROVEN** our beliefs? Or do we just assume that God exists and the Bible is true? There are some no longer with us precisely

because they didn't know hardly anything about Christian apologetics. Let us not take the foundations of our faith for granted!