

Can the New Perspective be a New Apologia?

In my current role I get to spend a lot of time at the interaction between public discourse, the thought-life and momenta of culture, and the application of Christian theology and devotion. It's a muddled space to play with a lot of speaking at cross purposes and a fast reducing amount of common ground.



I've reached a point of both frustration and passion.

The frustration comes from the level of misunderstanding and presumption that exists, particularly about how others view Christians and Christian thought. Our philosophical framework is ignored, our motivations are questioned, and our ambitions rejected. This is very understandable. As a friend of mine articulated to me recently "We Christians are like bad students. The world is asking the same questions, and being frustrated by its same lack of answers, and we come along and say 'The answer is JAY-sus.' And we don't bother to show our working."

"We don't bother to show our working." Yep. And ouch.

Over the ages there have been those that seek to show our "working out." These are the *apologists* (from the word *apologia* which means 'a formal written defense of one's opinions or conduct' which is synonymous with *apology* but you can't use that because it sounds like you're sorry for something...) And so the "first" apologist, Justin Martyr, showed his "working out" of the reasonableness (in both the moral and logical sense) Christianity in a context while

defending against some common misunderstandings of Christians.

Many centuries later on we have those that defend against the rationalism and modernist experiment of the Enlightenment.

And more recently some engagement with postmodernity (although I find many of these are delivering an apology for modernity, not Christianity, but that's another topic...)

I am simply not satisfied with the depths of our current apologia. A *defense* is a *responsive* exercise that is necessarily shaped by the context and the audience. We either ignore that context and audience and do the stereotypical bible bash; or we misunderstand our context and audience to the point of being rendered irrelevant.

So I am thirsty to *understand* our context. I've been reading some books that have engaged with philosophical theories that were fomenting in the mid 20th Century. The little I could quickly grasp gave me that "aha" moment: "*This* is where they are coming from, this is why they are saying, doing, teaching this and that. *This* is how they hear us when we say..." etc. etc.

So my resolution is this: **To learn more.** I want to join in with the unpacking of the Western World philosophically (and perhaps sociologically). I want to read a book a week from the ***top ten primary sources that have shaped or describe the Western World.***

Any recommendations?

Similarly, the passion, derives from an utter commitment that the gospel is, well, good news. And remains so. I have always aspired to be as kerygmatic (from the word *kerygma* which means 'proclamation') as possible. The gospel is gospel only when it is proclaimed. The gospel demands kerygma.

Effective kerygma is thus a combination of hermeneutic, homiletic, and applied ethics in which the gospel connects and enlivens the surrounding context.

In recent times the best kerygma I have witnessed (in my slight reading) has come from the school of thought that has been tagged as the “New Perspectives on Paul.” This is the stuff of Krister Stendahl and N.T. Wright and in my mind speaks to a framework that is high levels of realism. It emphasises community and activity, not simply as conceptual responses to revelational truth, but as innate fundamentals of divine historical interaction with the world.

My hunch is that there is an apologetic connection between New Perspectives and the currents of Western thinking which has not yet been fully explored – but could bear fruit if it was.

I want to see if this is true. **I want to learn more.** I want to read a book a week ***from the top ten expositions New Perspectives commentary.***

Any recommendations?

I’ll let you know how it goes.