

In Memorium

John Warwick Montgomery

October 18, 1931-September 25, 2024

Evangelical, Evidential, and Confessionally Lutheran

Christian

By: Craig A. Parton

John Warwick Montgomery

The Church Militant has lost a Lion with the death of John Warwick Montgomery. He directed that he be buried in Niederroedern in the Alsace, near Soufflenheim where he lived for over 20 years. The service was to be simple and direct--Christo-centric to the end, he ordered that no eulogy be given at his funeral and that his gravestone simply recite John 11:25-26 ("I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will never die.") But this is not his funeral and so eulogizing we shall go.

The scope of John Warwick Montgomery's contribution to the advancement of the Gospel by means of his writings, teaching and debating is colossal, and commenced with his conversion at Cornell in the late 1940's to the Fall of 2023 where, at the age of a mere 92, he delivered in

person a provocative paper on “Luther and the Authority of Scripture” at a theological conference in San Diego, California, to the summer of 2024 where he taught two courses at the International Academy of Apologetics in Strasbourg, France and published his last book this past summer (*The Art of Christian Advocacy*), also at the age of 92. His expertise ranged from Wittgenstein¹ to Luther,² Tolkien³ to Sherlock Holmes.⁴ He was a rare American member of both an elite culinary academy in Paris⁵ and wine society in the Alsace,⁶ who founded the first Christian law school that integrated theology, law, and apologetics; was a member of the

¹ See John Warwick Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus*, 5th ed. (Bonn, Germany: Culture & Science, 2012). This theological magnum opus by Montgomery mirrors in structure what many consider the most important work of philosophy in modern times done by the great twentieth-century analytical philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Elsewhere Montgomery’s *Tractatus* has been described as the “apologetical equivalent of Bach’s *Mass in B Minor*.” See Craig A. Parton, *The Defense Never Rests: A Lawyer Among the Theologians* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2015), 177. Montgomery himself considered it the culmination of all of his work.

² Montgomery’s commitment to the insights of the Lutheran Reformation are better known within evangelicalism than they are within his own Lutheran church. Suffice it to say that it is widely thought that his volume on the issue of Scripture’s total reliability and authority (“*Crisis in Lutheran Theology*”) was perhaps the single most important and comprehensive work that lanced the boil of doubt concerning Scriptural authority that lay festering within the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. His volume dedicated solely to the work of Martin Luther has such fascinating chapters as “Luther, Libraries and Learning.” See John Warwick Montgomery, *In Defense of Martin Luther* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1970).

³ John Warwick Montgomery, *Myth, Allegory & Gospel* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974).

⁴ John Warwick Montgomery, *The Transcendent Holmes* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Calabash, 2000). Here one learns of Holmes’s evolving religious position, which includes a refutation of the popular notion—which Montgomery shows to be utterly unsupportable—that Holmes ended up in Tibetan Buddhism.

⁵ L’Académie Internationale des Gourmets et des Traditions Gastronomiques, where he had the rank of Académicien, seat number 41 of 50, dedicated to the French translator of Apicius, Bertrand Guégan. For his most recent work dealing with gastronomy and theology, see John Warwick Montgomery, *A Gastronomic Vade-Mecum: A Christian Field Guide to Eating, Drinking and Being Merry Now and Forever* (Irvine, CA: 1517 Legacy, 2018).

⁶ La Confrérie St-Etienne, where he attained the highest rank of Master on the basis of three sets of blind taste tests. For a fuller discussion of the connection of gastronomy to metaphysics, see John Warwick Montgomery, “Transcendental Gastronomy” *Christianity Today*, November 22, 1974—repr. in *A Gastronomic Vade-Mecum*.

Sherlock Holmes Society of England; held citizenship in three countries (US, UK, and France); argued cases of international import involving religious liberty and human rights before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg;⁷ debated the likes of the infamous atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hair, death-of-God theologian Thomas J. J. Altizer, and liberal Bishop James Pike; and who, at the final count, had twelve earned degrees (including advanced degrees in law, history, philosophy, and theology) from such diverse institutions as UC Berkeley, University of Chicago, Essex, Cardiff, and Strasbourg. He published over seventy books and 250 articles in eight languages,⁸ was editor of an international journal of classical theology and apologetics,⁹ and did the definitive treatment on the history of efforts to locate Noah’s ark as well as personally led two expeditions up Mount Ararat in search of the ark.¹⁰ With such an interesting and vast scholarly background and reputation for utterly engaging public lecturing, and with the honed polemical ability and advocacy skills of an English barrister, French *avocat* called to the Paris Bar, and American attorney licensed to practice in California, Virginia, and

