FAITH'S REASONS
FOR
BELIEVING

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An
Apologetic Antidote
to
Mindless Christianity

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MENTOR

Dedication

A patient and careful editor is of priceless value to any writer. After seeing eight previous books of mine through the publishing process it is long overdue that I publicly acknowledge the tremendous contribution the Rev. Dr. Malcolm Maclean, pastor in the Free Church of Scotland, has made to my writing projects.

This I do now by dedicating this book to him.

Thank you, Malcolm, for all you have done to make my books better than they would have been without your sharp eye, kind advice, and red pencil.

Frontispiece

"…in your light do we see light."
(Psalm 36:9)

"…by faith [in the truth of God's Word, the Bible] we
understand…."
(Hebrews 11:3)

"Faith has its reasons that the world's reason does not know."

Δός μοι ποῦ στῶ καί κινῶ τήν γῆν.
(*Dos moi pou stō kai kinō tēn gēn.*)

Archimedes, the Greek mathematician and inventor (287?–212?
B.C.), boasted in conjunction with his experimentation with the
simple machine of the lever: "Give to me [a place] where I may
stand [that is, where I may place my lever's fulcrum, and a lever
long enough] and I will move the earth." He was, of course,
asking for a place *outside* the cosmos by such a request.

Similarly, mankind needs an extra-cosmic "Archimedean
point of reference" *epistemologically* – an extra-cosmic "first
principle" that can and will promote a unified field of knowledge,
the philosopher's dream. This means that only a revelation
from the omniscient God who is transcendentally outside of the
cosmos can provide the ποῦ στῶ (*pou stō*), "the place where

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they may stand," that is essential to the justification of human knowledge and ethical predications, since men beginning with themselves can never break out of their finite cosmic perspective and comprehend enough of the particulars of the cosmos to arrive at the universals that give the particulars their meaning, a step that is the necessary prerequisite for understanding with certainty either any single part of the cosmos or the cosmos as a whole, since the latter can be essentially different from the sum total of all its parts. Only an extra-cosmic "first principle" can provide that perspective. It is this matter of one's first principle, then, that is all-important in Christian apologetics.

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"The nature of faith is to be certain. Any measure of doubt or uncertainty is not a degree of faith but an assault upon it. Faith, therefore, must rest on something more sure than an inference of probability" (J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God*, 117). Biblical faith is not a leap in the dark; it is not fideism. It is whole-souled commitment to Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit works in the human heart by and with the proclamation of the objective truth of the self-evidencing Word of God. Such faith has its reasons for believing that the world's reason does not and cannot understand (1 Cor. 2:14).

Preface

I have always tried to give my readers a sense of what lay behind my writing a particular book. In 1976 Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company published my small book on apologetics entitled *The Justification of Knowledge*. If my memory serves me correctly this book went through two printings, one revision, and then another printing. Then P&R decided to allow the book to go out of print. P&R never gave me the reason for its decision and I never inquired.

Nevertheless, through the 1990s up to this present day I continued to receive both requests for *JofK* and inquiries concerning where a copy of it might be obtained. I have been no help in either case. A good many people who had read *JofK* urged me to try to get it back into print. (I recently learned that an institution in California has been reproducing it – without my knowledge – and selling it.) But occupied as I was with my teaching responsibilities and with other writing projects I had neither the time nor the inclination to do so, even though I continued to read in the field, since I believed any reprint of it now would require considerable updating.

When Reformed Theological Seminary requested in October 2006, however, that I teach its course on apologetics at its Boca Raton campus I happily agreed to do so and turned my attention once again to the subject of apologetics and prepared the chapters of this book as lectures for that course. That course, by the way, never materialized because of scheduling problems, but through this providential collocation of events I

now had in hand the material for a new book that is essentially what you my readers now hold in your hands. These chapters, however, are not *JofK* simply warmed over. While I adapted from *JofK* with a good many revisions this book's Chapters One and Eight, the other eleven chapters are in the main new, some of the material found therein having been adapted with alterations from Chapter Six and Chapter Fifteen of my *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*. This new material in the first half of the book deals more extensively than did *JofK* with faith's reasons for believing in several of the central historical events of the Faith. In the second half I defend again the apologetic method that I espoused in *JofK*, namely, presuppositionalism, because I believe that of all the apologetic methods that would claim our allegiance it best reflects the mind of the one living and true God who has revealed himself in Holy Scripture. As I wrote in the "Preface" to *JofK* thirty years ago I still recommend the reader to make the effort to read carefully the many biblical references to which I refer, and to think about their apologetic implications. No matter what he finally concludes with regard to apologetics he cannot but be richer for his labors.

