

THE POWER OF PENTECOSTAL APOLOGETICS

www.findingtruthmatters.org

By Dr. Andrew Corbett

Why do some people believe? Every Christian has a story of conversion. For some Christians their story is a journey from atheism to belief in the God of the Bible because of the evidence. For others, like Abdu Murray (<http://embracehethetruth.org>), their conversion story from Islam to Christianity was based on the credibility of the Bible. Then for those like Sy Rogers (<http://www.syrogers.com>), former homosexual and formerly a Gay Rights activist, his conversion to Christianity was based on the love and acceptance he experienced in a Christian community. Many people become Christians for reasons like these, but, by far, the most common reason, at least statistically, is some kind of Pentecostal encounter.

Spreading Pentecostal congregations — a quarter of all Christians worldwide — are bumping up against established Christian churches and Islam in Africa, and chipping away at what has long been a virtual Roman Catholic monopoly in Latin America. ... Across the tropics and the south, Christian worship, especially Pentecostalism, has captured hearts and minds in countries where the precariousness of ordinary living — blackouts, robbery, disease, corruption — makes rich and poor alike turn to divine intervention.

[The New York Times](#)

Pentecostals easily form the fastest growing segment of Christianity. In some parts of the world such as Africa, India, China and South America, the overwhelming number of conversions to Christianity are within a Pentecostal context. It is estimated by renowned Missiologist, Patrick Johnson, that by 2050 Pentecostals will comprise more than half of all Christians globally.

PENTECOSTALS & APOLOGETICS

Traditionally, Pentecostals have not given much attention to Christian Apologetics. But this is now changing. The best Apologetics is largely the domain of the Conservative Evangelicals such as William Lane Craig, Ravi Zacharias, Kenneth Samples, Craig Hazen, and Gary Habermas. But there are now a growing number of Pentecostal Apologists who have won respect of the broader Evangelical community. Notable among this growing community are J.P. Moreland (Philosopher, Biola University, <http://www.jpmoreland.com>) and Fazale Rana (Bio-Chemist, Reasons To Believe, www.reasons.org).

This new breed of Apologist promotes the use of reason, evidence, logic and scholarly research. They incorporate the latest evidence from cosmology, philosophy, bio-chemistry and astrophysics. But they also affirm the reality of the charismatic gifts described in First Corinthians 12. In fact, in his book, "The Kingdom Triangle", Dr J.P. Moreland (www.kingdomtriangle.com) documents how God's Spirit is demonstrating God's power in a way that is convincing people of the truth claims of Christianity.

While I am at bottom an advocate of mere Christianity and, thus, have much in common with conservative Catholics and Orthodox believers, I am also convinced that Evangelical Protestantism of a supernatural kind is the best expression of Christianity available...I want to foment a revolution of Evangelical life, spirituality, thought, and Spirit-lead power.

J. P. Moreland, "The Kingdom Triangle", Zondervan, 2007, page 14, ISBN: 031027432X

These Pentecostal Apologists often challenge those ideas within Pentecostalism which frequently make defending the claims of the Bible difficult (especially with a more sophisticated audience). In the crosshairs of this type of challenge is the very nature of *truth*. It has been said that the Protestant movement was a *Bible-based* movement while the Pentecostal movement has been a *Spirit-based* movement.

Theologically, most Pentecostal denominations are aligned with [Evangelicalism](#) in that they emphasize the reliability of the Bible and the need for conversion to faith in [Jesus](#). While there is cross pollination with other movements, Pentecostals differ from [Fundamentalists](#) by placing more emphasis on personal spiritual experience (often emotional), and, in most cases, by allowing women in ministry.

Pentecostals embrace a transrational worldview. Although Pentecostals are concerned with orthodoxy ("correct belief"), they are also concerned with orthopathy ("right affections") and orthopraxy ("right reflection or action"). Reason is esteemed as a valid conduit of truth, but Pentecostals do not limit truth to the realm of reason.

<http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Pentecostal>

Within Protestant Christianity there are four general approaches to a Christian understanding of *truth*.

LIBERALISM

Birtherd in the 18th century ‘Enlightenment’ Period, where the emphasis was on rationalism and the project among theologians was to “de-mythologise” the Bible, Liberal Theology was born. It claimed to “free up” the text of Scripture by dispensing with the superstitious claims of miracles and the supernatural. Truth to a Liberal is therefore limited to rational explanations which do not incorporate the miraculous or supernatural. Scripture to a Liberal *contains* the Word of God (truth) but must be understood rationally.

