

Refresh! Conference

MAY 14-17, 2007
WYCLIFFE COLLEGE

PLENARY SESSION I – Dr. Alison McGrath

“Recovering Christian Confidence: Proclaiming the Gospel in an Age of Skepticism and Cynicism”

Theme

- “Be ready always to give an answer to everyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” – 1 Peter 3:15

The Task of the Apologetics

- Negatively, about countering objections to the Christian faith
- Positively, about explaining the truth and vitality of the Christian faith
- To clear the ground for people to get to the grace of God
- We must be prepared to give an answer to all those who ask you for a reason of your faith
- Apologetics must be accessible and proactive, not just responding to criticisms

The Audience of the Apologetics

- Reaching outside your church, addressing misconceptions
- Also, there is a real need for an apologetic ministry within the church
- How are your congregation going to evangelize if they do not feel confident about their faith?

Limitations of a Rationalist Apologetics

- Apologetics is not simply about intellectual arguments
- Apologetics engages the mind, the heart and the imagination
- We are simply bearing witness, and what we say must be grounded in the power of God
- We need to make sure there is the person of Christ at the center of it all

A Biblical Example

- The story of Philip and Nathanel in John
- Philip is not giving Nathanel five reasons to go and follow Christ, he simply said, “Come and see!”

Postmodernity and Scripture

- Three key issues
- Issue 1: Truth
 - Truth is no longer something positive
 - Postmodernity is aversive to the truth
 - Option 1: critique
 - Option 2: work within post modernity's emphasis on "lure" and "attraction"
 - One way is to simply refuse to hear; the other way is to show forth the beauty of our faith
 - The attractiveness of our faith: e.g. Jesus as the "bread of life", Jesus as the "spring of water welling up to life", the liberating power of the gospel
- Issue 2: Story
 - Each of us can tell a story
 - Example biblical stories: Exile to Babylon, Calling of Abraham,
 - Parables: The sower, The pearl of great price, The prodigal son
- Issue 3: Images
 - Scripture is rich in images
 - People like to engage with images
 - Traditionally, apologetics have used word based arguments, how do we adapt to the society's new attachment to images?

PLENARY SESSION II – Dr. Alison McGrath

“Deluded about God? Responding to Richard Dawkins' God Delusion”

The God Delusion

- Four major points
 - 1) Belief in God is irrational
 - 2) Science shows us there is no God
 - 3) Faith in God can be explained away on scientific grounds
 - 4) Faith in God leads to violence

Response to Point 1: Belief in God is Irrational

- According to Dawkins
 - Faith in God is infantile or childish
 - A process of non-thinking which he calls faith
- Can God's existence be proved?
- *But* in the same way, can it be disproved?
- Inference of best explanation: when being confronted with a complex situation, each explanation bearing some evidence, how do we decide which one is the best explanation?
- C.S. Lewis, *“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen – not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else.”*

Response to Point 2: Science shows us there is not God

- Dawkins argues that whatever worth believing can be proofed by science
- *But* famous scientists have recognized that, “The existence of a limit to science is, however, made clear by its inability to answer childlike elementary questions having to do with first and last things – questions such as “How did everything begins?”, “Why are we all here?”

Response to Point 3: Explaining the origins of religion

- Dawkins' position – there is no God, but lots of people believe in God, therefore, belief in God is a mere projection of human desire
- God as a “virus of the mind”
- *But* this argument works against both theist and atheist, isn't atheism also a mere desire of the mind for autonomy and control?

Response to Point 4: Belief in God causes violence

- We need to acknowledge that beliefs (religious or atheism) can cause people to do some very good and very bad things
- There needs to be a distinction between the Christian faith, beliefs in general and religions