An explanation of this book's title is in order. Militant atheist writers are making an all-out assault on the Christian faith today[1] – they speak of ours as a "mindless Christianity" – and as a result many people today, including many scientists and many poorly taught Christians, would think it very strange to talk about faith's *reasons* for believing, for if there is one

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[1]For example, see Oxford professor Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* and Sam Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation*. While I certainly do not agree with everything they said in their response entitled *The Dawkins Delusion?*, nevertheless Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath addressed Dawkins' arguments so successfully that, after reading their response, Michael Ruse declared: "*The God Delusion* makes me embarrassed to be an atheist." And Douglas Wilson in his *Letter from a Christian Citizen* and Joel McDurmon in his *Return of the Village Atheist* have, in my opinion, more than adequately answered Harris' anti-God tract.

thing not understood today about biblical faith it is that it eschews any and all anti-intellectual, fideistic "leaps" of faith. But according to Scripture "saving faith" is grounded in the knowledge of propositional truths about Jesus Christ. Benjamin B. Warfield explains: "We cannot be said to believe or to trust in a thing or person of which we have no knowledge; 'implicit faith'[2] in this sense is an absurdity."[3] Knowledge (*notitia*) of propositional truths is the cognitive foundation or base of saving faith. The Bible insists that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17) and that men must "love the truth in order that they may be saved" (2 Thess. 2:10), and it speaks of "repentance leading to a knowledge [*epignōsin*] of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25). In sum, saving faith is based upon divine testimony. It knows nothing of the postmodern notion that faith is the enemy of knowledge or that faith repudiates all grounding in propositional truths. This contemporary notion is expressed in such sentiments as "When one does not know then one must believe; if one knows then there is no room for belief," and "It does not matter what one believes as long as one is sincere." To illustrate, A. J. Carlson, an early president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, declared: "The scientist tries to rid himself of all faiths and beliefs. He either knows or he does not know. If he knows, there is no room for faith or belief. If he does not know he has no right to faith or belief."[4] In these

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[2]"Implicit faith" (fides implicita) is the Roman Catholic dogma that as long as one accepts as true "what the church teaches," even though one does not know the objective content of that faith, one may regard himself as exercising true faith. The Reformers uniformly rejected this dogma, contending that since knowledge is lacking it is no true faith at all. They referred to such faith as the "faith of colliers" (fides carbonaria), that is, of charcoal burners, on the assumption that the average collier knows little or nothing of Christian doctrine.

[3]Benjamin B. Warfield, "On Faith in Its Psychological Aspects" in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 402-03.

[4]See A. J. Carlson, *Science* (1931), 73:217-25.

words one finds enunciated the total bifurcation of knowledge and faith. A very popular song some years ago expressed the other side of the bifurcation – the presence of faith devoid of knowledge – this way:

> I believe for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows,
> I believe that somewhere in the darkest night a candle glows;
> I believe for everyone who goes astray,
> someone will come to show the way,
> I believe, I believe.
>
> I believe above the storm the smallest prayer will still be heard,
> I believe that someone in the great somewhere hears every word;
> Every time I hear a newborn baby cry,
> or touch a leaf, or see the sky,
> Then I know why I believe.

But the song never made clear beyond its reference to the "someone in the great somewhere" who the one is in whom the singer believed. Is this someone the tooth fairy, Dorothy's fairy godmother, an evil spirit bent on deceiving us, maybe even Satan himself disguised as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14)? And what was his authority for believing what he did? What he himself heard, touched, and saw, which just happens to be the least trustworthy authority there is (Prov. 3:5).[5] Such sentimental drivel is simply jabberwocky,[6] irrational

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[5]People believe what they do on the basis of a book, an institutional tradition, or their own opinion.

