

## A Critique of the Evidentialist Apologetical Method of John Warwick Montgomery

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By means of three parables J. W. Montgomery attempts to supply some reason for drawing back from presuppositional apologetics.[\[1\]](#) After examining his critique of Van Til's position, we shall turn to a (non-parabolic) analysis of Montgomery's own.

### A. A Non-Telling Parabolic Critique

It is quite important when one is defending his position against criticism which comes in the form of a parable to make sure, at the outset, that the parable is not in fact a parody which counterfeits his position. That is, quite simply, the argumentative parable must be appropriate to the question at hand; it must accurately reflect the point of view being criticized. For instance, one gets himself into a very misguided tangle if he, when confronted with John Wisdom's parable of the gardener as used by Antony Flew, does not begin by pointing out that, contrary to the terms in which the story is told, the evidence for God's existence is far from ambiguous or vague. The Christian contention is in fact that the evidence for God's existence is unavoidable and clear, so much so that all men are without excuse for rebellion against the truth about God. Now that puts things in a much different light than the parable would suggest. Thus one must not be deceived by clever stories into arguing a modified form of his position. Parables are not themselves to be ruled out as argumentative instruments, but as with any such instrument, they must be properly and appropriately used.

#### 1. Seeing Through Tlon

This brings us to the first parable used by J. W. Montgomery against Van Til. It is an interesting story, but after all inappropriate and, thereby, inconsequential as an argument against presuppositionalism. In the first place, unlike Montgomery's story, the non-Christian does *not*, in fact, have the ability systematically to falsify the world as it reveals the living and true God. In his suppression of the truth every unbeliever is *inconsistent* (and if he were not, this would be the crack of doom); thus in actual practice the non-Christian escapes what, in principle, would be his total inability to interpret things properly according to his espoused presuppositions. Secondly, contrary to Montgomery's allegation, in the presuppositionalist outlook the "facts" *are* indeed powerful to stop the non-Christian's falsifying interpretation - that is, no one can make "reality yield." However, the state of affairs in the world (even as revelatory of God) does not deprive man of his freedom to rebel against God. The process of suppressing the clear truth and

attempting to substitute a different outlook (an attempt always mitigated by the power of God's revelation in the "facts") is precisely such rebellion; even though the unbeliever knows better in his "heart of hearts," he nonetheless has been granted the ability to oppose the truth. Thirdly, Montgomery's parable overlooks the fact that, as presuppositionalists maintain, common grace restrains the sinful rebellion of the unbeliever (and hence his falsifying interpretations of the "facts"). Therefore, the "facts" are a clear revelation of God, the non-Christian is free to attempt suppression of the truth, that suppression is never completely successful (due to the power of revelation and common grace), and yet the rebel thinker can stubbornly remain with his espoused presuppositions (avoiding an outward admission of the truth by various intellectual maneuvers and emotional patterns of coping, none bringing him genuine satisfaction). Montgomery's parable, then, fails to distinguish between what the non-Christian actually knows and what he pretends to know, between what happens in his system in practice and in principle. The unbeliever is always the image of God who lives on borrowed capital, as Van Til has continually stressed, and thus sinners can be reasoned with on a presuppositional level. Their "Encyclopedia of Tlon" is never a match for the revelation of God in creation and Scripture.

Coming to his actual point, Montgomery asks how the non-Christian interpretation of things is to be distinguished from reality.<sup>[2]</sup> Although he has not established why this should be a problematic matter for Van Til, the presuppositionalist can oblige him with an answer. Both Christian and non-Christian recognize the difference between their descriptions and interpretation of reality (on the basis of linguistic terms and behavioral responses, if nothing else). Both are God's creatures and suited to receive His revelation. Natural revelation constantly bears in upon them both, showing them the truth about God; this is supplemented with God's verbal revelation of the truth. The non-Christian's suppression of the truth (i.e., his reading things through colored glasses) is an ethical (not metaphysical) state of affairs; he distorts the truth by willful choice and willfully persists in his rebellion (i.e., cements the glasses to his face). Therefore, the unbeliever is *able* (though unwilling) to distinguish the sinful interpretation of things from reality, and God's revelation *ably* distinguishes the two. The unbeliever *can* be shown to be wrong, for the choice of world-views is not a subjectivist's guessing game but a matter of submission to or rebellion against the truth of God's revelation. But perhaps Montgomery has more than this in mind when he asks his question; maybe he wants to know how we *get* the unbeliever overtly to distinguish between a sinful interpretation and reality (i.e., to admit that he is wrong). If so, it is likely that Montgomery forgets how complex a matter it is to bring a man to change his mind on fundamental or important issues; people alter their beliefs for various reasons, and these various factors combine in different ways and have different effects from individual to individual (this is true even outside of specifically religious questions). A man can genuinely be shown the truth, be given justification for believing, and yet refrain from seeing it as the truth; what amounts to justification or sufficient reason for belief will (both in theory and effect) differ between people. However, keeping that complexity in mind, we can broadly indicate an answer to the extension of Montgomery's question posed above. First, we need to notice how the unbeliever attempts to escape the truth about God; by apostate presuppositions fostered in an unrighteous way of life (these are used to "naturalize" God's revealed truth or pervert it into false religious systems). Second, notice why the unbeliever does this; inherited depravity, a stone heart, and guilt-induced flight from God. Now if we intend to

change the unbeliever's mind we should, realizing that he is God's image and that he depends upon God's revelation to know any truth at all, press his espoused presuppositions to foolishness - that is, work on those glasses which falsely "color" the facts. Appealing to the unbeliever's guilt (violation of God's moral law) and his better knowledge (for the "facts" or actual state of affairs do reveal God to him) we call on him responsibly to turn from rebellion against God to submission and obedience to the truth, looking to the Holy Spirit to change his heart in order that he might submit to the authority of God's redemptive word (Scripture). That realistically is how we get the unbeliever to distinguish Tlon from reality.

If the facts were "neutral" they would not provide the revelation necessary to distinguish sinful interpretations of the world from reality; *all* interpretations would then be autobiographical impositions of meaning. Thus it is actually the *non*-presuppositional viewpoint which endangers the possibility of meaningfully criticizing one another's positions, the ability to distinguish error from reality, and the prophylaxis against successful myth-making. Moreover, by recognizing the sinner's ability to suppress the truth and see things through colored glasses which he cements to his face, the presuppositionalist acknowledges that "facts" or the state of affairs do not automatically determine the outworking of a man's life in some pre-established pattern; the sinner is accounted as able to rebel against the truth or to submit to the truth, to live in antagonism or obedience to God's revelation. Thus the presuppositional position reckons with the freedom of men and the complexity involved in the conversion of their thinking; the issues of guilt and authority are influential in presuppositionalism, while a *non*-presuppositional approach may not take proper account of the human condition and the factors accounting for man's attempts to twist the facts (i.e., may not explain the very plot of Montgomery's parable). Also, the presuppositionalist recognizes that the "facts" will only have argumentative effect when the disputants are working upon the same presuppositions; otherwise the unbeliever will use a paradigm which enables him to reinterpret all the evidence. Thus it is the *non*-presuppositionalist who would obviously jeopardize the feasibility of the believer and unbeliever criticizing each other's positions in any significant sense. All in all it would seem that Montgomery's parable is really putting the pinch on his own position, not that of a presuppositionalist.

But let us supply even further attenuation for Montgomery's question. We have seen that the point of his parable ("*how* is Tlon to be distinguished from reality?"<sup>[3]</sup> against presuppositional apologetics is far from trenchant in two suggested senses for the question (i.e., how are erroneous world-views and reality distinguishable in general principle, and how do we get the unbeliever overtly to distinguish them?). However, perhaps Montgomery's question amounts to: how can Mr. X adjudicate between the claim of the Bible and the claim of secularism ("which is the devil's city and which the *civitas Dei*?"<sup>[4]</sup>). Now the question assumes that Mr. X is either a neutral bystander, a self-sufficient unbeliever, or a convicted unbeliever. If Mr. X is taken to be a neutral bystander who is considering two hypotheses, there is no practical need to answer the question, for such a situation is never instantiated (no one is ever neutral, but is always caught up in the process of either opposing or obeying God's truth). If Mr. X considers himself autonomous in his unbelief, his search for independent standards by which he can pass judgment upon God's

revelation (i.e., as God, determining good and evil) is a form of rebellion; hence he needs conviction of his waywardness as usual (this case has been discussed before). Why should such a person as this believe the Bible as opposed to some other alternative? Well, there are many "factual" and logical books on the market, so a "factual" and logical demonstration of the Bible need not sway him as to its significance or uniqueness, and his sinful outlook will cause him to reinterpret the "facts" and arguments about the Bible. Therefore, the foundational reason he should believe that the Bible is true is because *God* (a genuine and unavoidable authority) says so; if he refuses to bow to the self-attesting word from God, then he is led to moral and epistemological futility. It is this futility which we presuppositionally work on (so that the "evidence" will really count and be given the correct interpretation). However, getting to the kernel of our attenuated sense of Montgomery's question, if Mr. X is not proceeding in an autonomous attitude but has a true desire to find God (i.e., has come under conviction) without being deceived by false religious options, then we need simply point him to Scripture; for only the Bible's teaching on justification will suit the moral conviction of God's law, and only God's revelation will be a suitable relief to his epistemological despair. There *are no* other answers once the right problem has been realized! Everything else smacks of irrelevance except God's truth and grace. If Mr. X is under conviction he does not need "evidential" arguments, he needs God's sure word.

Therefore, having seen the inappropriateness of Montgomery's parable ("The Universe of Tlon") in a critique of presuppositionalism and the fact that his commentary upon the parable presents un-telling questions for a presuppositional apologetic, we are forced to deny Montgomery's conclusion. People *can* criticize each other's spectacles (presuppositions) and New Jerusalem is *not* interchangeable with Tlon for anyone[5]! If anything, the parable puts the pinch on Montgomery's own non-presuppositional method. The presuppositionalist points out the clarity and authority of God's revelation as well as the knowledge which each man eradicable has of God. Even in rebellion the sinner cannot escape the truth about God. The final outworking of his autonomous presuppositions and their end will be hell, and there God shall be clearly known! So no matter where a man may be along the way, the as-yet-unconsummated attempt to escape God is itself a testimony to God. Whether the sinner lets the light of God's revelation through in a conscious fashion, whether he attempts to block it out, or whether he inconsistently does a little of both, he knows the truth about God. Whether in submission or rebellion the man confronted by the presuppositionalist is seen as "knowing God." [6] *This* is the answer Van Til would begin with in reply to Montgomery's misleading parabolic criticism, not the answer that Montgomery puts into his mouth [7] - an answer which is insufficient precisely because it is incomplete.

## 2. Misleading Quotation

Perhaps this would be the place to make a methodological observation about Montgomery's critique of Van Til. We noted earlier that parables in themselves are not illegitimate vehicles for making a point of criticism - as long as they are appropriate. Now how is it that Montgomery comes up with the parable which he directs against Van Til? The unsuspecting reader is led to

believe that the parable is appropriate because it follows a lengthy quotation from Van Til; however, in the way that Montgomery has handled Van Til's materials it becomes apparent that what we really have is subtle straw-man tactics. By not paying attention to the context out of which he lifts the quotes, and by arranging the quotes in a way suited to his intended criticism, Montgomery does not really allow Van Til to speak for himself. Montgomery sets up the problem and then sets up the answer, trimming his opponent's writings to fit the pattern desired. This is why he has ended up with an inappropriate parable in criticism of Van Til. As we see on pages 382-383 in *Jerusalem and Athens*, what Montgomery (via his parable) wants to make of the quotations from Van Til on pages 380-381 is that, by avoiding an inductive or factual apologetic, Van Til's position loses the objectivity of evidence and the fruitfulness of argumentation. That this does not do justice to Van Til will be clear to anyone who will bother to read the context from which Montgomery takes his quotations[8]. I offer a few examples:

The Aquinas-Butler type of argument...concedes that since historical facts are "unique" nothing certain can be asserted of them,...It is compromising in the first place with respect to the objective clarity of the evidence for the truth of Christian theism...Men ought, says Calvin following Paul, to believe in God, for each one is surrounded with a superabundance of evidence with respect to him.[9]

Van Til criticizes Butler's apologetic for also overlooking that the sinner has an axe to grind, for proceeding as if "they were not anxious to keep from seeing the facts for what they really are." [10] (*Here we see that Montgomery's parable proves Van Til's point - men will attempt to falsify the evidence!*) The same criticism would apply to modern day followers of Butler's method - e.g., Montgomery. Van Til says that the subjective element (which Montgomery's parable takes to be paramount) comes into the picture in only a restricted sense,[11] and he says of the presuppositional antithesis between believer and unbeliever:

It does not mean that any one person fully exemplifies either system perfectly...So then the situation is always mixed. In any one's statement of personal philosophy there will be remnants of his old man...In the case of the non-believer this keeps him from being fully Satanic in his opposition to God...*in principle* there are two mutually exclusive systems, based upon two mutually exclusive principles of interpretation.[12]

Moreover the discussion from which Montgomery takes his quite had been used by Van Til in order to show what was necessary in the argument between believer and unbeliever was to be "really fruitful"[13]. Consider further samples from the immediate context of Montgomery's quotations:

The objective evidence for the existence of God and of the comprehensive governance of the world by God is therefore so plain that he who runs may read. Men cannot get away from this evidence...Whether men engage in inductive study with respect to the facts of nature about them or engage in analysis of their own self-consciousness they are always face to face with God their maker.[14]

Van Til makes a point that "Every bit of historical investigation...is bound to confirm the truth of the claims of the Christian position", and he affirms that the falsifying interpretations of the facts by the unbeliever is not something unavoidable which the sinner cannot help doing: "...it is evident that by the sinner's epistemological reaction I mean his reaction as an ethically responsible creature of God." [15] As before Van Til asserts of the non-Christian that "they oppose God's revelation everywhere. They do not want to see the facts of nature for what they are"; and yet he also says further, "It is asked what person is consistent with his own principles. Well I have consistently argued that no one is and that least of all the non-Christian is...Neither do I forget that no man is actually fully consistent in working according to these assumptions." [16] Montgomery has simply not taken all the factors into account when he selects certain quotations from Van Til; those quotations must be understood in their context. When they are, it is manifest that they cannot be used as raw material for the type of parable Montgomery contrives. Van Til's assertions, properly read in context, certainly do not lead to the outlook of Montgomery's parable - which is precisely why it is deficient as a critique of Van Til's position. It *has nothing to do* with Van Til's position, despite the misleading appearance created by tendentious proof texting of Van Til's publications. Indeed, the problems which are evident in the parable (to whomever they may apply) are themselves vanquished by Van Til's teachings in the very places from which Montgomery quotes him!

### 3. Collision With Credibility

Montgomery now turns from the spurious to the outlandish; having misrepresented Van Til parabolically, Montgomery next alleges that Van Til's position is threatened with "solipsistic collapse." [17] Here Montgomery evidences that he fails to understand either solipsism or Van Til, or both. Nowhere in Van Til's publications will anyone find teachings that even remotely approximate the idea that he alone exists in a fundamental sense and that everything else exists only in a secondary sense as his perception or thought; indeed one cannot find grounds for even vaguely associating Van Til with the root phenomenalism (e.g., *Esse est percipi*) that leads to solipsism. The ironic thing is this: while Montgomery has outlandishly charged *Van Til* with having a position that reduces, of all things, to solipsism, in fact philosophers have usually seen solipsism as a threatening implicate of *positivism* [18] and methodological solipsism has been correlated with the *ego-centric predicament* - which two things are much closer to (if not virtually homogeneous with) *Montgomery's* own inductive epistemology! Not only is it outlandish for Montgomery to charge Van Til with solipsism, but the parable which Montgomery



produces[19] to go along with his charge contains an alleged example of presuppositional apologetic encounter which itself is outlandish. If Montgomery expects to render an effective critique of his opponents he is going to have to learn that ground rule one is to represent them in credible and responsible fashion - and the encounter between the Shadok and Gibi[20] is far from that. While Montgomery would have his reader falsely think that presuppositionalism advocates an unreasoning, sheer authoritarian, apologetic argument that requires unreserved commitment on the part of the unbeliever before evidence can be presented, anyone who will read Van Til in a responsible Christian fashion and in (at least) academic honesty will easily discover that he holds:

It must always be remembered that the first requirement for effective witnessing is that the position to which witness is given be intelligible...The second requirement for effective witnessing is that he to whom the witness is given must be shown why he should forsake his own position and accept that which is offered him.[21]

With regret we recall that presuppositionalism was given the same blatant misrepresentation by Pinnock[22] and that Pinnock is of the same school as Montgomery (ideologically and institutionally); we exhort that school to realize that neither trustworthiness nor erudition are supported by this kind of critique. The presuppositionalist is willing to listen to constructive critique as long as the critic will at least give a fair representation of the position; outside of that there would be no reason to listen.

To oblige Montgomery let us briefly respond to the parable, "Worlds in Collision." Is it possible that a religious stalemate could be generated if an unbelieving position responded to the presuppositional position with exactly the same line of argumentation? No. To show this we need only look at Montgomery's story. The Shadoks and Gibis come from different planets; now the parable either envisions a monotheistic or polytheistic framework. If the latter, there is no practical need to respond. Now in a monotheistic framework if the Shadoks and Gibis *really* say exactly the same things to one another (with the exception of formal labels for God, etc.), then they are endorsing the same religion and need no longer argue at all! That is, if the Christian presuppositionalist met someone who held to a Triune God who is clearly revealed in nature, who created and sustains all things, who sovereignly decrees the course of history, who sent the Son to die for the sins of the elect (who, being born in the sinful race of the first and representative man, are totally unable to propitiate God's eternal wrath), who authoritatively revealed Himself in Scripture and who sends the Holy Spirit to regenerate and sanctify His people, etc. - if he met someone holding such a view who carried it out with the same responses and implications, then the only kind of argument he could have would be a merely linguistic one. You see the problem with Montgomery's parable (beyond the fact that it does not exemplify the actual transcendental argumentation a real presuppositionalist would use) is that he does not give

any reason why "The two positions are logically incompatible...";[23] the rest of the story (e.g., each disputant repeating exactly the same assertions as the other) is not consonant with that foundational premise or condition. Now if we instead take that premise seriously and say that the positions to be described in the story are and must be incompatible, then (not only is the story wrong-headed, but) the type of argument put into the presuppositionalist's mouth (whether Shadok or Gibi, take your pick) would not be that which appears at all. Instead the presuppositionalist would seek to find out if the opponent has a theoretically justified epistemology (e.g., could answer the one and many dilemma, substantiate the assumptions of non-contradiction and uniformity, etc.); he would attack at that fundamental level, bringing in the moral culpability of the unbeliever (i.e., law violations), and showing the strength and justification for his own world-view. If the opponent had the *same* approach in every respect, then we are back to the more linguistic dispute already mentioned.

Montgomery's parable would only be telling against someone who endorses a *bare authoritarian* apologetic, someone who holds to only a *formal* authority for his religion, someone who does no more than demand unthinking deference to a contentless claim to dominion; two people with such an approach surely would have no evidence to appeal to in a dispute with each other! However, Dr. Van Til's arguments have never seen that impasse, and the reason is simply that his apologetic is nothing like that portrayed by Montgomery. Van Til is a Biblical Christian (who derives a presuppositional defense of the faith from Scriptural teaching; Cf. II.E above), not a Moslem. Montgomery should know the difference. And because Van Til is not a Dooyeweerdian (even of the Toronto I.C.S. brand), Montgomery's example of the instantiation of the Shadok-Gibi impasse[24] is irrelevant as a critique of Van Til (since the illustration deals with a Toronto Dooyeweerdian). Montgomery should also know the difference between these two - at least he should have indicated that while a Dooyeweerdian does not think presuppositions can be analyzed or argued for in any way, Van Til does. This noted, we would go on to caution that Montgomery's own alternative to the Zylstra-Marcuse impasse should not be identified with Van Til's nor should it be considered very telling (e.g., R.M. Hare's parable of the insane blik would be far from discomfited by Montgomery's inductive marshalling of the "facts"! [25]).

So then, we have seen two parables generated by Montgomery go by the boards; the first was inappropriate, the second was outlandish. What they had in common was a lack of basic understanding of Van Til's presuppositionalism. That deficiency is also evident in the commentary offered by Montgomery between his second and third parables.[26] Besides being misguided on Van Til's attitudes toward facts, evidence, aprioristic circularity, and positive demonstration just as Pinnock was,[27] Montgomery fails to see that Van Til's apologetic claims that use of facts and logic is not simply directed in a different direction on non-Christian presuppositions, but is in principle *impossible*. Thus Van Til's opponents could *not* (contrary to Montgomery's idea[28]) "employ his own two-edged sword against him"; the question is not that of mere personal volitions and commitments ("...right reason...begins with commitment to *my* presuppositional starting point"), but which presuppositions will support the use of induction and deduction for anybody who wants to reason at all. The unbeliever cannot turn Van Til's



apologetic around, for that apologetic shows all world-views except that of Biblical Christianity to be founded on presuppositions of an untenable rational-irrational nature; non-Christian thinking is inherently self-defeating, while Scripture grounds rationality and factuality as well as their fruitful interaction. Van Til does not merely show the unbeliever to be in a different volitional tower of personal commitment, he shows the unbeliever stranded in epistemological futility; he then goes on to show the strength of Christian presuppositions as founded in the authoritative revelation of God. Montgomery has really missed the point if he thinks the unbeliever could use Van Til's presuppositional apologetic against him! We do not arrive at religious stalemate with presuppositionalism (although the hardness of the unbeliever's heart can prevent him from turning to the truth), we see revealed wisdom showing the folly of worldly foolishness. A world-view as treated in presuppositional apologetics is not merely a matter of personal choice, it is also a matter of clear truth. Only a presuppositional apologetic gets to the bottom of the sinner's thinking and rebellion; only a presuppositional approach can effectively deal with both vain science (and its supposed factual foundations) and insane bliks (with their self-defeating presuppositions). Against Montgomery, then, the Christian must insist that when world views collide, the stakes are simply too high to operate *anything but* presuppositionally; this is the only preservative from having our witness absorbed into the rationalist-irrationalist schemes of religious anarchy.

#### 4. The Underlying Error

We would pause, before going on to Montgomery's third parable, to point out that in the two preceding parables Montgomery erroneously assumes that, on a presuppositional outlook, there is no essential difference between the believing and unbelieving moral-epistemological condition. What we mean is this: in the first parable it is assumed that believer and unbeliever have jaundiced vision in the same way or respects, and in the second parable it is assumed that the believer and unbeliever are both making irrational, unthinking choices as to the truth. The moral condition and the epistemological quandary have been taken as identical between Christian and non-Christian. On that misleading assumption Montgomery has misjudged that one could criticize presuppositionalism by simply reducing it to the problems of its opponents, by simply turning its approach around and directing it at Christianity itself. Thus Montgomery would have the devil's city indistinguishable from the city of God (since *everyone* has jaundiced vision) and would have the Shadok hopelessly encounter the Gibi (since everyone makes an *ungrounded* personal commitment to a metaphysic on bare authoritarian grounds). Yet Montgomery's parables fail to draw certain necessary distinctions and thereby render his criticism pointless; as noted earlier, Montgomery has simply been jousting with a straw-man that he set up. Van Til's position is not subject to Montgomery's criticism because Van Til does not maintain that the believer and unbeliever are in essentially the same moral-epistemological condition (making it impossible to distinguish or argue for the truth).

Let us see where Montgomery has gone astray. His critical commentary on the first parable begins with the assumption that there are no exceptions to jaundiced vision since sin is a

universal condition.[29] There is a far-reaching, though subtle, error here. It is unquestionable that if any man says he has not sinned he is a liar;[30] however, there is a principal difference between the sinning of a believer and the sinning of the unregenerate[31] Montgomery does not draw that distinction and so is misled into thinking that believer and unbeliever are morally incapacitated to the same degree, as if *neither* could see the kingdom of God;[32] the teaching of God's word is to the exact opposite effect, saying that the unbeliever cannot discern the things of the Spirit[33] while that very Spirit of truth teaches the believer all things.[34] The vision of the sinner is jaundiced, but in principle the vision of the believer is transparent. Therefore, we must reject whole-heartedly the subtle but drastic error which conditions Montgomery's critical commentary. Not only is the conditional premise of Montgomery's criticism untrue to Scripture, it is untrue to Van Til's position. Montgomery has set up things in his parable and in his critical commentary so that both believer and unbeliever would, to use Van Til's metaphor, have colored glasses cemented to their faces; however, had Montgomery read Van Til's metaphor in its literary context he would have seen that Van Til maintains, while they both have the facts in common, it is the *sinner* (not the saint) who has colored glasses on his nose[35]. Montgomery's quote from Van Til[36] picks up *immediately* after Van Til makes this essential distinction; I hate to have to say this, but it appears as if Montgomery is willfully deceiving his reader as to what Van Til's position is. I hope, contrary to appearances, that this is not the case. But the fact remains that Montgomery's criticism (error cannot be distinguished from reality if you are a presuppositionalist since there are no exceptions to jaundiced vision) is pointless since the presuppositionalist does not hold to what Montgomery alleges.

The same criticism can be made with respect to Montgomery's second parable. There he portrays the believer and unbeliever in the same epistemological quandary, being forced to a voluntaristic rationalism that cannot argue primary truths since they are arbitrarily and irrationally chosen. This is not what Scripture teaches,[37] nor is it an implication of Van Til's position. Montgomery would have his reader think that Van Til simply accepts that the difference in outlook between Christianity and its opponents is a matter of irrational choice; however, one should note the "... " in Montgomery's quotation from Van Til[38]. The excised material is far from insignificant. It refers Van Til's reader to a dilemma he has been formulating throughout the book: one must accept either the "scientific method" as his epistemological authority and thereby trim down or distort the Christian message, or he must accept the Christian Scriptures as his epistemological authority and use science appropriately without compromising the Bible's message. Van Til has demonstrated what the outcome is if one chooses to follow the first option; the method which appeals to facts as if they were "brute" renders predication impossible[39] and cannot talk about "facts" at all.[40] It is now evident what accepting the "scientific method" at all costs entails according to Van Til; it entails epistemological futility which can be avoided on Christian presuppositions. Hence the *difference of choice* between the Christian and his opponent is more than a mere matter of differing and arbitrary volitions; it involves the very salvaging of the epistemological enterprise. That is why Van Til says "we need not worry too greatly" if the opponent *intimates* that Christianity is simply a matter of irrational choice; that hint or suggestion overlooks the outcome of the unbiblical choice and thus the dilemma facing the unbeliever (as well as inductivist apologist), a dilemma which gives sufficient reason for affirming Christianity. When Montgomery quotes from Van Til he conveniently omits Van Til's

reference to that dilemma, making it appear (contrary to fact) that Van Til would make a *rootless* choice of Christianity at all costs. One must recognize the value of Van Til's formulated dilemma before he goes on to see Van Til's *further* distinction between the *notice of choice* itself of the positivist and of the Christian, differing as to their respective presuppositions of *autonomy* or *election*. Montgomery cites the second distinction but edits the first one out, and only in this way can it seem plausible to turn the presuppositionalist's apologetic in on itself. Thus again Montgomery's criticism (Christianity cannot successfully argue with unbelief if you are a presuppositionalist since the hopeless circularity of an arbitrary faith commitment is seen at the base of both positions) is pointless since the presuppositionalist does not hold to what Montgomery alleges (and intimates by editing his quotations). Montgomery has gone far afield by trying, in this manner, to reduce presuppositionalism to the problems of its opponents; the presuppositionalist's sword is not two-edged in Montgomery's sense at all (cutting against unbelief and belief equally well). By depending upon the self-attesting truth of Scripture for its directives, presuppositionalism attempts to embody the power of that word of God which is sharper than any two-edged sword!

