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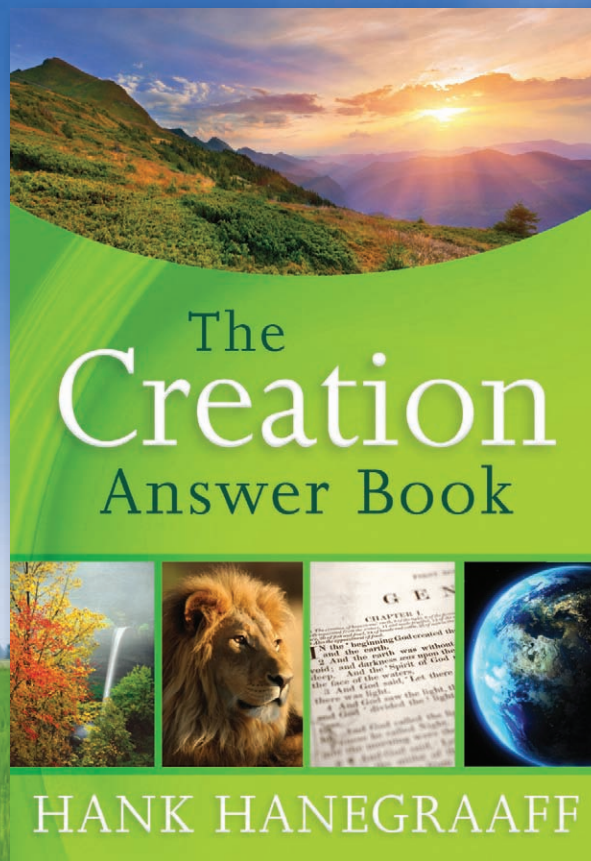
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From the Abstract to the Incarnational: Contending for the Faith in Today's World

Few if any Bible passages capture the driving impulse of the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL as well as Jude 3: “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (NASB). Why contend for the historic Christian faith? As someone who had sought for ultimate truth as a possession more valuable than gold, but had no assurance that any such truth could be found, this passage is extremely meaningful to me. God has undertaken through divine inspiration to make Himself, His will, and His plan and work of salvation known in sixty-six books bound as one (2 Tim. 3:16). It is our responsibility to study, apply, preserve, and defend this infinitely precious gift.

Note the finality of the words “once for all” (Greek: *απαξ*, pron. *apax*). The content of this faith was revealed progressively over a period of two millennia, but God’s special revelation reached its climax and completion in the person and work of Jesus Christ, as proclaimed and taught by His designated apostles, all of whom were eyewitnesses of His majesty (Heb. 1:1–3; cf. Matt. 28:19–20; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 Cor. 9:1). As we see in verse 3, Christ is the “exact representation of [God’s] nature.” He has so successfully effected human salvation that “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” There will consequently be no further revelation until the promulgation of this salvation is completed by His disciples and He returns to Earth as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This written word, the Bible, which reveals the Living Word, Christ, must never be subordinated to church authority, eclipsed by human philosophy or science, diminished by so-called supplemental revelation, or dismissed as outdated and obsolete. Just as the God who spoke it does not change (Mal. 3:6), and the Lord it reveals does not fade away (Heb. 13:8), so the Scripture itself has a timeless relevance, remaining ever vital, dynamic, and effectual (1 Pet. 1:24–25; Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:15–17). Those who live by its teachings know as a matter of daily experience that this is true (James 1:22–25).

Every article published in the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL in one way or another contends for this faith. To demonstrate this, I will point out how each article in the current issue serves this purpose. I have not selected this issue because it will be easier to do this than most but because it will be more challenging (e.g., in the past couple of issues, articles such as “Answering Muslim Objections to the Gospel” and “Authenticating Biblical Artifacts” were so clearly concerned with contending for the Christian faith that no explanation would have been required).

Our lead feature this issue, a debate between Michael Austin and Ron Gleason on gun control laws, is a good place to start. What could this debate possibly have to do with contending for the faith once delivered? It is easy for American Christians to be

caught up in the strong emotions on either side of this debate and base their positions on interpretations of the Second Amendment, crime statistics involving firearms, and so forth. While these considerations should be factored in, the Christian, unlike secularists both on the Right and on the Left, is both privileged and responsible to consult the Word of God for any explicit teaching or implicit principles that bear on the debate. If we do not make a practice of searching Scripture for light on the ethical debates of the day, we are more likely to take the wrong position in the name of Christ (since no position we take is in a vacuum but all reflect on our Christian profession). Thus, nonbelievers who through the light of natural (general) revelation have embraced a wise and righteous position on the subject could mistakenly conclude through our example that the Bible supports a different position. This would only strengthen their resistance to the gospel. What is the biblical position on gun control? That’s not for us to legislate! Read this issue’s debate, do further research, and decide for yourself.