⁷ Montgomery’s critical work on the general topic of human rights and apologetics is *Human Rights and Human Dignity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986). His legal role in the critical case vindicating the freedom to preach Christ Crucified in Greece but outside the dominion of the Orthodox Church is chronicled in *The Repression of Evangelism in Greece* (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 2001). That work, in addition to being dedicated to his son Jean-Marie and daughter-in-law Laurence, is inscribed as follows: “For My Lay Clients and Their Missionary Organizations Endeavoring, As Did Saint Paul, To Preach the Gospel in Greece.”

⁸ For a catalog of the writings, debates, videotapes, film, and lectures of Dr. Montgomery through at least 2007, see “Bibliography of Dr. John Warwick Montgomery’s Writings,” in *Tough-Minded Christianity: Honoring the Legacy of John Warwick Montgomery* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 704–34. Many of Montgomery’s books and lectures are now available at 1517 The Legacy Project.

⁹ See *Global Journal of Classic Theology*, for which Montgomery served as Editor-in-Chief for over a decade. The journal has a strong emphasis on apologetics and Reformation theology. See www.globaljournalct.com.

¹⁰ John Warwick Montgomery, *The Quest for Noah’s Ark* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1972). The book is worth the price for the hilarious pictures of Montgomery and his mountain climbing guides who look straight out of an Indiana Jones movie.

Washington D.C. and before the Supreme Court of the United States, John Warwick Montgomery had a staggering impact for the gospel of Jesus Christ in this modern secular era.

JWM...As Seen in 3D (Doctorates, that is)

John Warwick Montgomery was born on October 18, 1931, in Warsaw, New York, to Maurice Warwick Montgomery and Harriet Smith Montgomery. John's father owned a retail feed company, so when they discovered that young John had severe, life-threatening allergies to farm animals, he was sent to live with his grandmother, who was a believing Christian and a Fundamentalist Baptist with a very high view of Scripture and its accuracy. John attended Cornell University and majored in classics, and it was while at Cornell that he first encountered serious orthodox and evangelical theology. He was converted to Christianity in 1949.¹¹ Montgomery immediately sought to determine which expression of Christianity most clearly mirrored the Scriptures, so he set the Greek text of the New Testament alongside the thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church of England, the Reformed Heidelberg Catechism, and the Lutheran Augsburg Confession. He concluded that Lutheranism adhered most closely to the biblical text and promptly became a confessional Lutheran later operating within the conservative Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. Montgomery appreciated how Lutheran theology emphasized the doctrine of justification as the central doctrine on which the church

¹¹ The impact of Herman John Eckelmann on Montgomery at Cornell is incalculable. Montgomery later edited a set of essays in honor of Eckelmann, all authored by Cornell's graduates. See *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*, ed. J.W. Montgomery (Irvine: New Reformation Press, 2016). The essays sprung out of The Cornell Symposium on Evidential Apologetics, which took place in Ithaca, New York, in 1986. For the complete story of Montgomery's time at Cornell and his conversion, see chapter 3 of his autobiography, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Life in Defense of the Faith* (Bonn, Germany: Culture & Science, 2015).

rises or falls, and early in his academic studies he decided to focus on the defense and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ while advocating for the total reliability of the Scriptures.¹²

Montgomery finished his studies at Cornell University, graduating in 1952 with distinction and a degree in philosophy and classics. His academic studies were far from over, as he later earned an additional eleven degrees, including: a B.L.S. (1954) and M.A. (1958) from University of California-Berkeley, an M.Div. (1958) and S.T.M. (1960) from Wittenberg University, a Ph.D. (1962) from the University of Chicago, a Th.D. (1964) from the University of Strasbourg, an L.L.B. (1977) from LaSalle University, a diploma (1978) from the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, an M.Phil. (1983) from the University of Essex, an honorary doctorate (1999) from the Institute for Religion and Law in Moscow, an LL.M. (2000) and LL.D. (2003) from Cardiff University in Wales.