##### 5. An Ancient Apologetic Problem for Whom?

Having seen that Montgomery's first two parables and commentary have no critical strength since they are built up from misrepresentations and erroneous assumptions and since they pose no problematic questions for presuppositionalism, we move on to look at his third and final parable. It embodies the same syndrome of misrepresentation and false accusation as the previous two (Van Til is called an "aprioristic apologist" who sends one into "the cloud-cuckoo land of fideism" because he requires the unbeliever to accept Christianity before evaluating evidence and thus cuts off all opportunity to determine its truth value prior to a mere volitional commitment<sup>[41]</sup>) and, therefore, requires and deserves no further comment (the reader is again directed to III.A.1, especially numbers 9,10,11,12,14, 16,19,20,21). This much ought to be said: Christ our Lord delineated a very effective apologetic saying that the world would know that He had been sent by the Father when it saw the love expressed among believers.<sup>[42]</sup> How effective does Montgomery's apologetic then seem if he does not speak the truth in love<sup>[43]</sup> about his brother in Christ but is so quick to think evil<sup>[44]</sup> that he bears false witness about him? Can't a Christian critic treat his Christian opponent with fairness and respect what he actually stands for? Such mutual treatment is required if the world is to know that we are disciples of Christ.<sup>[45]</sup>

Although Van Til does not represent the position attacked by Montgomery under his third parable, we shall oblige the critic with a response lest it be thought that the above exhortation is merely a cloak to cover up problems with presuppositionalism. In reciting "An Ancient Apologetic Parable"<sup>[46]</sup>, Montgomery aims to criticize Van Til for forgetting that the religious situation is pluralistic and (by cutting off evaluation of the various religious remedies before commitment to the true one) does not render the non-Christian "without excuse." Is the presuppositionalist caught in such a plight? Not hardly. He knows that the unbeliever is the image of God and created to receive and know his Creator's voice. He knows that there is

abundant objective evidence in creation to leave man without excuse for disbelief and improper worship of God. He knows that the Bible is the self-attesting word of God which leaves the unbeliever more culpable for continued rebellion because it clearly and sufficiently reveals God the redeemer. Thus the presuppositionalist fears no competition from apostate religions. He alone has God's truth, the truth which all men have been created to receive and the only message bearing convicting power. The presuppositionalist knows the power of the Holy Spirit's operations in man's sinful heart. The presuppositionalist knows that all who deny God's word have built their houses on foundations of sand. He knows that the foolishness of unbelief can be demonstrated and contrasted to the wisdom of God. Hence he puts himself on his opponent's position for the sake of argument, proceeding then to show where the presuppositions of that position take one (to folly; epistemological suicide, skepticism, and the failure of all meaningful predication or understanding). The rationalism-irrationalism dialectic, the lack of theoretical justification for methods and assumptions, the breakdown of all ethical structure, and numerous other handles present themselves to the presuppositionalist as ways to drive the unbelieving position to futility; the upshot will be that the unbeliever cannot meaningfully go to the facts or use reason based upon his presuppositions. How then could he know anything? How then could he refute the Bible? How then could he entertain an understanding of alternative religious revelations? Then the presuppositionalist asks the opponent to place himself upon the Christian position for the sake of argument, proceeding then to show where revelational epistemology takes one (to wisdom, knowledge, and understanding). He shows the unbeliever why he can actually know God, how Scripture explains his rebellion, and what the way of salvation is; the gospel hope is defended upon the authority of God's word and with appropriate discussion of the unbeliever's sin. The Lordship of autonomous man is contrasted to the Lordship of Christ, thereby showing the sinner to be without excuse and culpable for rebellion (epistemological and ethical). While the Christian position grounds proper science and philosophy, accounts sufficiently for its knowledge of God and the unbeliever's attitude, and carries the convicting power of word and Spirit, the unbelieving position is sheer foolishness which accounts for nothing and carries no genuine conviction. This account is highly abbreviated and generalized, but it does show that a presuppositionalist would not cut off evaluation of competing claims or leave the unbeliever free to follow his subjective whims; genuine argument and comparison would take place, giving ample warrant for the unbeliever's change of mind, yet without forsaking the Lordship of Christ in the noetic realm. Having been presented with life and death, truth and error, blessing and curse, the unbeliever is called upon to submit his life and thinking to God. Therefore, the presuppositional apologetic, while demonstrating the only context which can give meaning to man's thought, does not expect a blind leap of faith of the unbeliever; no, rather the presuppositionalist presents the only adequate ground for belief at all, a ground which is completely sufficient, authoritative, clear and necessary; God's revelation in creation and word. The height of credulity is unbelief, not belief, if you follow out the presuppositionalist's case, for he does not simply give probable grounds for belief (thereby justifying the sinner's response; "well, then, there is possibility and reason to believe that Christianity is wrong" - leaving him with an excuse for unbelief) but grounds which show belief to be necessary (for the epistemological enterprise as well as for salvation since both depend upon a proper covenant relationship to God wherein He is Lord and we are His servants). Montgomery's parable is certainly not disquieting to a presuppositionalist. If the Christian presuppositionalist were set for the defense with a Moslem, he would not (contrary to Montgomery's suggestion) be reduced to demanding personal commitment to Christ before the evidence could be weighed or the positions

compared. Although the Christian knows that the Moslem is in fact working on borrowed capital (resting in God's revelation despite espoused rejection) he does not expect or demand immediate, unequivocal, admission of that fact at the very first move, the primal outset of the conversation! The whole procedure of each opponent putting himself on the position of the other is calculated to *bring* the unbeliever *to a realization* that he must be (and indeed has been) reliant upon God's revealed truth to know anything; the authority of God's word as presented by the Christian is not simply formal, but bears its own evidence inherently as part of its content. Thus the Moslem and Christian would not be reduced to urging blind authorities at each other; they could genuinely debate with each other, even though it is at a transcendental level that the presuppositionalist is driving home his argument. For instance the presuppositionalist might choose to show the irrationalism-rationalism polarity in Islamic faith and then explain the Scriptural account for man's ability to receive clear and authoritative word from God, giving this as the basis for thinking and argumentation (even that which is taking place between the Christian and Moslem). The Christian could point to the Islamic doctrine of "mukhalafa" which claims that God is so different from His creatures that it is impossible to postulate anything of Him; then it could be added that the Moslem affirms the doctrine of "tanzih" as well, stripping God of all qualities of impermanence and thereby rendering Him unable to be affected by the actions and attitudes of His creatures. God, then, for the Moslem is far removed from man and unknowable (the irrationalist pole). Yet on the other hand the Moslem claims to know God by means of the Koran, and he claims that by ecstatic enlightenment man can so fan his inner spark of divinity so as to be fused in union with God's being. Hence God for the Moslem is completely drawn into the cosmos (man himself) and made known in a book (the rationalist pole). Hereby we see how hopelessly dis-integrated the Moslem's presuppositions are; he claims that nobody can know God but that the Moslem knows Him! He refutes himself out of his own mouth. The Moslem's troubles are only beginning however. He expects men to *submit* to Allah, yet endorses a doctrine of *fate* (wherein volition is meaningless). He sees a unity for history which destroys particularity, while the basis for any historical variations (the arbitrariness of God's decree) undermines the unity itself. No wonder the Moslem renounces philosophy and logic when it comes to the Koran! The Moslem is an irrationalist-rationalist who can actually know nothing or even understand a divine revelation (his obligation is to simply recite the traditions). On the other hand the Christian entertains a view of God such that He is sovereign Creator and Lord over the cosmos and history; while He cannot be directly identified with anything in creation, He can come right into the world with a clear revelation of Himself. He created man to receive that revelation; He redeems man from rebellion so as to receive and obey it. His sovereign plan provides coherence to history, and His creating and guiding hand gives reality to particulars; revelation is the foundation of meaningful thinking within God's creation, calling us to think His thoughts after Him. Etc. Thus the case would be broadly developed, showing that there is every reason to accept the Bible (not the least of which is true guilt and alienation from God which the word of Christ takes care to remedy, a cure the sinner inwardly knows that he needs) while there is no reason at all to accept the Koran. Foolishness and death are set over against wisdom and life; autonomy is contrasted to the Lordship and authority of God which is clearly expressed in His self-attesting revelation.

Much more could (and would) be said in an actual setting in life, but this much is given to indicate how *non*-problematic religious plurality is to a presuppositional apologetic. The unbeliever, whether secular or pseudo-religious, is prevented from any escape at all on the presuppositionalist approach; the unbeliever is shown that Christianity, far from being irrational, is the only basis for rationality at all. Further, the presuppositionalist *can* distinguish systematic theology from apologetics (contrary to Montgomery's allegation), but he does not believe that there are separate and different epistemic *authorities* in the two! Moreover, just because he views all thinking as necessarily under the Lordship of God, the presuppositionalist does not thereby fail to distinguish believer from unbeliever (as Montgomery claims); he simply recognizes that all who are without *saving* faith nevertheless know (and hence believe in) God in an unrighteous fashion - that is, they suppress the truth rather than submitting to it. All men know God (though in two ways; in grace and in curse), and all thinking rests upon God's revelation (though in two ways; consciously and obediently or hypocritically and rebelliously); guided by the same authority which governs His dogmatics the presuppositional apologist would attempt to move men from the latter class (damning knowledge of God and disobedience) to the former (saving knowledge and obedience). Thus the presuppositionalist distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian without improperly separating the authority inherent in his dogmatics from the authority inherent in his apologetics; he comes in the self-attesting authority of God's word and points out that the unsaved sinner is living on borrowed capital (which he is forced to do in the nature of the case). So once again we see that Montgomery's parable and critical commentary present no problematic questions which the presuppositionalist cannot navigate.

Before leaving the third parable, however, we must note that Montgomery's own proposal for encountering the religious plurality of the world is far from suited for the task of Christian defense of the faith. He says the apologetic alternative we should follow is that of the apostles and of Christ, offering objective evidence and "many infallible proofs."[\[47\]](#) This incredibly suggests that we are to perform miracles and in the way that they did! However, in the next paragraph Montgomery becomes a bit clearer and explains that we are to present evidence of the truthfulness of Christianity for examination so that unbelievers will be without excuse under the pressure of the historical facts.[\[48\]](#) Of course Montgomery completely fails to take into account that the Pharisees living during earthly ministry of Jesus had far more than historical accounts; they saw the very miracles performed *and yet did not believe in Him!* And Montgomery fails to realize that an inductive apologetic by itself is unconvincing (note Pinnock's failures above, for instance) as well as inadequate to distinguish Christianity from other religions claiming past miracle-workers (the arguments for accepting the Bible's accounts and rejecting others all reduce to arbitrariness or question-begging of inductive premises alone). Moreover, false faiths have been known to be granted Satanic miracle-working powers (e.g., the sorcerers and magicians of Pharaoh's court); yet this does not prove that they are the road to religious truth! A historical basis, accounts of miracles, or even the actual miracles themselves are insufficient guides to the true religious remedy of man's ailments. And even where the miracles *were* those of the true God, the whole audience was not led to belief. So where has Montgomery gotten us in this religiously pluralistic world? Nowhere. And then even *if* his arguments were said to establish probable truth (a premise which is unfounded) in Christianity, we would be left with mere probability - which, again, leaves the sinner an excuse for his unbelief (i.e., there is *some* reason



and basis to call the Bible into question)! The sinner can legitimately "excuse" himself from whole-hearted commitment to Christ for eternity if the inductive, historical apologetic proposed by Montgomery gets us anywhere at all (which it does not in the face of alternative religious remedies). If it were not a mistake of tragic import because of the stakes involved one might be slightly amused at Montgomery's impulsive yearning to "compare alternative interpretations of fact and determine on the basis of the facts themselves which interpretation best fits reality."[\[49\]](#) What "facts" should the unbeliever consider in order to be dissuaded from his process theology, from his animistic interpretations of natural phenomena, from his transmigration-of-souls interpretation of death, or even from his avatar-interpretation of the facts about Jesus? "Facts" as objective, empirical, historical events cannot *by themselves* affect any of these (or many other) religious outlooks, for those outlooks would be willing to agree with Montgomery on the simple eye-ball inspection or historical examination of the phenomena; however, different interpretations are still being offered for those agreed upon phenomena. Montgomery's apologetic has not gotten off the ground. Moreover, let us assume for Montgomery's benefit that this world were *not* religiously pluralistic after all. In an imaginary world where only Christianity offered religious interpretations for the 'facts' (in Montgomery's inductivist sense) the secularist would be the only opponent of true faith. Now Montgomery goes to town, whipping out all the flashy research, adducing exquisite probability arguments, appealing to nothing but what are accepted inductive procedures in all sciences (since these *have* to be used to retain meaningful knowledge of the past and operating existence in the future). To his dismay he would find that an educated critic could whittle down the impressiveness of that apologetic in short time; in terms of probabilities and inductive procedures *alone* the case, for instance, of Christ's resurrection is most unlikely, and there is nothing of any telling strength in the evidentialist's considerations to make one abandon the well documented evidence and reasonable inference that cadavers do not revive (see the outcome of Pinnock's arguments above in III.A.1). If you follow simple inductive apologetics out, the evidence is weak indeed; all the crucial factors can receive very plausible explanations by the open-minded, yet "scientifically" honest, critic. But let us assume (to pursue our imaginary world a bit further) that the evidentialist apologist *could* show the probability of Christ's resurrection to the secularist (and not be encumbered with Hindu or any of the other religious interpretations); after all that argumentation, and after all the leeway granted Montgomery in this imaginary world, still the unbeliever could justify his non-Christian stance by means of his (salient) starting point or presuppositions. The world could be viewed as less than locked into a natural uniformity of causes and subject at freak points to indeterminacy, in which case the resurrection is highly unusual but scientifically neutral; or the only laws which might be cautiously taken into one's inductive outlook might be statistical summaries, in which case the resurrection is simply one more (albeit odd) statistic for the calculator. Or (taking another tack) the inductivist could be quite pragmatic and refuse to be affected by the resurrection at all; after all, how does that strange occurrence in the past help me solve the practical problems of the present (and the oddities of the past, says the pragmatist, do not infer anything about apple pie in the sky for the future). Any number of other premises could be used to neutralize or naturalize Montgomery's sheer "fact" of the historical resurrection (although it's really not "fact," just probability). Therefore, in the long run it seems that Montgomery's third parable is actually destructive of his own apologetic approach. Montgomery does not take seriously the religious plurality of the world and their various interpretative enterprises; he overestimates the power of inductive procedures to adjudicate between interpretations on the basis of the facts and nothing but the facts, and he allows the unbeliever to justify his continued

rebellion of mind even after the facts have been demonstrated. Whether in the real world or in the imaginary world (to oblige Montgomery) the unbeliever is *not* left "without excuse" if we take Montgomery's approach to apologetics.

## 6. Failure to Find Scriptural Support

Leaving Montgomery's third parable behind us (devouring its master) we should not fail to observe that his allusions to Scripture fall short of bearing up his apologetic method. Those he mentions are treated above in the evaluation of Pinnock's appeal to Scripture.[\[50\]](#) As explained there, the fact that Christ and the apostles performed miracles does not imply that inductive, historical validation of the Scriptural miracles is our central apologetic thrust. Far from it. God expects us to accept the word and witness of the apostles on their own Christ-given authority. It is a grave thing not to submit to the authority of apostolic proclamation (which is the source of our information, after all, about the miracles and resurrection, etc.), for that proclamation is self-attestingly God's word. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah (with all their inordinate immorality) on the day of judgment than for those who will not receive the words of Christ's commissioned representatives.[\[51\]](#) Because God's word is self-attestingly authoritative and indubitable truth, we see that when God sought fallen Adam in the garden He did not expect that Adam would have to verify His existence, identity and veracity before coming to terms with the Lord. Instead of beginning with raw data that could be fed into Adam's self-sufficient process of making truth judgments and satisfy him autonomously that God's word bore at least a probable level of credibility, God directly addressed him with an indicting question, "Where are thou?" Adam's sin (self-law) and rebellion (casting off God's authority over him, even over his noetic activities) was immediately confronted. It is not God who needs an intellectual defense, but rather Adam! At the outset God demands from Adam an admission of wrong. The question of authority is paramount. Adam had sinned, not by acting contrary to inductive validation of God's hypothesis over against Satan's, but by bringing God's presupposed word into question. Accordingly the Lord does not bow to Adam's pseudo-authority and assumed prerogative to judge; He does not correct Adam's inductive or deductive errors in evaluation and thinking, but rather He forces the matter of authority ("*Who* told you that you were naked?") and expects self-renouncing admission of guilt for violating the sovereign command of the Lord. You see, the fall had not so altered human nature as to make man other than man (contrary to Flacius). Man was still the responsible image of God who had an irradicable knowledge of God and knew His Creator's word. If we assume that man's condition was now such that he needed autonomous verification of the Lord's word we would (akin to Flacius) overlook man's true humanity and render him less than God's special creation in the full Biblical sense; man would be viewed as fallen, yet not "without excuse" for disbelief and rebellion. Our apologetic must not assume that man's responsible knowledge of God has been lost (thus requiring autonomous corroboration of God's word to satisfy man's intellect). And at the other extreme our apologetic must just as much refuse to assume (akin to Romanism) that man's intellect has been virtually unaffected by the fall, thus granting overextended trust to his verification procedures and noetic abilities. Because the apologetic method set forth by Montgomery tends ironically toward the types of error found in both Flacius and Romanism with respect to man's fallen condition, we must draw back from it and follow the full Scriptural view of man in his actual epistemic and soteric exigency.

## B. A Precautionary Word

Our examination of Montgomery's case against Van Til's presuppositionalism brings us to the conclusion that Montgomery's parables misrepresent Van Til's position; furthermore, in his critical commentary Montgomery has throughout failed to present viable considerations against presuppositionalism. Therefore, a presuppositional apologetic has not been shown to possess any telling difficulties. To the contrary it appears that Montgomery's *own* apologetic stance has been rendered feeble by his parables! The reasons for turning down Montgomery's conception of the apologetic task can be further developed in the remainder of this reply. But just to make sure that there is no misunderstanding of presuppositionalism inferred from the fact that inductive apologetics is criticized, let us take special note of the fact that a presuppositional approach does *not* exclude the use or appreciation of evidences (otherwise the excellent detail work done by men like Machen, Stonehouse, or Young would be senseless). However, one must not fail to understand the relation between presuppositions and evidence. Everybody has presuppositions and standards for judging; these presuppositions will themselves determine the strength and interpretation of evidence that is presented. However, people are not systems of thought and perfectly consistent in all that they do; therefore, the adequacy of presuppositions is sometimes doubted or examined, and people have been known to change their criteria for judgment. Personal volition, emotion, style of life, and numerous other factors will affect how people get along with their espoused presuppositions. This is quite obvious in the Christian life. For the Christian, God's existence, goodness, veracity and the like are all presuppositional matters; belief in these things is part of the defining characteristic of what it is to be a Christian. To call them into question is to call the genuineness of your profession of faith into question; thus they have a kind of "a priori" status (though based on objective revelation) and determine how we look at the world (i.e., are integral to our world and life view) and how we relate to states of affairs (i.e., interpret and respond to the "facts:"). Yet the believer is, in this life, always between the Garden and New Jerusalem; that is, he is not in an unfallen condition, nor has he arrived at the point where he cannot sin. Adam was expected to not call the Lord's word into question; in the consummation state we will in fact not call God's truth into question. However, in this life we struggle in the process of sanctification; as sinners we hold our presuppositions imperfectly. The grace of our God is made ever so manifest in the fact that He is willing to help our unbelief by verifying His word in history; He helps us by giving evidence of His goodness and truth. That *a posteriori* evidence, however, functions as such only for the believer, that is, within the framework of revealed presuppositions; the evidence God offers in history does not affect the unbeliever, for his presuppositions are such that he suppresses and misinterprets the facts (as revelational of the God with whom he has to do). To encounter unbelief one must understand and work at the root "foolishness" that characterizes the outlook of the non-Christian. This does not mean that evidence is put aside or that the unbeliever's questions (e.g., about the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch or the origin of Paul's religion) are treated irresponsibly in obscurantist fashion. But it does mean that evidence alone (without a change of presuppositional viewpoint) cannot significantly affect the non-Christian who "naturalizes," "rationalizes," and simply reinterprets things when his basic commitment seems in jeopardy. The *a posteriori* evidence God offers has its significant affect in helping God's people, in aiding their weak faith, in bolstering their religious outlook or commitment; while the evidence is sufficient to condemn the unbeliever, it only has positive results in the thinking of the believer. This is why a scholar

such as Dr. J. Gresham Machen, whose historical research and inductive apologetical concerns are akin to Montgomery's field of interest, recognized that his own primary audience was properly the church of Christ; an inductive approach has as its primary function the edifying and encouraging of God's people, not directly the persuasion of the unregenerate.

So I believe in the reasoned defence of the inspiration of the Bible...Its chief use is in enabling Christian people to answer the legitimate questions, not of vigorous opponents of Christianity, but of people who are seeking the truth and are troubled by the hostile voices that are heard on every hand...You see, what I am trying to do in such a lecture is not so much to win directly people who are opponents of the Bible as to give to Christian parents who may be present or to Christian Sunday-school teachers materials that they can use, not with those whose backs are up against Christianity, but with the children in their own homes or in their Sunday-school classes, the children who love them and want to be Christians as they are Christians, but are troubled by the voices against Christianity that are heard on every side. Yes, I certainly do believe in Christian apologetics...Certainly neglect of this work will be to the loss of countless precious souls.[\[52\]](#)

The effectiveness of the evidence is felt by the believer because he is thinking within the context of revelational presuppositions, but the historical evidences are insufficient in themselves (even theoretically) to change the unbeliever's mind because his thinking is guided by apostate presuppositions. If the non-Christian's presuppositions are granted, then he has adequate reason to reject a simple historical apologetic built up from inductive evidences; this is why our apologetic to the unregenerate must be made up of stronger material. However, we do not neglect the historical evidences; they do have their use for the Christian. He uses them to edify other believers and to give honest answers to detail questions from critics. In neither case though should he talk endlessly about facts and more facts without discussing the philosophy of fact or presuppositions which render the facts meaningful. Therefore, understanding the relation between evidence and presuppositions, the presuppositional apologist *does* endorse the proper use of evidence. We insist that Christian faith, anchored in God, deals with the area of *fact* which is open to scientific treatment.

### C. An Assessment of Montgomery's Apologetic

With the message of the above paragraph fixed securely in mind we would go on to criticize the kind of inductive or evidential apologetic Montgomery thinks should be central in our encounters with unbelief. In *The Philosophy of Gordon Clark* Montgomery declares that one cannot begin with God *without* the benefit of "objectively discoverable historical facts" (p. 383); Christianity's "fortunes are thus (for good or ill) bound up with the fortunes of history" (p. 385). When one

approaches the word of God he treats it as he would any other historical material;<sup>[53]</sup> although that would appear to reflect something of an *a priori* decision (i.e., to refrain from accounting Scripture as the self-attesting divine revelation which is, thereby, extremely different from "any other" historical material), Montgomery tells us that "it is necessary for us to evaluate, without *a priori*, the particular evidence for each alleged event, no matter how unique it is"<sup>[54]</sup>. The sort of event he has in mind here is a miracle (e.g., Christ's resurrection) such as would be recorded in the Bible. Montgomery thinks that the historical method is the same for all, irrespective of their religious commitments<sup>[55]</sup> - however, from the fact that he is continually criticizing the historical methods of other writers (e.g., Dilthey, *et. al.*) we can see that Montgomery should say instead that the historical method *ought* to be (not is) the same for all. Using the (allegedly) common and neutral method of historical investigation, Montgomery would ask the unbeliever simply to consider the "facts" with his reasonable use of reason, thereby finding compelling support for the truth of Scripture; making inductive argumentation which is rooted in evidence as *foundational* to his apologetic witness (rather than confirmatory of Christian faith), Montgomery would demonstrate the resurrection of Christ in attempt to move his opponent from the circle of unbelief by an irresistible case and perseverance of intellectually guided steps into the circle of Christian faith. He putatively offers "factually compelling evidence for the Christian truth-claim"<sup>[56]</sup> and models his apologetic on "objective evidence" which settles the dispute between the Christian and non-Christian "on the basis of the facts themselves."<sup>[57]</sup> "Proceeding on the basis of empirical method as applied to history, one can inductively validate the Christian revelation-claim and the Biblical view of total history."<sup>[58]</sup> As mentioned already, central to this objective and inductive validation of the veracity of God's word is historical argumentation for Christ's resurrection. The resurrection argument is said to be the fundament upon which all other apologetic defenses rest.<sup>[59]</sup> Not only is it the basis for taking Jesus Christ to be eternally divine, but the resurrection argument is so crucial to Montgomery's thinking in religious disputes and so determinative for locating divine truth that he crassly challenges his opponents, "I'm still calling for a resurrection on your part, or a deferral to the One who did rise from the dead!"<sup>[60]</sup> The attesting value of the resurrection, shown to be as much a "fact" as Columbus' discovery of America, is very great;<sup>[61]</sup> indeed, Montgomery claims to have "shown that the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is over-whelming in its force."<sup>[62]</sup> It should be clear to the reader by now what the basic thrust of Montgomery's apologetic would be. Insisting that we *begin* agnostically with *objective, historical facts*, Montgomery would treat the Bible as any other document and, without *a priori*, validate its truth by using the *common* empirico-historical method to evaluate the factually compelling, objective, evidence for Christ's *resurrection* - finding the case for it to have *overwhelming* force. By what is essentially a positivist method Montgomery would bring religious conviction to the unbeliever.<sup>[63]</sup> However, there is every reason for us *not* to anticipate a revival resulting from the use of Montgomery's approach.

