

Editor's Introduction

For some time now there have been voices within the church (and without) declaring the death of apologetics as a viable Christian enterprise. Apologetics, it is claimed, is but the relic of the modern era in which it was believed that it is not only possible but also necessary to “prove” the Christian faith. In today’s postmodern era, so the argument goes, people simply need to experience the faith personally rather than being argued into it.

However, while personal experience is certainly crucial to the faith, there is no reason to think that it must be in conflict with the need for an intellectual assessment of Christian truth claims or even for a defense of them. Indeed, evidence suggests that far from being a dying discipline, apologetics is thriving now more than ever. A simple Google search of the word “apologetics,” for example, garners nearly 4.5 million hits! And apologetics isn’t only thriving in online chat-rooms and blogs; its impact is being felt even at the highest levels of academia. Just last week (from the time this editorial was written) world renown philosophers Alvin Plantinga and Daniel Dennett debated the rationality of theism and naturalism before a room packed full of professional philosophers at an American Philosophical Association meeting in Chicago. Everywhere you look there seems to be a growing interest in questions of faith.

If the response to our inaugural issue of *JISCA* was any indication of the state of apologetics, then we would have to concur that apologetics is thriving indeed. Since the release of our first volume, we have received a host of top-rate submissions from across the spectrum of academic disciplines. And we’re delighted to be able to share some of them with you in this second volume.

Missiologist David Hesselgrave begins this volume with an assessment of the need for apologetics in cross-cultural ministry using Japan as a “case study.” He calls for a stronger relationship between academic apologists and cross-cultural missionaries. Next, in his insightful discussion of the uses and abuses of Mark 11:20-25, Kirk MacGregor argues that the traditional understanding of Jesus’ saying in this passage can cause believers to question the authenticity of their faith. But according to MacGregor, when understood in context this

passage is not about one's "faith to move mountains" generally but is specifically about proclaiming judgment on the Temple mount. Understood rightly, then, this passage should be no hindrance to one's faith but should encourage Christians to take a stand in faith against corrupt religious institutions.

In our third piece, Hendrik van der Breggen assesses the recent philosophical defense by Roger Montague of Dawkins' "infinite regress" argument against the existence of God. Contrary to Montague's claims to strengthen Dawkins' argument, van der Breggen argues that Dawkins' original argument is so logically fallacious that even Montague's argument cannot save it. Thomas Provenzola next discusses whether a belief must conform to Enlightenment evidentialist standards in order to be rational or justified. Provenzola rejects this notion—in a way reminiscent of Reformed epistemology—and argues instead that beliefs may be justified on the basis of a number of grounds, even if those grounds are not themselves infallible.

Returning to biblical studies, Steven Cowen next offers a novel defense of the inspiration of scripture using the resources of contemporary critical scholarship. Cowen demonstrates how one can use the generally accepted "authentic" sayings of Jesus to argue from Jesus' claims to deity (and God's confirmation of those claims in the resurrection) to Jesus' claims of scriptural inspiration. If Jesus—the very God incarnate—believed that scripture is inspired, then that provides strong evidence that the Bible is indeed inspired by God. Michael Licona likewise takes a Christological approach in his defense of Christianity against Islam. Licona demonstrates that the grounds Islamic scholars use to deny the death of Jesus are very weak and that, alternately, the evidence for the historicity of Jesus' death is overwhelming. But since Christianity affirms Jesus' death and Islam denies it, the fact of Jesus' death supports the truth of Christianity and refutes Islam.

Finally, Gene Carpenter offers an extensive table of Ancient Near Eastern texts and artifacts and discusses how these finds can be used to demonstrate both that the Bible authentically reflects its cultural milieu and that the Bible's message stands out from its culture as truly unique. Carpenter's piece is followed by some book reviews that you will want to check out as well.

Based on the contents of this issue, it seems that apologetics is truly alive and well after all. But more importantly, so is the One to whom our apologetics points.

Chad Meister and David Cramer