Montgomery considered himself an evangelical, but his embrace of the evangelical label should not be confused with an acceptance of *sociological* evangelicalism so prevalent in the United States. Montgomery's formal theological commitment, training, and temperament mark him out clearly as a confessional Lutheran.¹³ His theological roots are found in Luther's Reformation and the doctrine of the freedom of the Christian rather than the revivalistic

¹² The titles of two of his works say it all: *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: Nelson, 1978), and *God's Inerrant Word, infra*, at ft. 24.

¹³ As a "confessional" Lutheran, Montgomery "holds to the validity of the Ecumenical Creeds of Christendom" and to the Reformation's commitment that "the Holy Scriptures, as originally given, are correct, reliable, and sufficient to provide the church and the world with perspicuous revelational truth" and that "the central answer to human need is a personal, living relationship with Jesus Christ." See Montgomery, *Christ Our Advocate: Studies in Polemical Theology, Jurisprudence and Canon Law* (Bonn, Germany: Culture & Science, 2002), 10. He was also an ordained clergyman in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod.

Wesleyan Methodism or pietistic and moralistic Arminianism of much of American evangelicalism.¹⁴

JWM, The Battle for the Bible, and the Great Missouri

Divide

In the 1970's and 80's, Lutheranism (as did many denominations) went through a series of theological conflicts centered on opposing views concerning the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. During these debates, Montgomery, a Missouri Synod Lutheran (a conservative branch of American Lutheranism) was a veritable menace to theological liberals within the Synod and anathema to so-called "moderating" Lutherans. During the 1970s, the Missouri Synod had a significant theological faction arguing that Scripture contained errors and contradictions, and in his distinctive fashion, Montgomery called out (by name) those involved in compromise, while

¹⁴ One may find amusement in pondering what it was like at the charismatic Melodyland School of Theology in Anaheim when Dr. Montgomery taught there in the late 1970's along with now sainted and then highly polemical duo of Walter Martin and Dr. Rod Rosenblatt, Rosenblatt being described by J. I. Packer as a "living embodiment of Luther." We do know that because of Montgomery's influence, that school became the first theological seminary in the world to adopt a doctrinal statement with built-in **hermeneutical** commitments. Those commitments are a template for any modern-day seminary or college that wants to get its epistemology right from the get-go and desires that real teeth be set in place to combat the cancerous hydra of Higher Criticism, so-called "Neo" orthodox theology as well as postmodern deconstructionist hermeneutical approaches. For those seven concise hermeneutical foundations, see Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact*, *supra*, at ft. 12, at 225ff. Virtually the same doctrinal statement became the foundation for the later Simon Greenleaf School of Law, for which Montgomery served as Dean in the 1980s.

at the same time dissecting the fatal weaknesses of their arguments (weaknesses which in many cases had been articulated and refuted centuries earlier).¹⁵

As a French-speaking Lutheran without a German surname and lacking degrees from Synod-blessed schools,¹⁶ Montgomery was regarded with a large dose of suspicion by many in old-line Lutheran circles. Oddly enough, the most frequent criticisms of Montgomery were accusations that he was either a liberal (because he was willing to teach all manner of Christians¹⁷) or an Arminian (because he valued argument as a tool for communicating the Christian message and invited non-Christians to “weigh the evidence” for the truth of the claims of Christianity).¹⁸ Even

¹⁵ See John Warwick Montgomery, *Crisis in Lutheran Theology* Vols. 1 & 2, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1973). Montgomery continued the fight within his own Missouri Synod, recently confronting the suspect textual critic Dr. Jeffrey Kloha and exposing Kloha’s methodology and advocacy of a “plastic text.” After their debate in Chicago in 2016, Kloha left his academic position at the Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and joined the Bible Museum in Washington DC, where the implications of his methodology were unlikely to be understood by its corporate sponsors. Kloha now lists the Bible Museum as in his rear-view mirror and presents himself as a private consultant. See discussion of Kloha’s article “Text and Authority: Theological and Hermeneutical Reflections on a Plastic Text” and Montgomery’s response and the fallout from the debate all discussed in John Warwick Montgomery, *Defending the Gospel in Legal Style: Essays on Legal Apologetics & the Justification of Classical Christian Faith* (Bonn, Germany: Culture & Science, 2017), 227–72.

¹⁶ Apparently overlooked were his dual Master of Arts degrees (M.Div. and S.T.M.) from Wittenberg University.