### 1. Defective As an Argument

In the first place, putting aside more basic difficulties, Montgomery's argument for the resurrection is faulty. He claims to set forth "a very precise and confirmable argument,"<sup>[64]</sup> but on his own basis he offers neither precision nor confirmation. He himself formulates the argument for us and advances it in a number of places;<sup>[65]</sup> we give the rendering from *The Shape of the Past*:

1. On the basis of accepted principles of textual and historical analysis, the Gospel records are found to be trustworthy historical documents - primary source evidence for the life of Christ.
2. In these records, Jesus exercises divine prerogatives and claims to be God in human flesh; and He rests His claims on His forthcoming resurrection.
3. In all four Gospels, Christ's bodily resurrection is described in minute detail; Christ's resurrection evidences His deity.
4. The fact of the resurrection cannot be discounted on *a priori*, philosophical grounds; miracles are impossible only if one so defines them - but such definition rules out proper historical investigation.
5. If Christ is God, then He speaks the truth concerning the absolute divine authority of the Old Testament and of the soon-to-be-written New Testament; concerning His death for the sins of the world; and concerning the nature of man and history.
6. It follows from the preceding that all Biblical assertions bearing on philosophy of history are to be regarded as revealed truth, and that all human attempts at historical interpretation are to be judged for truth-value on the basis of harmony with Scriptural revelation.

When subjected to clear-headed cross examination the above case turns out to be non-telling unless one is predisposed to believe the conclusion anyway. Montgomery's arguments for the above premises are not substantially different from those used by Clark Pinnock, and we have already pointed out how easy it would be for an astute unbeliever to disarm and refute these considerations[66] Montgomery fills out his argumentative skeleton (the six steps just listed) in a number of places throughout his writings;[67] his considerations, just as with Pinnock, are readily dismissed as overstated, inconclusive, or gratuitous. The reader is referred to a discussion of this matter in our analysis of Pinnock. In addition to those observations, however, let us examine Montgomery's six apologetical steps themselves.

#### a. An Audit of Each Step

The first premise suffers from an inferential hiatus and conspicuous exaggeration. Montgomery attempts to give evidence pointing to the conclusion that we have in the extant New Testament documents an *early* picture of Christ; from that Montgomery goes on (without any supervening explanation or indication that a huge jump in argumentative development is transpiring) to designate the New Testament documents "an accurate portrait" of Christ and "reliable sources.[68] It should be easy to see, however, that the early character of a document tells us nothing about its positive reliability and accuracy (Joseph Smith's famous "golden plates" have very early authentication, but this fact certainly does not infer their trustworthiness - or even intelligibility for that matter!), or else two morning newspapers which conflict in their reporting of an event would both have to be accounted as reliable. But beyond this Montgomery is found overstating even the results of textual analysis. If he grants non-evangelicals an opportunity to be heard (and he must if he is true to his boast of neutral, common historical procedures) there is



very little reason to conclude, as Montgomery does, that the evidence points to first-century, eyewitness accounts of Jesus. From an examination of textual-critical evidence Montgomery claims that "competent historical scholarship must regard the New Testament documents as deriving from the first century"[69] and that they "contain eyewitness testimony to the life and claims of Jesus." [70] However, the concrete evidence certainly does not take one to those conclusions at all. Even as conservative a scholar (relatively speaking) as Bruce Metzger indicates in a widely used, standard discussion of *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1968) that the only fragment of the New Testament we possess which predates *circa* 200 A.D. is papyrus 52, and it dates (based on the probabilities of script style) in the first half of the *second* century. All competent scholars do not even agree on that early dating. And even if you follow the conservative estimations you can get this fragment (with merely a portion of four verses) into the first century only by agreeing with Deissmann's own evaluation, landing on his indication that perhaps the fragment is even as early as Trajan's reign (although Deissmann's conviction was confident only to the point of Hadrian's reign), and then taking the very earliest years of his reign (98 or 99 A.D.) as your target point. This is far from having a unanimous vote from competent scholars that the New Testament documents are first century, eyewitness accounts! Instead you have one fragment, in one stream of evaluation, with an individual's estimation, taken to its furthest intimation of a period of time, and a choice of the earliest date within that period. But even this does not give eyewitness *evidence*. However, Montgomery may mean to say that the evidence we do possess (from the first half of the second century and around 200 A.D., etc) should take us in the direction of inferring the earlier, eyewitness sources for these later (presumably) copies (which are supposed to reflect accurately their autographa). Yet even here Montgomery would have to be seen as exaggerating: e.g., no competent scholar late-dates the Gospels, there is no doubt about their authorship, their dates of origin are beyond a shadow of a doubt, there is no present day competent scholarship which denies the Pauline authorship of that corpus of epistles attributed to him, the Dibelius-Bultmann type of criticism is widely recognized as outmoded and wrong, and indeed the divine Christ has withstood critical reconstructions. [71] Now while these evaluations are my own conclusions with respect to the New Testament, it is simply a distortion to say that the scholarly world as a whole is *also* in agreement with evangelical convictions on these matters; in fact there are men recognized as competent scholars who would dispute with evangelical conclusions. One looks in vain for the indications of support for the conservative viewpoint from a majority of schools of thought. One wonders how Montgomery could make the evaluations which he does in the above references when it is recalled that Thomas Altizer *challenged* him to the *very opposite* effect in their dialogue [72] - thereby certainly giving the impression that the vast majority of scholars would *not* accept the New Testament fully, as Montgomery does. Now I would fully agree that these men *ought* to agree with Montgomery's evangelical evaluation of Scripture, its documentary reliability, and eyewitness origin, but it is simply improper for Montgomery to represent those men as if they *do* accept those conclusions! Therefore, on Montgomery's evidentialist platform (calling for common, neutral methodology to confirm historically his argumentative premises), the first premise of his argument cannot be accepted; the range of historical scholarship does *not establish* the early, eyewitness character of the New Testament, and even if it did this fact would *not infer* the reliability of the accounts. And if Montgomery wants to restrict recognition of "competent" scholarship to those men or works which come to *evangelical* conclusions, then he has abandoned his neutrality altogether!

When we turn to examine Montgomery's second premise we see that it contains two basic ideas: Christ's claim to deity, and Christ's prediction of His resurrection. Remembering what was said about the first premise above, we have to see that when probabilistic evidence is weighed, there is some probability that Jesus never made these claims and predictions in the first place (i.e., it cannot be said with neutral, historical evidence that he did). Laying that crucial point aside, we would go on to observe (in simulated unbelieving style) that even the historical accuracy of the gospel records does not establish the authority or deity of Christ on his mere say-so. Moreover, the unbeliever need not be persuaded by Montgomery's argumentative dilemma: i.e., Jesus was either a charlatan or lunatic, if not truly divine, or his disciples were charlatans, lunatics, or naive exaggerators[73]. Now this is a false dilemma since there are other legitimate options (e.g., Jesus was teaching a new concept of God based on modified Eastern ideas, or an adoptionist messianism, etc.), but even accepting the terms of the dilemma the unbeliever can readily choose any of the options, while finding no obstruction in so doing from Montgomery's arguments.[74] Jesus or his disciples could have been deceptive on this one point (in order to achieve a more *lasting* impression for their otherwise noble ethic), holding to an end-justifies-means viewpoint (but of course prohibiting such leeway to their followers since, if *everybody* followed the practice, a lasting maximization of good could not result), or they could have done it to shake down either established Judaism (from its dead religious orthodoxy) or messianically imperishable Rome. On the other hand we could view Jesus (or, easier, his disciples) as having mental problems, says the astute unbeliever. Montgomery says we cannot avoid the conclusion that Jesus was a deranged schizophrenic who retreated from reality, and we cannot account for the fact that a psychiatrist sees Jesus' teachings as a blueprint for successful living and mental health, if He is not accounted as actually divine. The unbeliever's reply comes with no difficulty. Montgomery has to get away from his hopelessly outdated conception of mental illness. That a man has a particular mental problem does not necessarily mean he is irredeemably crazy or demented in everything he does or says; Jesus simply had one of many personality hangups expressed in a very unique way (one which certainly needs counsel, but hardly "whitecoats"; after all, his *behavior* is the key to treatment, and his behavior was far from psychotic). You call him a "schizophrenic"; so what is in a label? Even more, this particular label is so broadly interpreted today in psychiatry that many doctors feel it applies to all of us in one way or another. The same ploy can be directed at Montgomery's second point (the blueprint of mental health). Or from a different evaluative perspective the unbeliever could simply say, "Well that just goes to show you how messed up modern psychiatry is, when they will run after the ideas of Jesus!" On another hand, one could reply that other "experts" would disagree, saying that Christian ethics is unhealthy for effective personality, etc. Well on and on we could go, but the point is that one need not fall back from Montgomery's dilemma if he is an "educated" unbeliever. The possibilities and motives for the disciples being deceptive are explained in the analysis of Pinnock above.[75] They too could have had emotional problems while nevertheless having good intentions (thus taking Jesus teachings to the world, thinking him somehow divine). Or they might have been misled by Messianic expectations, though not of the "purer" strands discussed by Montgomery. Remember the Eastern and Roman worlds were very eclectic, and there was much cross fertilization of messianic ideas (the unbeliever might say); this accounts for the unique blend in the New Testament's messianic concept or confusion, depending on your viewpoint). Now while the writer finds none of the simulated responses of the unbeliever

satisfactory to him (and certainly disagrees with them all), the fact remains that Montgomery cannot make any real point based on the *claims* of Jesus (or his followers) when arguing from a neutral position with an astute sinner. There is very little probability value in Montgomery's arguments if you are not inclined to agree with a Biblical perspective.

The second element of premise 2 in Montgomery's apologetic six-step was listed as Jesus' prediction of his own resurrection. There are definite problems with this consideration as well. The first is this. Montgomery wants to point out, as part of his demonstration of the resurrection and its significance, that Jesus predicted His own victory over the grave; Jesus rested His very claim to deity and authority on this prediction of His resurrection (further, that prediction would not only set up an interpretative context for the event, but it would serve to dissuade the critic from the idea that the resurrection was merely a weird, unexplainable, biological mishap that nobody expected - least of all Jesus). So this prediction is integral to Montgomery's argument. *But* Montgomery grants that the gospels were written from 30-65 years after Jesus' death[76]; taking these accounts "as nothing more than historical records"[77], how could we think that these men were able to recall (with precision) the words of Jesus or His predictions? We are talking in the range of half a century for memory lapse, imaginative embellishment, distortion, etc., and remember that the apostles would have been in old age by then (between 60 and 95 years old). Moreover, two of the four gospels were not written by apostles at all! So why should we trust the gospels that Jesus actually made these specific predictions or claims about Himself? Montgomery's answer is that Jesus gave His apostles "the gift of total recall"[78]. In the place where Montgomery says this, he recognizes that this answer *assumes* the deity and authority of Jesus; but to avoid circular reasoning Montgomery says that Jesus' divine authority is itself established by historical confirmation of His resurrection. That historical confirmation, Montgomery claims, "is accomplished by analyzing the New Testament documents...as nothing more than historical records"[79]. *However*, we have seen that *the prediction* of Jesus' own resurrection is *itself part* of Montgomery's argument for the resurrection and deity of Christ[80]. Thus the prediction is integral to the resurrection argument, but the prediction can only be accepted as credible if the apostles had total recall; yet total recall is an acceptable answer only *if* Jesus rose from the dead. So Montgomery's argument comes full circle! To avoid question-begging Montgomery must drop either (1) his making Jesus' prediction and claims as recalled by the apostles integral to the argument, or (2) the idea that he is treating the New Testament documents as nothing more than ordinary, common, unspecial records (for "total recall" over 65 years would most definitely be extraordinary!). Any reasonable man would demand this sort of integrity from Montgomery; we must not reason in vicious circles. Now if Montgomery chooses to drop #1, then we need not view the resurrection as having the significance or interpretation given it by Montgomery (that is, Christ's resurrection could be a weird, unanticipated mishap that does not confirm remarkable predictions or claims about himself); yet if Montgomery chooses to drop #2, then we do not have a neutral, historically objective argument! Thus contrary to his claims, Montgomery's "historical and philosophical demonstration" of the truth of Christ's resurrection does not have "an objective foundation which will stand up under the most exacting criticism";[81] his "case for Christianity" fails to demonstrate the deity of Christ in a religiously neutral fashion, for he cannot *simultaneously* have his neutrality and a deity-attesting resurrection. However, even if we forget all of the above, forget the question-begging and

resultant dilemma, there would still be a crucial flaw in Montgomery's use of a prediction by Jesus to validate the Christian position. The problem is this: a fulfilled prediction does *not infer* deity in any normal sense on unbelieving, methodological assumptions. We would not say a man was God just because he correctly predicted what time he would get to work in the morning (looking at the clock as he goes out the door), or even because he correctly predicted the value of his stock two months in advance; neither proper evaluation of the factors involved in getting to work nor guess-work indicate divine character. But what if the prediction is self-referential? Well we are not inclined to consider Harry Houdini as God are we? Indeed, far from considering his amazing self-predicted escapes as proof of deity, we take them as indications of circus feats or trickery. Moreover, even if someone tried to pre-interpret his self-referential prediction, we properly could question his logic or suspect fraud or consider the prediction a "lucky guess." If some deranged person claimed that because he was a bird he could jump out of the airplane and not die, we would be silly to consider him a bird just because he (as others) did not happen to get killed when he hit the ground (an item for Ripley's "Believe it or not!" but certainly *not* a validation of *deity*)! Thus from a neutral standpoint, a fulfilled prediction does not demonstrate deity in itself.

Therefore, we must consider premise 2 of Montgomery's six-step argument as faulty; there is no apologetical value (the astute unbeliever will say) in either the *claims* of Christ to deity *or* His *prediction* of resurrection. Montgomery's argument with respect to the claims of Christ is a false dilemma because (1) the critic has other legitimate options, and (2) even the choices offered by Montgomery pose no real problem to the unbeliever; there is, then, no dilemma. Montgomery's argument with respect to the prediction of Christ fails for two reasons: (1) it involves question-begging taken in the whole context of his apologetic, and (2) even if it did not, it still would not carry the weight of any apologetically significant inference. And to top things off, this second premise in Montgomery's argument (with its mention of Christ's claims and prediction) is completely dependent upon the first premise (about the early date, and hence trustworthiness, of the New Testament documents). But that first premise was seen to be invalid due to factual exaggeration and unwarranted inference. So premise 2 is thoroughly debilitated.

When we come to premise 3 and go behind it to Montgomery's demonstration, we find the same faulty arguments utilized by Pinnock above. Montgomery thinks the unbeliever should affirm the historical resurrection of Christ, for: how do you explain the empty tomb otherwise,[\[82\]](#) how do you account for the growth of Christianity otherwise,[\[83\]](#) and how could the disciples be considered psychologically or ethically capable of lying?[\[84\]](#) All three of these questions are more than satisfactorily answered from the non-Christian perspective in III.A.1, and the reader is merely referred there for refutation of Montgomery. The lack of any historical evidence against the resurrection is mentioned by Montgomery,[\[85\]](#) but this consideration is erroneous and non-telling. In the very documents which Montgomery takes as authentic we find testimony against the resurrection (e.g., the soldiers claimed that the disciples stole the body, the religiously esteemed members of society were unconvinced and opposed the disciples, the Athenian intellectuals scoffed, and many people were not compelled to believe). Moreover, even a genuine

lack of evidence can be explained either by the efficiency of the disciples' deceptive activities (i.e., committed the "perfect" crime when stealing the body) or by the suppression of evidence once Christianity gained political leverage in the Roman world (can anyone really doubt that this sort of thing was beyond the corrupt popes?). But all of this is really beside the point. Belief in the resurrection cannot be built on an argument from silence, but rather the burden of proof is on Montgomery to deliver solid evidence and show just cause for thinking that the empirical uniformity of nature has actually been broken in history. He cannot turn the tables and expect his opponent to disprove what appears to be a scientifically ridiculous claim. Thus the lack of contrary evidence is (1) erroneous, (2) understandable, and (3) apologetically insignificant. Montgomery is not beyond question-begging either in his argument for the resurrection. His own predisposition to believe is quite evident when, in light of the fact that he does not think absolute certainty can be arrived at either for or against the resurrection, he dismisses naturalistic explanations of the resurrection accounts in the New Testament as "infinitely more improbable than the Resurrection itself."[\[86\]](#) But those holding to the naturalistic accounts (e.g., the swoon theory) certainly think that *a miraculous event is the thing* that is infinitely more improbable (and indeed there is far more statistical evidence from history and empirical accountability for men living through execution attempts on rare occasions, especially when it has been a rushed attempt, than there is for men coming to life three days after their death!). But even beyond the fact that Montgomery's arguments all fail to demonstrate a historical resurrection of Jesus (on neutral methodological principles) there is the inferential hiatus which is involved in alleging that Christ's resurrection evidences His deity or establishes His truthfulness.[\[87\]](#) The movement of thought, "Resurrection, therefore God" or "Resurrection, therefore total infallibility," simply does not follow. So even *if* Montgomery could demonstrate the historical resuscitation of a cadaver, his argument would still be logically crippled. Indeed, Montgomery himself has to admit that his inferences *could* be unfounded;[\[88\]](#) and when he goes on to say about contrary inferences from the evidence that "such probabilities are extremely small", his question-begging is again evident. Montgomery's contention that Jesus' own explanation of His resurrection should be preferred[\[89\]](#) is disputed in our discussion of premise 2 above. If a man happened to be the lone survivor from an ocean liner which went down at sea, the only person who did not drown before rescuers arrived, should we accept his demented conclusion, "well then, I must be in reality a fish"? Or imagine a woman living in Hiroshima and overtaken by surprise with the dropping of the atomic bomb; the next thing she is aware of is being treated in a Red Cross hospital, the doctors telling her that all her neighbors were killed and her city destroyed by the bomb. Now if she should conclude that she must be the Sinto goddess, Amaterasu-omikami, because she survived the blast, would we think that she was "in a better position to explain how this happened"[\[90\]](#) than the doctors? The unbeliever would answer with an unequivocal "no!" Therefore, premise 3 in Montgomery's six-step apologetic must be rejected because: (1) his arguments can be refuted, and (2) even if his arguments stood, the premise involves a breach of logic, an inferential hiatus, which sabotages the train of thought. Moreover, premise 3 completely depends on the acceptability of premise 1, which has been undermined already, and so breaks down altogether.

In premise 4 Montgomery wishes to point out the rationalistic or scientific presupposition which lies behind any discounting of miracles *a priori*. To the opponent who argues that no amount of



historical study could yield more than a picture of Jesus as a very remarkable man, Montgomery says "This argument rests on the rationalistic presupposition that God *could not* become man"[91]. But somehow Montgomery has overlooked that his opponent can have exactly the same repudiation of Montgomery's own outlook; "Your argument rests on the mythological presupposition that God *could* become man! Premise 4 is not going to stop the astute unbeliever. Montgomery offers an example to show why one should reject Hume's *a priori* dismissal of miracles[92]; if you follow Hume, says Montgomery, you would justify the Lilliputians' (imagined) refusal to believe in Gulliver's existence even though he were right before their very eyes! But by failing to realize the significance of the fact that men today do not see the resurrected Christ before their empirical eyes but must rest belief on written testimony, Montgomery can have his example twisted around and directed at *his* position. The unbeliever might well point out that his own situation is *not* akin to that of a Lilliputian who is called upon to believe Gulliver's existence (i.e., the non-Christian does not confront Christ as did Thomas) but that his situation is really much more like that of Captain Pedro de Mendez who was called upon by Gulliver to believe in the existence of the Lilliputians, *et. al.* (i.e., the non-Christian confronts testimony to the most unusual sort of thing, a resurrection). When looked at from this perspective (which is really what took place in the novel, not what Montgomery has to imagine might have taken place) and remembering how Gulliver argues so strenuously for his *veracity* in the last chapter of the novel, the tables have really been turned on Montgomery! Jonathan Swift published "Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, by Lemuel Gulliver" (i.e., *Gulliver's Travels* as it comes to be known) in the form of an actual autobiographical travel adventure; except for a very few close friends, nobody knew who the anonymous author really was. The "Travels" were accompanied by a testimony from the Publisher, Richard Sympson which corrects all of the errors in the publisher's account of the travels. We have all the trappings of an accurate historical account; historical circumstances (even dates and geography), eyewitness accounts, character witness, an apology for the author's veracity, and even a correction of possible distortions! Now then, the unbeliever asks, is Montgomery prepared to believe in the existence of the Lilliputians, or does he discount them on *a priori* philosophical grounds? The farce here is painfully apparent to all - because Swift's satire did come to be known as just that: Swift's work (not Gulliver's), and a satire (not eyewitness history). Thus the unbeliever is not disturbed by premise 4 in Montgomery's argument; he had reason (even before Swift's was revealed) not to assume the existence of Lilliputians, and he *has* reason not to assume the possibility of resurrections. The difference between himself and Montgomery, the unbeliever will say, is the difference between scientific scrutiny and mythological credulity. Montgomery, no less than the sceptic, has *his* presuppositions of what is possible and what is not. Furthermore, are we to believe that Montgomery would really have affirmed the existence of the Lilliputians had not Swift's secret accidentally got out to the public? If he would *not* have, then Montgomery's presupposition is seen to be not only unscientific (because it allows resurrections) but biased and inconsistent (because had Swift's secret not been found out Montgomery *still* would *not* have allowed for the existence of the Lilliputians). And if Montgomery *would* have believed in the Lilliputians you can be sure the non-Christian would write off his scholarly credibility altogether! There is one final problem with premise 4. Even *if* Montgomery could establish that "history and not philosophy must answer" whether miracles have happened[93], even if one could investigate the facts without an *a priori* and determine objectively whether some alleged event is historical or not, we can still not avoid the truth that it is *philosophy*, not neutral historiography, which determines what you make of the "brute facts."



Thus a demonstration of the resurrection might not be discounted by the willing unbeliever on philosophical grounds, but he still need not interpret the resurrection as having the significance Montgomery attributes to it. Thus premise 4, like the previous three, proves to be unsatisfactory: (1) it can be reversed against Montgomery's own position, (2) it could show him to be tendentious in his conclusions, and (3) it is apologetically non-telling (since it does not challenge the unbeliever's *interpretation* of history or the "facts").

Little needs to be said with respect to the obvious unacceptability of premise 5 in Montgomery's argument. From the non-Christian's perspective, the assertion that "If Christ is God, then He speaks the truth..." amounts to simple question-begging, for Montgomery's assertion *assumes* the *Christian* conception of God (who cannot lie, who is omniscient, and who is inerrant in all His pronouncements). There are plenty of other conceptions of god to choose from, and these conceptions do *not* include the idea of infallibility and complete honesty! If Christ is god in the ancient Greek sense, then we might well wonder if his assertions are trustworthy or accurate at all. The unbeliever can easily counter Montgomery's fifth premise with the questioning attitude of Plato's *Euthyphro*. Modifying the question in one respect, but maintaining the same *attitude* toward the gods, the unbeliever can follow Socrates in wanting to know what the truth is *irrespective* of whatever the gods may say. Therefore, the simple fact that Christ is formally designated "God" does not imply anything with respect to his truthfulness or reliability about the authority of the Old and New Testaments, the significance of His death, or the nature of man and history. Montgomery's premise begs the very question at hand: whether the Christian teaching about the God situation is true or not. If one is really going to be unbiased in his use of the empirico-historical method, if one is going to be objective in his approach to the simple facts, then he cannot *import* the Christian idea of God at the presuppositional level. If our assumptions are only methodological in character, not substantive, then we cannot allow a veiled presupposition of the Christian view of God to confer truth on the Old Testament, the New Testament, the interpretation of Christ's death, the Biblical teaching on man's nature, or the Biblical teaching on the nature of history. Montgomery must, in all intellectual honesty, validate each of these items point by point with rigorous and painstaking inductive argumentation. Premise 5 is an illegitimate short-cut. The conclusion of Montgomery's argument comes in premise 6; its main thrust is this: "It follows from the preceding that all Biblical assertions...are to be regarded as revealed truth..." But our analysis of the foregoing argumentation, represented in premises 1 to 5, has shown *each one of them* to be defective, thus depriving Montgomery of his conclusion altogether. It certainly does not "follow" from these five faulted assertions that the Bible is correct in all that it says. The only thing which follows is the ineffectiveness of a neutral, inductive apologetic in dealing with an astute sinner. One final observation should be made about premise 6 (Montgomery's conclusion to the argument). Even if we put aside the fact that each of the previous five premises is unsatisfactory in itself, it still would *not* logically follow that premise 6 is true. Montgomery's argument lacks the necessary transitions from premise to premise to produce the sixth assertion by means of logical calculus. However, he admits that his argument does not meet the demands of formal logic.<sup>[94]</sup> This of course is no credit to his argument! However, even granting him the looseness of argumentation that he desires, the sixth assertion still does not "follow" in any reasonable sense, and this is because of the numerous illegitimate inferences embodied in the previous five premises. The earliness of the New

Testament documents does not infer their trustworthiness, and their composition by Jesus' disciples does not infer their reliable recording of His words. The resurrection of Jesus does not infer His deity, and His deity does not infer His truthfulness. Upright, inductive, and objective methodology demands that these assertions be made by anyone who comes to the "brute facts" without substantive presuppositions inclined toward the acceptance of Christianity. Thus premise 6 does not even loosely follow from numbers 1 to 5, even if we forget the various other difficulties already noted in regard to those previous premises! Therefore, at every step along the way Montgomery's apologetical argument is thwarted. It turns out to be neither "very precise" nor "confirmable."[\[95\]](#) (N.B. I would repeat that, while I personally agree with the views expressed in Montgomery's six premises, it is from an unbelieving perspective and based on "neutral" methodology that Montgomery's apologetic argument has to be seen as sterile.)

## b. Conceptual Criticism

Having seen that Montgomery's intention is to produce an objective, historical and overwhelming argument for the resurrection of Christ which does not use substantive presuppositions, we went on to examine that argument for the resurrection with respect to its particular steps and backing, finding it not very overwhelming. We turn now to examine that argument more on the level of conception (rather than particular outworking) in order to determine further its effectiveness as an apologetic for the Christian faith.