What does Dean Halverson’s critique of Lawrence Krauss’s *A Universe from Nothing* have to do with apologetics? Because all truth is God’s truth, what God has revealed in Scripture must ultimately cohere with what He has made known through creation, and as seekers of truth we can safely operate under that assumption. If science and Scripture appear to be in conflict, we can be assured that at least our interpretation of science or our interpretation of Scripture is wrong; but *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) is not a doctrine that Scripture leaves open to debate. For Christians, the Big Bang Theory is quite consistent with this doctrine, although it is also possible that the universe was created at some point prior to the Big Bang. For atheists or naturalists, the situation is more desperate. Both science and logic tell us that only nothing emerges from nothing, and so for the naturalist the natural realm must always have existed in some form. The temptation is therefore strong for them to press science and logic, and stretch them if necessary, so that the “nothing” out of which the Big Bang is thought to have emerged may be defined in a manner that avoids an encounter with God at the beginning of it all. By pointing out the problems with this approach, Halverson’s article supports the biblical doctrine of creation.

Like Halverson, William Lane Craig uses science and philosophy rather than Scripture itself to support the scriptural doctrine of creation. The astounding ability of mathematics to describe the structure and predict the behavior of the universe is very difficult to explain apart from God.

How do two men in a Russian prison camp (gulag) who desperately dream of taking even just a few drags off a cigarette respond to the sight of a third man with a nearly finished one in his hand? Stephen Mitchell’s article “Alexander Solzhenitsyn Confronts the Grand Inquisitor” brilliantly uses the unlikely

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Elliot Miller

image of a cigarette butt to defend the biblical doctrine of *imago dei* (that human beings are created in the image of God).

While the truth of salvation through Christ would stand even if no one had spilled his blood for it, a powerful confirming witness to the gospel both in Scripture and in church history has been the martyrs of the church (in fact, *martyr* literally means “witness”). In her recent book, *The Myth of Persecution*, Notre Dame scholar Candida Moss seeks to rewrite history on this subject. In his review of her book, evangelical historian Paul Maier convincingly demonstrates that Moss has uncovered nothing that alters the traditional understanding of the role of persecution and martyrdom in the historic church.

There should be no difficulty in seeing how my article on 1 John 4 contends for the faith once for all time delivered to the saints. “Metaphysical” teachers have appropriated the biblical phrase “God is love” to support their pantheistic belief that God is an impersonal Principle and then proceeded to use that same phrase to attack the biblical doctrine of Christ’s atonement. It is important to point out to their followers that the very passage in 1 John 4 where that phrase first appeared is *teaching* the doctrine of Christ’s atonement. We then can use their error as a springboard to share with them the gospel of true salvation from sin, sickness, and death (the very conditions they would most like to eliminate from the universe).

Finally, how could Kevin DeYoung and Jason Helopoulos’s article on church attendance have any connection to apologetics? Contending for the faith does not merely involve answering challenges from *outside* the church. It even more critically entails preserving biblical doctrine and practice *within* it. Church attendance is not only enjoined by Scripture but also is necessary for the preservation of New Testament Christianity. The currently fashionable practice of Christian spirituality *sans* membership or even attendance at a local church is therefore a demonic shot at the heart of Christianity that must not go unanswered.

As we have seen, Christians need to contend for their faith across a wide range of human concerns, from the extremely abstract (mathematical formulas and *creatio ex nihilo*) to the extremely incarnational (how one behaves if imprisoned and physically attending church). As I have often stressed in this column, the biblical call to apologetics has never been optional. If it was essential even in the previously “Christian” culture of the West, how much more critical is it in today’s post-Christian, postmodern, and increasingly pagan Western world? The CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL is therefore not merely a magazine for apologetics enthusiasts and countercult evangelists; it is a strategic resource in the hands of every Christian. —Elliot Miller

As an organ of the Christian Research Institute (CRI), the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL’s primary commitment is to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). In keeping with this commitment, the JOURNAL’s mission is both evangelistic and pastoral: evangelistic in that it is dedicated to furthering the proclamation and defense of the historic gospel of Jesus Christ; pastoral in that it is dedicated to helping His followers identify and distinguish between essential Christian doctrine and doctrine that is peripheral, aberrant, or heretical.