FUNDAMENTALISM

Birtherd at the beginning of the twentieth century, Christian Fundamentalism regards Scripture as the *only* truth. Everything, including human imagination and reasoning, has been corrupted by sin and is therefore so distorted that it is unreliable, and untrustworthy. Fundamentalists have such a high regard for the truthfulness of the Bible that they place great emphasis on the *literal* understanding of the Bible. The Scripture should be read and interpreted in its plainest, simplest, and most straight forward manner. Thus, if Genesis 1 says that God created the world in 6 days, this should be understood as 6 consecutive solar days (24 hour days) which according to the calculations derived from adding up the Biblical genealogies indicates that the earth was created around 4004BC. To the Fundamentalist Christian, if the Bible says something - no matter how miraculous it sounds - it should be taken literally.

EVANGELICALISM

A movement birtherd in the mid-twentieth century, largely attributed to Billy Graham, Evangelicalism¹ regards truth as revealed in the Bible and in other ways (such as nature, philosophy, science). It regards the Bible as uniquely authoritative but acknowledges that the Bible itself says that God has revealed His truth in other ways (as stated in- Job 38; Psalm 19; Romans 1). “*All truth is God’s truth, wherever it may be found*” wrote the second century Christian author, Clement of Alexandria, and Evangelicals respond with an “Amen!” Thus, to an Evangelical, truth is coherent and Scripture is not contradicted by science or philosophy but complemented by it.

¹ I am using the term “Evangelical” in a much narrower sense than it is often used. In its broad sense Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism are branches of Evangelicalism.

PENTECOSTALISM

Initially Pentecostal thought was borrowed largely from the Fundamentalist camp. Truth in Scripture was totally affirmed by Pentecostals. But because of its emphasis on an experience with the Holy Spirit, truth could also be ‘revelatory’. That is, God could reveal something *subjectively* to a person which was *true*. Pentecostals were receiving prophecies and words of knowledge from the Holy Spirit which often were found to be a true word from God. As a boy I remember attending a meeting at a Pentecostal church in Geelong one Sunday night where a visiting pastor from New Zealand, Ps. Des Short, preached then prophesied. He had never been to this church before and that night there were several hundred people there. He began looking at individuals, some of whom I knew, and he spoke under an inspiration from the Holy Spirit about details of these people’s lives and what God was about to do. There was no natural explanation for reasoning why he was so precise and so accurate and as time went on, and these prophecies were unfolded in people’s lives: so true. Because of Charismatic events like this, Pentecostals have therefore felt justified in claiming that God has revealed His truth *indirectly* to us through Scripture and *directly* to us by His Spirit.

A new generation of Pentecostal Apologists is challenging this concept of truth. Unlike Evangelicals or Fundamentalists who generally dismiss claims of Charismatic phenomena, these emerging Pentecostal Apologists put such claims to the test. They take very seriously the Biblical injunction-

*Do not quench the Spirit.
Do not despise prophecies,*
First Thessalonians 5:19-20

But the equally apply the next verse-

but test everything; hold fast what is good.
First Thessalonians 5:21

“The resultant denial of the supernatural has crippled much of theology, leading to at least two serious consequences. First, most present-day Western systematic and pastoral theologies fail to address the demonic at both the personal and cosmic levels ... The other consequence is that Western Christians often fail to fit the ‘signs and wonders’ of the Holy Spirit into their theological framework ...”

Bishop Hwa Yung,

http://www.christianitytoday.com/globalconversation/templates/article_print.html?id=89334

MIRACLES WITHIN APOLOGETICS

Humans are not just rational beings. We are experiential and emotional beings as well. Jesus Christ could have used reason to argue His case as Saviour and Lord. But He didn't. He complemented His teaching with miracles, signs and wonders. Imagine that! The greatest intellectual that's ever walked the planet didn't rely on His intellectual prowess to persuade His audience.

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me,

John 10:25

If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me;

John 10:37

but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

John 10:38

It seems that God sovereignly employs miracles to draw the elect. That is, miracles in themselves do not convince the hard-hearted. In fact, as we remember the story of Moses before Pharaoh we are reminded that miracles can actually harden the hearts of the hard-hearted against God. But miracles have the opposite effect upon the elect. Miracles are usually a "sign" and a "wonder" *to the elect*.

So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.