### 1. Internal Conflict

The first comment we would make is that it seems Montgomery is unable to distinguish between the historic *character* of Biblical events and the empirical historical *method* of ascertaining truth;[\[96\]](#) for example, he fallaciously moves from the fact that the resurrection is objective *Historie* to a criticism of evangelicals like Ramm and Ladd for *not* thinking that the resurrection has demonstrable, solid, historical facticity (in the modern sense) which must be established by the searchlight of objective, historical criticism, thereby producing a rational, religious certainty apart from the internal witness of the Holy Spirit! Secondly we note that Montgomery is involved in the troublesome inconsistency of using a method of ascertaining truth which assumes the *uniformity* of nature (i.e., inductivism) in order to demonstrate an event which proves the *non-uniformity* of nature (i.e., a miraculous resurrection)! Montgomery is enmeshed in using a principle of continuity (between historical particulars, so that they be linked together in inductive argumentation) to establish the truth of discontinuity (the uniqueness of the resurrection, not naturalistically caused). When Montgomery wants to verify that the resurrection very *probably* occurred as a *unique* or miraculous event, he is divided against himself. So we see that Montgomery's conception of apologetics incorporates fallacious inference as well as self-vitiating inconsistency on the methodological level.

The dialectical tension in Montgomery's apologetic procedure is painfully evident. On the one hand he has to assume that the world is such that argumentative probability resting upon inductive examination of evidence can be established, but on the other hand he has to utilize metaphysical assumptions which will allow for uncaused, unique events in history. His historical inductivism leads to probability judgments based upon the assumption of metaphysical determinism (natural uniformity); hence he can objectively argue about historical events. But then the astute unbeliever who also works in the area of historical study tells Montgomery that the uniformity of nature precludes a resurrection from the dead, so Montgomery has to run to the other pole in his thinking and justify the possibility of a miracle by assuming metaphysical indeterminism. But if this appears to deprive the resurrection of its significance as well as our ability to verify it, Montgomery runs back to the former pole in his thinking: natural uniformity and determinism. On and on the pattern continues; every time an opponent renders a crucial attack on Montgomery's position he runs to the opposite corner, waiting for the counter-attack and then running back to the first corner. This rationalism-irrationalism, determinism-indeterminism, continuity-discontinuity runaround might seem to be apologetically valuable, protecting Montgomery from all angles of attack and rendering his position unassailable; since there are contradictory elements in his system of thought he has an answer for anybody! He has his cake (miracles) and can eat it too (probability). But far from being a boon to his apologetic, this dialectical tension in Montgomery's position really renders it doubly weak, open to criticism from both directions, and assailable at both poles. His apologetic is scuttled at the point of his probabilism as well as at the point of his indeterminism. After we see this we will have to conclude that, even at the level of conception, Montgomery's apologetic cannot establish the miraculous resurrection of Christ as a validation of His deity.

#### aa. Probabilism Faulted

Let us first examine the use of *probability* in Montgomery's apologetic. He desires to show that Christ very probably rose from the dead. To do this he chooses to follow the empirico-historical method, objectively examine the evidence without any religious commitment one way or the other; hereby he would put a solid empirical base under the Christian world-view. However, he recognizes that taking this route exacts its tolls; one simply *cannot* have *certainty* with respect to knowledge of either history or the present<sup>[97]</sup>. Certainty can only be attained in mathematics and formal logic, says Montgomery; all significant, synthetic knowledge about genuine states of affairs (past, present, or future) must remain at the level of mere probability in the nature of the case. This distinction between analytic and synthetic truths is central to Montgomery's plea for the acceptability of mere probability in historical judgments:

Tillich missed the vital insight offered by contemporary analytic philosophy in its distinction between analytic (purely formal) and synthetic (content) judgments; only the latter, based on experiential investigation of the world, can provide substantive knowledge of reality. If one intends, therefore, to speak of religious or historical meaning, he must offer concrete evidence...Granted, only a high level of

probability can ever be adduced in support of such synthetic claims; but to demand absolute certainty is to obtain pure formality and thus no knowledge of the world at all...All our verifiable knowledge of the world, present or past, is based on the sifting of experiential data, and just as in ordinary life we must constantly jump the gap between probability and certainty by faith, so in the religious realm we have no right to demand - much less any expectation of acquiring - a certainty transcending the probabilities of historical evidence.[98]

Absolute truth...is possible only in formal logic...and these formal systems are absolute only because they are *so defined* and insofar as they stand independent of empirical experience. The moment the realm of experience is introduced, "absolute," "unalterable" results become impossible...[99]

Only deductive logic and pure mathematics provide "apodictic certainty,." and they do so because they stem from self-evident formal axioms...involving no matter of fact. The moment we enter the realm of fact, we must depend on probability...[100]

Only the tautology (if A then A) can be *proved* true, and proof of its truth is possible only because the tautology makes no statement of fact. In the case of every theory involving statements of fact, *proof* is impossible...Since this is so, all science and history - indeed *all* intelligent decision between alternative theories, beliefs, ideologies, must rest squarely upon *probability*. The rational man, when confronted with a problem of fact, must ask himself two questions: (1) What is the probable validity of the present evidence for and against the notion, (2) What is the probability of future data arising to negate the force of present evidence for or against the notion.[101]

With this analytic/synthetic distinction in mind, Montgomery asks "the rational man" to apply the inductive method to the stuff of experience in order that he might know and affirm the truth of the Bible. But how can he be expected to know and affirm such truthfulness if certainty is out of reach? Montgomery's answer amounts to this, "Who needs certainty?" As Harvard logician Willard van Orman Quine has soundly pointed out, one doesn't need to put supports under every inch of a roof in order to hold it fully and completely up." [102] Now the utterly amazing thing about Montgomery's deference to Quine in order to defend reliance upon probability, a reliance which Montgomery thinks is necessitated by the analytic/synthetic distinction, is this: Quine is one of the key philosophers in recent years to have impugned and confuted the very distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, between formal and empirical science.[103] Here is

one outstanding problem with Montgomery's system of apologetics. It is built upon a viewpoint which is widely disputed and forcefully attacked today. By trying to defend his probabilism (in the sense of not needing certainty) Montgomery has unwittingly backed right into the refutation of his notion of probabilism (as generated from the analytic/synthetic distinction)!

Montgomery's apologetic use of probabilism, then, is unfounded. Logic is not merely formal and empty of substantive content; indeed, as Quine argues, even the process of quantification holds the key to the ontological commitments of our use of language.[\[104\]](#) And if simple logic betrays ontological viewpoint, how much more does empiricism! Pending Montgomery's rehabilitation of the analytic/synthetic distinction as well as the neutrality of methodological assumptions (e.g., logic and empiricism) in the philosophic journals, we must reject his apologetic dependence upon probability. However, even laying aside these fundamental deficiencies, there are grave problems with Montgomery's view of probability in defending the Christian faith. Montgomery claims that certainty and absolute truth cannot be possessed except in formal logic or pure mathematics; he further says that religious decisions are one with ordinary-life decisions and that probability is the guide to life (cf. the above quotations). Therefore, he concludes that, since probability is the "guide of life" and "our Christian convictions based on historical uncertainties are...one with the rest of life,"[\[105\]](#) even when it comes to the question of Christian faith "you have to act on this basis."[\[106\]](#)

Granted, the basis is only one of probability, not of certainty, but probability is the sole ground on which finite human beings can make any decisions. Only deductive logic and pure mathematics provide "apodictic certainty"...The moment we enter the realm of fact, we must depend on probability; this may be unfortunate, but it is unavoidable, and since it does not keep us from making decisions in non-religious matters, it should not immobilize us when religious commitment is involved.[\[107\]](#)

However, the Bible-believing Christian must oppose Montgomery most strenuously on these points; Scripture's outlook is most definitely *not* the same as Montgomery's probabilism. Indeed, the very heart of our faith would be fatally substituted with an alien epistemology if we followed Montgomery, and the transplant would have religiously lethal results. On accord with God's sure word we must stress and diligently defend the fact that we *can* have certainty outside of logic and mathematics, that Christian faith is *not* one with ordinary-life decisions, and that probability is *not* the guide to the Christian's life.

The Bible communicates to us matters of *fact*; yet, contrary to Montgomery, that factuality is not to be depreciated to a mere level of probability. Basing our thinking on the apostolic word, we

can "know assuredly (without doubt)" that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ;[\[108\]](#) we know this certainly, not just probably. The inspired gospel comes to us that we might "know the *certainty*" of our Christian teaching.[\[109\]](#) Our conviction comes from the powerful Creator who "hath shined in our hearts for enlightenment of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ."[\[110\]](#) The eternal Son of God has revealed the Father to us, and the result is *knowledge*[\[111\]](#), not probability. Our conviction does not rest on flesh and blood, but on God[\[112\]](#); therefore, we can have *full assurance* of the truth. The gospel comes not "in word only, *but also* in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and *full assurance*";[\[113\]](#) this is not mere probability which must entertain some degree of doubt, but is "plarophoria" (Greek for full conviction, assurance, certainty, perfect faith limited by no doubts). This Greek word is used by Ignatius in his letter to the Smyrnaeans in the expression "perfect faith in the Lord" (1:1) and in I Clement 42:3 to say (so unlike Montgomery's probable resurrection) "fully assured by the Lord's resurrection." The Bible speaks of our "full assurance of understanding"[\[114\]](#) and "full assurance of hope."[\[115\]](#) With respect to faith Abraham is the father of us all,[\[116\]](#) and he was not weak in faith but had full certainty with respect to God's word[\[117\]](#). For us to fall back from following his example and to content ourselves with probability (just like in every other mundane decision) would be sub-Christian. Instead "let us draw near with a true heart in *full assurance* of faith"[\[118\]](#), and "let us hold fast the confession of our hope *unyieldingly*."[\[119\]](#) In Christ we surpass human probabilities and can have bold access in confident faith.[\[120\]](#) While the confidence of the godless is like a spider's web,[\[121\]](#) "In the fear of the *Lord* is strong confidence"[\[122\]](#) because "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."[\[123\]](#) Knowledge which is no better than probable is far from what the Lord promises us; we who put our confidence in Jehovah may "know the *certainty* of the words of *truth*."[\[124\]](#) Montgomery is wrong to think that certainty is limited to formal logic and pure mathematics; certainty of knowledge applies to the truthful word of God which the apologist is defending! For the apologist to settle for mere probabilities is to go against the very certainty of truth in God's word which he is defending. The renewed Christian would be undercutting his own character if, instead of genuine knowledge, he thought he could only have probability with respect to Christianity; the believer, says the Bible, has been "renewed unto *knowledge*."[\[125\]](#) He not only believes but *knows* the truth,[\[126\]](#) for the very nature of salvation is a knowledge of the truth.[\[127\]](#) Thus we would not be true to ourselves either as apologists or as renewed, saved, believers if we did not think we could have certainty of knowledge with respect to God's truth. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free";[\[128\]](#) if we are restricted to probability judgments, our very liberation is in jeopardy! Let us heed rather what John tells us: "I wrote not to you because you do not know the truth, *but* because you *know* it."[\[129\]](#) His whole purpose in writing was to show believers that they can have confident knowledge of their salvation.[\[130\]](#) Now if Christ be not raised[\[131\]](#), then our faith is vain and we are still in our sins.[\[132\]](#) Consequently, I John 5:13 certifies to us that we can have confident knowledge that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, not simply a high probability that He did. Such an apologetic as Montgomery's would deprive us of the solid hope which characterizes the apostolic proclamation of the resurrection; he cannot offer any assurance to an age longing to hear the meaningful affirmation, "He is risen!" Against the idea that certainty can only be found in non-substantive formal matters of logic and mathematics, the idea that Christian faith must rest in mere probability judgments, we boldly affirm "we *know* that the Son of God is come and has *given* us understanding in order that we might *know* Him that is *true*."[\[133\]](#) Let our attitude not



be "It is highly probable..." but that which characterized the apostle Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and have been persuaded..."[134]

We must also oppose the bringing of Christian faith down to the level of ordinary-life (Montgomery calls them "non-religious") where we weigh fallible evidence, depend upon man's research and word, and make mistakes in calculating conclusions. This is far from the situation in which we submit to the clear, sufficient, necessary, and authoritative word of God for our eternal salvation! That word does not come with the force or mere probability of with mere human prestige. Paul praises the Thessalonians because, when they heard his word from God, they "received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God." [135] When it comes to Christian faith we are not dealing on the level of questionable evidence, human argumentation, and probable truth; indeed we surpass the prestige of human intellect and scholarship. Note these words from Paul: "And my speech and my preaching was not in persuasive words of wisdom, *but* in demonstration of the Spirit and power, in order that your faith might not be in the wisdom of men *but* in the power of God...Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, *but* the Spirit from God in order that we may *know* the things freely given to us by God...we have the mind of Christ." [136] The word from God and faith which stands in His powerful demonstration are completely unparalleled in human words and demonstration; a self-attesting revelation and internal testimony from the Holy Spirit produce the certainty of knowledge. Our Christian convictions, then, do not (contrary to Montgomery) rest on uncertainties or yield only probability. Even if probability were the guide of life, it would not be the basis for Christian faith. The Christian's thinking is not dependent on man's teaching alone; in the area of divine revelation he has "an anointing from the Holy One" and knows all things. [137] "The anointing which you received from Him remains in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true and is not a lie, and just as He taught you, you abide in Him." [138] In this very significant respect religious decision is not one with the judgments of ordinary life, not being restricted to the probabilities of human thinking.

Furthermore, Montgomery is mistaken in thinking that probability is the guide of life for the Christian. We have already seen that God's word provides the certainty of knowing the truth; mere probability is not what it offers. Now Christ is the Word of Life, [139] and thus His words are Spirit and life [140] and the source of the Christian's life. [141] He alone has the words of eternal life [142] and His inscripturated word is also designated "the word of life." [143] The Scriptures provide us with sufficient guidance for the whole of life, [144] and by means of Spiritual sanctification the believer learns to prove the will of the Lord, receiving assurance in the particular decisions and situations of His life. [145] Thus the Christian's life is squarely founded, not on probability, but on the word and the Spirit, just as believers worship God in Spirit and in truth [146]. Life comes from Christ, is directed by His word, and aimed at His glory. The Scripture as the word of life is our guide, for Christ said that we must build our lives on His word [147]. Everything that the believer does, then, should be seen through the spectacles of the Bible's teaching. Since we have observed that the Bible gives certainty, truth, and genuine

knowledge rather than mere probability built on uncertainties, we cannot endorse the idea that "probability is the guide of life." God's clear and authoritative word is the guide of life. When it comes to scholarly decisions about what happened, say, at the battle of Waterloo, the believer might not have full assurance or infallible judgment, but that does not mean that he surrenders the whole of his life to the dictates of probability. In the most important sense, his life is still founded on the sure word of God; his certainty with respect to Scripture *grounds* his research into nature and history. His tentativeness about conclusions in these fields does *not undermine* the certainty with which he knows God's truthful word. To say that probability must be as far as we can go in knowing that Scripture is God's word because our inductive studies elsewhere are often tentative is to have our thought move in the wrong direction; Scripture should not be reduced to the uncertainties of human thought. Instead human thought must be directed by the life-giving word of God. If it is not, it becomes epistemologically futile. Human science and history have their proper function within the context of the cultural mandate, and that mandate is rooted in God's clear and certain word of truth. Human life, study, and science are guided by and founded upon, not probability, but the certainties of God's revelation.

Therefore, we reject as out of harmony with the Scripture viewpoint the notions that certainty is restricted to deductive logic and pure mathematics (it also applies to God's inscripturated word), that religious faith is one with ordinary-life decisions (it is rooted in far better authority and demonstration), and that probability must be the guide of life (God's word is instead the guide of life; even natural revelation must be approached via special revelation). The Christian apologist must not sell his birthright of indubitable knowledge of God for the pottage of probabilism in epistemology - no matter how alluring the autonomy of (allegedly) objective, inductive science may seem. Although we have made the crucial observations that Montgomery's apologetic use of probabilism is (1) unfounded and (2) sub-Christian, we should see that his problems are still not over, even forgetting what has been said already. We must add that the attempt to defend the Christian faith by means of probability is (3) unworkable both as a method and as an effective apologetic.

The inductive method and appeal to probability assumes the regularity or uniformity of nature and the operation of cause and effect. Instead of viewing truth as deduced rationally from self-evident principles, the inductivist derives truth from a generalization of particular facts. Now since the days of David Hume this simple outlook and its assumptions have had no theoretical grounding (from an inductive, neutral perspective). Hume would have nothing of presumptuous *a priori* reasoning; his method would be rigorously "scientific." However, his acute scientific analysis undermined the inductivist's confidence altogether:

When we infer the effects from causes, we would establish the existence of these causes... 'Tis therefore by experience only, that we can infer the existence of one object from that of another... The nature of experience is this... a regular order or

contiguity and succession with regard to /two species of objects/...We likewise call to mind their constant conjunction in all past instances. Without any farther ceremony, we call the one *cause* and the other *effect*, and infer the existence of the one from that of the other...From the mere repetition of any past impression, even to infinity, there never will arise any new original idea, such as that of a necessary connexion; and the number of impressions has in this case no more effect than if we confin'd ourselves to one only.[\[148\]](#)

Thus Hume thought with respect to the notion of cause and effect that there simply was no impression "which produces an idea of such prodigious consequence."[\[149\]](#) What happens to probability then?

'Tis therefore necessary that in all probable reasonings there be something present to the mind, either seen or remember'd and that from this we infer something connected with it, which is not seen nor remember'd...The only connexion or relation of objects, which can lead us beyond the immediate impressions of our memory and senses, is that of cause and effect; and that because 'tis the only one, on which we can found a just inference from one object to another. The idea of cause and effect is deriv'd from *experience*...probability is founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt those objects, of which we have had experiences, and those, of which we have had none; and therefore 'tis impossible this presumption can arise from probability...Now as we call every thing custom, which proceeds from a past repetition, without any new reasoning or conclusion, we may establish it is a certain truth, that all the belief, which follows upon any present impression, is deriv'd solely from that origin...Thus all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy.[\[150\]](#)

Therefore, what men call probability is nothing more than personal taste and custom. Empirical examination does not give evidence for the inference of causation; therefore, causal judgments are built on nothing but the psychological habit of expecting regularity, and the supreme premise offered to justify this (the continuity between past and future events, the uniformity of nature) is nothing but public custom. Thus all induction and probability judgments are reduced to mere habit, and nobody can really take them seriously any more. Now Montgomery can either question Hume's assumptions in some way (thus becoming a presuppositionalist and putting aside neutral inductivism for the time) or appeal to popular opinion, showing that a majority of people believe in causation and trust probability (thus surrendering to Hume's refutation, admitting that the apologetic for Christianity is merely subjective). The neutral inductivist does not see the causal connection between two events, and he does not have knowledge of the whole series of events (past and future) so as to summarize regular succession; he must conclude on his

own terms that there is no adequate grounds for belief in causation, natural uniformity, or probability. The extension of our knowledge beyond immediate sensation had rested on the predication of future expectability, but since this required the assumption of uniformity such an extension of knowledge was destroyed by Hume. The probabilism of Montgomery's (putatively) neutral, inductive apologetic is undermined as well. Montgomery will certainly wish to dispute Hume's point, but how can he on his own basis? (Note: although this should be obvious, I would point out that Montgomery's writing against Hume, e.g., SP, pp. 288ff., pertains to Hume's argument against miracles, not his undermining of probabilism; it is widely recognized that Hume was embarrassingly inconsistent in being a sceptic about causation yet dismissing miracles on the basis of natural law - clear evidence of his irrationalism-rationalism dialectic! - but it is more embarrassing to see a believer like Montgomery parallel Hume's inconsistency by appealing to indeterminacy to permit miracles yet relying on probabilism, which involves uniformity, to defend them. Montgomery's reply to Hume's anti-miracle polemic just underscores the critique of Montgomery's probabilism presented in this paragraph. Granting indeterminacy and not answering Hume on this very point, how can Montgomery assign probability to anything with any seriousness?)

On "neutral" inductivist grounds Hume has invalidated Montgomery's appeal to probability. However, even if we magnanimously grant the soundness of an apologetic appeal to probabilities, there are further methodological impediments to its use. Utmost among them is the problem of *rating* probability: how can you do it? To calculate the odds in favor or against something we need to know all the factors involved, we need to know the context in which particular evidence is seen in order to know the significance or weight of that evidence, we need to compute the disconfirming against the confirming data, etc. That is, if the notion of probability is not going to reduce to a simple matter of saying "*Perhaps* this happened," there must be a way to evaluate relative strength of evidence and arrange different hypotheses in a scale - otherwise the notion of "higher" probability is pointless (and we are left with a mere "perhaps"). Yet it appears that the process of rating probabilities *accurately* is impossible, for we never know the precise extent of our ignorance. Indeed, outside of omniscience it is inherently an overestimation to think that you have correctly computed the factors and arrived at an accurate appraisal of the probabilities in a historical judgment. One might arbitrarily define the limits of a certain context in order to have a built-in "omniscience" with respect to that context (e.g., a card game, a statistical survey within set boundaries and using only pre-established parameters, etc.) and thus calculate the probabilities, but no one has such comprehension of history and nature except God. Thus the problem of accurate rating of probabilities would force Montgomery to reduce his claims to a simple "perhaps" (i.e., "I can't be certain") or to a popular vote (counting how many people think hypothesis x has "higher" probability than hypothesis y); in either case the unbeliever would not be told anything about the true state of affairs with respect to God, the Bible, the resurrection of Christ, etc., but only something about the person or persons who thought the "probabilities" higher for Christianity than against it. We would learn something about their mind-set, proclivities, and commitments, but apologetics is more than a mere personal testimony about what satisfies someone! The vicissitudes of rating probability (and thereby finding it a useful notion) are more than evident in the way that Montgomery tells us adjudicate the strength of an hypothesis:

The rational man, when confronted with a problem of fact, must ask himself two questions: (1) What is the probable validity of the present evidence for and against the notion, (2) What is the probability of future *data* arising to negate the force of present evidence for or against the notion... Thus one must make his decisions on probability, for the conclusions of empirical method are always hypothetical (to varying degrees, of course, depending upon the strength of present evidence and the probability of relevant new evidence arising).[\[151\]](#)

Now how does one go about determining "the probable validity" of the testimony from a historical writer? How is it to be arranged on a scale with conflicting testimony? How much more probable is one than the other? Are there established and agreed upon rating systems so as to avoid arbitrariness? Are these systems arbitrary themselves? Is it possible to rate the probable trustworthiness of some testimony in isolation from cross examination? These and a dozen more questions afflict the first criterion for determining the "varying degrees" of probability for a hypothesis. But the second criterion is even more infeasible! How can anyone have any idea of what might or might not turn up in the near or remote future as far as evidence? Who but God knows the future? Present evidence or testimony simply cannot tip one off as to discoveries to be expected from archaeology or the rummaging of archives. The neutral inductivist has no idea of the extent of evidence, its quality, or its character (confirming or disconfirming) yet to be uncovered; he cannot even estimate the degree of his ignorance. So how is he to assign probability values with any serious thought of being accurate?

This problem of rating probability leads right into the unworkableness of Montgomery's probabilism for an effective defense of the faith. In rating the probability of Christ's resurrection as "extremely high,"[\[152\]](#) Montgomery bases his appraisal on two things; "no contrary historical evidence has come," and "the possibility of future evidence arising to negate the force of the now existing evidence for Christ's claims is almost too small to be entertained."[\[153\]](#) Can Montgomery really think any educated person will take him seriously? Far from engendering scholarly esteem, the proposal that *extremely high* probability can be rooted in the *lack* of negative evidence plus a *peremptory* prognostication is nothing but unbridled enthusiasm and vacuous presumption of foresight. From the lack of certain kinds of evidence and a feeling about what is likely to happen in the future, how can Montgomery be so sure, nay, so *dogmatic* about an unparalleled reversal of natural operations once two thousand years ago (Christ's resurrection) or the exhaustive inerrancy of the Bible autographa which nobody has seen for at least that long? The difficulty of rating probability can also be approached from the perspective of statistics and uniqueness. One will note that probability judgments (which are more than a "perhaps") are usually reached with respect to a *series* in which an event or characteristic recurs on some regular basis that can be traced and computed. Thus general probability can be assigned to something which is periodically repeated, but the resurrection of Christ is a unique, one-time event. As such there is no way to estimate a positive probability for it. If anything, taking the

series comprised of every death throughout past history as your context, the probability that Christ rose from the dead (even granting a dozen other similar reports from the past) would be *incredibly low!*

Of course then the question arises as to what exactly Montgomery is endeavoring to show probable: the resurrection's historicity, or the veracity of the New Testament account? *If* he were to demonstrate that the resurrection as a historical *event* is highly probable, then it would cease being miraculous! If Montgomery is trying to show the *accounts* of the resurrection to be very probably truthful, then he is involved in question-begging (since what we know of the alleged authors elsewhere is still found in the book which is under question) and in the dilemmas of rating the odds of someone's honesty (indeed, someone who lived nearly two thousand years ago and whose writings were subjected to the unsure outcome of hand copying and ecclesiastical legend-making). From an agnostic, inductive standpoint Montgomery's apologetic is very unconvincing. In a sense it could not be otherwise. Once we fail to maintain that Christianity is the *only* adequate basis for a meaningful interpretation of historical facts and eventuation, once we reduce it to simply a working hypothesis which is "as plausible" or more so than the next hypothesis about isolated, particular facts, once we have lowered our sights by appealing to the mere *probability* of Scripture's veracity, then we have left the door wide open and invited the skeptic's escape to considerations of *possibility*. Montgomery is forced by the logic of his position to grant that there is *some* probability that Jesus did not rise; the unbeliever can (and does) ring all the changes on that possibility of disconfirmation. For a neutralist approaching "brute" facts, even the evidence confirming the resurrection can take on a wholly different interpretation in light of its possible misleading character, and certainly the evidence pointing away from the outlook of the gospels will be central in his thinking. However, the Biblical position is not that Jesus probably rose, but that there is *no possibility* that death should hold Him! The resurrection is an incorrigible, foundational fact of the Christian faith; *weaken* its certainty and you are on the way to (or moving in the direction of) rendering Christian faith vain and undermining man's assurance of his salvation from sin.[\[154\]](#) The possibility of disappointment with respect to the resurrection of Christ indicates that our faith goes no further than hoping in this life, and that would be most pitiable (the odds are high, but in essence you are still whistling in the dark); contrary to this outlook is Paul's life-giving truth, his assured declaration, "But now Christ *has been raised* (an accomplished fact, a standing truth) from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep."[\[155\]](#) All men are under *unreserved obligation* to believe the Scriptural declaration of the resurrection when they hear it. However, on the basis of mere probability no absolute, necessary obligation can be established; probability implies some reservation. Thus Montgomery's probabilistic apologetic cannot confront the unbeliever with full authority (indeed, his probabilism would seem to imply that there is nothing for which a man is under absolute and formal obligation to act upon - i.e., meaning the dissolution of ethics since the authority or norm is theoretically always subject to a degree of doubt), and the irresponsibility and sin of unbelief are granted some asylum.