¹⁷ Montgomery held faculty positions at the charismatic-oriented Melodyland School of Theology (appropriately located across the street from Disneyland) as well as at the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois. In addition, he taught for numerous campus evangelical groups at universities across the country, including Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru), Inter-Varsity and The Navigators, even lecturing for the Veritas Forum at the University of California, Santa Barbara on “Why Human Rights Are Impossible Without Religion.” See a transcript of that presentation in Montgomery, *Defending the Gospel in Legal Style*, *supra*, at ft. 15, 129-144.

¹⁸ “Synergism does not come about when unbelievers are expected to accept persuasive, objective evidence for the truth of the Bible or its gospel message, any more than it is synergistic for evangelists to call for decisions for Christ. Apologists (and evangelists) operate outside the house of salvation; they are not pastors or systematic theologians interpreting the conversion experience after it has come about. Synergism exists only when, following conversion, the justified man is led to believe that in any way whatever (rational, moral, volitional) he contributed to his own

his own Lutheran church body has ignored his work at a time when its rediscovery would be invaluable. It was largely due to courageous polemicists such as Montgomery and Robert Preus in the late 1960s and early 70s that the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod successfully steered its seminary away from the path of theological liberalism.¹⁹ Yet despite Montgomery's essential role in this theological turnaround, Lutherans by-and-large never understood, let alone embraced, Montgomery as one of their own. Of course, that assumes Lutherans have heard of him. Most have not.

Montgomery's unique contributions to the apologetic task and his robust defense of the faith are best seen in his ability to integrate his training as a theologian, historian, philosopher, and lawyer with an unswerving commitment to the centrality of the saving message of Jesus Christ as it is contained in a totally reliable Scripture. His commitment to centering his apologetic on both the formal (Scripture and its reliability) and material (the Gospel) principles arises directly from his Lutheran orthodoxy. Montgomery's evidential approach to apologetics is directly tied to the incarnational focus of Lutheran theology—that God became man at a specific time in history.

In summary, John Warwick Montgomery's impact can be best understood by seeing him as an evangelical, evidential, and confessional Lutheran apologist.

salvation." John Warwick Montgomery, "The Holy Spirit and the Defense of the Faith," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154, no. 616 (October–December 1997), 387–95.

¹⁹ Montgomery, *Crisis in Lutheran Theology*. Happily, though, one of the best apologetical shows on radio (Issues, Etc.) is now produced by the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, and it had Montgomery on as a guest on a regular basis. Issues even devoted a series of seven one-hour programs to discussing each chapter of Montgomery's monumental *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus*. See www.issuesetc.org.

An Evangelical Apologist

John Warwick Montgomery's life and work was above all *evangelical*—that is, its sum and substance was a commitment to the intellectual defensibility of the gospel, the complete trustworthiness of the record in which that gospel is found, and the aggressive presentation of that saving gospel to all people by calling for their personal commitment to Jesus who saves. The early Lutherans were called “evangelicals,” a term that comes from the Greek word *evangelion*, or *evangel*, and simply means “good news” or “gospel.” The Lutherans of sixteenth-century Germany were originally called “evangelicals” because of their emphasis on Christ's atoning death and resurrection, and this same gospel was the focus of all Montgomery's writing, lecturing, and debating. Having heard him speak and lecture hundreds of times, he never failed to deliver a lecture on human rights, gastronomy, Sherlock Holmes, analytical philosophy, or the music of J. S. Bach without discussing the implications that topic had for the proclamation and defense of the gospel.

Montgomery's evangelical focus is particularly evident in his public presentations. There are three things one could *always* be sure of when attending a Montgomery lecture. First, he prepared like a trial lawyer operating in front of a jury. Montgomery had a keen awareness of his audience and had a powerful gift of being able to articulate advanced content to any level, whatever the topic might be and regardless of whether there were six hundred people, sixty people, or six people²⁰ in attendance. Second, Montgomery ensured that the case for the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Christ's perfect life, atoning death, and verifiable resurrection) always

²⁰ Having experienced this myself while a student of his at Simon Greenleaf School of Law, where three of us poor souls had a dreaded once a week three hour class with Montgomery, all done by him in Socratic style, covering three books a class session relating to “Legal Apologetical Literature.”

found its way into his presentation and emphasized the *extra nos*²¹ character of that evidential case. Third, his presentations were always at the highest level of scholarship and had such academic rigor that one could confidently invite a skeptic without the least apprehension. One can still advise someone to read or listen to Montgomery with the same confidence one has when recommending they read C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*.²² Any non-Christian in the audience was respected, not talked down to, and not subjected to "in group" Christian lingo. Modern-day American evangelicalism could benefit from a rediscovery of this apologetic acumen, an approach that combines rigorous research, clarity in message, breadth of application, and upholds the utter centrality of the gospel²³ as the intellectually credible center in dialogue with unbelief.