[6]"Jabberwocky," written by Lewis Carroll and found in *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), is considered one of the greatest nonsense poems in the English language, about which Alice said: "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don't exactly know what they are." Here is the first of its seven quatrains:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimple in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogroves
And the mome raths outgrabe.

nonsense, absurd inanity. And as far as salvation is concerned it portends a salvation by ignorance and/or by sincerity, which instrumentalities will never save. They amount to having "faith in the power of faith," a sentiment best captured perhaps by Norman Vincent Peale's popular phrase, "the power of positive thinking." Frankly, I find Peale's representation of faith appalling for it fatally wounds Christianity in the heart, while I find Paul's representation of faith appealing for he everywhere glories and delights in revealed knowledge and propositional truth as the foundation of true faith while at the same time characterizing "faith devoid of knowledge" as "believing the lie" that leads to condemnation (2 Thess. 2:11-12). The Bible often highlights this knowledge base of saving faith by employing some form of the construction *pisteuein hoti*[7] ("to believe that"), followed by a propositional truth, to indicate the content of saving faith:

Hebrews 11:6: "…without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one coming to God must *believe that* he exists and is the rewarder of those seeking him."

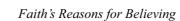John 8:24: "…if you do not *believe that* I am, you shall die in your sins."

John 11:42: "…I said this for the benefit of the crowd standing here, in order that they may *believe that* you sent me" (see also John 17:8, 21).

John 14:11: "*Believe me that* I am in [union with] the Father and the Father is [in union] in me."

John 16:27: "For the Father himself loves you, because… you have *believed that* I came out from the Father" (see also John 16:30).

John 20:31: "…these things [that is, the entire Gospel of John] are written that you may *believe that* Jesus is the Christ,

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[7]I have transliterated all of the Hebrew and Greek words for the benefit of those who have not studied these biblical languages. Horizontal lines over the ā, ē, and ō indicate that they should be vocalized as follows: ā as in "father," ē as the "a" in "fate," and ō as in "know."

the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Romans10:9: "…if you *believe…that* God raised [Jesus] from the dead [this is not all that one must believe but it is one thing that must be believed], you will be saved."

1 Thessalonians 4:14: "…we *believe that* Jesus died and rose again."

1 John 5:1: "Everyone who *believes that* Jesus is the Christ has been begotten by God."

1 John 5:4: "Who is it who overcomes the world but he who *believes that* Jesus is the Son of God?"

In this feature of saving faith "lies the importance of doctrine respecting Christ. The doctrine defines Christ's identity, the identity in terms of which we entrust ourselves to him. Doctrine consists in propositions of truth."[8] All this simply means that faith must indeed have its reasons for believing. Some of the more significant reasons I intend to provide in this book.

One final comment: For what it is worth to those who may be interested, I required the students in my course in apologetics to read the following books and articles:

Clark, Gordon H., *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* (P&R, 1977) (they read all)

Clark, Gordon H., *Religion, Reason and Revelation* (Trinity Foundation, 1986) (they read all)

Dulles, Avery Cardinal, *A History of Apologetics* (Second edition; Ignatius, 2005) (they read all)

Frame, John M., *Apologetics to the Glory of God: an Introduction* (P&R, 1994) (they read all)

Geehan, E. R. (ed.), *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*

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[8]John Murray, "Faith" in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:258.

(P&R, 1971) (they read "My Credo" and Chapters III, IV, V, XIV, XVI, XIX, XXI, XXIII)

Nash, Ronald H. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark: A Festschrift* (P&R, 1968) (they read "Part One: The Wheaton Lectures" and Chapters V and XVII, VI and XVIII, VII and XIX, XI and XXII)

Sproul, R. C., John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Zondervan, 1984) (they read all)

Warfield, Benjamin B., "Apologetics" in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), IX, 3-21

Warfield, Benjamin B., "Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*" in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Reprint; Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), II, 93-105

Warfield, Benjamin B., "The Real Problem of Inspiration" in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Reprint; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948)

I also required them to write a book review of *Classical Apologetics,* 1200-1500 words in length, in which they were to pinpoint its major flaw and explain why.

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