The ineffectiveness of an apologetic which appeals to probabilities is further indicated by the fact that what is seen as probable or improbable is settled by a person's presuppositions; thus an appeal to probability is futile until something has been done to alter the presuppositional outlook of the unbeliever. Stanford Reid put this criticism against Montgomery well:

And after all, one's view of what is probable largely depends upon one's presuppositions. This Montgomery has admitted when he has stated that men will accept any wild idea rather than believe in Christ's resurrection. Exactly so! A probable proof *proves* nothing, for what one believes to be probable is to a great extent determined by one's assumptions.[\[156\]](#)

Probabilities should not be made the *crux* of our apologetic for the very reason that probabilities do not have a "crucial" character; rather it is presuppositions which are decisive, marking final determination of an issue. (This is illustrated in the course of our next criticism of Montgomery's apologetic use of probabilism). It was indicated in the quotations from Montgomery above that he thinks a probability-oriented apologetic is suited for the "rational man"[\[157\]](#) who confronts the facts and wants to make his decisions thereby. Montgomery would lead us to think that his apologetic approach excels in reasonability and so promises effectiveness in dealing with intellectuals who will make a reasonable use of reason. The "rational man" should find Montgomery's inductive defense of the faith most admirable. Montgomery would also lead us to believe that the renowned analytic philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, supports the search for a divine intervention, a revelation from outside the world, in human events which Montgomery's probabilistic apologetic offers.[\[158\]](#) Philosophical thought today "manifests a passion for objective, empirical truth" just like Montgomery,[\[159\]](#) and the recovery of confidence in historical objectivity stems from Wittgenstein-inspired insights.[\[160\]](#) Wittgenstein even leads right up to the evangelical affirmation of *verbal* inspiration![\[161\]](#) Such an apologetical use of Wittgenstein certainly suggests that in him Montgomery finds the sort of "rational man" who would admire what Montgomery does in his defense of the faith; Wittgenstein is portrayed as the "missing link" between unbelief and Montgomery's apologetic.

But the analytical philosophy movement - Wittgenstein's continuing legacy - has provided the tools by which early twentieth-century existential skepticism toward objective Biblical truth can be effectively countered, and the fact of "divine intervention" through Scripture meaningfully proclaimed.[\[162\]](#)

Now even apart from the gross misapplication and extensive misunderstanding of Wittgenstein demonstrated here, let us look at Wittgenstein's own testimony and see whether he is impressed with Montgomery's sort of inductive, historical, probabilistic apologetic for Christianity. Just

how does the "rational man" respond to apologetical use of historical probabilities? Favorably or not? Without in the least endorsing or dealing with the Kantian notion of religion and revelation in Wittgenstein, let us consider specifically his evaluation of the Montgomery-like apologetic:

He will treat this belief as extremely well-established, and in another way as not well-established at all...

There are instances where you have a faith-where you say "I believe" - and on the other hand this belief does not rest on the fact on which our ordinary everyday beliefs normally do rest...

These controversies look quite different from any normal controversies. Reasons look entirely different from normal reason.

They are, in a way, quite inconclusive...

A man would fight for his life not to be dragged into the fire. No induction. Terror. That is, as it were, part of the substance of the belief.

That is partly why you don't get in religious controversies, the form of controversy where one person is *sure* of the thing, and the other says: 'Well, possibly.'...

We don't talk about hypothesis, or about high probability...

We could even talk of historic events.

It has been said that Christianity rests on an historic basis.

It has been said a thousand times by intelligent people that indubitability is not enough in this case. Even if there is as much evidence as for Napoleon. Because the indubitability wouldn't be enough to make me change my whole life.

It doesn't rest on an historic basis in the sense that the ordinary belief in historic facts could serve as a foundation.

Here we have a belief in historic facts different from a belief in ordinary historic facts...

Those people who had faith didn't apply the doubt which would ordinarily apply to *any* historical propositions. Especially propositions of a time long past, etc.

What is the criterion of reliability, dependability? Suppose you give a general description as to when you say a proposition has a reasonable weight of probability. When you call it reasonable, is this *only* to say that for it you have such and such evidence, and for others you haven't?

For instance, we don't trust the account given of an event by a drunk man.

Father O'Hara is one of those people who make it a question of science.

Here we have people who treat this evidence in a different way. They base things on evidence which taken in one way would seem exceedingly flimsy. They base enormous things on this evidence...

I would say, they are certainly not *reasonable*, that's obvious...

What seems to me ludicrous about O'Hara is his making it appear to be *reasonable*...

I would definitely call O'Hara unreasonable. I would say, if this is religious belief, then it's all superstition.[\[163\]](#)

Thus by deferring to Wittgenstein, Montgomery has backed right into the repudiation of the idea that his apologetic use of probabilism is either effective or reasonable. The "rational man" is far from respecting an apologetic for Christianity which is staked on historical probabilities. He realizes that it would be ludicrous to think of such historical uncertainties as adequate to settle the question of his *eternal* destiny! From an allegedly neutral, inductive standpoint Montgomery bases enormous things on exceedingly flimsy evidence; that is why his "reasons" do not function in any normal fashion. When historic evidence is brought to bear on religious decision, even "high probability" is not the determining factor - indeed, probability is (in addition to being an illusion here) not the fitting mind-set for a religious controversy ("You might be surprised that there hasn't been opposed to those who believe in Resurrection those who say "Well, possibly" Wittgenstein, LC, p. 56 - apparently Wittgenstein had not run into the strange sort of reasoning found in men like Montgomery who make the resurrection a question of probability!). According to Wittgenstein it is inherently unreasonable to base religious decision on probability; the evidence does not *convince* you by bringing probability-inspection to bear upon it, but the evidence takes on *significance* only in terms of presuppositions and a form of life: "As it were, the belief as formulated on the evidence can only be the last result - in which a number of ways of thinking and acting crystallize and come together."[\[164\]](#) Montgomery's (unwarranted claim to high probability for Christ's resurrection, then, cannot be the crux of Christian apologetics even to the putative "rational man"; the crucial factor, and the locus of the real encounter with unbelief, is presuppositional.

Therefore, with respect to the first dialectical pole in Montgomery's apologetical thinking (probability orientation) we have found it to be unfounded (since it depends on the illegitimate bifurcation of analytic from synthetic judgments), sub-Christian (since it restricts certainty to logic and mathematics, reduces religious faith to any other kind of decision, and fosters the notion that probability guides our lives), and unworkable as a method (since it is undermined by Hume and impossible to calculate) as well as being unworkable as an effective apologetic (since it is uncritically enthusiastic, shows Christianity to be possibly - perhaps very probably - wrong, provides asylum for unbelief, does not come across as reasonable, and in reality must rely upon particular presuppositions to have argumentative force). The second dialectical pole in Montgomery's apologetical thinking involves his appeal to indeterminism in order to protect the possibility of miracles.

This side of his thinking fails to commend itself to us as well. Consequently his apologetic turns out to be doubly-weak.

#### bb. Indeterminism Faulted

We observe that Montgomery does not affirm the doctrines of divine foreordination and predestination; he is very critical of those who do[165]Montgomery does not like thinking which is sovereignty-oriented[166] or which sees God as the *ultimate* cause of everything.[167] He is opposed to approaching things from the standpoint of God's eternal, sovereign decrees.[168] Indeed, not only does he hold back from asserting God's predetermination of all historical events, Montgomery's espoused position would in principle discount any genuine *predestination* at all.[169] Instead Montgomery holds that "in a relativistic universe nothing but logical self-contradiction is impossible!"[170] As a critical historian Montgomery declares "nothing is impossible"[171]. And it is in terms of this "modern" attitude that Montgomery would defend the possibility of miracles:

But can the modern man accept a "miracle" such as the Resurrection? The answer is a surprising one: The Resurrection has to be accepted by us just *because* we are modern men - men living in the Einsteinian-relativistic age. For us, unlike people of the Newtonian epoch, the universe is no longer a tight, safe, predictable playing field in which we know all the rules. Since Einstein, no modern has had the right to rule out the possibility of events because of prior knowledge of "natural law." [172] (cf. WHG, p. 194n.)

Since Einstein's revolutionary theory of relativity, progressive scientists have abandoned the notion of natural law, thereby providing Montgomery with an answer (i.e., indeterminism[173]) to Hume's argument against miracles;[174] "The universe, previously closed by Newton, Hume, *et. al.* to the possibility of unique events, now opens to full empirical investigation." [175] Thus Montgomery, the "modern man," maintains that in our open universe where nothing is impossible a miracle cannot be precluded. Determinism, whether divine or natural, has been evicted, and the open universe of indeterminism prepares the way for the coming of the Christian apologist.

Now we might be tempted to pursue a discussion of the modern scene in the philosophy of science in order that Montgomery's misreading of its support for Christian apologetics would be seen. For instance, we recall the statement by Bertrand Russell:

There has been a tendency, not uncommon in the case of a new scientific theory, for every philosopher to interpret the work of Einstein in accordance with his own metaphysical system, and to suggest that the outcome is a great accession of strength to the views which the philosopher in question previously held.[176]

It is a bit tendentious for Montgomery to think that Einstein's thought opens the door to a recognition of miracles. Russell, who is *not even recent* as a philosopher of science, certainly was well acquainted with Einstein's theory of relativity (having written the article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on it); however, far from becoming tolerant to the notion of miracles, Russell chided those believers who defended Christianity by appeal to indeterminism saying, "They seem to have overlooked the fact, that, if you abolish the reign of law, you also abolish the possibility of miracles..."[177] The renowned indeterminist, Werner Heisenberg, had this to say about the effects of modern physics on religion:

The general trend of human thinking in the nineteenth century had been toward an increasing confidence in the scientific method and in precise rational terms, and had led to a general skepticism with regard to those concepts of natural language which do not fit into the closed frame of scientific thought - for instance, those of religion. Modern physics has in many ways increased this skepticism .[178] (N.B. The way in which this skepticism may *not* have been increased, says Heisenberg, pertains to a new sense for "understanding" - something Montgomery would rightly shun.)

And even aside from the question of whether modern physics supports the possibility of miracles by means of indeterminacy is the questionable truth of indeterminacy itself; for example, Mario Bunge sees the denial of a causal nexus in the world as "a regressive attitude" that cannot avoid "the pitfalls of subjectivism" and which encourages "fortuitism and its epistemological partner, namely, irrationalism." [179] Montgomery might do well to heed the advice of C. S. Lewis: do not rest your apologetic on some recent development in science, even if it appears to be bearing you a gift! [180] Well, as we said, it might be tempting to pursue this kind of discussion here, but there are actually far more crucial and foundational problems with Montgomery's defense of miracles by appeal to indeterminism. In the first place, this undermines meaningful thinking altogether. In a universe which is completely contingent, completely indeterminate, one could not rely upon any principles or *universals*; reality might be so altered in the immediate future that our knowledge of nature could now mislead us and even our process of thinking could be transformed so as to recognize things as logical which were not before. Yet on the other hand, in an indeterminate universe one could not identify any *particulars* or himself, draw distinctions, or determine preferences between competing options; all the appearances would be the fortuitous



present-states of a universe that is ultimately mysterious. A system of truth could not be generated, scientific investigation would be futile, and even the law of contradiction could not be meaningfully used. Without an ultimate unity and interpretation for the particular facts of reality, and without an ultimate significance and individuality for the facts which are unified, the thinker becomes stranded between pure contingency and (correlative to it) abstract logic. Van Til has set forth this dilemma in many of his publications, and I have dealt with it in II.B.2 and II.C.1 above.<sup>[181]</sup> If the universe is taken to be indeterminate in order to defend miracles, the apologist has frustrated his own effort to bring men to a knowledge of God, for meaningful thinking or knowledge are precluded altogether against the background of all-embracing contingency.

Montgomery would also undermine the miraculous character and apologetic significance of miracles by his appeal to indeterminacy. In a universe where anything can happen because "the bludgeonings of chance" (W. E. Henley) forge the shape of the past, present and future, a "miracle" is nothing but an *accident*, not the telling revelation of power and meaning from the God who sovereignly directs the universe. Even if the position that says the universe does not operate in a uniform or law-like fashion were not highly improbable, and even if Montgomery could give historical evidence of a so-called "miracle," by appealing to indeterminacy, to indeterminacy Montgomery's foes force him to go. A "miracle" is nothing more than the other accidents we expect to be sired in the womb of chance. Some accidents impress some people, other accidents impress other people. Montgomery is forced to argue that a "miraculous accident" is one which is *unique*: "The significance of a miracle.../lies/ in the fact that it is unique."<sup>[182]</sup> However, this reduces to relativism since in an indeterminate universe all events are unique; what we *take to be* unique is due to our perspective or inclination. Montgomery himself destroys the appeal to uniqueness when he applauds his conception of natural law because "it p[laces] all events, regardless of their uniqueness, on equal footing."<sup>[183]</sup> Indeed! No event is actually more unique than another, but in terms of our historical study some oddities stand out from the usual run of events; yet these "oddities" are, from a historian's perspective, on an equal footing with all the rest. Since history has not yet terminated, since all the data is not in, and since no one individual has all the necessary information, we cannot even predicate *historical uniqueness* (based on statistical analysis of occurrences of any event; no one can know what *is* a miracle and what is *not* if we accept Montgomery's notion of natural law as simple "description of what is observed to happen in the universe"<sup>[184]</sup>! Lacking universal perspective, the apologist cannot be sure that the resurrection is unique in fact; thus he cannot proclaim a "miraculous" resurrection. The resurrection is on "an equal footing" with the sinking of the Bismarck, man's first step on the moon, and all other events! Trying to determine which events are genuinely unique and which are not (i.e., which events are miraculous and which are not) is futile on Montgomery's basis - as he himself unwittingly admits by saying "a historian, in facing an alleged 'miracle,' is really facing nothing new. All historical events are unique"<sup>[185]</sup>. Thus every event is a miracle, but because there is no distinction, no event is a miracle. Uniqueness cannot be known for sure, and even if it could the "miracle" would reveal nothing beyond that very uniqueness itself. Even then, many of the things Christ did (e.g., healing) could not qualify as "miracles" (i.e., unique events) since they were repeated on numerous occasions! Thus Montgomery's appeal to indeterminacy to defend the Christian faith ends up nullifying the

Christian faith: "miracles" are non-revelatory *accidents*, unique events which cannot be *known* as unique and which (in fact) *are* not unique.

Montgomery's apologetic not only destroys the miraculous character of miracles, but it deprives them of any significance whatsoever. If the resurrection took place in a relativistic universe where anything can happen, its backdrop is that of chance; and based on chance nothing can be implied or signified. Moreover, in terms of Montgomery's epistemology, the resurrection could only be as significant as any individual took it to be, for the individual must interpret the "fact" for himself. Montgomery sees a "fact" as any unit of being which is capable of bearing meaning," and the source of that meaning is made very clear; "Knowledge is the mind's construction of meaning." [186] Man's mind, then, must construct meaning for the "fact" of the resurrection, a "blank" unit of being which needs to be given color, significance, interpretation by the historian. Of course the resurrection loses all apologetical value hereby, for its interpretation is autobiographically projected and the event can bear various (even contradictory) meanings as different individual historians design for it to have. Montgomery has made the resurrection so "brute" that it no longer presents any important challenge to unbelief. Thus in terms of his cosmology and epistemology Montgomery would efface the significance of our Easter faith. Even if Montgomery could verify the historicity of the resurrection, he would prove only that it is an isolated and uninterpreted, "freak" event in a contingent universe. The apologist is left stranded on the far side of Lessing's ditch; the accidental truths of history cannot be bearers of revelation within my experience and cannot be used to demonstrate anything. The sceptic can grant that Christ rose and then simply ask what that odd, ancient fact has to do with God, revelation, or his own present life and experience. Rather than authoritatively crossing Lessing's ditch with the self-attesting eternal Christ who became incarnate on our behalf. Montgomery simply digs the ditch a bit deeper (with the pretense of using an "evangelical" shovel). From a neutral framework of thought the resurrection does not prove or imply anything (neither Christ's divinity nor our future resurrection). Until the neutral inductivist like Montgomery proves every other point of Christianity, the resurrection is an isolated, irrelevant, "brute" fact which cannot aid our apologetic effort or evangelistic mission. The unbeliever can easily accept the resurrection without flinching on Montgomery's basis, for it is only a random fact until a Christian foundation has been put under it. Only within a presuppositional framework can the apologist argue that *God* raised Jesus, and that *for our justification*. Abhorring presuppositions, Montgomery cannot argue these points. But if you cannot argue these truths, but only the resuscitation of a cadaver, why argue at all? We are not interested in a mere historical oddity, we are interested in a resurrected Savior who can deliver us from sin's guilt; it is this miraculous Messiah we set forth to the unbeliever, not an accidental event from history. An apologetic which deprives the resurrection of its significance has thereby rendered itself inoperative.

Not only does the appeal to indeterminism undermine meaningful thinking plus the miraculous character and significance of miracles, it undermines the Biblical orthodoxy of the apologist, thereby compromising his witness to the truth. If oddity and chance become the crux of one's

apologetic for miracles, he has simply argued for one element of scriptural revelation by means of denying another. The question would then arise, whether he is defending the faith which was once delivered unto the saints or not. Scripture clearly teaches that this universe and the history thereof are not characterized by indeterminacy and non-uniformity. On the one hand, we know that God causes all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11), declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done (Isa. 46: 9-11). As He has purposed so shall it stand (Isa. 14:24, 27) and He does whatever He pleases (Ps. 115:3) even on earth and in the seas (Ps. 135:6), for none can stay His hand from doing according to His will in the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth (Dan. 4:35). God's sovereign direction applies to all things: nature (e.g., Nah. 1:3; Matt. 5:45), animal creation (e.g., Matt. 10:29), nations (e.g., Dan 2:21; Acts 17:26), man in general (e.g., Isa. 64:8), kings (e.g., Prov. 21:1), individuals (e.g., Ps. 37:23; Prov. 16:9; Jas. 4:13-15), man's power (e.g., Deut. 6:17f.), man's birth and death (e.g., Gen. 18:14; Luke 12:20), man's spirit and heart (e.g. Hag. 1:14; Ps. 105:25; Acts 16:14), man's affection (e.g., Gen. 39:21; Ex. 11:3), man's beliefs (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:11f; Acts 13:48; Phil. 1:29), man's plans and decisions (e.g., Prov. 19:21; Jer. 10:23), even man's destiny, whether salvation (Rom. 9:10-24; Eph. 1:4f; 2 Thess. 2:13f) or damnation (Rom. 9:13, 22; 1 Peter 2:8) There is *nothing* which is indeterminate or left to chance: "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah" (Prov 16:33). On the other hand, the natural operations of the world follow a determined pattern of regular succession - according to God's promise (cf. Gen. 6:22; Jer. 33:20, 25). Therefore, to appeal to *indeterminacy* in one's apologetic is to forsake the biblical orthodoxy of the position to be defended. As it has been pointed out in another place, Montgomery is straddling the fence between the biblical outlook (e.g., Martin Luther) and the autonomous viewpoint e.g., Martin Marty); advocates of both positions are struck with the inconsistency of Montgomery's inductive apologetic for authoritative revelation. Marty would say to Luther about Montgomery, "I think he is really on your side...yet joins us in a method of inductivism that presupposes a purely contingent universe," and Luther would say to Marty. "I am certain he is on my side...However, he seems to think that he can at the same time also be on your side. He does not seem to realize that his inductive method, as he uses it in common with the non-Christian analytic-positivists, implies, as it is implied by, a metaphysics of pure chance. I hope he won't continue to try straddling the fence.[\[187\]](#) To *defend* Biblical miracles *by surrendering* to the non-Christian metaphysic of indeterminacy is apologetically self-vitiating.

Therefore, the second dialectical pole of Montgomery's apologetic must be rejected just as the first pole was. His appeal to indeterminacy undermines (1) meaningful thinking, (2) the miraculous character and apologetic significance of miracles, and (3) the orthodoxy of his witness. This is a *critical* difficulty with Montgomery's inductive apologetic. Failing to endorse the position that God predetermines all historical particulars, and claiming that his methodology assumes that in history nothing is impossible, Montgomery holds forth a neutral, objective, inductive historiography. However, if all facts are not what they are according to the sovereign plan of God, and if every fact is not pre-interpreted by the Creator - that is, if neutral, fortuitous phenomenon are assigned meaning by the organizing mind of man - then history would indeed appear to be sired in the womb of chance. In such a situation Montgomery could neither identify himself to himself nor discover intelligible facts which function as evidence for anything

whatsoever. The universe and history would be unfathomable mysteries - even as all pagan religions, with their elements of fate, maintain. Temporal eventuation cut loose from the God who declares the end from the beginning, who bears all things along by His powerful word, and who works all things after the counsel of His own will (i.e., history separated from the meaning and power of God, His revelation and sovereign plan) would be sound and fury, signifying nothing. History would be worse than a tale told by an idiot. Without the presupposition of God's truthful word men try in vain to make a contingent (irrational) world intelligible (rational), but a contingent cosmos cannot but be the home of ultimate skepticism. An evidential apologetic which presupposes indeterminacy would be meaningless and sterile, impossible as a reasoned defense of anything at all.

## 2. Dead-end Approach to Religious Truth

Finally we should observe that Montgomery's conception of apologetics is not only built upon a fallacious inference and involves a self-contradictory, doubly weak dialectic, but it embodies a dubious and otiose approach to religious truth. According to him religious claims are to be verified in two steps: (1) determine "that the writing had no internal contradictions" and (2) determine, by exact fit to the facts of experience, that the alleged divine being "performed acts unable or highly unlikely to be performed by mere human beings."[\[188\]](#) Now with respect to #1, Montgomery has severely criticized Gordon Clark for taking this approach, and he admits that "It is conceivable that a systematically consistent written work could be produced by mere human beings."[\[189\]](#) Thus this criteria is far from conclusive in approaching religious truth, and it is somewhat canting for Montgomery to be the one setting it forth. With respect to #2, it would be decidedly non-inductive for someone to delimit what could and could not be accomplished by "mere human beings" before the end of history; thus on Montgomery's basis we could never use #2 to determine what the truth in religion is. Plus, as Stanford Reid notes, this is a criterion "which might also support the claims of Lourdes, Fatima, and Ste. Anne de Beaupre (cf. Exod. 7:11)."[\[190\]](#) Moreover, if (as Montgomery says) anything can happen in history, the performance of amazing events has no *supernatural* significance. Therefore, neither criterion #1 nor criterion #2 can function effectively to acquire religious truth, discriminate between the devil's city and the *civitas Dei*, or verify a revelation or messenger from God. And these criteria do not fare any better if linked together, as Antony Flew would be quick to observe;

A failed proof cannot serve as a pointer to anything, save perhaps the weakness of those of us who have accepted it...nor can it be put to work along with other throw outs as a part of an accumulation of evidences. If one leaky bucket will not hold water that is no reason to think that ten can.[\[191\]](#)

So there would not seem to be very much point in using the approach to religious truth advocated by Montgomery; one could analyze an alleged revelation for coherence and extraordinary events

only to find out that his scrutiny was much ado about nothing. "O! what authority and show of truth can cunning sin cover itself withal!"<sup>[192]</sup> Satan himself can be transformed into an angel of light<sup>[193]</sup> who would have little difficulty passing Montgomery's test for religious truth; if we are going to try the spirits to see whether they are of God, we need the *apostolic word* for our standard of measurement.<sup>[194]</sup> It alone is rigorous enough to detect the many false prophets that have gone into the world.

We must conclude, then, that Montgomery *cannot* establish the historicity of Christ's resurrection or verify the divine origin on the Bible to the satisfaction of any reasonable man who uses the empirical or scientific method. His apologetic argument has been faulted in its specific *outworking* as well as in its *conception*. The former was defective in each of its premises and did not have a conclusion which reasonably followed from the premises anyway. The latter was disqualified for fallacious inference, dialectical tension (weak with respect to both probabilism and indeterminacy), and an otiose approach to religious truth. Montgomery has simply failed to make good on his promise to provide a factually compelling argument for the Christian truth-claim and to set forth evidence for Christ's resurrection which is overwhelming in force; his kind of inductive apologetic is bankrupt as an *argument*. However, there is a further way in which his apologetic fails to live up to his promise. In the introduction to our critique of Montgomery's apologetical approach we saw that he not only claims to have an overwhelming argument, but he claims to be completely *objective* in his methodology. He would have us think that his defense of the faith evaluates God's word like *any other* historical material - by means of objectively discovered *facts*, the *neutral* historical method, and without *a priori*. We turn now to an investigation of this aspect of Montgomery's apologetic in order to see that his defense does not commend itself to us on this score either.

## 2. Defective as Presuppositionless Objectivity

A succinct digest of Montgomery's apologetical theory (and by implication his epistemological moorings) would be this: "When world views collide, an appeal to common facts is the only preservative against philosophical solipsism and religious anarchy."<sup>[195]</sup> The epitome of Montgomery's war cry against presuppositional apologetics and the central girder of his own system is the primacy of "the facts and nothing but the facts" (as it were) in establishing truth-judgments. The objective facts, objectively discovered, and objectively argued virtually become an incorrigible realm for intellectual appeal, the fountainhead of any and all resolutions for disputes. Thus with the demand of the positivistic, analytic philosophers for empirical verification of religious utterances, Montgomery takes this as the cue for Christian apologetics to claim center stage - apparently being oblivious of the fact that verificationism (along with the seemingly indefinable verifiability criterion) has long been discredited.<sup>[196]</sup> Plantinga remarks that verificationism is entirely unsuccessful, and he goes on to make the relevant observation, "this makes the dizzy gyrations of those theologians who accept it more puzzling than ever; perhaps they would do well to *study* it before rushing to embrace it"<sup>[197]</sup>. Nevertheless, Montgomery plays right into the hands of the apostate positivists, offering them what he thinks is

verifiable, historical, objective, factual evidence that can convince any "reasonable man" (although the still unconverted analytic philosopher, Antony Flew, is something of an anomaly). Montgomery chides men like Ramm and Ladd for moving away from objective, critical historiography because they see the need for the Holy Spirit's internal witness, the significance of the covenantal community context of revelation, and the uniqueness of the resurrection as a historical event.<sup>[198]</sup> Montgomery obtusely insists, "there are no degrees of objectivity...we must...courageously use the language of objective facticity."<sup>[199]</sup> The resurrection must be verified by a method which is not encumbered with presuppositions, a method which is fully objective and academically respected, a method which lets the facts alone determine your outlook. No other factors can be influential. Montgomery is adamant that the theological theorist must build up his views from the realm of "objective facticity."<sup>[200]</sup> He says that objective, scientific theologizing is demanded by Christianity's historical nature, that we need concrete verification of all our inferences, and that success for a theory depends on its ability "to fit the facts."<sup>[201]</sup> Using a notorious distinction, Montgomery maintains that the apologist must move up from the I-it dimension to the I-thou plane,<sup>[202]</sup> that is, that defending the faith calls for starting with impersonal "facts" and letting them lead you into the personal presence of God by their unavoidable force. Theology is nothing less than science,<sup>[203]</sup> and science tried to fit its theories to "the irreducible stuff" of the natural world.<sup>[204]</sup> Theology simply broadens the scope to encompass supernatural revelation as well as historical phenomena (e.g., the resurrection).