Acts 14:3-4

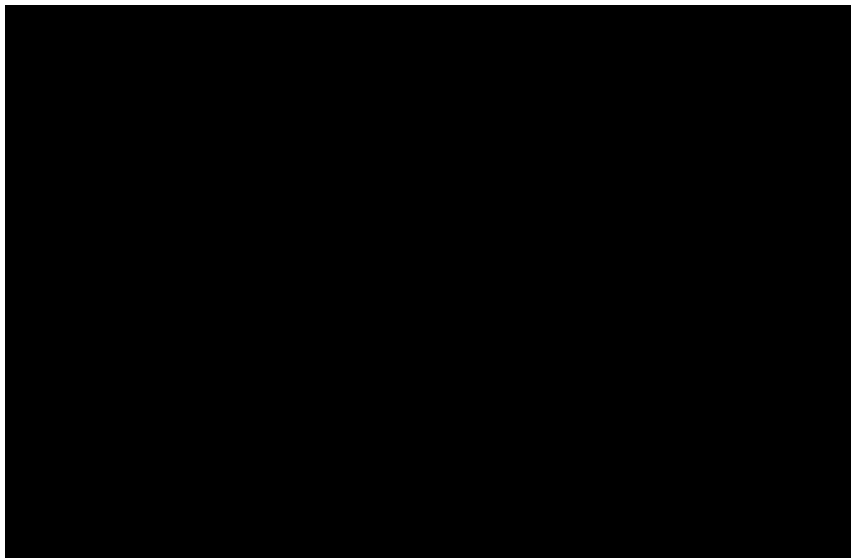
It seems from a study of Scripture and history that God sovereignly grants miracles to (i) establish a new season in redemptive history (the Exodus, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the era of Prophets, the era of the Messiah, the Church, the Reformation, the Charismatic Renewal) and, (ii) where there is extreme demonic activity opposing His redemptive purpose. While cessationists (those who believe that the era of miracles ceased with the close of the Canon of Scripture in the first century AD) may dispute the assertion that God still grants miracles today (such as a subsequent experience for the believer with the Holy Spirit resulting in glossolalia - *speaking in tongues*), the evidence seems to be against their position.

Sometimes a miracle is a matter of interpretation. Take the examples of two men in our church: When a cancer patient (Brian) who has been given only a few months to live is prayed for in the Name of Jesus to be healed, and he goes on to live another 6 years, is that a miracle? When a young man (Michael) with a debilitating yeast intolerance which had hospitalised him throughout his childhood is prayed for and instantly healed (he had a

beer to celebrate!), is that a miracle? Atheists may dismiss these ‘miracles’ as merely “mind over matter” or the “power of positive thinking”. Cessationists on the other hand often (curiously) dismiss these claims of miracles as being demonic (apparently they have no trouble with the concept of the Devil doing pseudo-miracles today). But ask the recipient of these ‘miracles’ whether they think they have received a miracle or not and the answer is an emphatic: *yes*.

Arguably the most aggressive assault on Christianity is not coming from the *New Atheists*. For all their shrill, the Polls show us that the proportion of atheists to theists has actually remained unchanged over the past twenty or so years. When it comes to the New Atheists, it’s not their numbers which give them volume, it’s their daring. Rather, the most forceful challenge to Christianity is coming from Islam. And a strange thing is happening at the moment in the regions of the world where Islam is most dominant and vociferous in its opposition to Christianity: miracles pointing to Christ are occurring in unprecedented frequency.

I have a friend who works in such a region as the Principal of a Bible College. He reports that just in the areas surrounding his college there are hundreds of Muslims who experiencing miraculous phenomena, such as healing, visions, dreams of Christ speaking directly to them, that is resulting in their coming to Christ as Saviour. According to Father Zacharias Botros, an Egyptian Coptic Priest, there are now more Muslims converting to Christianity than any other time in history. Miracles play a large part in this.



“More Muslims have come to Christ in the last three decades than in the last three centuries combined!”

Father Zacharias Botros, 2010

Pentecostals understand miracles to be the result of faith in God. They don't limit openness to miracles to just redemptive seasons or responding to spiritual opposition, they believe that God can grant miracles in response to praying in faith. Some even go so far as to teach that when Christ died on the Cross, His death was not just to save people, it was to miraculously heal people also. This belief is known as *Healing In The Atonement*. But the new breed of Pentecostal Apologists who value miracles as signs and wonders challenge both of these Pentecostal assumptions. Rather than miracles being regarded as God responding to faith, miracles are a display of God's *grace*. Instead of viewing the Cross, Christ's Atonement, as incorporating physical healing as a miraculous right for the believer, they limit the Cross to the atonement for *sins* and therefore interpret passages referring to Christ's suffering bringing 'healing' as referring to spiritual healing (atonement for sins).

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

1Peter 2:24

Because Pentecostals are open to God revealing His will directly, they are more prone to a lack of discernment when it comes to wild claims of God outpouring His Spirit in a way that causes people to behave extremely childishly or even irrationally (such as barking like dogs, crowing like roosters, or moving uncontrollably at random moments). But the new breed of Pentecostal Apologists place a high degree of currency in spiritual discernment. Without automatically dismissing such things, they apply certain discernment tests (1Thess. 5:21) to ascertain whether such things are really of God or perhaps the result of suggestion, crowd manipulation, hyper-emotionalism and the like.

