

FIRST, AN APOLOGY

GREG CLARKE

It is a good rule in life never to apologise. The right sort of people do not want apologies, and the wrong sort take a mean advantage of them. P.G. WODEHOUSE



Greg Clarke began work as Director of CASE in August.

It is tempting to apologise for the presence of the word ‘apologetic’ in the name of this new venture which I have been employed to direct, the Centre for Apologetic Scholarship and Education.

It is such a peculiar word, rarely used outside religious debate and emanating a waistcoat-and-pipe vibe. What does it mean?

apologetic—*adj.* of reasoned defence or vindication, especially of Christianity, says the Oxford.

philosophical apologetics—a philosophical activity which has as its goal (or perhaps as its result) the increasing or maintaining of the epistemic justification of a Christian world view in whole or in part, says Biola University Professor of Apologetics, J. P. Moreland.¹

to apologise—to seek to explain or justify or defend.

It can all sound a little too, well, defensive. Certainly, the defence of a Christian understanding of reality is an important part of CASE’s work. Christian faith frequently comes under attack in academic arenas, and much of this attack can be defused or parried with considered responses from appropriately educated Christians. This traditional apologetic activity—we might call it, somewhat tautologically, ‘defensive apologetics’—remains a valuable intellectual task.

But CASE has in mind a broader notion that carries the flag ‘apologetics’. This broader concern is to bring a mind which is committed to Christian theology—that is, a view of God

and the world that is shaped by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ—to the many and various subjects of contemporary life. In the case of CASE (sorry, that is the first and last time I shall do that), we are looking to present Christian perspectives on the subject matter of university work, as it affects those inside and outside the university. A Christian perspective will no doubt at times be in conflict with received views within a discipline (for instance, much contemporary bioethics is a challenge to and is challenged by Christian views of personhood); but at other times, it may concur with contemporary thought and provide another strand to its development.

CASE’s apologetic enterprise will sometimes be involved in ‘kategorics’—the flipside to apologetics, in which views other than Christianity receive close scrutiny and critique.² Other names for such an enterprise are ‘negative apologetics’, ‘reverse apologetics’ and ‘unapologetic apologetics’.³ In cricket, kategorics is like ‘dancing down the wicket’; it’s about taking the intellectual challenge to those who see the world differently to Christians and offering a critical perspective on their approach. It’s an activity I intend CASE to undertake in an irenic spirit of genuine scholarship.

And there is a third kind of activity which takes the label ‘apologetics’. It can be found in operation when reading the biography of a fine Christian business executive; or in a paper examining Bach’s attempt through his Sacred Cantatas to convey in church services the emotional weight of Christian doctrines; or in a study of the Christian origins of major Australian charities; or in a critique of the use and misuse of biblical eschatology in science fiction films. Such activities have an apologetic function in making the Christian faith intellectually *attractive*. They demonstrate the

robustness of Christian thinking applied in different areas of life, and its explanatory power and good consequences; the biblical image for this spiritual activity in the earthly realm is ‘fruit’. These are the aromatic, sweet, nourishing and morish works that spring from a mind, heart and soul that belongs to Christ. CASE plans to make sure this third kind of apologetics—let’s name it for the time being ‘attractive apologetics’—is high on our agenda.⁴

And one further idea for now. A distinctly Christian theory of apologetics is constructed from a seemingly incredible cornerstone—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This unique event controls Christian thinking in a profound and pervasive way. Looking ‘back’ on the world from the vantage point of the resurrection offers a defence of faith, a critique of atheism in all of its forms, and a promotion of the Christian world view. Resurrection-based apologetics provides a thrilling and deeply satisfying perspective on theology, philosophy, ethics and culture. At CASE, we are looking forward to exploring how this can be so; this issue of *Case News* represents our early efforts. Whoever you are and whatever you believe, we hope that you will come with us on the journey, and keep us on track. ©

* A small group of Christian philosophers, theologians and apologists will meet early in 2004 in a CASE symposium to discuss a philosophy of apologetics. Expect to hear about it in the next *CASE News*.

END NOTES

1 J. P. Moreland, “Philosophical Apologetics, the Church, and Contemporary Culture”, *Premise*, III/4, April 29, 1996, p.6. Also <http://capo.org/premise/96/april/p960406.html>.

2 The classical origins of the terms *kategoria* and *apologia* are in the Greek courts, as an accusation, and the defence against an accusation, respectively. Plato famously recorded Socrates’ *apologia* against the accusations of the men of Athens that he taught lies and fantasy and corrupted the minds of youth. In philosophical terms, negative apologetics employs undercutting defeaters whereas positive apologetics employs rebutting defeaters.

3 See the following publications for examples of this approach: the journal, *kategoria*, published by Matthias Media; William A. Dembski & Jay Wesley Richards (eds), *Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies*, Intervarsity Press, 2001; Brian D. Ingrassia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology*, Cambridge University Press, 1995. Most apologetic works are in fact a blend of *apologia* and *kategoria*.

4 For links related to these various types of apologetics, see the CASE website at www.newcollege.unsw.edu.au/case.