

## John Milbank

### *An Apologia for Apologetics\**

*The exercise of philosophical judgement requires attention to an apologetics, that is usually uttered by faith. In the case of Christian theology apologetics is central rather than secondary. It involves a defensive narrative of the exceptional life of the God-Man and of other lives lived in his wake. The invocation of reason by this narrative implies a certain apophatic reserve as to the nature of the witness of these lives and this same reserve permits a counter-apologetic for the purposes of this world: a conceptual space in which it can state its case. Christian apologetic in fact expounds itself both as a pointing away from the world of human theory and human politics and a recognition of the necessary mediating role of this world. It is therefore caught in a tension in which it must to an extent deploy reason and deploy power, yet at the same time can only remain true to its exceptional witness if it cleaves to the personal dimension of the apologia which allows itself to be guided by both feeling and the imagination. Sometimes this has been best grasped by Christian poets, as I try to illustrate.*

The philosophical question of judgement is preceded by the rhetorical and forensic question of advocacy: of prosecution and defence. And if there was only the former, then prosecution could proceed to action on its own account, though that action could be genuinely neither distributive nor corrective. So the exercise of judgement, whether in court or in the academy, requires a listening to the case for the defence. It requires an attention to the case for the defence which is an *apologia*. And the science of putting forward a case for the defence is the science of ‘apologetics’ – a science arguably prior to the science of philosophy, which is concerned with the rendering of judgements, whether about given reality or about proposed activity.

It is in this respect significant that ‘apologetics’ has from the outset been considered a crucial aspect of theology: since mere faith has been held to require a ‘defence’ which reason does not require since it speaks for itself, with its own authority and proffers the discourse within which any case, any defence must be made. However, when reason speaks purely on its own behalf, it is unable to make any substantial, as opposed to a merely formally consistent case, whatsoever.

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Were it to pretend to judge substantial issues purely on its own behalf it would morph into the opposite mode of a self-sufficient and thereby criminally anarchic 'prosecutor' who acts before and outside the rendering of judgement. So although precarious, and though forced to occupy the alien ground of reason, the role of faith, which always seems to require an apology, may be held to be fundamental for the substantial speculative and practical concerns of human existence.

However, the notion of 'apologetics' now has unfortunate connotations. Demotically it suggests at worse saying sorry, at best a defence of a doubtful or compromised position. Technically it has come to mean a theologically secondary exercise: not the exposition of the faith, but the defence of the faith on grounds other than faith – on one's opponent's territory, where one risks remaining in a weak or even a false position. The best that such a posture can hope to achieve would be the occasional demonstration that one's adversary has somehow missed the authentic wider ground of her own standing. But calling this very standing into doubt would appear to be beyond the apologetic remit.

For these reasons apologetics often fell into disfavour within 20<sup>th</sup> C theology. Instead, what was recommended was an authentic exposition of faith, capable of persuading the non-believer to start to inhabit the alternative world which that exposition can invoke. In this light apologetics appeared to be a compromised exercise, unlikely in any case to succeed. And yet, the latter assumption was belied by the wide popular reach of some apologetic writing, most notably that of C.S. Lewis – the sign of the success of his *Screwtape Letters* being that they were often much admired even by those whom they did not convince. Meanwhile, the recent rise of the 'new atheism' has left many ordinary Christians feeling that they need the assistance of an upgraded apologetic weaponry in the face of newly aggressive scientific assaults.

For both these reasons the time seems ripe to reconsider the apologetic role. And perhaps the first question to ask here is whether this role is really a secondary and subsidiary one after all? Perhaps the exposition of faith always includes an apologetic dimension? This might suggest that any successful exercise of apologetics, like indeed that of Lewis, must contain a strong confessional element which convinces precisely because it persuades through the force of an imaginative presentation of belief. Conversely, however, this possibility would equally suggest that confession has to include a reasoned claim, just as 'argument' denotes both the plot of a narrative and the sequential unfolding of a logical case.

A brief glance at the history of the relationship between Christianity and apologetics supplies immediately a positive answer to this question. *Apolegein* in Greek means 'to tell fully' and therefore simply *to narrate*, with a fullness that is acquired from a slightly detached perspective, as indicated by the prefix '*apo*' meaning 'away from', 'off', or 'standing apart'. Therefore the very word would suggest that an *apologia* is the primary narrative testament of faith, yet with the interesting proviso that even an initial, committed, heartfelt, interior-derived confession must already stand somewhat apart from itself, rendering a reflexively felt judgement upon the spontaneously felt commitment to the triune God and the incarnate *Logos*. From the very outset, therefore, the '*apo*' in 'apologetics' calls

to mind the ‘*apo*’ in ‘apophatic’ – etymologically the ‘away-disclosure’ of negative theology, or that caution in the face of mystery which alone allows a genuine adherence to mystery’s manifestation.