The Reformers referred to the gospel as the "material principle of all theology." Recognizing the centrality of this good news, Montgomery argued that a gospel contained in a text with errors and contradictions is intellectually indefensible. If the texts that give us the gospel (that is, the Holy Scripture, sometimes known as the "formal principle of all theology") cannot be trusted in

²¹ *Extra nos* simply means "outside of us," and it is Luther's characterization of the gospel. This is evidenced by Montgomery's debates, where he was often quick to make clear to the audience that the debate was not about the personalities of the debaters but about an objective and *extra nos* truth fully capable of being investigated by the serious inquirer.

²² Montgomery sent Lewis the monograph that became the basis for one of Montgomery's earliest (and still most popular) works, *History and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1964). Lewis, in a letter to Montgomery in August 1963, said that Montgomery's work "two lectures did me good and I shall constantly find them useful. . . . I don't think it could be bettered." Id. at 6–7. The consistently popular book is now reprinted as *History, Law and Christianity* (Irvine: New Reformation Press, 2014). It is strongly recommended as a first book to read by Montgomery.

²³ For how Montgomery's entire apologetical effort has been Christo-centric, whether focusing on juridical apologetics, or literary or aesthetic apologetics, or human rights and apologetics, see his volume *Christ as Centre and Circumference: Essays Theological, Cultural and Polemic* (Bonn, Germany: Culture & Science, 2012).

what they say about what the Temple in Jerusalem looked like, how can they be trusted when they speak of the heavenly Jerusalem? Montgomery saw the logical landmines created by neo-orthodox theologians and “mediating evangelicals” as they sought to maintain what Montgomery regarded as a hopelessly unbiblical contradiction—an *inerrant* gospel residing in an *errant* Scripture. Montgomery gave no place to those who sought to undermine the sole theological foundation of the canonical Scriptures. He viewed those who replaced inerrancy with “infallibility” and “partial inerrancy” as existing on the same theological continuum with those willing to give up the faith altogether.²⁴ As an evangelical apologist, Montgomery encouraged modern evangelicals to rediscover total confidence in the gospel²⁵ and to recover a vigorous and intellectually defensible ground for that gospel in a totally reliable Scripture.

An Evidential Apologist

Montgomery utilized an evidential and fact-driven approach in his defense of the saving gospel and the record that contains it. His best-known work, *History, Law, and Christianity*, presents a “historical-legal” apologetic that was utterly innovative and sets him apart from other

²⁴ Montgomery’s central articles on inerrancy and the complete reliability of Scripture are found in Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Irvine, CA: 1517 Legacy, 2017), esp. the article “Inductive Inerrancy,” 356ff; Montgomery, *Crisis in Lutheran Theology*, vol. 1, *supra*, at ft. 15, esp. “Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure” and “Lutheran Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics Today,” 15–77; *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974), esp. “Biblical Inerrancy: What is at Stake?” and “Lessons from Luther on the Inerrancy of Holy Writ,” 15–42 and 63–94; *Ecumenicity, Evangelicals and Rome* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), esp. “The Approach of New Shape Roman Catholicism to Scriptural Inerrancy: A Case Study for Evangelicals,” 73–93; and Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact*, *supra*, at ft. 12, esp. “The Fuzzification of Biblical Inerrancy,” 215ff.