Hence we have Montgomery's apologetic with its motto: that in all things objective, factual evidence might have the preeminence. He is the very antithesis of "philosophical apologetics" and stands in stark contrast to presuppositionalism. The central thrust of his thinking is the necessity, in testing for truth, of accumulating objective facts and building them up piece by piece, in a neutral fashion, into a pattern of ultimate reality; added to this is the evaluative centrality of these facts derived from undeniable perceptions (or reports thereof) and confidence in their conversion power. If "the winds of scepticism" are blowing through the church with respect, say, to the Old Testament, then Montgomery's apologetic takes our appropriate response to be an immediate quest for Noah's ark! His most basic and unquestionable authority is historical facticity as interpreted by his own thinking; verification and appeal cannot reach beyond this ultimate standard.

#### a. Theoretical Shortcomings

If Montgomery is found deficient at this point, the heart will have been cut out of positivistic apologetics (leading to the subsequent re-evaluation of the proper place and function of evidence in Christian apologetics).

#### 1. Unbiblical Apriorism



Now it is easy to see that Montgomery's approach is devastatingly unbiblical (e.g., "The beginning [not end] of knowledge is the fear of the Lord,"[\[205\]](#)) for an aspect of the created world is placed authoritatively higher and taken to be more sure than the Word of the covenant Lord.[\[206\]](#) However, going beyond even this, Montgomery's objectivism fails to be upheld by the autonomous-minded philosopher-scientist of his day. Montgomery thinks that "facts," not presuppositions, determine one's interpretation of history. Everyone, he contends, employs inductive procedures to distinguish fact from fiction; the Christian and non-Christian alike are able to "compare alternative interpretations of fact and determine on the basis of the facts themselves which interpretation best fits reality."[\[207\]](#) Here Montgomery ignores the noetic effects of sin and completely obscures the centuries of debate over what constitutes "reality" (a most magnanimous and ambiguous word!). In dealing with unbelievers, says Montgomery, the apologist should see that "the starting-point has to be the common rationality (the inductive and deductive procedures) which all men share."[\[208\]](#) It would have been helpful had Montgomery explained to us his reasons for making this statement despite the destructive work of Kurt Gödel on deductivism and David Hume on inductivism. We are a bit surprised by the universalism of Montgomery's assertion also - has this been empirically, factually verified or is it a full-blown, far-reaching assumption? Montgomery thinks that the scientific method is the only way one can come to know truth without having to refer to anything beyond the method (is he inductively sure of this?) and alone provides public evidence which can compel assent (another unverified assumption!). Any authoritarian approach, even God's has to be tested by outside measuring devices before its claims can be accepted (is it then an authority in this emasculated sense?). Since Montgomery recognizes only the scientific method as valid, empirical reason must be the judge of divine revelation![\[209\]](#) His approach comes across as definitely unfaithful (recall Abraham) to the Christian outlook and authority structure, as well as ironically dogmatic in the most *a priori* fashion (e.g., declaring that all human knowledge uses probabilistic empirical methods). Nevertheless, even overlooking these crucial defects, Montgomery's apologetical-epistemological framework has fallen out of repute among professional scientific theories. It borders on anachronism. His approach is not only unsupported by the Christian viewpoint, it is greatly unsupported by the outlook of non-Christians in this day as well.

## 2. Contemporary Incursions

We should note that there is no simple, direct argumentative method that carries the universal, compelling force which Montgomery assigns to his inductive objectivism, and that "facts" are seen for what they are when taken as "facts for a system" - that is, only in light of presuppositions (which Montgomery tacitly detests and feigns not to use) do particulars take on meaning and significance. On the first score we look to Gilbert Ryle and Stephen Toulmin; Thomas Kuhn has effectively argued against the Montgomery-mentality on the second score. Ryle accurately points out that the positivists do not deal with logic as a whole, but only with one kind of logic: invariable, formal logic; however, there are many arguments and investigations which turn on informal logic, and thus we must be cautious not to confuse one pattern of operation for that which applies in a different field altogether. "There is no such animal as 'Science.' There are scores of sciences...it is not necessary or expedient to pretend that they are fellow-workers in some joint but unobvious missionary enterprise. It is better policy to remind them how different and independent their trades actually are."[\[210\]](#) Indeed, it is most important

to see the distinction between technical and untechnical concepts: "The welter of technical concepts with which a scientist operates and the welter of untechnical and semi-technical concepts with which we all operate are welters not of homogeneous, but heterogeneous concepts"[211]. And this in turn necessitates a distinction between the logic which holds in one field and that which operates in another; informal logic must be distinguished from formal logic, and the former must not be swallowed by the latter.

. . . the settlement or even partial settlement of a piece of litigation between theories cannot be achieved by any one stereotyped manoeuvre. There is no one regulation move or sequence of moves as a result of which the correct logical bearings between the disputed positions can be fixed.[212]

Different fields work on different assumptions, and hence have different logics. Stephen Toulmin has gone on to point out that the philosophy of logic in this century has been too much directed by mathematical ideals and thus bewitched into thinking that logic is merely a mechanical calculus which operates upon propositions. Instead the various special sciences establish for themselves different grounds for justification; different kinds of evidence are subjected to varying evaluations from field to field, depending on what is accepted as proper argumentative "backing." [213] Therefore, not only is Montgomery mistaken to think that the scientific method is the same for everyone (and to blur the distinctions between natural science and history, [214] but he is misguided in thinking that some singular, simple objective approach (a common rationality) can settle the differences between disputed interpretations on the basis of the facts themselves - that is, that a neutral methodology and the irreducible stuff of experience are the only factors in an argument.

But far more devastating to Montgomery's outlook than the work of Ryle and Toulmin is the challenging work of Thomas S. Kuhn in the philosophy of science. [215] Whereas Toulmin demonstrated that logic and argument will differ from field to field due to varying operations, standards and presuppositions, Kuhn has shown that logic and argument varies even *within* a particular field of endeavor, between different schools of thought. We offer here an extended summary of Kuhn's book. In opposition to the suggestive and implicit image of science and scientific development given in textbooks, Kuhn demonstrates that a critical history of science does not support the concept of development-by-accumulation at all, but rather a notion of tradition-bound periods succeeding each other via revolutions. Central to Kuhn's thesis is the concept of paradigm: a significant scientific achievement sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity and sufficiently open-ended to leave many puzzles for its practitioners to resolve. The paradigm provides a model from which springs a coherent tradition of scientific research as well as standards for scientific practice. The developmental pattern of science is usually the successive transition from one paradigm to another by means of non-cumulative and extraordinary research episodes wherein a

new model, incompatible with the previous one, unlocks the riddles or anomalies generated by its predecessor.

In the absence of a paradigm all facts pertaining to a given science seem equally relevant. The end of this pre-paradigm period is signaled by the emergence of a body of intertwined theoretical and methodological beliefs permitting selection, evaluation, and criticism as well as the formation of a specialized discipline (committed to the newly received paradigm). The paradigm received was successful because it was able to solve acute problems and promise success in selected, yet incomplete, examples. The articulation of these phenomena and refinement of theory by means of puzzle-solving (according to restrictions which limit the nature and method of obtaining acceptable solutions) constitutes the work of normal science. Agreement on a paradigm does not have to be accompanied by agreement on the interpretation of it, and paradigms can be prior to, more binding, and more complete than any set of research rules abstracted from it. Even though normal science does not aim at factual or theoretical novelties, unexpected phenomena are repeatedly uncovered (especially by a newly developed apparatus which does not render the precise expectation involved) and eventually recognized as anomalies for the paradigm, despite resistance. After a pronounced failure in the activities of normal problem-solving, often a novel theory emerges in response to the crisis (many times coming from someone who worked in another field previously). The transition into crisis and extraordinary science begins when an anomaly comes to be regarded as more than just another puzzle for normal science. The blurring of the paradigm (through competing articulations) and consequent loosening of the normal research rules follows, along with explicit discontent, a willingness to try anything, recourse to philosophy, and debate over fundamentals.

When it is acknowledged that the existing paradigm has ceased to function adequately in an exploration of some aspect of nature, the older paradigm is replaced with an incompatible new one and scientific revolution has taken place. Then follows the reconstruction of the field due to reconstruction of its fundamentals, change of criteria, and alteration of concepts. Arguments between competing schools are bound to be circular since even the basic data is viewed differently. The choice between competing paradigms is a choice between incompatible modes of community life and so cannot be made according to normal science's evaluative procedures (its logic and experimentation) - for those very procedures depend upon a particular paradigm, and it is the paradigm which is at issue. Reception of the new paradigm often requires a redefinition of the corresponding science, its legitimate problems, and accepted standards. Thus when two schools disagree, they will usually talk through each other in debating the relative merits of their respective paradigms. The paradigm change re-educates a scientist's perception of his environment, rendering his world of research incommensurable with the one previously inhabited (similar to a gestalt switch). The interpretative enterprise does not correct a paradigm, but only articulates it. There is no neutral language of observation, for the theory sorts out the perception from the flux of experience. Hence paradigms determine large areas of experience by perceptually and conceptually subdividing the world in a certain way.

By referring only to that segment of work in past science which can be easily viewed as contributing to the solution of the text's paradigm problems, science books persist in making the history of science look linear and cumulative. Such a view (through selection and distortion) misrepresents the scientific enterprise and disguises the revolutionary nature of scientific developments. It smothers the critical significance of presuppositions in scientific enterprises.

Competition between paradigms is, unlike disagreements in normal science, not resolved by proofs and evidence, verification and direct argumentation. Differing standards and definitions, new relationships between central terms, concepts, and experiments render a communication across the revolutionary divide inevitably partial. The transition from one incommensurable paradigm to another cannot be made a step at a time by forced logic and neutral experience. Incidental factors may influence the conversation (e.g., problem-solving ability, appropriateness or aesthetic appeal), but counter considerations can always be adduced by a persistent opponent. The individual must be converted to a changed style of operations and methodology. The social resolution of the dispute results from an increasing shift in the distribution of professional allegiances (the various individuals making their decision on various faith-bases). Once the reception of a common paradigm has freed the scientific community from the need to re-examine its first principles in a constant fashion, progress during a period of normal science will seem obvious and assured. The victors in a revolution will always see their victory as nothing less than progress; that prophecy is self-fulfilling since past formulations are junked and since the scientific community is the exclusive arbiter of professional achievement. Science grows in depth, but not necessarily in breadth. The nature of scientific communities provides a virtual guarantee that both the list of problems solved by science and the precision of individual solutions will continually grow.

Kuhn's major accomplishment here was his demonstration that paradigms (presuppositions) play a determinative role even in the field of science - a field long taken to be the grand illustration, the apex, of objective facticity. If this holds in the field of science, how much more does it hold in the field of history! The historian does not have the scientist's advantage of repeating experiments under controlled conditions, the historian's evidence is much more fragmentary, and the historian is forced to accept certain evidence on unverified authority as well as to construct explanations by speculative empathy and sympathy;[\[216\]](#) thus he is far from having the advantages of the scientist, and yet even the scientist is crucially dependent upon paradigms. *A fortiori* the historian's objectivity must be dismissed. (But doesn't Kuhn prove his thesis by historical evidence? Only to those who will step inside his paradigmatic circle! The opposition given to Kuhn by those wishing to cling to their venerated "objectivism" only goes to illustrate Kuhn's very point; They continue to portray the history of scientific inquiry as linear and cumulative, rejecting Kuhn's evidence as not meeting their particular standards.)

It is a bit amusing to see Montgomery try to dismiss Kuhn's probing analysis by merely calling it "misinformed".[\[217\]](#) Quite the contrary, it is *Montgomery* who persistently turns up being *misinformed* on the support he has for his apologetic (recall his outlandish claims about the putative confirmation of the New Testament, his analytic/synthetic distinction, his deference to Quine, his appeal to Wittgenstein, his argument from Einsteinian relativity, his dizzy embracing of verificationism, etc.); faced with the choice between Montgomery's credentials and those of Kuhn, between Montgomery's dogmatic, one line dismissal and Kuhn's closely argued and well documented treatise, is there any doubt as to who is in the position of greater expertise? Montgomery's shallow treatment of Kuhn is all the more conspicuous when we remember that the debate over objectivity in history *per se* has been raging for years now (with objectivism far from being victorious). Montgomery is at a decided disadvantage in opposing Kuhn; he has little more than a squirt-gun to overcome a flame-thrower! Robert S. Cohen has compiled an impressive list of the cultural and social influences which have significant effect on science[\[218\]](#), and a compelling example of the non-objective character of the scientific guild is afforded in *The Velihovsky Affair: The Warfare of Science & Scientism*,[\[219\]](#) especially the chapter entitled "The Scientific Reception System." Even the logical-empiricist C. G. Hempel, who exposts a subject-neutral approach to historical investigation, makes this candid concession:

What will have to be taken into account in constructing or justifying inductive acceptance rules for pure scientific research are the objectives of such research or the importance attached in pure science to achieving certain kinds of results. What objectives does pure scientific research seek to achieve? Truth of the accepted statements might be held to be one of them. But surely not truth at all costs. For then, the only rational decision policy would be never to accept any hypothesis on inductive grounds since, however well supported, it might be false.

Scientific research is not even aimed at achieving very high probability of truth, or very strong inductive support, at all costs. Science is willing to take considerable chances on this score. It is willing to accept a theory that vastly outreaches its evidential basis if that theory promises to exhibit an underlying order, a system of deep and simple systematic connections among what had previously been a mass of disparate and multifarious facts.

It is an intriguing but as yet open question whether the objectives, or the values, that inform pure scientific inquiry can all be adequately characterized in terms of such theoretical desiderata as confirmation, explanatory power, and simplicity and, if so, whether these features admit of a satisfactory combination into a concept of purely theoretical or scientific utility that could be involved in the construction of acceptable rules for hypotheses and theories in pure science. Indeed, it is by no means clear whether the conception of basic scientific research

as leading to the provisional acceptance or rejection of hypotheses is tenable at all. One of the problems here at issue is whether the notion of accepting a hypothesis independently of any contemplated action can be satisfactorily explicated within the framework of a purely logical and methodological analysis of scientific inquiry or whether, if any illuminating construal of the idea is possible at all, it will have to be given in the context of a psychological, sociological, and historical study of scientific research.[\[220\]](#)

Reference could also be made to N. R. Hanson's *Patterns of Discovery*[\[221\]](#) to get a good look at the unsettled and dynamic character of the research sciences as opposed to the calm and finished efficiency, the alleged objectivity, of (what Kuhn calls) "normal science." The renown physicist, Max Planck, maintains that the presuppositions of the scientist influence his method and condition his conclusion (cf. his *Scientific Autobiography*), and he is joined by Michael Polanyi, Stephen Toulmin, J. Bronowski, and G. Holton in deflating the glorification of scientific objectivity. If we step into the field of history, notable scholars like Isaiah Berlin, Leo Strauss, and R. G. Collingwood (to mention only a few) would turn us away from the chimera of objective historiography; the fact is that the historian is not, and cannot be, "a neutral mirror."[\[222\]](#) Now no listing of names can decide a dispute, but from an introduction to a few well known thinkers and writers we can begin to see whether Montgomery stands on good ground in calling the internationally recognized scholar, Thomas Kuhn, simply "misinformed." Montgomery might dismiss a college undergraduate on that basis, but he lacks cogency when taking this facile approach to a man with Kuhn's stature.

In writing his valuable work for the philosophy of science Kuhn has not only exorcised the ghostly influences of positivism in the physical sciences he has performed a valuable job in tearing the very core out of the position of objectivism in historiography (*a fortiori*, and by development of the significance and function of paradigms). This is not to say that the biblical Christian will not insist on differing with Kuhn at some points. For instance, Kuhn unnecessarily moves from his accurate analysis of the way in which paradigms influence scientific endeavor to the renunciation of a final, true account of nature. This would cut the ground out from under Kuhn's statements about problem-solving in science, improvements and advances, etc., for without the possibility of an "ultimate true conception" (whether possessed in every area by some man or not) it does not make sense to speak of "solutions," "advances" and the like. "Adaption," "growth," and "improvement" presuppose the perfect ideal in the light of which something can constitute a degree or stage. By relinquishing the idea that paradigm changes can bring the scientist closer and closer to the truth (that is, by advocating an evolutionary but non-teleological conception of science) Kuhn has precluded a final viewpoint on truth; thus he cannot really be sure whether a puzzle is not rather a fact, solution, or personal blunder. Without an ultimate standard (however ideal) growth could be confused with, rather than contrasted to, regression; these very distinctions would be nonsensical if a standard or criterion is sceptically abandoned. Moreover, the Christian need not make the sharp distinction between greater control of the world and better knowledge of the world that Kuhn does; to know something is to know



how to react to it and use it. Indeed Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis as well as the continuing cultural mandate would support the idea that increasing control of nature implies increasing knowledge of it. Plus there is the fact that God has revealed certain fixed reference points of truth to us (and He certainly *knows* the way the world really is). Thus the biblical Christian will not agree with Kuhn at every point, but Kuhn's general analysis of scientific development and use of paradigms remains accurate. In developing a theory the scientist does not simply collect and tie together generalizations about "facts" that are irreducible *there*. The empirical inductive method does not proceed by constant accumulation of "incorrigible facts" because facts are actually facts-for-a-paradigm. When the paradigm changes so do the observations and meanings previously utilized (or, as the Christian would say, the real world is variously interpreted) even though the stimuli remain constant. The paradigm determines one's evaluative procedures and accepted methodology, one's standards and expectations, one's legitimate problems and range of solutions. Hence conversion to a new paradigm cannot be forced by logic and experimentation since the competing paradigms themselves circumscribe and define the procedures, "crucial" experiments, criteria, etc.

Therefore Kuhn has exposed and disposed of the naivete of a Baconian approach to the world with its expectation that simple empirical data can tell us the pure truth by immediate contact and generalization. We must judge also that a positivistic apologetic such as that propounded by Montgomery has been made obsolete; hypothesis testing in history is *not* simply a matter of fitting things to the commonly held "facts" (like the easy task of trying shoes on your feet). The deceptive simplicity of Montgomery's approach blurs the crucial and relevant distinctions between competing positions which work with divergent presuppositions; the fit-the-facts-syndrome, by reason of its disregard of the acute factors in a dispute (especially over interpretative or highly significant, far reaching, matters) can lead only to confusion between two schools (each being eager to adduce common and undeniable "facts," yet neither speaking directly or relevantly to the other on the underlying or fundamental points that have produced the disagreement) or bewilderment for the novice apologist (who is thoroughly basted and run over by unbeliever who is conscious of the role and importance of paradigms). Kuhn has rendered Montgomery's objectivism defunct. This is not to chronicle the death of "true truth" however; the presuppositional approach to knowledge, truth, and defending the faith allows for both common paradigms between men and the function of factual evidence - it acknowledges that the world reveals the true and living God at every point of natural and historical phenomena, not just selected "unique" events, and it responds seriously to the fact that all men are created as the image of God. In looking about him, Montgomery should realize that his method and position are not respected or supported by the self-conscious secularist any more than they are by the biblical Christian (who finds epistemic authority in the word of the covenant Lord). The prevailing philosophy of science should be forcing him to take a long look at presuppositionalism again, both for the salvaging of genuine Christian apologetics and as a necessary corrective to the errors of a man like T. S. Kuhn. "The beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord" - a message for positivists and positivistic apologists both.

### 3. A Modified Notion

I should judge that the traditional understanding of what is meant by "historical objectivity" is pretty well represented by the attitude of Leopold von Ranke: one achieves historical objectivity by simply reporting what the sources reveal must have happened, gathering and arranging this data into chronological order, and thereby allowing the facts to speak for themselves and reveal their meaning. Nietzsche indicated what people think of as reporting the past objectively when he said, "The objective man is in truth a mirror." And that Montgomery is willing to let his readers entertain this notion of historical objectivity is evident from his assertion that "'confidence in history' is laudable if it means that...one confidently endeavors to find the meaning of historical events by objective study of the events themselves." [223] It is this (common) understanding of "historical objectivity" which has been successfully undermined by men like Thomas Kuhn in their various indications of the very non-objective elements of even natural science. Of course the case with history-reporting's non-objectivity is much more dramatic. The historian studies, not the direct phenomena, but the sources which report the past. The historian must interpret his sources, attempting to reconstruct the past. He does not simply accept the facts as a passive observer. He is faced with the chore of cross-examining his sources (which cannot but be silent in response!), knowing what questions are appropriately addressed to the various types of sources, knowing when he is pushing the sources too far for desired information, etc. Moreover, the historian's inquiry must be directed toward a specific goal from its inception; he does not simply string together anything and everything he learns about a certain period or event, but he is seeking particular kinds of answers to particular questions, certain lines of evidence for various sorts of hypotheses, different conceptions of relevance, etc. History as a science is also inherently value-impregnated. The subject matter itself is charged with a value orientation. The ordinary language which historians use is quite a bit more than merely descriptive, and this is only to be expected since they cannot properly reduce human history to the history of natural objects - to do so would be to screen out that which is peculiar to humans: intentions, desires, motives, morals, etc. In approaching the evidence the historian is also forced to use a criterion of selectivity, and this itself involves personal value judgments; such selectivity enters right into the historian's attempt to find solutions, and not simply into his choice of problems to study. In this selectivity the historian either utilizes a notion of historical causation or a standard of historical importance. In the former case his causal explanations are not value-neutral, for he had to judge that certain conditions were relevant as causes and some were not; furthermore, a causal analysis of human action and social history is itself a matter of assigning responsibility (thus involving moral judgment). If the historian follows out the idea of historical causation in his selectivity, then he is faced with the selection between competing models of "explanation" (i.e., shall he seek to render covering laws as suggested by Hempel, non-deducible generalizations as Gardiner, joint-sufficiency conditions like Goudge, or necessary conditions like Dray or Danto?). On the other hand if the historian's selectivity is guided by a standard of historical importance (e.g., what is memorable, intrinsically valuable, etc.), then it is *ipso facto* the case that he is doing more than simple description of the past. Thus in all these ways we see how strong the case is against the common conception of objective historiography.

In the face of all these considerations Montgomery still wants to cling to the favorable connotations of "historical objectivity," but he can keep his claim to "objectivity" only by

reforming what the word means. That is, Montgomery boasts of his historical objectivity, but when he is pressed with the myriad problems involved in that claim it turns out that he has *abandoned* the *common* conception of historical objectivity (as represented above by Ranke and Nietzsche). When Montgomery claims to be objective he is *not* claiming (even though he seems to be willing to let his readers think that he is) to let the facts speak for themselves and to be simply a mirror for the unbiased truth. It turns out that, following Watkins, Montgomery basically equates objectivity with criticizability.<sup>[224]</sup> This is best explained by the notion of Passmore that the historian is objective in his judgements when he is subject to factual constraint and to regular ways of settling disputes with other historians.<sup>[225]</sup> "Objective" is no longer the quality of a judgment but the label for a particular method of arriving at the judgment. So what happens when another school of thought chooses to label a completely different method "objective"? There simply is no far-reaching agreement between historians as to a standard way of determining historical truth (e.g., contrast Dilthey to Montgomery). The notion of factual constraint is not of much help here since human history is not simply a non-selective description of the history of physical objects; human history is interpretative history. As Popper demonstrated in *The Open Society*, human historiography does not come under the same constraint as is present in the field of physics. Thus Montgomery's truncated conception of "objectivity" not only leaves us with little information as to the quality of a historical judgment (the conclusion of a line of thought, rather than the method used to arrive at the conclusion), but it is not even viable as a genetic description. Moreover, on Montgomery's basis it is not clear to me why the judgments of theatrical critics would not qualify as "objective"; the critics are involved in interaction with various opinions, and factual considerations certainly enter into their evaluations (e.g., did the actor remember his lines, stumble over the props, etc.). Thus theatrical reviews are "criticizable" in the relevant sense. I surmise that Montgomery would respond that the judgments of theatrical critics, while involving some factual elements, are mingled with many subjective, value-laden considerations and thus do not qualify as "objective." In this case Montgomery would be adhering to the original notion of an "objective" judgment as that which gives us "the facts and nothing but the facts." However, this notion of objectivity is the one which has been thoroughly demolished by analyses of historiography such as were presented above. Historians simply do *not* give us mere eyeball reports. The conclusions of historians are not "uninfluenced by personal perspective, presupposition, or prejudice"; consequently they are not "objective" in the common and most important sense. As Montgomery wishes to define "objective" (viz., criticizable) he clearly wants to guard Christian profession from the charge of obscuratism, an unwillingness to hear contrary evidence or be shown wrong (i.e., to secure the "non-falsifiability" of Christianity in the wrong sense). Christianity is not the figment of our imagination, a theory dreamed up without any concern for historical facts, a projected ideal. However, as true as these things are, it should be obvious that what Montgomery has taken to be "objectivity" (viz., factual constraint) is in reality simply the quality of being "cognitive." To say that "Jesus rose on the third day" is a criticizable conclusion is to say that it is a cognitive conclusion - not necessarily an objective conclusion. It is objective if it reflects a genuinely public and factual (true) state of affairs; it is cognitive since it is theoretically falsifiable (i.e., it is not mere human speculation or emotional longing). Now the problem is this. Since the majority of judgments made by people are criticizable (i.e., cognitive, falsifiable in one way or the other), Montgomery's collapsing of "objective" into "cognitive" makes the statement, "historiography is an objective science," more than a slight bit trivial. When people have esteemed historiography as objective they have customarily intended to elevate it and impute to it a special status. If

anything which is "objective" does not have that special status, then who cares? (N.B. Lest it be thought that the presuppositionalist is making impossible demands for "objectivity" and thereby committing the fallacy of vacuous contrast, the reader can pursue critiques, such as Dray's of this alleged fallacy as well as a presuppositionalist's conception of objectivity as presented in the discussion of Pinnock above; basically, "objective" is a quality of God's judgments, His revelations and our judgments when we think His thoughts after Him, and "subjective" is a quality of thought when it is the projection of sinful, rebellious, autonomous man.)

#### 4. Pragmatics

In addition to the above mentioned, principal problems with Montgomery's alleged, apologetical objectivity must be mentioned the fact that he, when pressed to defend his claim, resorts to pragmatic argumentation. In his book on historiography Gordon Clark makes out a strong and thorough case against the "objectivity" of that field, showing that absolute or fixed truth is not achievable therein. However, our concern here is not with the merits or demerits of Clark's conception of objectivity, but with the reaction given to it by Montgomery.