More specifically, as already mentioned, *apologia* in ancient Greece referred primarily to the defence speech spoken at a trial, in contrast to the *kategoria* proffered by the prosecution. This pairing shows that the echo of ‘apophatic’ is matched by the echoing of the term for the prosecuting case by the term for positive theology: *kataphasis* or ‘down-disclosure’. In either case one has the sense of something being ‘pinned-down’, at least provisionally ‘located’. One can think here of our word ‘category’, but also of our word ‘catalogue’ since this derives from the more etymologically precise, if not legally opposite number to *apolegein*, namely *katalegein*, meaning to pick out, enlist, enrol, include, enumerate. So a ‘catalogue’ of one’s life or views on life might be a list of isolated events, achievements and propositions – unlike an *apologia* it would *neither* be a sequential story, nor a provisional attempt objectively to assess oneself and one’s commitments.

Perhaps surprisingly then, if an *apologia* is indeed an argument, it is also a narrative, and if it attempts to be detached, this is only because it springs from the most authentic heart of interior commitment.

And this turns out to be true of the three most famous legal defences in Western history, which are the three original sources for the true sense of Christian apologetics. First there is the *apologia* of Socrates as written by Plato. This was a defence before the city not only of the quest for a truth that is prior to the city’s foundation, but also of a certain unknowing as the condition for that quest which is not abolished by the quest’s partial achievement.

Secondly, there is the defence of Jesus before Pilate. Here we have a denial by Jesus that he is a worldly rebel against the city, but, as with Socrates, the affirmation (at least in John’s gospel) that he is witness to a truth beyond the city and beyond this world. But in excess of Socrates Jesus claims to be in some sense the King of an unworldly kingdom. Whether or not he is thereby the ‘King of the Jews’ he mysteriously leaves in the hands of human acclamation (Mathew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:34). Beyond these points his defence is his silence and he does not elucidate Pilate’s query as to the nature of truth (John 18:28-38).

In the case of both Socrates and Christ, therefore, their teaching is accentuated and has to ‘re-commence’ as a *defence* before it can be an affirmation, precisely because it concerns a truth beyond all known legal and cosmic bounds, and therefore a truth that is threatened with legal and scientific exclusion. In speaking for the truth Socrates is consequently threatened by the city with death. In identifying himself as the truth and as the real ruler with a kind of casual indifference to the city’s norms, Christ is likewise threatened with legal execution.

The third defence is that conducted by Paul before Festus and Agrippa in the book of *Acts* (Acts 25-26). This is explicitly described as an *apologia* (Acts 26:2). Paul’s speech is at once a narration of his life, a justification of his learning and status, a ‘saying sorry’ for what he has done in persecuting Christians, including a certain ‘excuse’ in terms of his rigid Pharisaic commitment, and a confession of his faith in Christ. The ‘full narration’ of the latter includes most spectacularly

Paul's account of his vision of the resurrected Christ and hearing of his words. So at this point his 'apologetics' contains a highly 'cataphatic' moment in which a vision 'comes down' to him in the middle of his journey. One could say that the inclusion of this moment indicates how an apologetic discourse which is primarily a narrative and a detached assessment can suddenly reach for the positive hymnic testament of the disclosing imagination and reception of apostrophising address. It is, one might suggest, the interweaving of all these things in Paul's speech which is convincing.

In all three cases then, 'apology' turns out to be *theologico-political* in some fundamental and constitutive sense. And yet this sense is thoroughly ambivalent: it involves a certain appeal beyond the city which is, and yet is not, against the city, which is indeed in some measure in its support, but which also leaves the city behind in its own vanity. What we have here is an apology *for the ultimate* and for the primacy of the ultimate over the quotidian. And yet there is a certain caution in this apology, even a hesitating shyness. For no claim can be made fully to present the ultimate here and now, even in the case of Christ wherein God is fully shown and yet still secreted for the present, since he is manifest in a limited human being. Hence the everyday and the customs and laws of the everyday remain respected even where they are condemned with ironical extremity.