²⁵ See Parton, “Whatever Happened to the Gospel?” in Parton, *Defense Never Rests*, *supra*, at ft. 1, 13ff.

contemporary apologists.²⁶ This work sets forth several tests to determine the reliability of the New Testament gospels. Montgomery builds on these tests and presents a tight evidential progression that culminates by proving the case for Christianity under legal standards of evidential probability.²⁷

The outline for the historical-legal argument progresses through a series of four propositions. First, Montgomery asserts that the gospels are reliable historical documents or *primary source material*. Virtually all scholars (even non-Christians) admit that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written within fifty years after Christ's death, and most agree that John was written within sixty-five years after Christ's death. Objectors can verify this in any credible encyclopedia. Second, in these reliable records Christ claims to be God in human flesh (see Matt 11:27; John 12:45; John 10:30; Matt 16:13–17). Third, Christ's bodily resurrection is described in great detail in all four gospel accounts. Fourth and finally, Christ's resurrection proves his claim to be God. Of course, a corollary of this argument is as follows: If Christ is God, whatever he says is true, and Christ stated that the Old Testament was infallible (Matt 5:17–19) and that the coming New Testament (written by apostles or close associates of apostles) would be infallible as well (John 14:26–27; John 16:12–15; Acts 1:21–26).

²⁶ See Montgomery, *History, Law and Christianity*, *supra*, at ft. 22. The three-part test for establishing the reliability of the gospel records are the *bibliographical test* (deals with how good the manuscript tradition is from which we get the present text), the *internal evidence test* (answers whether the authors had the means, motive, and opportunity to be accurate witnesses to the events or not or whether they instead make factual errors), and the *external evidence test* (determines if any other generally contemporaneous historical facts (documents or artifacts) confirm or deny the biblical material).

²⁷ This material is a summary of the analysis found in Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past: A Christian Response to Secular Philosophies of History* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1975). See also John Warwick Montgomery, "The Jury Returns: A Juridical Defense of Christianity," in *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question* (Dallas: Probe, 1991), 319 et seq. (reprinted by New Reformation Press in 2016).

The flow of Montgomery's legal defense of the faith arises from his training as an English barrister, American attorney, and French advocat and flows naturally from the groundbreaking work of professor Simon Greenleaf of the Harvard Law School. Following Greenleaf's approach, substantive or material presuppositions are kept to the absolute minimum. The least quantum of data is *assumed* (only presuppositions of form, such as assuming the objectivity of the external world, the inferential operations of induction and deduction, the meaningfulness of language, the validity of the law of noncontradiction) so that the maximum amount of data is capable of being *discovered*. In the historical-legal apologetic presented by Montgomery, inquirers are invited to investigate the claims of Christianity contained in the New Testament documents as they would any other work of antiquity and to apply probability reasoning—that is, reasoning used by all of us every single day to negotiate our way through life.

The importance of Montgomery's legal or juridical emphasis in apologetics can be seen in at least three applications. First, in the concept of probability reasoning; second, in his use of the principle of the "burden of proof;" and finally, in his insistence that a *verdict* be rendered and that the historical case elevates one beyond mere intellectual acknowledgment or even assent to the claims of Christ into a personal *fiducia* or trust that the work of Christ is for that specific person.

Montgomery helps us understand why lawyers have been more inclined to do apologetics than say dentists or street cleaners. It's not only because Scripture is so intertwined with law but because Christian truth claims cry out for verification. Montgomery dedicated his energy to establishing that the testimony of biblical witnesses are not subject to the hearsay objection, but

they stand up to the most rigorous cross-examination.²⁸ Whether he is applying the parol evidence rule or the principles supporting the admittance into evidence of any ancient document, the biblical documents are, simply put, the best attested works of all antiquity.²⁹

A Confessional Lutheran Apologist

Montgomery's apologetic is both evangelical and evidential *because* it is confessionally Lutheran. His apologetical efforts focus on the perfect life and atoning death of the Jesus who suffered under Pontius Pilate. As a confessional Lutheran, Montgomery's approach was centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ. From his earliest lectures in Lutheranism and the defense of the biblical gospel,³⁰ Montgomery remained a faithful proclaimer of Christ crucified for all and maintained an unflinching commitment to the truth of the Christian faith (as expressed in the confessional documents of the Lutheran Reformation), to Luther's freedom of the Christian in Christ (who has set us free from the law of sin and death), and to the Lordship of Christ over all intellectual and cultural life. His apologetical work flowed directly out of his commitment to the insights of the Lutheran Reformation. Yet what sets Montgomery apart from other serious

²⁸ John Warwick Montgomery, *The Law Above the Law* (Irvine: New Reformation Press, 2015), see esp. 84ff. dealing with legal reasoning and Christian apologetics.