The moment the realm of experience is introduced, "absolute," "unalterable" results become impossible, but to argue that objectivity disappears at the same time is to ignore all the ordinary operations of life...The choice is very clear: formal perfection without empirical content, or the acceptance of empirical objectivity without putting impossible demands upon it.[\[226\]](#)

The problem with Montgomery's response is simply that *wanting* something to be so does not make it so! The fact that people, in their ordinary operations of life, naively think their judgments are detached and "objective" does not mean that we must grant that genuine objectivity has been attained. Montgomery does not want impossible demands to be placed on the claim to objectivity; if they are, then the field in which Montgomery is interested loses its special status or compelling truth. However, instead of saying why the rigorous demands Clark has in mind are improper, Montgomery merely says that they are not expedient. Thus serious doubt is cast upon the alleged objectivity Montgomery claims to achieve; if it cannot be demonstrated or supported by sound argumentation but only by appeal to common practice, is it as "objective" as is claimed? A parallel might be drawn in the field of ethics. It might be claimed by some thinkers that the requirement of perfect obedience to the law of God as a criterion of righteousness places impossible demands on human beings; it might be said that the moment the realm of experience is introduced "absolute righteousness" becomes impossible, but to argue that righteousness disappears at the same time is to ignore all the ordinary operations of life. I take it that any evangelical Christian could see through such an argument. The universality of sin cannot be used as a basis for lowering the claims of righteousness. Similarly, the pervasive influence of personal considerations in historical judgments cannot be used as a basis for lowering the demands of

objectivity. Montgomery's only legitimate response to Clark would be a clarifying exposition of the genuine character of objectivity, not an appeal to pragmatic considerations. Montgomery's reforming notion of objectivity has been dealt with above, and Montgomery's appeal to popular practice proves nothing (except, maybe, the expedience of historians claiming to be "objective"). Whether the assertion, "American rebels are responsible for the Boston Massacre," is *objective* or not should be settled by something other than a popular vote or reference to the wanted policies of the historians' guild.

## b. Betrayal in Practice

### 1. Aprioris Disclosed

Beyond the theoretical problems inherent in Montgomery's claim to present an *objective*, compelling argument for Christianity is the undermining of his alleged objectivity by the fact that he abandons it in practice. That is, it is more than evident that (whether he admits it or not) Montgomery *has* his own supervening presuppositions as an apologist and as a historian; he is not "a mirror," letting nothing but the indubitable facts speak for themselves. Even a cursory reading of Montgomery's publications will demonstrate that he, far from objectively arguing every point, has his own choice of authorities (e.g., Dray, Hempel, Pasmore, Watkins, Danto, etc.), men whose opinions Montgomery is willing to abide by. Moreover, as any historian, Montgomery has his own basic definition of history:

An inquiry focusing on past human experience, both individual and societal, with a view towards the production of significant and comprehensive narratives embracing men's actions and reactions in respect to the whole range of natural, rational, and spiritual powers.[\[227\]](#)

Now certainly this definition predetermines how Montgomery will carry on his historical research and writing; the definition, if nothing else, operates as a screening device and standard for evaluation as well as blueprint for Montgomery's projects. Yet this definition could hardly be said to be "objective"; for one example, many people such as materialists will not accept the assumption of spiritual powers as valid. By using the above definition Montgomery's historiography operates with a particular bent from the outset. It is also quite apparent from Montgomery's writings that, aside from the substantive presupposition of what constitutes history, methodological assumptions enter into Montgomery's historiography.[\[228\]](#) Montgomery claims that these *a priori*s are "self-evident,"[\[229\]](#) erroneously taking for granted that what is self-evident to a Christian will be the same as is self-evident to an unbeliever! Montgomery's standard of self-evidency is a presuppositional commitment. A further indication that Montgomery has his own presuppositions is given in his published acceptance of the test for hypothesis-making as laid down by E. J. Carnell: production of "the best set of assumptions to account for the totality of reality."[\[230\]](#) Clearly the best set of assumptions to account for *all*

reality goes far beyond mere matters of scholarly *method* and embraces one's whole worldview! If this were not the case (i.e., if methodological assumptions alone could account for the totality of reality), then the methodological assumptions made by the positivistic apologist - assumptions which he expects any reasonable unbeliever to endorse at the outset of their discussion - which can best account for the totality of reality could just as easily be the possession of the unbeliever. Thus the believer and unbeliever would share the same set of methodological assumptions - the same set of assumptions which best explain all reality - and yet not agree in metaphysics, soteriology, etc.! That means that *both* believer and unbeliever would be the winner in the contest of hypothesis-making. Quite obviously, the, the best *set* of assumptions which explain all reality must include more than the mere methodological assumptions laid down by Montgomery. Montgomery, like everyone else, has metaphysical presuppositions and not (as he claims[231]) simply methodological *a priori*s.

## 2. Scientific Method Evaluated

Indeed the very scientific method which is adopted by Montgomery as his *a priori* assumption, besides being metaphysically and epistemologically anti-Christian, clearly betrays that he is far from detached or free from substantive, material presuppositions (i.e., acceptance of the scientific method includes the acceptance of a body of truth already). We should pause briefly to consider both of these points. The empiricist's adoption of the scientific method commits him to a predetermined authority structure, a pattern of authority that does not do justice to the authority of God's word. Montgomery baldly asserts that nothing is certain except the presuppositions of empiricism and the data with which the empiricist works,[232] and on the same page he had listed the presuppositions of empiricism as epistemological, ethical, and even *metaphysical* in content. The most important thing to notice here, however, is the fact that Montgomery takes empiricism to be more certain (since it is the only thing which is certain) than the word of the Lord; the authority of revelation is (at best) secondary to the authority of the scientist. Listen to his candid disclosure:

Even in the case of an alleged divine authority, it would be necessary to test by some means or another whether the authority is truly an infallible one before accepting as true all of its decrees. *Thus authority must be rejected as a primary method of acquiring truth...*Empirical or scientific method is the truly valid way of approaching truth...it is in itself capable of *determining what authority to follow* and what common sense beliefs and presuppositions to hold.[233]

God's authority must be established and endorsed by the primary authority of the empiricist; the intellect and research of the scientist must prove God to be infallible. Not God's authoritative revelation, but scientific method is the truly valid way to find the truth (this sounds more like secularism and negative criticism than biblical apologetics!). God's word might be admitted into



our thinking, but only as it is authorized by our thinking in the first place. For Montgomery, authority cannot be the way to truth - that is, *unless it is the authority of the empiricist!* "Empirical of scientific method...alone can accomplish to the satisfaction of all what the other methods which we have discussed cannot."[\[234\]](#) Only the scientific method is the way to truth; it has supreme authority. It even is allowed to lord it over the word of Him who said "I am the way, the truth, and the life," the one "in whom are hidden *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," the one of who Paul said "that in all things He might have the preeminence." Not the word of Christ, but the word of the empiricist has preeminent authority and foremost ability to lead to truth and knowledge - according to Montgomery, that is. At this point it should be manifest that Montgomery's thinking is encumbered with personal opinions and determinative presuppositions of the most significant sort. His foremost and aboriginal commitment is to the scientific method aside from submission to Christ (at least this is what he portrays in his writing). The scientific method determines what "authority" to accept, meaning that the scientific method must be used to establish *its own authority*? No, for it obviously cannot do this. Thus Montgomery's commitment is a non-objective, pre-theoretical, religious confidence. He cannot prove the authority of empiricism; he can only bow to it at the outset and expect others to do the same. The scientific method is not allowed to destroy the (unscientific) presuppositions of empiricism or the (assumed) authority of the scientist, and thus it is Montgomery's primary, unquestioned, personal commitment.

In an unpublished doctoral dissertation for the Toronto School of Theology Robert B. Strimple renders a short but telling critique of J. W. Montgomery's commitment to the scientific method. Strimple's words from chapter one of his dissertation, "Jesus and the Church; A critical Study of the Christology of John Knox," are worth quoting at length:

Is Bishop Butler, then, through such contemporary disciples as Montgomery and Pinnock, to be the orthodox Protestant's guide as he seeks to answer the challenge which John Knox and other modern theologians have presented to biblical Christianity in terms of the problem of faith and history? It should have been clear from our very description of the background of this faith-history question in the modern, post-Enlightenment assumption of the authority of autonomous reason and the pure contingency of world history that our answer must be a vigorous "no."

Montgomery seems to assume that the empirical historical method, since it involves a merely heuristic presupposition rather than a presupposition of "substantive content," is philosophically or religiously neutral and if only carefully and diligently employed will result in the verification of the Christian faith. Does Montgomery really expect the historian to use the historical method to call into question the authority of the historian? As Van Harvey puts it, "The

historian does not accept the authority of his witnesses; rather, he confers authority upon them, and he does this only after subjecting them to a rigorous and skeptical cross-examination." - a cross-examination based on naturalistic criteria...

Montgomery seems totally to overlook the fact that that method normally designated "historical" or "empirical" assumes, as Marc Bloch has so well demonstrated, a view of history's contingency and regularity which is fundamentally opposed to the Christian outlook....

....When a Biblical scholar examines the evidence for the virgin conception of Christ, his miracles, and his resurrection leaving an empty tomb, using "the 'analogies' which historical research employs," how can it be expected that he will conclude in favor of the supernaturalistic biblical presentation?

What the Reformed theologian must do is to challenge Knox far more radically than is possible for a Montgomery or a Pinnock, that is, to challenge him at the root of his thinking....

But at the very outset we must affirm our conviction that the only way out of the crisis is the recognition anew of the absolute authority of Scripture and the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5). The basic flaw in the traditional defense of orthodox Christianity represented in Montgomery and Pinnock is that it simply cannot do justice to the authority of Scripture. If the Scripture as "God-breathed" (theopneustos, II Tim. 3:16) revelation is as a lamp shining in a dark place (II Peter 1:19), then we must take this with radical seriousness. We must "switch on the light" if we are to see "facts" as they really are. We cannot continue to go rattling around in the dark. We cannot think in terms of the historical investigator, in Harvey's phrase, "conferring authority" upon the Bible. In that case, the seat of authority would pass from the text to the interpreter. But is this not exactly what Montgomery and Pinnock do when they invite the sceptic to "test" the Bible's claim to authority by canons not drawn from the Bible itself?

...Van Harvey, for example, /recognizes/ "how inextricably intertwined the historical and theological issues seem to be: and how this results in debates about the New Testament passing so easily "from judgments about fact to judgments

about the presupposition of the investigator, from claims about results to counterclaims that these so-called results simply reflect the assumptions of the critic"....

With striking clarity, Harvey recognizes the difficult (must we not say untenable?) position in which a suspension of his distinctive theistic position places the Christian. "If, however, the doctrine of inspiration and the principle of supernatural intervention are set aside, the apologist necessarily employs the canons of those with whom he is in debate" - "the general canons and criteria of just those one desired to refute." If the believer accepts the assumption that history can be understood altogether apart from God's self-revelation Christ, if he agrees that man can see quite well without the aid of that "sun" - and without the "eyes" which the Holy Spirit in his regenerating work provides to sinners blinded by the noetic effects of the Fall - then has he not lost the debate before it has started? Yet unless the orthodox believer is willing thus to capitulate he is, according to Harvey, "intellectually irresponsible." "The accusation is not that the traditionalist lacks learning or does not possess the tools of scholarship but that he lacks a certain quality of mind." The "traditionalist," however, fears that another designation for that "certain quality of mind" is unbelief."

In this cogent statement and evaluation Strimple has brought out the heart of the matter: (1) Montgomery's "scientific method" is not free from material assumptions, involving as it does presuppositions with respect to the condition of man, the abilities and station of his mind, the God-situation, the type of demands God is allowed to make on man's thinking, the question of whether men are in the dark without Christ or not, the appropriate way to respond to a revelation from God, the metaphysics of world process and history, the function of historical analogy, the place and capabilities of the historian, the seat of authority, the conditions of knowledge, and much more; (2) his empiricalistic presuppositions, moreover, do not do justice to the authority of God speaking in His word, and (3) his assumptions require capitulation to unbelief.

Because we have noted above that Montgomery rejects the authority of God as a path to truth in favor of empiricism alone as certain and as the way to knowledge, we are most dubious of his attempt to distinguish between his position and that of scientism.<sup>[235]</sup> At the most crucial juncture, as Strimple has indicated, Montgomery's commitment to the scientific method clearly calls for him (in Montgomery's own words) to "operate on the non-Christian's territory"<sup>[236]</sup> - an admission which should be contemplated as to its deep and thoroughgoing significance. Montgomery wrongly thinks that the empirical method is the same for all men, irrespective of their presuppositions and application of thought; this parallels his penchant to describe that method in deceptively vague and overgeneralized terms<sup>[237]</sup>, which in turn explains his misapprehended idea that scientific method applies not only to the physicist but also to the work

of the historian.[238] By blurring critical differences between unbelieving science and believing scholarship Montgomery has been led to endorse an apologetical method which unwittingly lands him squarely in the enemy's camp. Unfortunately, as much as he strains to differentiate his autonomous method from that of autonomous unbelief, he is forever doing so as a P.O.W.

The surprising thing is that, just as Montgomery should have realized how non-objective his scientific method is since he admits that it is a variety of intuitive rationalism,[239] even so he should have realized that his apologetic method capitulates to unbelief since he acknowledges that empiricism rests upon pre-scientific views concerning reality. As Stanford Reid observes, after reviewing Montgomery's writings,

In other words, despite his disclaimers, he is acknowledging that empiricism rests upon pre-scientific or naive views concerning reality that have come to the historian either by intuition or my authority whether human or divine.

When one considers his critiques of other historians, one soon discovers that he takes for granted that their different starting points lead them to different conclusions. Thus he tacitly admits that no matter how "empirical" one attempts to be, one consciously or unconsciously assumes a whole metaphysical system. Presuppositions are inescapable.[240]

We see, then, that the alleged objectivity of Montgomery's apologetical argument has actually been abandoned in practice; we have found evidence of Montgomery's own determinative presuppositions, especially in his endorsement of the scientific method. The sad thing is that in his self-deceiving claim to objectivity Montgomery, because substantive presuppositions are unavoidable, has been oblivious to the fact that he has absorbed the destructive perspective of unbelief. By not carrying out the full implications in his thinking of apologetically serving a *sovereign God*, Montgomery has ended up agreeing with Ernest Nagel in his objection to any idea based upon a theological or metaphysical commitment for which no experimental evidence is invoked; appropriately, Nagel entitled the book where this objection was expressed *Sovereign Reason*. [241]

### c. Imperfections in Doctrine and Defense

In addition to the failure of Montgomery to achieve apologetical objectivity in both theory and practice we need to observe the theological and apologetical inadequacies of his attempt to

engender religious conviction in unbelievers via the allegedly objective arguments of (positivistic) science and history. His problem is perhaps best seen as originating in his failure to take account of the noetic effects of the fall. He speaks of a "common rationality" which all men share,[242] thereby overlooking the critical differences between the fallen and regenerate mindset and spiritual capabilities - not to mention the great gulf between their respective informal logics. So unaffected by his fallen condition is man, as portrayed by Montgomery, that Montgomery can even say, "both those out of relation with God and those in proper relation to him can compare alternative interpretations of fact and determine on the basis of the facts themselves which interpretation best fits reality." [243] Quite to the contrary, "the natural man receives not the things of God's spirit...he cannot know them because they are Spiritually examined." [244] The carnal mind is enmity against God,[245] for the alienated unbeliever is an enemy of Christ precisely in his mind.[246] The person who is out of a proper relation with God (i.e., alienated) simply is *not* capable of properly examining the facts of an objective argument and coming to Christian conclusions; his mind has been blinded in darkness[247] so that he believes a lie[248] and views the word of cross as utter foolishness.[249] Montgomery has (in practice) simply overlooked the fact that the unbeliever's problem is not lack of information or an error in scholarly procedures; rather, it is sin.

As a result of not taking account of the noetic effects of sin Montgomery does not see the need for the work of the Holy Spirit in apologetical argument. By means of overwhelming evidence, an objective and indisputable argument, Montgomery would lead the unbeliever to faith.[250] Of his apologetic argument Montgomery claims, "It depends in no sense on theology. It rests solely and squarely upon historical method, the kind of method all of us, whether Christians, rationalists, agnostics, or Tibetan monks, have to use in analyzing historical data." [251] But the simple truth is that historic method (which is *not* the same for believer and unbeliever) is completely *insufficient* to bring man who is lost in sin to repentance and saving faith in Christ as He is set forth in the gospel. Acceptance of the good news is not a mere matter of intellect and empirical reasoning! Acceptance of the gospel message is impossible aside from regeneration and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Montgomery hardly ever refers to these necessities, as observed also by Stanford Reid.[252] And in this case I do not believe we have an easily dismissable argument from silence against Montgomery; his silence on the necessity for regeneration and the Spirit's internal testimony is a conspicuous silence for one who has written so much on apologetics - even more, it is a culpable silence. This is a significant and terrible oversight, both in terms of theological orthodoxy and Christian practice. One does not penetrate to the heart of the problem if he as an apologist does not see that the human heart *is* the problem in those who have not faith.

However, Montgomery's error extends beyond his flagrant oversight of the need for the Holy Spirit's operations in apologetics. He goes so far as to criticize severely a man like Bernard Ramm for stressing the centrality and need of the Spirit's internal witness[253] and when Clark and Van Til emphasize that the assured proof of the Christian revelation is supplied by the

inward work of the Holy Spirit, Montgomery accuses them of fideism[254] But to his discredit, Montgomery's argument is in actuality with the word of God.

No man is able to come unto me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard and has learned of the Father comes unto me.[255]

And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments and do them.[256]

Ye know that when ye were Gentiles ye were led away unto those dumb idols, howsoever ye might be led...No man can say "Jesus is Lord" but by the Holy Spirit.[257]

God has from the beginning chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Holy Spirit and belief of the truth.[258]

But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit...we received not the spirit of the world but the spirit which is from God in order that we might know the things that were freely given to us from God.[259]

give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to that working of His mighty strength.[260]

And my word and my proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in *demonstration of the Spirit* and of power, in order that your faith would not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.[261]



By not taking account of these things, and by excoriating those who do, Montgomery has crippled his apologetic and virtually made it impossible for him to see any success in its use. Without the objective (i.e., not originating in the subject) and internal (i.e., not the external word to which witness is borne) testimony of the Holy Spirit and His regenerating work the unbeliever's mind will never submit to God's word; only through the Spirit's work can a man be taught of God, believe the truth, know the things revealed by God, and keep His judgments.

Coordinated with the Spirit's internal work is God's *giving of faith* to the unbeliever; the sinner, having a stone heart and blinded eyes, comes to Christ not by willing demonstration and self-sufficient sight, but by faith.

The fact is that Montgomery, convinced beyond all probability that Christ is his Savior and Lord, is trying to prove absolutely from objectively and empirically known history that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord for all who will come to him *in faith*. This he cannot do, for no one comes to Christ except he is drawn by the Father through the Spirit and the Word (John 3:3, 5; 6:63-65).[\[262\]](#)

It is far from fideism to insist that faith comes only when a person has been reborn from above. It is arrogance to deny it. Hopefully Dr. Montgomery will not. The scientific method and its capacity to convert men's thinking ought to be re-evaluated by Montgomery in terms of the Scripture presented above. It would not hurt also to re-evaluate them in terms of his own experience and his own statements:

In his debate with Professor Stroll of the University of British Columbia, he presented what he believed to be the empirical evidence for Christianity, but we have no evidence that he convinced Stroll at Vancouver any more than he did Professor Altizer at Chicago or Bishop at Hamilton, Ontario. The fact is, Montgomery's view of the nature and efficacy of the scientific method is wrong... Yet while he insists that Christ's resurrection can be proven scientifically as fully as Columbus' discovery of America, he also admits that many men will not accept it or its implications. Why? Because 1) they are not willing to do Christ's will (John 7:17), and 2) they are more interested in the present, than they are in the future life. But is not this an admission that the scientific method cannot bring Christian conviction without Christian assumptions?[\[263\]](#)

Moreover, not only has Montgomery overlooked the spiritual condition of man, but in his attempt to construct a compelling apologetic from objective facticity and the scientific method he has overlooked the philosophical climate of post-Kantian thought which, now more than ever, manifests that the apologetic issue is staked on metaphysical and epistemological matters - as Van Til so succinctly demonstrated.[\[264\]](#) Before "objective evidence" can have any effect upon the unbeliever his philosophic presuppositions must be altered; in terms of apostate thinking the "facts" of the gospel are relativized, naturalized, generalized, demythologized, etc. - stripped of their genuine significance or meaning. The self-sufficiency of the unbeliever, notably in the area of epistemology, determines how he responds to the biblical record and apologetic evidence. Consequently, unless Montgomery directs his polemic to the presuppositions of apostate thought he will get nowhere with the self-conscious unbeliever. Montgomery's "objective evidence" simply will not be taken at, what the Christian sees as, its face value. The non-Christian's philosophy of history, for instance, not only determines the selection and evaluation of the "facts," but provides the context in which the very meaning of the gospel record is determined (e.g., personalistically, existentially, naturalistically, etc.). Thus the "objective" apologetic promised by Montgomery - even if we forget that it is theoretically unsupportable, betrayed in actual practice, and virtually oblivious to the need for regeneration - cannot be successful because it hastens to "facts" in oblivion of the autonomous presuppositions of the unbeliever which "form" those facts according to a scheme that chokes out the Christian message. If Montgomery will not focus on the critical, presuppositional nature of the dispute between the Christian and the non-Christian his "objective facticity" will never have any place; that is, in terms of the actual, determinative issues Montgomery would never get to his "objective facticity." The major hinderance to belief (viz., autonomous presuppositions) will always obstruct the way of his apologetic argument from "the facts and nothing but the facts." The defender of the faith can only be adequate to his task if his apologetic deals with more than the "facts" without being less than objective (i.e., challenges unbelief from the perspective of God's objective word at the presuppositional level).

#### d. Self-refutation

Having observed Montgomery's desire to devise an apologetic approach which embodies a (virtual) presuppositionless objectivity, we went on to demonstrate that such an approach is impossible in theory; it rests on an *a priori* dogmatism and unbiblical outlook, is refuted by recent philosophy of science and logic, is inviable or trifling in its truncated (reformulated) sense, and is defended in the long run by pragmatic considerations. Next we noted that Montgomery himself is encumbered with his own presuppositions, and indeed that his endorsement of the scientific method implies definite, material presuppositions - of a non-Christian character. Further, the overlooking by Montgomery of the need for the Holy Spirit's work and the critical significance of presuppositions in altering the unbeliever's thinking has been presented as indications of theological and apologetical inadequacies in Montgomery's "objective" approach. Now finally we would observe that his presuppositionless objectivity is incriminated and refuted by *his own* published assertions. As we go to these assertions the reader should recall that Montgomery's own words were quoted previously to the effect that historic facts must be investigated "without a priori,"[\[265\]](#) that we must courageously use the language of "objective facticity" and recognize that there are no degrees of objectivity,[\[266\]](#) that appeal to

facts is the *only* preservative against solipsism - in which case we must refuse to operate presuppositionally and instead offer objective evidence to the unbeliever.[267] But it turns out that this is all a facade; Montgomery puts on a front and promotes his apologetic as rigorously and purely objective, established with facts that are as hard as nails. But he knows that for all his grandiose and boisterous claims, his "objective facticity" is a house of cards. His vaunted presuppositionless objectivity as a historian and apologist is mere whistling in the dark; the astonishing thing is that in Montgomery's writing he does so much whistling. It is astonishing because a careful reader will find that Montgomery confesses (in a footnote) that "we must make assumptions to think at all:[268] and even concedes that a final, unproven standard and source of knowledge is inescapable: "Obviously, one must either frankly admit that one source is final, or establish a criterion of judgment over all previously accepted sources - which criterion becomes, *ex hypothesi*, the final source!"[269]. He admits that the answers offered by historians to "What" questions depend on "the larger issues of meaning and purpose that underlie specific historical investigations"[270]. By his own admission Montgomery as a historian "clearly operates with a *prior* conception of human nature.../which/ stems from his general philosophy of life." [271]

It goes without saying, therefore, that a sound personal philosophy is of crucial importance for sound historical work...One's conception of human nature ultimately derives from one's religio-philosophical beliefs, and these need to be solid or one's historical study will suffer in the gravest possible degree.[272]

Exactly! Presuppositions *do* determine the soundness of one's historical research and judgments - presuppositions, *not* allegedly "objective facticity." And even in the case of a question as to past fact, "What he /the historian/ takes to be credible depends on what he conceives to be humanly possible." [273] This is what presuppositionalists like Van Til have argued for years - to the frequent, published consternation of positivistic apologists. Yet now Montgomery grants the far-reaching point. He also acknowledges that "Philosophy of history, in other words, derives from one's general *Weltanschauung*" and that one's philosophy of history is in fact one's "*Theology of history*";[274] indeed, the central problems of theology of history, for instance the issue of "historicity," are *presuppositional* in nature.[275] Thus Montgomery relinquishes his "objectivity" (for which there can be no degrees); historical questions of fact depend on underlying religious issues, the historian settles those issues out of a prior context of religio-philosophical beliefs, this theological anthropology and theology of history, moreover, stem from a wider worldview that is forged presuppositionally. The historian simply does not operate without *a priori*. A list of the *a priori*s that intrude themselves in Montgomery's historical apologetic (i.e., presuppositions which go beyond the bare facts allegedly validated) is disclosed by Montgomery himself.[276] Furthermore, and most tellingly, Montgomery surrenders to the fact that the battle with unbelief is decided at the presuppositional level:

Historicism refuses to regard the resurrection as history...but this is no more than the result of rationalistic presuppositionalism concerning the nature of the universe...Our responsibility is to make sure that in the use of historical method scientific, historicist presuppositions...are not surreptitiously smuggled into the picture disguised as objective historical method and allowed to determine the results of the investigation.[277]

Putting it otherwise, the trouble with secular philosophy of history...is that the secularists have been deflected by their extra-historical commitments from looking at history objectively - and particularly from looking at the Christ of history objectively.[278]

It is not facts, but primarily presuppositions (e.g., rationalism, scientism, extra-historical commitments) that are determinative in the debate with apostate thinking. Thus Montgomery should openly avow that the stakes are simply too high to make the crux of our apologetic *anything but* presuppositional. We can only wish that Montgomery would take to heart the full import of his comment at the end of the dialogue with Thomas Altizer:

As Pascal said, there is enough evidence to convince anybody who is not set against it. But there is not so much evidence that a person can be forced into believing it if he simply will not.[279]

Precisely. And because the people with whom we carry on apologetic argumentation are *set against* the truth of God and simply *will not* submit to Christ's Lordship, mere evidence fails to convince them. Thus we must go beyond the evidence to the heart of the matter, to the presuppositions controlling that unbelieving response to the evidence. The reason that Montgomery accepts the evidence and Altizer (for instance) resides not in Montgomery's superior scholarly ability to handle historical questions, but in the presuppositions and renewed heart Montgomery brings to the facts. If his apologetic were really "objective" in the sense that he portrays it (*viz.*, without *a priori*; letting the facts speak for themselves) he couldn't even convince himself of the gospel truth. His darkened mind would fare no better than Altizer's.

e. Review

Therefore, Montgomery's apologetic fails to commend itself to us with respect to its alleged objectivity. That objectivity has been faulted in theory, abandoned in practice, demonstrated

theologically and apologetically inadequate, and refuted out of Montgomery's own mouth. As a consequence the core of positivistic apologetics has disintegrated - just as its outer rind (the specific inductive argument which is set forth) was rejected in its outworking (every premise being defective) and in its conception (being vitiated by the dialectical tension between its probabilism and indeterminism). Montgomery promised a compelling, inductive apologetic, but he has failed to make good on *either* its argumentative strength or its objectivity. Even *if* the *argumentative* aspect of his apologetic could be bolstered and improved, and insolvency of its *objective* aspect spells the demise of positivistic apologetics.