Of the three defendants, Paul is of course the most forthright. And yet an aspect of reserved submission is shown in his request to be taken before Caesar, although it is clear that he would have been discharged by Agrippa and Festus. Rather than this being merely to do with the superficialities of pride in Roman citizenship, it is as if Paul is saying at this point that this contestation must now be between Christ and Caesar, between the Kingdom of heaven and the Roman imperial legacy. And yet this contestation ends in *Acts* with the banal anticlimax of Paul's long house-arrest in Rome – as though to say, this contestation is only just begun and will define the age between now and the final apocalypse.

In this respect, should we see it as merely accidental (symbolically and theologically) that the Caesar Augustus to whom St Paul submitted, the Emperor Nero, was the fourth successor to that first Augustus Caesar in the Julio-Claudian dynasty who, uniquely amongst emperors, left an *apologia* enscribed upon pillars of bronze outside his tomb: the *Res Gestae Divi Augustus*? As if the historical irruption of defence against the city in the name of the eternal, beginning with the Incarnation during the first Augustus's reign, had already incited in *riposte* a new sense of the need to apologise for political coercion – whether by the internal judiciary or the external expropriations and military police actions of warfare? The Christian event would at once require such a counter-apologetics (a kind of novel 'defence of the prosecution') though bring it under extreme suspicion and yet again – given the reserve before quotidian law of the three defendants – not necessarily be always able to deny its cogency.

Apology as narrative, argument, confession and imaginative witness *by the human person* in the exceptional name of divine personality against the hitherto uniform impersonality of the city – that is the very heart of Christian theology. This is why it *began*, with Paul, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus as 'apologetics' – not just

against pagan accusations and misconceptions, but also in continued expansion of Paul's defence of the God-Man, the infinite personality made flesh, before a human jurisdiction. A defence that continues, after Paul, to be a witness to the real eternal life of Christ's spirit, soul and body as untouchable by either time or finite verdict. But a defence that must therefore begin to elaborate an entire metaphysical vision that seeks to imagine a reality in which all is divine gift; in which all creatures belong to an eternal kingdom that will overcome every kingdom of this world.

The point then is that Christianity is a refusal to allow that the three trials are over, because they *always were secretly cosmic trials*. And because they are, still, cosmic trials, the act of political defence must here take the form of a new elaboration of metaphysics, as commenced by Plato, but now in terms of the disclosure of God as personal because interpersonal, and as assuming into himself his creation through his entire inclusion of one human being into the personhood of the divine Son. Thus in the course of his *Apologeticus* Tertullian first defined Christianity as *vera religione*, in a new linking of cult with philosophy that Augustine will later much further elaborate. Eventually it will have to be shown how this metaphysics – Christian *sacra doctrina* – better saves the appearances of everyday reality than does any other doctrine.

For it is at this point that the apophatic Christian *apologia*, out of its own internal structure, always *makes room for* the counter-apologetics for the quotidian. Jesus allows Pilate's questioning of truth to have the last word, precisely because he has not, as yet, fully answered this question; because the questioning still goes on and is even most radically instigated by the enigmatic presence of the truth in person. For since Christianity is not Gnosticism or Marcionism, its qualified world-refusal will, even at the *eschaton*, allow the world a place, including a place for political law, in the sense of positive just distribution which the fulfilment of love itself requires. As W.H. Auden wrote, quoting Franz Kafka: 'God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph'<sup>1</sup>. At the end, indeed, the need for law as negative coercion and appeal to people's lesser or even base instincts will vanish; yet for now even this must be accorded some respect, else the innocent will not be able to live in freedom and true *apologias* will not be granted the civilised space in which they can be made.

What we are beginning to see then is that there are two seemingly contradictory things that must be said about the apologetic process. In the first place it is not that weazly, insidiously weak thing that so many imagine: rather it is bold proclamation and confession in the face of extreme danger. It lies at the very heart of faith and of theology. And yet, after all, in the second place, it introduces into that heart something complexly cautious and even ambivalent. It is indeed imaginative vision, but it is also apophatic reserve. As imaginative vision it instigates a new self-distancing of the world from the world's self – a felt need to render a counter-apology. And yet as apophatic reserve latter it allows the world and the city of this

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Auden, 'For the Time Being: a Christmas Oratorio', in *Collected Poems*, Vintage, New York 1991, p. 400.

world also to make a continued self-affirmation – albeit provisionally and only up to a point. This affirmation lies ‘outside’ theology – it is that with which theology is in apologetic dialogue – and yet, more fundamentally, it is not outside theology at all. For the distancing of the world and the city from itself is the difference made to it by theology, and in this very difference theology is able to sketch certain further more positive imaginings of the divine. The initial world-refusing here turns out to be a compassionate world-understanding that is yet more ultimately a world-transfiguring.

