



Please, Be Yourself

I sense there is a strong temptation among those who defend the faith to try to be like someone else in their efforts to present the truth claims of the Christian faith. Rather than following King David's example of refusing Saul's armor in the fight against Goliath and choosing instead to use the simple sling

and smooth stones he knew so well, an apologist may try to parrot this or that popular speaker or author. In doing so, they risk losing something that the world needs more than an imitation of someone else; they risk losing their unique voice in the apologetic arena.

I have been there, and I understand the temptation.

I originally thought, going back nearly four decades, that my goal should be to memorize and imitate the then-current apologetic arguments and style of successful apologists like Josh McDowell, Paul Little, or Norman Geisler. I even went through a time when I attempted to become the redivivus of C. S. Lewis, Pascal, and Anselm. To be sure, all these men are capable and effective apologists, certainly worthy of emulation in many, many areas. Yet, my mistake was to try to recreate what they did and who they were, and that is impossible. God called them to a specific task at a specific time, and my calling was not the same. I cannot be anyone other than me. So, after several poor attempts at being someone else, I decided that the best I could be was me...just me.

It was about the same time that a wise pastor shared something with me that I took to heart and have never forgotten. I was preparing a series of sermons for a revival campaign, and, in the course of discussions with the host pastor, I explained that I was considering using a number of outlines I found in an evangelistic preaching book as the basis for my sermons. The pastor looked at me for a moment, then spoke with clarity and a bit of forcefulness these words, "It's fine to look at another man's work and learn from it but never forget that God has something to say through you, and he wants you to say it in your way, not someone else's." And just like that, my heart was pierced, and my mind was opened. I learned that day that God gave me a voice, and he wanted—expected—that I would use it and not try to use some other voice and pass it off as my own.

Here is how I have taken that counsel to heart as an apologist, and what I hope you will learn from my journey in coming to be myself.

1. It is fine and good to learn from other apologists, to study their arguments, to internalize their methods. The goal, however, is not to parrot or repeat them; the goal is to

learn from them and integrate that learning into your own message. And when you are following the path of another apologist, be up front and open about it. Do not plagiarize a person.

2. Remember that the people you are privileged to serve and encounter in your apologetics context are likely in one of two categories. They either do not know who you are trying to imitate and will think it odd that you are not simply being yourself with them, or they do know who you are trying to imitate and will realize you are not the same as the apologists you copy (and this last group may feel you are being a bit shady by not being yourself).
3. None of us are as good as all of us when it comes to apologetics, so find your niche in the apologetics arena and serve there. Be you in the place where God has called you and let the others be who they are where God has called them. God will not ask you to give an account for another person's calling, but he will ask you about yours.

So, I say to you: my dear apologist, please, be yourself. The world needs you.