²⁹ *The Law Above the Law* deals with these issues, as does Montgomery's work *Law and Gospel: A Study in Jurisprudence* (Oak Park, IL: Christian Legal Society, 1978), esp. 34–37. For a current treatment, see Parton, *The Defense Never Rests*, *supra*, at ft. 1, esp. "A Lawyer's Case for Christianity: An Apologetic for the Tough-Minded," 99ff.

³⁰ This foundational and critical material is contained in a series of lectures delivered at Bethany College in Mankato, Minnesota, at a time when the sainted Robert Preus presided as President of the college. See John Warwick Montgomery, "Lutheranism and the Defense of the Christian Faith," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (Fall, 1970): 1–56. For a contemporary discussion, see Parton, "Why Distrust of Evidential Apologetics is not Lutheran," *The Defense Never Rests*, *supra*, at ft. 1, 79ff.

confessional Lutherans is that he was not only an apologist and a contagiously zealous defender of the faith but also an *evangelist*. For Montgomery, there is ultimately no tension between being a serious follower of the insights of the Lutheran Reformation, a zealous advocate of Christ crucified for unbelievers, and a proclaimer of “many infallible proofs” that demand a personal verdict.



John Warwick Montgomery consistently defended the total trustworthiness of Scripture and incorporated innovative techniques from other disciplines to accomplish this. The insights of analytical philosophy and legal argumentation are present throughout his works defending the inerrancy of Scripture. Similarly, his defense of the gospel found in Scripture also benefitted from his training in legal argumentation. His development of a legal-historical case for Christ, beginning with the factual assertion of the primary source quality and general reliability of the gospel records, is unique among apologists. His unrelentingly evidential and legal approach to defending Christ crucified sets Montgomery apart from many modern apologists whose focus is on proving “mere theism.” Montgomery was led to pursue legal training later in life, and he did this for the explicit purpose of integrating legal reasoning with the defense of the central claims of the Christian faith. Today, the *International Academy of Apologetics, Evangelism & Human Rights* in Strasbourg, France, has influenced a generation of apologists, many of whom are

lawyers and judges who have attended the Academy and have obtained Fellow or *Diplome* status from the Strasbourg Academy.³¹

Montgomery's significant impact on apologetics did not prevent him from engaging in robust public debates with renowned secularists or from having an active career litigating some of the most influential human rights cases at the European Court of Human Rights. He defended the freedom to preach the gospel in Greece (outside of the influence of the Orthodox Church), as well as more recently defending the practice of religious freedom by Christians in Moldova.

Montgomery's contributions can be generally characterized as focused on the gospel of Christ for both the tough and the tender-minded. For the tough-minded individual, he offers an impressive body of legal, historical, philosophical, and evidential apologetical writings that will be of critical value for future defenders of the faith for generations to come.³² For the tender-minded—those more interested in literature, art, music, and aesthetics—he offers works that speak to how the gospel fulfills the deepest longings of the fractured human heart. His works on the power of compelling allegorical and mythical stories, such as those presented by C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams and reflected in the “transcendent” life of Sherlock Holmes, highlight the apologetical possibilities inherent in the so-called “archetypes of the collective unconscious.”

³¹ Attendees at past Academy sessions have included lawyers and trial court and appellate and high court judges from Singapore, Malta, Jamaica, Australia, Germany, France, Romania, Nigeria, Malaysia, England, Canada, and the United States to name but a few countries represented. The Academy just celebrated its twenty-sixth year of training professionals and laity in the apologetic task. See www.apologeticsacademy.eu.

³² Montgomery's 30,000 volume personal library will be kept largely intact thanks to the generosity of the Lanier Theological Library in Houston, Texas, which also endows an annual lecture in Montgomery's name in the area of evidential apologetics. The 2023 presenter was John Lennox, while the 2024 presenter of the Montgomery Lecture in Evidential Apologetics will be Gary Habermas.

John Warwick Montgomery was an evangelical, evidential, and confessionally Lutheran apologist, a defender of the faith for all people and for all seasons. The *raison d'être* for the degrees, the books, the debates, and his tireless contribution to the defense of the faith was not his pursuit of an esoteric idea or an intellectual chess game to win human souls. Rather, it was a life lived *sub crucis*—under the cross—and dedicated to the aggressive and apostolic defense and presentation of Christ crucified for sinners and raised again for their justification.

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