In the history of the English language, ‘apology’ initially meant defence; then it came to mean ‘excuse’; later still ‘acknowledgment of offence’ and finally, also, ‘a poor substitute’. And yet this entire development, one could claim, was always latent in the Greek sense of the word and its application in the course of the three trials. It has already the sense of ‘excuse’ for Paul in *Romans* (Romans 1:20 – the pagans are without any), while admission of the *appearance* of public offence is assumed by the legal settings. Finally, Jesus died because the crowd saw him as but a ‘poor substitute’ for Barabbas – ‘a mere apology of a law-breaker’, if you like – even though he was in reality the richest possible substitute for all of humankind.

All this negativity of connotation is indeed only breached and rendered convincing by our witness to this substitute for ourselves: the very instance of our positive imaginative envisionings of Christ. The procurator of Judea, Porcius Festus, already recognised the bizarre coincidence of cautious reflection and exorbitant claim involved in Christian *apologia* when he expostulated to Paul, ‘thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad’. To which Paul, who has just recounted the extraordinary events on the road to Damascus, implausibly replies, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness’ (Acts 26:24-25).

Indeed we have seen how Paul nomadically located himself between the *élan* of personal vision and the allowance for the role of Roman judgement, just as in *Acts* he also allows for the role of Greek philosophical testament to the participated and parental God ‘in whom we live and move and have our being’ and of whom we are natural ‘offspring’ (Acts: 17:28). And I have tried to argue how this shifting location between the defence *against* the world on the one hand, and defence *of* worldly *nomos* and worldly *logos* on the other, is not really a tension between Christianity and something else, but rather a tension constitutive of Christianity itself as refusing the Gnostic or the Marcionite path.

Perhaps no-one grasped this with more unsettling subtlety than the Victorian poet Robert Browning. Nearly all his characteristic dramatic monologues take the form (in some measure) of apologies, which are never without extreme ambiguity. In his first long poem, *Paracelsus*, the message would seem to be that the speaking protagonist has tried to perfect the human race through power under the inspiration of romantic love, while wrongly despising the little that can be made of faint loves or even hates that conceal an unadmitted love at their hearts. And yet he is brought to the realisation that he is ‘from the over-radiant star too mad/ to drink the light-springs’ by one ‘Festus’, whose very name surely invites caution in the reader who recalls *Acts* and another eponymous diagnostician of supposed insanity. This surely

further invites her to read Paracelsus' final hope for a day when human advance through a mere refusal of the worst will be surpassed, and his own offer of full 'splendour' can be admitted on earth, as truly belonging to Christian eschatology parsed in terms of a magical or technological release of all natural powers<sup>2</sup>.

But in other poems by Browning this order of apologetic and of suspicious counter-apologetic is exactly reversed. Thus in *Fra Lippo Lippi* the painter protagonist offers us a counter-apology for his sensual inability to paint soul and spiritual symbol by persuasively suggesting that our only human way to these things must be through physical beauty, and that we need to be constantly reminded of this by a humbly mimetic art<sup>3</sup>. More complexly, in *Bishop Bloughram's Apology*, Browning's supposed satire on Cardinal Wiseman, we are drawn into a smug contempt for the Bishop's defence of a half-belief ensuring his own worldly comfort far more readily than any other *metier*, only to be drawn up short by the circumstance that this very crassness has given him an insight into the 'dangerous edge of things/The honest thief, the tender murderer,/The superstitious atheist, demirep/That loves and saves her soul in new French books'<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, we are easily led to despise Bloughram's offering to people of semimythological consolation, only to be once again surprised by his profundity in the face of the implications of the modern scientific outlook when he suggests that if we lose the idea of Pan's face appearing in the clouds, we will soon lose also our belief in the reality of the clouds themselves<sup>5</sup>.

Bloughram proves himself to be, despite everything, in this Protestant satire, the Catholic spokesperson for the half-hints of the sacramental and the halting virtue of the ceaseless resort to the confessional, which is perhaps why Wiseman famously did not take offence and later a Catholic novelist, Graham Greene, could make Brougham's 'interest' on the 'dangerous edge' his very own. And yet of course this *apologia* for the unsatisfactory remains, in the end, precisely unsatisfactory, and has to be tempered by Paracelsus's reformed and alchemical *apologia* for the marvellous, the ideal and the utopianly transformative, despite his eventual admittance of Festus's tempering of this vision in terms of the prerogatives of the gradual and the partial.