The question then is: is Montgomery's rejection of presuppositional history correct? Is his professed historical epistemology consistently Christian? The answer to both questions would seem to be, no. He has to admit, despite all his deprecation of presuppositions, that no historian can or does carry on his work without presupposing a view of the whole of reality. His so-called objective, scientific methodology brings him only probability, largely determined by his own presuppositions. And finally his rational-positivistic approach completely ignores, if it does not specifically deny, the necessity of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in order that men have truly Christian presuppositions and so reach valid Christian conclusions. One cannot but feel that this rational-positivism largely stems from the fact that he wishes to avoid dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit in speaking to a rationalistic world, a position that is supported neither by the Gospels nor by the rest of the New Testament. His historical epistemology, therefore, seems to be contrary to a truly Christian approach.[\[280\]](#)

We must conclude that Montgomery's historical apologetic is debilitated and defenseless.

### 3. Defective in its Subjectivistic Core

However, when one looks deeper, Montgomery's apologetic may be in an even worse condition than indicated above! Although it is his (defunct) objective argument that Montgomery spends nearly all his time presenting or discussing in his books, it turns out that in actuality the structure of his apologetic shows itself to be *experiential at base*. This comes as an initial surprise to anyone who is familiar with the reputation propagated for Montgomery by himself and others. Despite all the stress on inductive proof, in the final analysis Montgomery defends the faith by appealing to *personal, subjective experience*. Montgomery describes his own conversion as coming about by a two-step process: (1) historical evidence, but then (2) a "resultant experiential (existential, if you will) satisfaction with the Christian world-view."[\[281\]](#) His apologetic is actually structured on the same scheme: "The resurrection provides a basis in historical probability for *trying* the Christian faith,"[\[282\]](#) emphasis supplied). "The argument is intended, rather, to give solid objective ground for testing the Christian faith experientially."[\[283\]](#) The real

or underlying proof of Christianity in Montgomery's apologetic is self-satisfying experience - having Christ's claims attested existentially, for "God's word will attest itself in his personal experience."[\[284\]](#) What then is the use of the inductive argumentation so adamantly insisted upon by Montgomery? After all, the central proof of Christianity is made a matter of taste in Montgomery's outlook. His defense of the faith, in the long run, comes down not to undeniable and unavoidable truth, but personal (and must we not say relativistic?) satisfaction. So why the historical argument at all? For the apologist who wishes to have his defense center on matters of truth and knowledge, Montgomery's explanation is more than a trifle bit disheartening.

...the honest inquirer needs objective ground for trying it, since there are a welter of conflicting religious options and one can become psychologically jaded through indiscriminate trials of religious belief. Only the Christian world-view offers objective ground for testing it experientially; therefore, Christ deserves to be given first opportunity to make His claims known to the human heart.[\[285\]](#)

It is not that Christ has the certain and self-attesting truth which no man can avoid, but that a self-attesting personal experience decides the religious issue, in which case we Christians must make sure that Jesus gets tried *first*. With their unsophisticated longing to indulge personal experience, unbelievers must be sold on the idea that Jesus is the one who should be given the first chance to satisfy them; this is the function of Montgomery's historical argumentation. Without it the religious seeker might become exhausted with other experiences or even stopped along the way to trying Jesus experientially; thus we must "catch his attention" with an impressive sounding claim to a compelling, objective argument from history. Of course in taking this approach Montgomery has made a host of blunders: (1) if personal taste is the final criterion in religious competition, then what's to make us think that personal taste (rather than dry, academic, historical disputing) will not be the basis for choosing which religious options to experience first? (2) If personal experience is the ultimate religious proof, then why shouldn't a plurality of religions be true since there is an obvious, wide diversity of religious tastes in this world? (3) If an experiential trial decides whether a person will become a believer or not, doesn't that person's endorsement of the religious option simply tell us something about that person - rather than about the truth of what he believes? (4) If personal satisfaction is the test for which religion to follow, what is the proper kind of satisfaction to use for your standard (emotional, aesthetic, physical, monetary, social, etc.)? (5) If personal satisfaction decides the religious issue, is it not possible that Christ would provide one kind of satisfaction and Buddha would provide another kind of satisfaction, thus recommending to us the "package deal" we could have by becoming religious ecclectics? And on and on the questions could go, pointing out the dead end which Montgomery's apologetic scheme (viz., use a historical argument to point the unbeliever to Christ first, and then settle the issue experientially) runs into as a matter of course. But the really curious thing about Montgomery's experience-based apologetic scheme is that, although he clearly sees the deficiencies of such subjectivism in other approaches (e.g., constructive religious empiricism), he is blind to them in his own thinking. Montgomery attacks constructive religious empiricism as being impotent to acquire religious truth or lead to religious knowledge



due to the subjective data it works upon, the difficulty of analyzing religious experience, the tyranny of subjectivism[286]; especially important is his observation that this approach to religious truth produces results which exactly correspond to the presuppositions of those who employ it[287] - "it is a machine whose products reflect precisely the interests of the operators who feed it the material they choose"[288]. Would that Montgomery realized that in carrying out this trenchant critique he was simultaneously subverting his own apologetic scheme with its experiential anchor.

Having examined the main outline of Montgomery's apologetic we can summarize its trust and its breakdown. Montgomery's program calls for an appeal (1) to objective validation of the resurrection by inductive argument, and then (2) to subjective religious satisfaction. With respect to (1), his argument, both in practice and conception, has been faulted throughout, and his objectivity - even by his own words - has been undermined. With respect to (2), his approach is unworkable and - even by his own admission elsewhere - unable to achieve religious truth and knowledge. Therefore, both pillars upholding Montgomery's apologetic have crumbled. Since *both* are deficient we would be devoid of cogency if we thought the two pillars could buttress each other! Such an apologetic framework is frankly in a state of collapse.

#### 4. Defective Appeal to Scripture

Before concluding something should be said about Montgomery's loose and inaccurate allusion to Scripture allegedly to support his apologetic program. Simply put, his problem is the same as Pinnock's; by reading particular verses out of context he creates a pretext. The dismissal of this pretext can be pursued above in the discussion of Pinnock's appeal to Scripture. A few specific notes can be made on Montgomery's own penchant to give his reader the impression - without warrant - that Scripture calls for his kind of inductive defense of the faith. He says that the offense of the cross is its evidential compelling power,[289] but this is hardly true to Paul's teaching. How could the cross be "a stumbling-block unto Jews"[290] if its scandal is its proved facticity? After all, the Jews *brought* Christ to trial and execution! The offense of the cross is its indictment of sin and its dying Messiah, things hard to accept by a Jew or by anybody not convicted under the Holy Spirit's operations. Montgomery tries to give the impression that Thomas' "prove it to me" attitude is sanctioned by Scripture when he says that John's statement, "these things have been written that you might have life through believing," *follows immediately* upon Thomas' convinced affirmation of Christ's Lordship[291]; but the fact of the matter is that the solemn pronouncement of our Lord, "blessed are those who *without seeing* believe," *intervenes* between Thomas; conclusion and John's explanation for writing the gospel. The implication is not that Scripture condones Thomas' attitude but that John's gospel has been written so that those who do not see the resurrected Savior can have the blessing of belief. That's quite a reversal of Montgomery's point! Montgomery claims that Paul's statement that 500 people saw the resurrected Christ and were still alive carries the "implication" to go ask them about it,[292] but fails to explain how that implication fits the context of a doctrinal passage being addressed to believers! The fact is that Paul is driving to the conclusion that he was the

late-comer, the last to see the resurrected Lord, the least of the apostles.[\[293\]](#) Moreover, Montgomery's supposed implication from the statement that the greater part of the witnesses were still alive is hard pressed for an explanation of the fact that Paul went on to say "but some are fallen asleep." That statement would (1) be redundant (since the indication of the "greater part" being alive already presents this fact) and (2) weaken the "go ask them" implication. It is more likely that Paul's statement ties in with the doctrinal discussion to follow since he there is concerned with the status of future of the believing dead. Montgomery again misleads his reader in saying that the apostolic community "invited their contemporaries to check the matter out for themselves"[\[294\]](#) with respect to Christ's resurrection. But in fact there is no Scriptural evidence at all that the apostles or anybody else urged people to go prove the resurrection by inductive research on their own. The apostles expected the fact of the resurrection to be believed on this own authoritative witness. So we must demur when Montgomery so carelessly appeals to the Bible to bolster his apologetic method.

Genuine resurrection faith according to the word of God is not staked on inductive validation, for even when the resurrected Lord appeared to His eleven disciples, "some doubted"[\[295\]](#). Indeed the spiritual condition of man is such that "if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one should rise from the dead."[\[296\]](#) Resurrection faith is a matter of presuppositional submission to the authoritative word of God. When Christ met two travelers on the road to Emmaus and found them doubtful of the resurrection, rather than offering them compelling empirical evidence (by causing them to recognize Him) He rebuked them for being slow of heart to believe all that the *prophets had spoken*;[\[297\]](#) He made their hearts burn within them by expounding to them *the scripture*. If men will not begin by acknowledging the truth of God's authoritative revelation, an empirical resurrection will *not* bring them belief. This is the plain teaching of Scripture. The example of resurrection faith is found, not in doubting Thomas, but in Abraham, the father of the faithful. Against all empirical probability or inductive reasoning Abraham offered up his only begotten son, "accounting that God is able to raise men up even from the dead";[\[298\]](#) the nature of Abraham's faith was an ability to believe against hope but according to what God had spoken, being fully assured that God was able to perform what he had promised.[\[299\]](#) Such faith cannot be produced in a sinner's hardened heart by inductive argumentation; it must be a gift from God[\[300\]](#) - not self-glorifying, intellectual works of man. "So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ";[\[301\]](#) "faith is...a conviction of things not seen."[\[302\]](#) Therefore, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" said Christ to Thomas. Resurrection faith begins with a presupposition about God's ability to raise men even from the dead - as it did with Abraham - not with inductive proofs. Hence our apologetic should begin, as did Paul's, with a question of presuppositions: "Why is it judged incredible by you that God should raise the dead?"[\[303\]](#) It must be rooted in the authoritative revelation of God, "saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come"[\[304\]](#) because if men will not hear Moses and the prophets neither will they believe the most compelling, factual demonstration!

#### D. Summary of the Critique

Due to the lengthy nature of the foregoing critique of Montgomery's apologetic it might be best to conclude by summarizing, in outline form, the main points presented against his method of defending the Christian faith.

- I. Montgomery promises an objective argument validating Christianity.
  - A. With respect to his compelling, inductive, *argument*:
    - 1. It is faulted in its *outworking*.
      - a. Every premise is defective.
      - b. And its conclusion does not reasonably follow.
    - 2. It is faulted in its *conception*.
      - a. Fallacious inferences and inconsistency are embodied.
      - b. Dialectical tension (contradiction) is evidenced:
        - 1) Its probabilism (uniformity) is
          - a) unfounded
          - b) sub-Christian
          - c) unworkable as a method
          - d) unworkable as an effective apologetic
        - 2) Its indeterminism (non-uniformity)
          - a) undermines philosophical thinking
          - b) undermines the miraculous character and significance of miracles
          - c) undermines the orthodoxy of one's witness.
      - c. An otiose approach to religious truth is used.
    - B. With respect to his alleged *objectivity*:
      - 1. It cannot be supported in theory.
        - a. It rests on unbiblical, a priori, dogmatism.
        - b. It is refuted by recent (even unbelieving) philosophy of science and philosophy of logic.
        - c. Its truncated sense is inviable or trifling.
        - d. It is defended finally by appeal to pragmatics.
      - 2. It is abandoned in practice by Montgomery.
        - a. His presuppositions are easily disclosed.
        - b. His acceptance of the scientific method
          - 1) is metaphysically and epistemologically anti-Christian
          - 2) implies definite, material presuppositions.
      - 3. It is theologically and apologetically inadequate
        - a. since it overlooks the need for regeneration
        - b. since it skirts the crucial issue of presuppositions
      - 4. It is refuted out of Montgomery's own mouth.
  - II. In the long run Montgomery appeals to experiential satisfaction.
    - A. But a host of blunders makes this unworkable as relativistic.
    - B. And such subjectivism is confuted by Montgomery's own critique elsewhere.

#### Legend Of Footnote Abbreviations

**AMD** The Altizer-Montgomery Dialogue Chicago: Inter-varsity, 1967.

**CTEv** C. Van Til, Christian-Theistic Evidences Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1935, 1947, 1966 (syllabus). In Defense of Biblical Christianity vol 6. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978.

**CTK** C. Van Til, A Christian Theory of Knowledge Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed 1969.

**DF** C. Van Til, The Defense of the Faith Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955.

**Int.** IAB "Introduction" by C. Van Til in The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible by B. B. Warfield. Philadelphia:

Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948.

**JA** Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til. Edited by E. R. Geehan. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971.

**LC** Ludwig Wittgenstein Lectures and Conversations. Edited by C. Barrett. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

**PGC** The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark Edited by Ronald H. Nash. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968.

**SP** J. W. Montgomery The Shape of the Past Ann Arbor: Edward Bros., 1962.

**TBLWR** The Bible - The Loving Word of Revelation Edited by M. C. Terney. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968.

**TC** "The Theologian's Craft: A Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology" (J. W. Montgomery) Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation, Sept. 1966.

**THN** David Hume A Treatise on Human Nature. Edited by Green and Grose. London, 1874.

**WHG** J. W. Montgomery Where is History Going? Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969.

Footnotes

[1] JA pp. 380-392

[2] JA p. 382

[3] JA p. 382

[4] JA p. 382

[5] cf. pp. 382f

[6] Romans 1:21

[7] JA p. 383

[8] i.e., on and around Int IAB, p. 20 and CTK, pp. 294f

[9] Int. IAB, pp. 20, 21

[10] Int. IAB, p22

[11] Int. IAB, p. 23

[12] Int. IAB pp. 24, 25 emphasis provided

[13] Int. IAB, p. 29

[14] CTK, p. 289

[15] CTK, p. 293

[16] CTK, pp. 294, 295

[17] JA, p. 383

[18] cf. E. S. Brightman, *An Introduction to Philosophy*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1951, p. 78

[19] JA, pp. 384f.

[20] JA, p. 385

[21] DF, p. 331

[22] On twenty-three central points; cf. III.A.1 above especially note numbers 2,9,10,11,12,17,18,19,20,21,23

[23] JA, p. 384

[24] JA, pp. 386f

[25] Cf. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. Flew & A. MacIntyre. New York: Macmillan, 1955, pp. 99ff.

[26] JA, pp. 387f.

[27] cf. numbers 6,11,13,15,16,17,20,21,23 in III.A.1 above

[28] JA, p. 387

[29] JA, p. 382



[30] cdd. I John 1:8, 10

[31] I John 3:5-10; Job 15:16; Romans 8:7f

[32] cf. John 3:3-21

[33] I Cor. 2:14

[34] I John 2:27

[35] Int. IAB, p. 20

[36] cf. JA, p. 380

[37] cf. II.E above

[38] JA, p. 383

[39] CTEv, p. 35

[40] CTEv, p. 52

[41] cf. JA, pp. 388f, 391

[42] John 17:21, 23, 26

[43] Eph. 4:15

[44] I Cor. 13:5f

[45] John 13:35

[46] JA, pp. 388f

[47] JA, pp. 389f

[48] JA, p. 390

[49] JA, p. 390

[50] cf. III.A.1

[51] Matt. 10:14f

[52] J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936, pp. 63, 64-65

[53] *Where is History Going?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969, p. 44

[54] *The Shape of the Past*. Ann Arbor: Edwards Bros., 1962, p. 292

[55] WHG, p. 53f

[56] JA, p. 392

[57] JA, p. 390

[58] PGC, p. 388

[59] SP, p. 140

[60] *The Altizer-Montgomery Dialogue*. Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1967, p. 73

[61] SP, p. 338

[62] SP, p. 237

[63] cf. Standord Reid, "Subjectivity or Objectivity in Historical Understanding," JA, p. 411

[64] *The Bible-The Living Word of Revelation*, ed. M. C. Tenney, p. 211

[65] SP, pp. 138f; PGC, pp. 388f.; WHG, p.35; cf. TBLWR, p. 211

[66] cf. III.A.1

[67] particularly in SP, pp. 139-141, 237-238, and in WHG, pp. 37-74

[68] WHG, pp. 52-53

[69] WHG, p. 49

[70] WHG, p. 53; cf. SP, p. 236

[71] SP, pp. 235, 237; WHG, pp. 41, 50; PGC, p. 381

[72] AMD, p. 89

[73] WHG, p. 63

[74] cf. WHG, pp. 63-69

[75] cf. III.A.1

[76] cf. WHG, p. 49

[77] PGC, p. 511

[78] PGC, p. 511 cf., WHG, pp. 196f

[79] PGC, p. 511

[80] cf. SP, 138f

[81] SP, p. 138

[82] cf. SP, pp. 23gf; WHG, p. 72

[83] cf. SP, p. 236; WHG, p. 71

[84] cf. WHG, p. 43

[85] cf. SP, p. 236; WHG, p. 72

[86] WHG, p. 72

[87] cf. TBLWR, p. 213

[88] SP, p. 287

[89] cf. SP, p. 141, AMD, p. 94

[90] SP, p. 141

[91] SP, p. 141

[92] SP, p. 292

[93] SP, p. 237

[94] cf. SP, p. 139

[95] cf. TBLWR, p. 211

[96] cf. WHG, pp. 114-116

[97] AMD, p. 94

[98] WHG, pp. 136f



[99] PGC, p. 379

[100] SP, p. 143

[101] SP, p. 229

[102] PGC, p. 390

[103] see, for instance, *From a Logical Point of View*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1953, especially essays "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" and "Truth by Convention"

[104] *Word and Object*. New York: M.I.T., John Wiley and Sons, 1960

[105] WHG, pp. 137f; cf. PGC, p. 390

[106] AMD, p. 95

[107] SP, pp. 143f.

[108] Acts 2:36

[109] Luke 1:4

[110] 2 Cor. 4:6

[111] Matt. 11:27

[112] Matt. 16:27

[113] I Thess. 1:5

[114] Col. 2:2

[115] Hebrews 6:11

[116] Romans 4:1, 11, 16

[117] vv. 19, 21

[118] Hebrews 10:22

[119] v. 23

[120] Eph 3:12

[121] Job 8:14

[122] Prov. 14:26

[123] Prov. 1:7

[124] Prov. 22:17-21

[125] Col. 3:10

[126] cf. I Tim. 4:3

[127] I Tim. 2:4

[128] John 8:32

[129] I John 2:21

[130] I John 5:13

[131] for our justification, Rom. 4:25

[132] I Cor. 15:17

[133] I John 5:20

[134] cf. 2 Tim. 1:12

[135] I Thessalonians 2:13

[136] I Cor. 2:4f, 12, 16

[137] I John 2:20

[138] v. 27

[139] I John 1:1

[140] John 6:63

[141] John 5:25

[142] John 6:68; cf. 8:51; 12:50

[143] Phil. 2:16

[144] 2 Tim. 3:17

[145] cr. Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:8f; Phil. 1:10; Heb. 5:11-14

[146] cf. John 4:24

[147] Matt. 7:24

[148] *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. Green and Grose. London, 1874, vol. I, pp. 384, 388, 389

[149] THN, p. 377

[150] THN, pp. 389, 391, 403

[151] SP, pp. 229, 266

[152] SP, p. 237

[153] SP, pp. 236, 237

[154] I Cor. 15:17

[155] I Cor. 15:20

[156] 156JA, p. 410

[157] cf. SP, p. 229

[158] TBLWR, pp. 206-211

[159] TBLWR, p.211

[160] TBLWR, p. 209

[161] TBLWR, p. 211

[162] TBLWR, p. 208

[163] *Lectures and Conservations*, ed. C. Barrett. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, pp. 54, 56, 57, 58, 59

[164] LC, p. 56

[165] cf. PGC, pp. 369ff; JA, pp. 383ff.

[166] WHG, p. 142n

[167] PGC, p. 369



[168] PGC, pp. 371, 372

[169] cf. Montgomery's anti-"double predestination," PGC, pp. 370f; WHG, p. 160n with Hodge's discussion of the historic Lutheran denial of "double predestination," *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Vol. II, part III, chap. 14, paragraph 7, pp. 722-724

[170] SP, p. 11

[171] WHG, p. 72

[172] WHG, p. 71

[173] PGC, p. 380

[174] SP, pp. 290-292 cf., p. 121

[175] SP, p. 292f

[176] cited by P. Frank, *Philosophy of Science*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1957, p. 176

[177] *Why I Am Not A Christian, and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, ed. Paul Edwards. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957, p.38

[178] *Physics and Philosophy, The Revolution in Modern Science*. New York: Harper & Row, 1958, p. 201

[179] *Causality: The Place of the Causal Principle in Modern Science*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1959, esp. pp. 333-353

[180] *God in the Dock*, p. 92

[181] cf. also the article by R. J. Rushdoony in JA, pp. 339-348), "The One and Many Problem"

[182] SP, p. 292

[183] SP, p. 291

[184] SP, p. 291

[185] WHG, p. 71

[186] SP, p. 301

[187] JA, pp. 402, 403

[188] SP, p. 287

[189] SP, p. 287

[190] JA, p. 414

[191] *God and Philosophy*, p. 63

[192] Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act IV, Scene 1

[193] 2 Cor. 11:14

[194] I John 4:1-6

[195] JA, p. 388

[196] e.g., see Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967, pp. 156ff.

[197] p. 168n

[198] WHG, pp. 114ff.

[199] WHG, p. 116

[200] "The Theologian's Craft; a Discussion of Theory Formation and Theory Testing in Theology," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, IVIII, Sept., 1966 p. 76

[201] TC, p. 69

[202] TC, p. 76

[203] TC, p. 68

[204] TC, p. 69

[205] Prov. 1:7

[206] cf. II.E. above

[207] JA, p. 390

[208] JA, p. 391

[209] SP, pp. 264ff.

[210] *Dilemmas*. Cambridge: University Press, 1954, pp. 71, 81

[211] p. 92

[212] p. 126

[213] cf. *The Uses of Argument*. Cambridge: University Press, 1958

[214] cf. JA, pp. 409f.

[215] cf. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.<sup>2</sup> Chicago: University Press, 1970, originally 1962

[216] cf. JA, p. 409

[217] PGC, p. 379

[218] "Alternative Interpretations of the History of Science" in *The Validation of Scientific Theories*, ed. P.G. Frank. New York: Collier, 1961

[219] ed. Alfred de Grazia. NY: University Books, 1966

[220] "Recent Problems of Induction," in *Mind and Cosmos*, ed. R. G. Colodny. Pittsburgh: University Press, 1966, pp. 131f.

[221] Cambridge: University Press, 1958

[222] cf. Charles Beard, "That Noble Dream," in *The Varieties of History*, ed. F. Stern. Cleveland: World, 1956

[223] PGC, p. 377

[224] PGC, p. 381); cf. WHG, pp. 194-195

[225] cf. PGC, p. 382

[226] PGC, p. 379

[227] SP, p. 13

[228] PGC, p. 388; SP, p. 141

[229] SP, p. 265

[230] SP, p. 241

[231] SP, p. 141

[232] SP, p. 266

[233] SP, p. 265, emphasis supplied

[234] SP, p. 265

[235] cf. SP, pp. 141, 267

[236] JA, p. 390

[237] e.g., SP, p. 258

[238] cf. JA, pp. 409-410

[239] SP, p. 266

[240] JA, p. 409

[241] Free Press, 1954, cf. p. 32

[242] JA, p. 391

[243] JA, p. 390

[244] I Corinthians 2:12



[245] Romans 8:7

[246] Colossians 1:21

[247] cf. Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:18

[248] Romans 1:21, 25)

[249] I Corinthians 1:18

[250] e.g., SP, pp. 237-238

[251] WHG, pp. 53-54

[252] JA, p. 411

[253] WHG, p. 114

[254] PGC, p. 388; JA, pp. 384, 389, 391

[255] John 6:44-45

[256] Ezekiel 36:27

[257] I Corinthians 12:2-3

[258] 2 Thessalonians 2:13

[259] I Corinthians 2:10, 12

[260] Ephesians 1:17-19

[261] I Corinthians 24-5

[262] JA, p. 415

[263] JA, pp. 409, 41

[264] see JA, pp. 392-394

[265] SP, p. 292

[266] WHG, p. 116

[267] JA, pp. 388, 390

[268] SP, p. 300-301

[269] TC, p. 69

[270] SP, p. 3

[271] SP, p.14

[272] SP, pp. 14, 15

[273] SP, p. 14

[274] WHG, pp. 183,184

[275] WHG, p. 186

[276] SP, pp. 145-152, 266

[277] WHG, p. 116

[278] PGC, p. 376

[279] AMD. p. 95

[280] JA, p. 412

[281] WHG, pp. 38-39

[282] SP, p. 143

[283] SP, p. 140

[284] WHG, pp. 35-36

[285] SP, p. 140; cf. JA, p. 389

[286] SP, pp. 269-286

[287] SP, pp. 278-285

[288] SP, p. 281

[289] JA, p. 391

[290] I Corinthians 1:23

[291] AMD, p. 74

[292] AMD, p. 76

[293] cf. I Corinthians 15:2-9

[294] PGC, p. 375

[295] Matthew 28:17

[296] Luke 16:31

[297] Luke 24:25

[298] Hebrews 11:17-19

[299] Romans 4:18-2

[300] Ephesians 2:8

[301] Romans 10:17

[302] Hebrews 11:1

[303] Acts 26:8

[304] Acts 26:22