



STATEMENT DC-234

## PRACTICAL APOLOGETICS

### **E-Q-U-I-P: The Mission of the Christian Research Institute**

**by Hank Hanegraaff**

The mission of the Christian Research Institute from 1960 to the present is encompassed in a single word: *EQUIP*. In the words of St. Paul, our organization is committed to *equip* "God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ might be built up" and strengthened (Eph. 4:12). Today, CRI's Internet site ([www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org)) further reflects our commitment to this mission. The word *EQUIP* serves as an acronym to define our goals and objectives.

The "E" in *EQUIP* represents the word *essentials*. CRI is committed to the maxim: "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity." Our goal is to make people so familiar with the essentials of the Christian faith that when a counterfeit looms on the horizon, they will recognize it instantaneously. There must be unity around the essentials, since essential Christian doctrine forms the line of demarcation between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the cults. Today, as perhaps never before, this line is not just being blurred by false teachings, but it is being obliterated. The tide in evangelicalism is turning from unity *around* the essentials to unity *despite* the essentials. Movements within the culture — cults as well as the church — are compromising, confusing, and contradicting essential Christian doctrine.

It is precisely because these essentials have been redefined that millions have a completely distorted view of what it means to be a Christian. As a case in point, the "Faith" movement may use Christian terminology when it comes to the essentials, *but the meaning it pours into the words is decidedly unbiblical*. Faith is redefined as a force, God is reduced to a being who has faith, and the gospel of grace has been relegated to a gospel of greed.

Although Faith teachers have trivialized the importance of essential Christian doctrine, it remains the key to effective Christian living. First, "essential Christian doctrine" provides the framework through which we properly relate to God in *prayer*, accurately understand the *Bible*, and actively involve ourselves in vital *church* membership. Furthermore, it is the means by which we ably defend our faith. Finally, it is the basis for how we live our lives. As Paul instructed Timothy, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16).

The "Q" in the acronym *EQUIP* represents the word *questions*. In addition to focusing on essentials, CRI answers people's questions regarding cults, culture, and Christianity. As we move further into what has been described as a post-Christian culture, it is increasingly important to equip Christians to answer questions regarding *what* they

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believe, *why* they believe, and *whom* they believe. The apostle Peter urges us, "Always be prepared to give an answer [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pet. 3:15, emphasis added).

To begin with, answering questions involves *pre-evangelism*. The vast majority of people in today's culture think that Christianity is a blind leap into the dark, rather than faith founded on fact. Thus, questions become opportunities to use well-reasoned answers as springboards for presenting the good news of the gospel. Answering questions should never be viewed as merely a means to demonstrate mental acumen, but as an opportunity to humbly present the truth claims of Christ.

Answering questions also involves *post-evangelism*. During an age of apostasy, knowing that Christianity is historic and evidential strengthens our faith. In a time when Christian leaders are falling around us, it is encouraging to know that our faith is not based on the reliability of men and women but on the unfailing revelation of God.

Moreover, answering questions involves *evangelism* itself. Christians on the cutting edge of evangelism will be driven into education. While you are witnessing, inevitably you will be asked questions you don't know how to answer. Your response should involve admitting that you don't know the answer to the question but that you would be delighted to research and return with an answer.

Through our daily *Bible Answer Man* broadcast, correspondence, and customer service divisions, CRI provides both pastors and parishioners with answers.

Imagine for a moment that you've encountered a skeptic who claims the Bible is full of contradictions. As evidence this person asserts that Matthew contradicts Luke regarding the genealogy of Jesus. *Bible Answer Man* listeners not only know the answer to this *apparent* contradiction but also have been equipped to use it as an opportunity to communicate the good news of the gospel.

Furthermore, suppose some Jehovah's Witnesses appeared on your doorstep and twisted you into a doctrinal pretzel. Our correspondence division will assist you in untangling the doctrinal distortions and also provide you with the resources necessary to become a witness to the Witnesses.

Finally, picture a university professor proudly asserting that Neo-Darwinian evolution has rendered the notion of a Creator obsolete. A quick call to CRI's customer service hotline will equip you with a host of resources that will prepare you to communicate that the theory that all of life has evolved from a single source (macroevolution) is full of holes, and that the preponderance of scientific evidence indicates we have been designed by a Creator for a purpose.

The "U" in the word *EQUIP* represents the word *user-friendly*. As much as possible, the Christian Research Institute is committed to taking complex issues and making them understandable and accessible to the lay Christian. In the past, scholars have often been content to play "intellectual keep away" over the heads of people. But the defense of the faith must never be relegated merely to bastions of higher learning. Instead, apologetics must be both user-friendly and painstakingly accurate.