This authentic Christian fusion and balancing of the apologetic and the counter-apologetic insofar as *both* are elements of apologetic itself (this being another version of the oscillation of the apophatic and the cataphatic) stands in stark contrast to the pathos of false apologetic as satirised by Browning in his *Caliban upon Setebos*, where the blind monster provides a 'natural theology' of his god, based merely

2 R. Browning, 'Paracelsus', Book V, in *Poems of Robert Browning*, OUP, London 1912, p. 498.

3 Browning, 'Fra Filippo Lippi' in *Browning: a Selection*, ed W.E. Williams Penguin, Harmondsworth 1974, pp. 194-206.

4 Browning, 'Bishop Bloughram's Apology' in *Browning: a Selection*, pp. 220-251; this quotation p. 232.

5 'Bishop Bloughram's Apology', p. 247.

upon projections from his own sensory experience and self-centred cravings<sup>6</sup>. All he can do on this basis is reason to a god who has created out of boredom and a need to exercise a playful cruelty. Imagination does *not* enter into this, except at the point where Caliban postulates a 'Quiet' beyond Setebos, whose goodness amounts at most to an indifference, at worse a favouring of Setebos alone – though Caliban recalls a rumour that Setebos may be demiurgically 'vexing' the Quiet. All merely natural theology, Browning implies, which falsely and idolatrously poses as a necessary adjunct to natural science (as if divine and material causality lay on the same univocal plane) is idolatrously like this, risking a reactive inversion to a Gnostic demonisation of the material cosmos. By contrast, Bloughram is cynically nearer a genuinely pious consideration when he suggests that the creation exists in order to conceal God and prevent us from a premature confrontation that would be too overwhelming to survive<sup>7</sup>.

Instead of such a falsely 'neutral' approach (and one can think here of the folly of much 'science and religion' debate in our own day) which accepts without question the terms and terminology of this world, we need a mode of apologetics prepared to question the world's assumptions down to their very roots and to expose how they lie within paganism, heterodoxy or else an atheism with no ground in reason and a tendency to deny the ontological reality of reason altogether.

But such a mode of apologetics does not pretend that we have any access to what lies beyond the world save through the world and its analogical participation in that beyond. For this reason its mode is bound to be, like Browning's idiom, fragmentary and 'spasmodic' (to use the term applied to the now forgotten literary school which he largely despised and yet to which he himself undoubtedly helped to give rise). And yet, through and beyond our human spasms, this participation is consummated in the Incarnation where God and the world become one through a specific point and event of identification. And it is here that God himself in human guise offers an *apologia* for himself in both word and deed.

Christian apologetics must therefore always remain Christological. And this means true to an uncompromising offer of splendour which has once (unlike Paracelsus's pretensions) had the full divine power on earth, mediated from the outset by a sublime patience (which Paracelsus had to learn), of magical transformation of all things through mere verbal utterance – a power that is still faintly transmitted to us through the ecclesial offices. And yet true also to the memory of the refusal of this power by the world and its law and wisdom, and true once more to Christ's refusal violently to respond to this refusal – in the interests of a complete persuasive and demonstrative overcoming of this refusal in the end.

Since the time of this founding event, the Church has been adjured to remain faithful both to Christ's offer and to his refusal of violence in the face of rejection by the world, whose sphere of legitimacy he also recognised. But after the inevitability

6 R. Browning, 'Caliban upon Setebos; Or, Natural Theology in the Island', in *Poems of Robert Browning*, pp. 650-655.

7 'Bishop Bloughram's Apology', pp. 240-241.

of the Constantinian moment, the Church has had fully to realise that the counter-apologetic belongs also to the apologetic and that the frailties of the human physical vessel, unlike the auto-rising body of the God-Man (since the power of the Trinity is undivided) means that the true interests of the human spirit cannot be entirely disentangled from the need to defend and keep the space of civil peace and order – think, for instance of the case of systematic attacks upon sacred buildings, whether by terrorists or regular forces<sup>8</sup>. The Church has tried to avoid and minimise coercive defence of its own polity, and must hold to the ultimate witness of preparedness to die for the eternal truth which needs not worldly defence, yet in the penultimate secular finality of crisis, the fate of State and Church, of physical survival and the very possibility of offering salvation here on earth have proven to be ineluctably and by no means altogether improperly bound up together.

