

How to Develop a National Strategy for Apologetics

There is an urgent need for apologetics – explaining and defending the Good News – in post-Christian Europe. But how can we move from sporadic seminars or individual lectures about apologetics to a strategic, long-term building up of a culture of apologetics in the church and in our evangelism? In this presentation Stefan Gustavsson will share his experience of a 30 year ministry of building an apologetic movement in Sweden.

Stefan Gustavsson is a member of the European Leadership Forum Steering Committee. He is the director for Apologia – Centre for Christian Apologetics and makes his home in Stockholm. He was the founding General Secretary for the Swedish Evangelical Alliance. Stefan travels widely with apologetic teaching and training and is often involved in university evangelism and public debates. He is the author of several books on Christian apologetics and the Christian mind. Stefan is married to Ingrid and they have three grown children.

Introduction

Apologetics in the church: “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” Titus 1:9

Apologetics in evangelism: “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Col 4:5-6

A. History of 20th Century Apologetics in Sweden

1. General picture: Apologetics weakened by

- Liberal theology: the gospel reduced to ethics or existentialism
- Pietistic and Pentecostal theology: assuming a conflict between the holy Spirit and the human mind

The role of apologetics: answering critique of the Bible and affirming biblical archaeology

2. Gradual developments

Slowly a wider view of apologetics was introduced, dealing also with philosophical and cultural issues:

- C S Lewis’ apologetic books were translated to Swedish in the 1940s and 1950s
- Francis Schaeffer’s books “Escape from Reason”, “The God Who is There” and “What Ever Happened to the Human Race” was translated to Swedish in 1960s/70s
- Nordic L’Abri was established in Mölle, in the south of Sweden, 1981

3. The Beginning and Breakthrough of an Apologetic Movement

- The Credo Academy was established by IFES Sweden in Stockholm 1992
- The publishing of “Kristen på goda grunder” (literally: “Christian – on good grounds”)
- Successful debate tours with William Lane Craig
- The Swedish Evangelical Alliance was established 2001, making national impact
- Annual national conferences with Don Carson, Gary Habermas, John Lennox, Pete Williams, Os Guinness et al
- Apologia: Centre for Christian Apologetics was established 2016

B. Six Factors Behind the New Wave of Apologetics

1. Biblical teaching:

- Showing Jesus and Paul as apologists
- Dealing with misunderstandings of well-known texts like 1 Cor 1-2 and John 20 (“doubting Thomas”)

2. Serving the local church: Helping them with the next generation

3. Evangelism: Showing the place of apologetics as a tool for sharing the gospel personally and for public proclamations and debates

4. Publishing: A steady flow of apologetic books, both translations and from Swedish authors, and a steady presence in Christian media

5. International influences: God’s global resources and creating new Nordic networks

6. Perseverance: working with a long-term vision