The task of defending the faith can be conducted in three distinctly different manners: *top*, *slop*, and *pop* apologetics. As the middle letter in CRI suggests, our ministry is committed to *top* apologetics in the sense that the information we disseminate is based on first-rate, primary *research*. It can be depended on as trustworthy and true.

In contrast to many Christian publications, the *Christian Research Journal* bases its information on primary research and investigative journalism. In sharp distinction, the *evang-elastic* stories many others circulate are based on selling and sensationalism. A classic case in point involves a story circulated by *Charisma* magazine (June 1996, pp. 21-23) entitled "'Holy Water' Triggers Healing Revival." Readers were informed that plain old bottled water, when "blessed" by a charismatic bishop, was suddenly transformed into "miracle water." Those who drank not only were "slain in the Spirit" but were also allegedly healed of such ailments as "cancer, tumors and heart disease." No evidence exists to

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support such outlandish claims. Sadly, this is far from an isolated incident. Stories such as Darwin's supposed deathbed renunciation of evolution and his conversion to Christianity are frequently circulated — this despite the fact that there is not a shred of evidence to support the story and ample evidence to refute it.

Stories like *Charisma's* "miracle water" and Darwin's deathbed conversion might best be characterized as *slop* apologetics. Rather than advancing the cause of Christ, this kind of sloppy sensationalism ends up dragging Christ's name through the mud. Without careful research it is easy to circulate fabrications in place of facts.

On the one hand, we are committed to making apologetics user-friendly (i.e., *pop* apologetics), while on the other hand, we popularize information based only on accurate primary research. For example, while my *Christianity in Crisis* was written on a popular level and presented in a memorable format, it was also recognized for its complete and accurate documentation.

This brings us to the "I" in EQUIP, which stands for *integrity*. Recall Paul's admonition: "Watch your *life* and *doctrine* closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16, emphases added). As a Christian organization, we are committed to integrity in both practice and doctrine.

With regard to practice, we are committed to integrity in business and finance. CRI adheres to the regulations set by secular institutions such as the IRS and the Better Business Bureau and adheres to further standards set by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA). CRI's board of directors has established additional standards that ensure fiscal accountability. For example, CRI authors may not receive royalties on books, tapes, or materials sold through the ministry.

With regard to principle, CRI is committed to doctrinal integrity no matter what the cost. I have often said that had I known in advance what I would face as a result of writing *Christianity in Crisis*, I probably would not have had the courage to continue. While some may think that statement expresses cowardice, what my battered heart was saying was that often God leads us into circumstances step by step, because if we were able to see what lay ahead in terms of suffering and slander, even our steely determination and fiercest resolve would prove inadequate. That's why God gives us the grace we need exactly when it's needed, and often not a moment before. While the financial cost of our stand has been staggering, the spiritual rewards in terms of transformed hearts and minds have been well worth that cost.

Standing against the tide of unity at all costs is not politically correct at the moment, but it will have an impact for time and eternity. Abraham Lincoln stood against the tide of slavery before it was politically correct. As a result, liberals as well as conservatives slandered him. Years ago I heard statements attributed to Lincoln that have left an indelible impression on my mind. They aptly sum up my convictions regarding leadership: "I desire to so conduct the affairs of this administration that if, at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me." "I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to the light that I have." Our goal should not be popularity, prosperity, or a platform, but rather to live according to the truth, that at the end Christ may say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:21, 23).

Finally, the "P" in the acronym EQUIP represents the word *para-church*. CRI is deeply committed to the local church as the God-ordained vehicle for equipping, evangelism, and education. Through our research, resources, and outreach CRI is helping in that mission.

As a practical illustration, imagine a parishioner asking her pastor whether or not she should attend a Lifespring seminar. While the pastor may not have the resources or time to do the required primary research on human potential groups like Lifespring, this pastor may well be aware that CRI is able to provide the needed information. In our increasingly complicated society, characterized by information overload, there simply is no way local pastors can be expected to stay abreast of the ever-changing world of the cults and religious belief systems. CRI provides pastors

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and parishioners with the facts and knowledge needed to defend the historic, biblical Christian faith against the attacks of pseudo-Christian cults, the occult, new religious movements, world religions, atheism, and the plethora of other threats both from within and without the church that attempt to undermine the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul summarized a vast list of biblical exhortations when he wrote, "Test everything. Hold on to the good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Christians must be ready to give a reason for the hope they have within them, and to do so with "gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:16). All believers are called on to defend "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). CRI is here to EQUIP you — to help you define and defend what you believe.

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