DOING PENTECOSTAL APOLOGETICS TODAY

People believe the claims of the Bible for different reasons. Some accept the claims of the Bible because the evidence from history, science, philosophy, and logic comports with it. Others believe it for social reasons - they have observed a genuine conversion or genuine follower of Christ and attracted to Christ as a result. Others believe because they witness a miracle - the miracle acts a sign and a wonder. Others believe because they experience an undeniable miracle. This was the case with the Saul of Tarsus who vigorously denied the claims of Christ and His Christians but then experienced a miracle encounter with this Christ.

When the Fundamentalist Christian does apologetics they have the problem of presenting an incoherent picture of truth - that is, they cannot integrate the truth of science, philosophy, history, with their interpretation of Scripture. When the Evangelical does apologetics they have the problem of largely basing their appeal to reason or social persuasion. But the Pentecostal, who takes the best of Evangelical reasoning, is able to present a coherent picture of truth with the potential for the added dimension of supernatural confirmation.

This emerging Pentecostal Apologetics values logic, reason, philosophy, history, sciences, and the inerrancy of Scripture. But they have also learned to incorporate a divinely supernatural dimension to their presentation. This begins in their own soul where they experience an empowering from the Holy Spirit subsequent to their conversion. It continues as they learn to discern the Holy Spirit's leading. It is developed as they walk in faith by praying for the sick and speaking words of knowledge. And it is undergirded as they pray in the Spirit for the God of Miracles to reveal Himself in supernatural ways to those who do not yet know Christ.

Over the past few years I have had the opportunity to deliver apologetic presentations in four continents. Before I speak, I seek. In over 20 years of preaching ministry I have rarely shared the same message twice. I seek God for what He wants to say to a particular church at that moment and then customize a teaching/apologetic message for them. As I deliver this message I am remaining sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. I pray that as I teach and preach that God will speak supernaturally into the hearts of my hearers in a way that to them it is undeniably God revealing something to them. This is followed by prayer for the sick and needy. Based on the testimonies I receive back from such visits, it is apparent to me that the God of miracles still answers with miracles today.

“There are two ways to live: you can live as if nothing is a miracle: you can live as if everything is a miracle”

Albert Einstein

BECOMING A NEW BREED PENTECOSTAL APOLOGIST

Christian Apologetics is about defending the claims of the Bible and giving good reasons to believe in the God of the Bible. For too long many Pentecostals have shunned or even ridiculed Evidential Apologetics (giving a coherent picture of truth in support of Scripture). Without being able to put a label on it, many Pentecostals would actually favour Presuppositional Apologetics. Ironically even those who reject Evidential Apologetics in favour of Presuppositional Apologetics (the belief that unless God has already opened the heart of the unregenerate no amount of evidence will ever persuade them) have their *reasons* for saying that *reasons* are not necessary. In a moment I'm going to argue for Presuppositional Apologetics in concert with Evidential Apologetics.

Why is Apologetics important? It's time now to realise that in the West, more people are walking away from Christianity than are joining it. Why are they walking away from belief in the God of the Bible?

Firstly, Christianity has been presented in an incoherent manner to them. They cannot integrate faith and reason. They see the Bible and science as contradictory.

Secondly, their experience of Christianity was supernaturally unsatisfying. Conversion to Christ was presented to them as a purely intellectual enterprise. Prayer was dismissed and relieved of its supernatural potential. Miracles were relegated to a by-gone era.

Apologetics is therefore necessary to go some of the way to stemming the tide of Christian decline. Since Pentecostals form the emerging majority of Christians the need for Pentecostal Apologetics is all the more urgent because in the coming years a new generation of Pentecostals will be exposed to the onslaught of unprecedented intellectual attacks upon their faith. This is why we need a new breed Pentecostal Apologists who can give a reasoned defence of the faith in the God of the Bible complemented by a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;

Rom. 15:19

and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

1Cor. 2:4

because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

1Thess. 1:5

The kind of Pentecostal Apologist called for now is one who is -

- Grounded in the classic reasoning for Christianity, theologically and philosophically
- Conversant with the belief systems of the world's major religions
- Qualified in the art and science of Hermeneutics
- Able to integrate the record of nature with the record of Scripture in a coherent fashion
- In a living relationship with Christ through the infilling of the Holy Spirit
- Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit subsequent to their regeneration
- Persuaded of the reality of the charismatic expression of the Holy Spirit's gifts for today
- Bold enough to step out wisely in faith as a conduit for the power of the Holy Spirit to demonstrate His miraculous power and grace

This is a call for such a breed of Pentecostal Apologists who can demonstrate the power of 'Pentecostal' Apologetics.

Dr. Andrew Corbett

www.findingtruthmatters.org

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