CRI’s areas of research specialization include (1) non-Christian religions, sects, and cults; (2) the world of the occult (including practices, phenomena, and movements); and (3) issues of contemporary theological and apologetic concern (e.g., aberrant Christian teachings and practices; philosophical and historical speculations that challenge biblical reliability; relativistic ethics that compete with biblical ethics for influence on culture and public policy; and sensational conspiracy theories). In its approach to all of these themes, the JOURNAL strives to be at once scholarly and readable, uncompromising and charitable; offering analyses and critiques that are biblically, rationally, and factually sound.

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What Cops Can Teach Christians about the Critical Use of Language

“Officer Stevenson, tell us what happened on October 20th at about 4:30 p.m.” The officer on the witness stand spoke directly into the microphone. He began to answer the prosecutor’s question without glancing at the jury. “I was dispatched to 1235 Westmont Street at approximately 1634 hours in response to a 415 Family. Once I was 97, I contacted the RP. She was concerned about the assailant being 5150. I requested the 10-20 of unit 503 and ran a 29 while I was waiting.”

Sitting at the prosecution table, I watched the facial expressions of the jury. I knew most of them had had no idea what Officer Stevenson said. The district attorney recognized the problem. “Can you try to say that in English, Officer Stevenson?” he asked.

“Sorry about that. I got the call from our radio dispatcher at about 4:34 p.m. The dispatcher told me there was a family disturbance of some kind at 1235 Westmont Street. When I got there, the woman who originally called us met me at the door and told me her boyfriend was violent. She was afraid he was mentally ill. I asked the dispatch operator for the location of the nearest additional police unit so I wouldn’t have to go into the house alone. While I waited for my back-up, I asked the dispatcher to run the woman’s boyfriend in our computer system to see if he had any warrants for his arrest.”

Stevenson’s first statement reminded me of some of my Christian police partners back when I was an obstinate atheist. There weren’t many outspoken Christians in my department, and the few I knew seemed to have a language all their own. I wasn’t raised in the church, and I didn’t become interested in Christianity until I was thirty-five, so I was unfamiliar with the words my friend Dennis used when he first talked to me about Christianity: “Jim, I’ve been convicted lately, and God has put you on my heart. God told me you need to be born again; you need to come to repentance and experience a conversion. It’s time for you to deal with the sin in your life and have a true spiritual rebirth. Why don’t you invite Jesus into your heart, and make Him the Lord of your life? If you have faith, you can be saved. You can be washed by the blood of the Lamb, and sanctified so you can enjoy fellowship with your Christian brethren.”

Dennis didn’t actually put it quite like that, but he might as well have. I couldn’t understand a thing he said. I had the same difficulty deciphering Dennis’s “Christian talk” that Stevenson’s jury had deciphering his “cop talk.” I wish there had been a prosecutor with me at the time to ask Dennis, “Can you say that in English?”

As police officers, we often forget that our “professional language” sometimes alienates and creates suspicion in the very people we’re trying to serve. When Officer Stevenson decided to address the jury instead of the prosecutor, he began to use *their* language. He “connected” with them and decreased their suspicion. If Dennis had tried to speak *my* language as a



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nonbeliever, he might have been able to connect with me as well. Instead his Christianese kindled my sarcastic distrust.

“God has put you (or something) on my heart. / God told me.” Really? As an atheist, I was offended by this kind of language. What makes you Christians so sure you know what God is thinking? Are you actually hearing a voice from heaven? Does it sound like Morgan Freeman? Sounds a bit presumptuous to me. Try this instead: “Jim, I’ve been thinking about you a lot lately. You come to mind when I am praying and talking to God.”

“Be ‘born again.’ / Have a spiritual rebirth.” Is “born again” a political party, or something you want me to join? Aren’t all Christians “born again?” If so, why are you using the additional adjective? Are “born agains” the true, hardcore Christians? Are they political activists, like the modern-day “birthers”? Sorry, I’m too busy to become a fanatic or join a movement. Try this instead: “Reconsider your beliefs, and begin a new life as a Christian.”

“You need to come to repentance. / Experience a conversion.” My mother used to take me to Catholic Mass occasionally when I was a small boy. I hated it. I never understood what those priests were saying, but I’m sure it had something to do with “penance,” “penitence,” or “repentance.” Didn’t King

If Dennis had tried to speak my language as a nonbeliever, he might have been able to connect with me as well.

James die a long time ago? Why are we still trying to talk like him? Try this instead: “You and I might be ‘good’ at times but we’re not ‘perfect.’ If God is all-powerful, He has the ability to be perfect. The only way imperfect creatures like you and me can be united to a perfect God is to accept the pardon He’s offering for our imperfection.”

