

## Some Books on *Apologetics*

At our LLM Meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November, several colleagues asked for a session on apologetics. These are three books that I have found helpful. *Apologetics* (from Greek ἀπολογία, "speaking in defense") is the discipline of defending faith doctrines through systematic argumentation and discourse. We are often asked questions about Christianity, sometimes out of interest, or confusion, by inquirers or from positions of outright hostility. Our answers can't be like an academic argument and need to come from the heart, straightforward, but theologically sound.

Former Bishop John Pritchard has written **How to explain your faith**<sup>1</sup> in order to answer common questions. The sections are: **Why Bother? Why Believe? Why Get Involved?** In each section he addresses a wide range of questions that we may be faced with. Chapter 3 of **Why Bother?**, as all chapters, starts with the following: **What they say?** "I've got most of the things I want in life. I could always do with more, of course, but basically, life's fine as it is." "I haven't noticed there's anything missing from my life, really. I don't see what your Christian faith has got to offer me." "What is it about Christianity that makes it important? I just can't see where it might make contact with my life and what I'm interested in." Then there is a **Star Quote**, in this case from Nick Hornby's **How to be Good**. This is followed by **Key Issue** and then **What you might say**. Each section provides a range of answers to the central question. The book is clear, easy to follow, and can give us confidence that we can speak about why Christianity is reasonable and attractive as well as affirming the depth and mystery of every human being. There is a section on how to use the chapters in a home group and a useful bibliography.

Francis Spufford's book is called **Unapologetic, Why, despite everything, Christianity can still make surprising emotional sense**<sup>2</sup>. He also deals with questions, but begins by listing all of the negative statements and movements currently accepted as cases against Christianity. Spufford states clearly that his book is not an *apologia*, a defence of the ideas, because he isn't sorry! This is more of a social commentary about modern Western society and its language and attitudes

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<sup>1</sup> SPCK, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Faber and Faber, 2012.

about religion in general and Christianity in particular. His language is colloquial and sometimes coarse (be warned!). He discusses belief and unbelief in terms of emotion and daily life. For example, he starts by examining the word 'sin,' and its use as 'indulgence' or 'enjoyable naughtiness' instead of what believers think of as the 'human propensity to f... things up,' referred to throughout the book as **HPTfTU**. He writes of forgiveness, judgment, what is expected of the Christian life and how it isn't supposed to be about gathering up the good people and excluding the bad people – but what he calls 'the league of the guilty.' He writes about God, feeling God's absence and presence, the problems of pain and evil, and Jesus. He writes in a narrative style that takes the reader on a headlong journey of conviction about why Christianity is the best way to live one's life and the consequences of taking this path. This is a good read, but not a handy resource or *apologia* as is the Pritchard book.

Michael J. Langford's book is called **Unblind Faith, A new approach for the twenty-first century**.<sup>3</sup> It is closer to Pritchard's approach than Spufford's. Part One is called **The Essentials of the Christian Faith** (Faith and Reason; The Idea of God; The Story of Humankind; Jesus is Lord; Jesus is Saviour; Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Church and Sacrament; Eternal Life; The Essentials and the Non-essentials) and Part Two: **Problems for the Christian Faith** (Evil and Suffering; The Problem of Freedom; The Bible: History, Myth or Legend?; Christianity and other Religions; The Rational Defence of the Christian Faith) and then a section on **Prayer and Work**. Langford tries to pay serious attention to the intellectual content of the Christian faith without being overly technical. He argues that Christian faith should be seen as a kind of middle way between 'blind faith' and a 'purely rational faith.' It is therefore an Anglican approach based upon scripture, faith and reason. There are extensive notes. It is an excellent reference book.

These are three different approaches to *apologetics*. Each gives much food for thought and foundational background for answering those challenging questions.

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<sup>3</sup> PARAPRESS, 2010.