In like mode, while the truths of the Creation, the Incarnation, the Trinity and of Grace, are replete of themselves, they complete and safeguard rather than destroy our sense of natural order and human dignity. This means that they themselves presume such a defence, and therefore that belief in these supernatural truths cannot survive the threatened collapse of the ordinary and perennial human belief in soul, mind and will, and its intuition of a teleological purposiveness in all existing things.

For this reason today apologetics, which is to say Christian theology as such, faces the integral task of at once defending the faith and also of defending a true politics of civic virtue (rooted in Platonic and Aristotelian assumptions), besides a renewed metaphysics of cosmic hierarchy and participatory order.

Yet today also we have a more specific sense that such a metaphysics was lost through an assumption that the only ‘reason’ which discloses truth is a cold, detached reason that is isolated from both feeling and imagination, as likewise from both narrative and ethical evaluation. Christian apologetics now needs rather to embrace the opposite assumption that our most visionary and ideal insights can most disclose the real, provided that this is accompanied by a widening in democratic scope of our sympathies for the ordinary, and the capacities and vast implications of the quotidian – like the road running outside our house which beckons to endless unknown vistas.

It is of course just this combination (and indeed this very image of the open road) which was recommended by the Romantic poet William Wordsworth who provided (like Browning later) such an inspiration for 19<sup>th</sup> C. Anglicanism and for the new *apologia* for the ancient faith in the face of English civil distortions by the Oxford

8 No clear distinction between a ‘just’ and a ‘holy’ conflict was ever made before the early modern era, when the distinction then coincides with a dubious downgrading of international justice to merely procedural and not substantive criteria, even though Christianity did not, like Islam, usually or authentically (in Christian theological terms) endorse holy wars for purposes of religious expansion – the Crusades being – understandably, given the initial circumstances – viewed as a defensive enterprise. See J. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity and Islam*, Columbia UP, New York 2008 and J. Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: a Moral and Historical Inquiry*, Princeton UP, Princeton NJ 1981.

Movement. As Simon Jarvis has pointed out, Wordsworth's own poetic apology, *The Prelude*, reaches a point of consummation when he remembers himself, standing above the mists of the mountaintops in Snowdonia, as coming to the realisation that the power of the imagination, which is the whole force of the mind, is something that belongs objectively within nature as its very core and key to its underlying enigma:

'The universal spectacle throughout  
Was shaped for admiration and delight,  
Grand in itself alone, but in that breach  
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,  
That deep, dark thoroughfare, had nature lodged  
The soul, the imagination of the whole'.<sup>9</sup>

What Wordsworth here glimpses is an image of the imagination itself: within nature we often see a 'domination' revealed, or else one overwhelmingly impressive object, both of which call attention to the usually concealed primacy of *natura naturans* over *natura naturata*. It is this very shaping power which is most acutely shown in the natural object 'humanity', within whom, as 'the imagination', it similarly stands out in dominance over all other intellectual capacities. It is the imagination which intuits 'the underpresence' of God and can 'build up greatest things/From least suggestions', being 'quickened' but not 'enthralled' by 'sensible impressions' and 'made thereby more fit/ To hold communion with the invisible world'. It is this power which gives rise to religion and faith which concerns an attuned 'Emotion which best foresight need not fear/ Most worthy then of trust when most intense'<sup>10</sup>.

As with Paul then, it is the true exercise of the imagination which induces a paradoxically sober *furor* and guides and cautions our discursive judgement. But the vision of human imagination in the mountain cleft most truly attains Wordsworth's desired collapse of the subjective into the objective and vice-versa, when it is the vision of Christ, the God-Man who exercised for our redemption the supreme imaginative act of recreation here on earth<sup>11</sup>.

A true apologetics negatively defends this imaginative action against assault by positively perpetuating its performance. It is this task we should seek to renew in our time.

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9 W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude: the Four Texts* [1798, 1799, 8105, 1850], Penguin, London 1995), [1805 version], Book XIII, pp. 60-65, p. 512; S. Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song*, CUP, Cambridge 2007, pp. 214-223.

10 W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude* [1805], Book XIII, 66-122, pp. 514-516.

11 See S. Medcalf, 'The Coincidence of Myth and Fact', in *The Spirit of England: Selected Essays of Stephen Medcalf*, ed. B. Cummings and G. Josipovici, Legenda, London 2010, pp. 20-40.

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