“Deal with your sin.” You go ahead and deal with your sin if you want to. I’m too busy dealing with everyone else’s sin. I’m a police officer, for crying out loud; we’re the “good guys.” We put the “bad guys” in jail, and most of the folks I arrest tell me they’re Christians. Please Mr. “Holier Than Thou,” don’t start talking to me about *my* “sin.” It’s offensive. Try this instead: “The Bible says Jesus is God *and* the only perfect man who ever lived. Yet He died like a common criminal to pay the price for our daily ‘crimes’ of imperfection. If we are willing to accept what Jesus did for us on the cross, He’s willing to apply His perfection to us.”

“Invite Jesus into your heart.” You mean, like a boyfriend? What exactly does that mean to have “Jesus in my heart?” I’m not an emotional kind of guy, so please don’t ask me to sing songs or hold hands with Jesus, especially in public. Do I have to emasculate myself to become a Christian? If so, thanks for reminding me why I’m not a Christian. Try this instead: “When we admit our imperfections, believe Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our mistakes, and accept His sacrifice, we can start a new relationship with God.”

“Make Jesus the Lord of your life.” Isn’t this the twenty-first century? Are there still serfs and lords? Was J. R. R. Tolkien the author of your Scripture? What is a “Lord” anyway? Is it like a “slave master”? Between bosses and supervisors, most of us have enough people trying to be our “Lord.” Thanks anyway. Try this instead: “If Jesus is who He said He is, He deserves to be more than a sticker on your car or a slogan on your lips. That’s why He wants you to trust Him for everything. You’re already submitting your heart to something fleeting; God wants you to submit it to someone eternal.”

“Have faith.” If by “faith” you mean believing in something in spite of the evidence, no thanks. Blind faith is dangerous. I’m a cop; evidence matters to me. You can keep your “faith”; I’d rather have my “reason.” The world would be a better place if fewer people flew planes into buildings because they believed something blindly. Try this instead: “Jesus gave us more than enough evidence to believe what He said about Himself. He never asked people to take an irrational, blind leap. He asked instead for a reasonable step of trust.”

“Be saved.” Saved from what, and saved by whom? Last time I

checked, I’m the guy who usually does the saving. And doesn’t your holy Book say, “God helps those who help themselves?” I’ve been helping myself for thirty-five years now without a problem. No need to change that. I’m OK, but thanks for the offer. Try this instead: “God doesn’t want anyone to be separated from Him. He’s given us a way home. All we have to do is accept His offer of forgiveness through Jesus.”

“Be washed by the blood of the Lamb.” Tell me you didn’t just say that. I know what a “blood bath” is, and it’s not usually a good thing. I’m not sure what a lamb has to do with it, but lamb’s not my favorite food anyway. Are you trying to get me excited about Christianity or chase me away? Try this instead: “The death of one perfect man (Jesus) provides forgiveness for the rest of us.”

“Be sanctified.” Is that kind of like “sanctimonious?” I know a lot of Christians who are smug and self-righteous. Is that what happens over time if I become a Christian? It certainly seems that way. “Sanctified” sounds a bit arrogant. I bet sanctified people think they’re pretty special. Try this instead: “Grateful people are selfless people. Christians who understand how much they’ve been forgiven are changed over time.”

“Enjoy fellowship.” What, another Lord of the Rings reference? Do you people ever use language from this century? Christianity sounds a lot like an exclusive country club. If I join, it sounds like I’ll get to become a “fellow” of some sort. Do I have to give up having a beer with the fellas in order to hang out with the Christian fellows? Hmm, that makes the decision easy for me. Try this instead: “It’s encouraging to find grateful Christians who are struggling to become people of God. We’re out there and eager to have you join our community, regardless of what you may believe today.”

In my ignorance, I misunderstood much of Dennis’s Christianese, and in my stubborn rebellion, I deliberately found many ways to misinterpret Dennis’s words. As a nonbeliever, I was like Stevenson’s jury: unfamiliar with technical language and somewhat suspicious about people who use it. I was rebellious enough without the added obstacle of language. Now, as a Christian myself, I try to remember the old Jim. When I talk to my unbelieving friends, I try to anticipate their rebellious objections, speak their language, and remember the limits of their theological training. Like Officer Stevenson, I’ve learned to pick my words carefully and put the needs of my jury ahead of my own preferences. —J. Warner Wallace

J. Warner Wallace is a cold-case detective in Los Angeles County, a Christian case maker at Stand to Reason, and the author of *Cold-Case Christianity* (David C. Cook, 2013).