

Douglas Groothuis, Ph.D., Denver Seminary, Head of Apologetics and Ethics MA degree. DouglasGroothuis.com. Doug.Groothuis@denverseminary.edu

Apologetics as Spiritual Formation

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you—Galatians 4:19.

I. Apologetics and Spiritual Formation: Friends or Foes?

- A. “You’re just in your head, you apologists”
- B. “Your faith is not rational enough, you spiritual formation people.”
- C. Me: “Apologetics is part of spiritual formation! Getting spiritual means getting smart!”
- D. Our lives as works of beautiful art

No work of art is more important than the Christian’s own life, and every Christian is called upon to be an artist in this sense. He may have no gift of writing, no gift of composing or singing, but each man has the gift of creativity in terms of the way he lives his life. In this sense, the Christian’s life is to be an art work. The Christian’s life is to be a thing of truth and also a thing of beauty in the midst of a lost and despairing world (Francis Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*).

II. The Spiritual Formation Movement

- A. Lead by Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (1978)

B. The Renovare Movement

C. Emphasis on disciplines such as prayer, meditation, *lectio divina*, silence, solitude, service, study

D. My concerns: too ecumenical, even Eastern in some cases with “contemplative prayer”

E. We can conserve the good and be discerning about the rest

III. The Apologetics Movement

A. Society of Christian Philosophers and *Faith and Philosophy*

B. Evangelical Philosophical Society and *Philosophia Christi*

C. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (1998) and follow up books

D. Apologetics programs: NOTBS, Biola, Houston Baptist, Denver Seminary

IV. Three Exemplars: Dallas Willard and J.P. Moreland

A. Jesus as apologist (Matthew 22)

1. Not an irrational mystic, but a thinker of highest order

2. “Where is the Holy Spirit?”

B. Dallas Willard, philosopher, apologist, spiritual mentor

C. J. P. Moreland, philosopher, apologist, spiritual mentor

V. The Fear of Apologetics as Unspiritual

A. The problem of pride

B. C. S. Lewis's fear

The Apologist's Evening Prayer

From all my lame defeats and oh! much more
 From all the victories that I seemed to score;
 From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf
 At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;
 From all my proofs of Thy divinity,
 Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.
 Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust, instead
 Of Thee, their thin-worn image of Thy head.
 From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,
 O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.
 Lord of the narrow gate and the needle's eye,
 Take from me all my trumpery lest I die.

C. The answer to pride: humility in the Holy Spirit

1. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

2. Humility is based on thanksgiving for all of God's gifts, whether in yourself or another. Don't brag about yourself, but only in the Cross of Christ. Don't think too highly of yourself or too lowly.

VI. **Studiosness as a Spiritual Discipline for Apologetics**

- A. *Studiosness* is widely considered an intellectual virtue for Christians. Foster addresses study as a spiritual discipline.

Study is the process whereby our minds take on an order conforming to the order of whatever we concentrate upon. . . . What makes study a Christian spiritual discipline is the content of our study as well as the spirit by which we engage in our study. The content of our study consists in all those things that lead to the glory of God.

- B. The death of Stephen, the first martyr of the church,

1. Stephen, was murdered while explaining and defending the Christian faith before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin.

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:55-56).

2. Stephen was well-studied and prepared to defend the faith

- C. We find study commended in the Book of Acts.

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and *examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true*. As a result, many of them believed, as did

also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men (Acts 17:11-12; emphasis added).

D. Studiosness is required for teaching

In your teaching show integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us (Titus 2:7-8; see also Malachi 2:7-8; James 3:1-2).

VII. Prayer as a Spiritual Discipline for Apologetics

A. Paul on prayer for outreach

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:2-6).

B. Prayer and spiritual warfare in apologetics. Paul:

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should (Ephesians 6:18-20).

C. How I pray: for myself (humility and wisdom), my for audience (the right people who will listen), for the technology (that it will work)

VIII. Apologetics is Part of Spiritual Formation

- A. We need the Holy Spirit to defend the truth rightly: intelligently and courageously
- B. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth and leads us into the knowledge of God and apologetics

Reading

1. Jacques Barzun, *The House of the Intellect*. Harper, 2002 reprint.
2. Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind*. Servant, 1963.
3. Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*. Baker, 1994.
4. Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, InterVarsity Pres, 2011,
5. Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. InterVarsity Press, 1979.
6. George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. Eerdmans, 1998.
7. J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With all Your Mind*, 2nd ed. NavPress, 2013.
8. J.P. Moreland, *Finding Quiet*. Zondervan, 2019.
9. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*. InterVarsity Press, 1973.
10. Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book*. Eerdmans, 2008.
11. John Piper, *Think*. Crossway, 2011.
12. Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*. Tyndale, 1972
13. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*. InterVarsity, 1968.
14. James Schall, *The Life of the Mind*. Intercollegiate Studies, 2008
15. James Sire, *Habits of the Mind*. InterVarsity Press, 2000.
16. Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*. NavPress, 2002.
17. Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*. HarperOne, 2014.

