



# Doc.bytes

Discussion starters offered by the National Working Group on Doctrine

## Worksheet 1: Apologetics

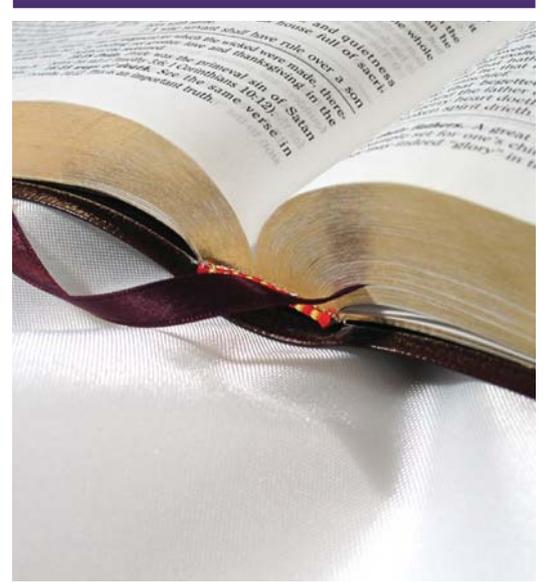
**“Apologetics” is the reasoned argument to justify a theory or doctrine; an explanation or defence of the Christian faith.**

In Christian theology, apologetics means the defence, by argument, of Christian belief against external criticism or other world views. Put positively, it is the commendation of the Christian faith in the light of people’s issues and questions.

Apologetics takes the questions or the problems posed by the philosophy and culture of the age as its starting point and looks for some common ground in order to build the case for Christian faith against objections.

### Examples of apologetics in Christian history:

- >> Paul’s sermon on the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31)
- >> Augustine’s *City of God*, written in reply to pagans who attributed the fall of Rome in 410 to the abandonment of their traditional religion
- >> Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, written for Christian missionaries in dispute with Muslim theology
- >> Schleiermacher’s *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*
- >> Paul Tillich developed a method of correlation by which Christian doctrine may be shown to answer people’s existential questions
- >> Wolfhart Pannenberg seeks to argue the case for Christianity in books such as *The Apostles’ Creed in the Light of Today’s Questions*
- >> Similarly Hans Küng’s books, *On Being a Christian* and *Does God Exist?* are excellent examples of apologetics.



### Story

**A large church on the outskirts of Sydney sought to reach out to men where they live and work. Apart from locally based activities, such as golf days, activities are run in the centre of the city itself, such as men’s dinners and evangelistic Bible study groups.**

Attendees from the church invite their non-church friends to these events. One such person invited was Ian who, after attending a golf day and a dinner, came along to a Christianity Explained course in the city. “I really saw something different in the way these people related together,” says Ian. “I felt relaxed about coming to these activities and gradually felt confident to share my own experiences and to pray with the others.”

After some time, Ian felt free to explore some of his questions and was surprised to discover that some of things he thought he had to swallow in Christianity were not essentials at all!

Eventually, Ian reached a point of Christian commitment. Ian recalls: “For me, the key was getting to know about Jesus in a relaxed atmosphere. Having the opportunity to meet in the city meant that I could do so in the midst of my busy work and personal life.” (Adapted from *Mission Under the Microscope*, p.95)



#### Note

This sheet is part of a series on theology in the 21st century. It is prepared for the National Assembly by the Working Group on Doctrine as a discussion starter for small groups, in congregations, faith communities or other settings. It may also be used for personal reflection. Low resolution copies of this sheet can be downloaded free of charge from the Doctrine website: [www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine).

“IN ORDER TO DEAL WITH A PERSON’S GENUINE ISSUES AND CONCERNS, WE NEED TO GET TO KNOW THAT PERSON AT DEPTH. IT IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS. GENUINE FRIENDSHIP OPENS UP COMMUNICATION.”

## Quotes

“Apologetic theology is ‘answering theology’. It answers the questions implied in the ‘situation’ in the power of the eternal message and with the means provided by the situation whose questions it answers.”

(Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, p.6)

“This book is written for all those who, for any reason at all, honestly and sincerely want to know what Christianity, what being a Christian, really means. It is written also for those who do not believe, but nevertheless seriously inquire; who did believe, but are not satisfied with their unbelief; who do believe, but feel insecure in their faith; who are at a loss, between belief and unbelief; who are skeptical, both about their convictions and about their doubts.”

(Hans Küng in, *On Being a Christian*, p.19)



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## Objections to Christian faith today



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The National Church Life Survey found the most common objection to Christianity that attendees heard is that there are too many hypocrites; that Christians don't practise what they preach. The next most common issues are the problem of suffering, whether the Bible is true, and that faith is irrelevant. Women are more likely to encounter the question of suffering while men are more likely to hear that faith is irrelevant.

(Mission under the Microscope, p.80-81)

## Questions

- >> How can you become more adept in sharing your faith?
- >> What can your church do to be more effective in recommending the Christian faith to others?
- >> What are the issues in your community that inhibit people in considering Christianity?
- >> Why is how we come across even more important than what we say?



## Further reading

Douglas John Hall, *Why Christian? and Professing the Faith and Confessing the Faith*

Alistair McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion*

Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

Christopher C. Walker, *Living Life to the Full: Spirituality for Today's Baby Boomers*

Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*