TEAMING WITH LAY LEADERS TO IMPROVE APOLOGETIC UNDERSTANDING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

A Doctoral Project

Presented to

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Doctor of Ministry

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by

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To Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

You have given me life that began when I was a child and will now last forever.

You will always be worthy of my worship and praise.

To Ann

The love of my life who did more than just give me the time to complete this project, but who encouraged me all along the way. You are my greatest cheerleader.

To Eric, Ian, Hudson, and Corrie

I learn with you in mind more than anyone else. The stakes are too high to ever stop learning, and I hope that my efforts encourage your own for a lifetime. May you climb on my shoulders and look higher and farther. I love you all.

To BridgePoint Bible Church

Without your financial support, the gracious gift of a sabbatical, your continual encouragement, and a willingness to receive what I have learned secondhand, this would not have been possible.

ABSTRACT

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John K. Hopper

This doctoral project sought to answer the question, “Is it possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetic understanding among those who attend?” The hypothesis was that this question could be answered in the affirmative and was tested by working with a team of lay leaders to present an apologetics conference in a church setting. Attendees of the conference completed surveys at the onset of the conference, at its completion, and six weeks after the conference. The results of the pre- and post-conference surveys (n=84) were compared with each other and confirmed the hypothesis by indicating improvement relative to apologetic understanding. The results of the pre-conference survey as compared to the follow-up survey (n=39) also indicated improved apologetic understanding.

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CHAPTER 1

THE RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this doctoral project is to increase the understanding of Christian apologetics in the local church, particularly by teaming with lay leaders in the training of those within the church. In this chapter, essential elements of the doctoral project are outlined in four parts.

First, a rationale is provided for the project so that the reader recognizes the reason for embarking on this study.

Second, the research question is articulated and a general description of the methodology used to answer the question is presented.

Third, the parameters of the project are provided. Definitions are given to assist the reader in an accurate understanding of the terms used in this study followed by a description of the assumptions employed in the research, design, and execution of the project. In addition, the limitations and delimitations of the study are stated so that the reader understands the boundaries of the study.

Fourth, the basic organization of the doctoral project is summarized by including an overview of each chapter.

Rationale

From time to time it is said that the church is dying. This is most certainly an overstatement if for no other reason than that Christ himself said the church would never be overcome.[1] But the certainty of the church's endurance says nothing of its health in any geographical location or during any period of time, and every indication is that the influence of Christianity in North America has been on a long slide. There are fewer who declare themselves to be Christians,[2] a smaller percentage who regularly attend a local church,[3] and, perhaps even more importantly, those who hold to a broad Christian worldview, whether they declare themselves Christians or not, are few and far between.[4]

A 2012 Pew Research Center report highlights the changes in the North American religious climate by its title alone: "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No

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[1] Matt. 16:18

[2] Pew Research Center, "'Nones' on the Rise: One in Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012, accessed March 8, 2013, http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/10/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf.

[3] Rebecca Barnes and Linda Lowry, "7 Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America," Church Leaders, accessed October 24, 2013, http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html.

[4] The Barna Group, "Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years," March 6, 2009, accessed October 24, 2013, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years#.UmnZivnBOSp.

Religious Affiliation."[5] While those without a religious affiliation still represent only about 20 percent of the American population, the increase in "nones" from about 15 percent in 2007 is almost mirrored by the same percentage of decline in those who call themselves Protestants. Furthermore, Protestants themselves now make up only 48 percent of the American population, making them a minority for the first time in U.S. history.[6] These figures certainly do not come as a surprise to most Christians. Who cannot sense the growing resistance to Christianity? Billy Graham for years was the most respected man in America; it is hard to imagine a Christian holding that position today, particularly if he were a clergyman who unabashedly preached: "The Bible says…" The atheist, the agnostic, and the spiritually apathetic are no longer those we encounter on rare occasion; they are our neighbors, co-workers, and family members.

Not surprisingly with the increase in the religiously unaffiliated, those with strong anti-Christian perspectives have been emboldened to state their case. Atheistic ramblings are no longer on the fringe but fill best-selling books with audacious titles like: *The God Delusion, God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, Breaking the Spell: Religion as Natural Phenomenon,* and *God: The Failed Hypothesis.*[7] As suggested by

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[5] Pew Research Center, "'Nones' on the Rise."

[6] Pew Research Center, "'Nones' on the Rise," 13.

[7] See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston, MA: First Mariner Books, 2008); Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York, NY: Twelve, 2009); Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, paperback ed. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2007); Victor J. Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis. How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist*, paperback ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008).

these titles, the authors of such works are not shy in stating their disdain for religion in general and Christianity in particular, a disdain which they say is warranted because of religion's irrationality. Along these lines, Sam Harris writes in his *Letter to a Christian Nation*:

> One of the greatest challenges facing civilization in the twenty-first century is for human beings to learn to speak about their deepest personal concerns—about ethics, spiritual experience, and the inevitability of human suffering—in ways that are not flagrantly irrational. We desperately need a public discourse that encourages critical thinking and intellectual honesty. Nothing stands in the way of this project more than the respect we accord religious faith . . .
>
> Clearly, it is time we meet our emotional needs without embracing the preposterous. We must find ways to invoke the power of ritual and to mark those transitions in every human life that demand profundity—birth, marriage, death—without lying to ourselves about the nature of reality. Only then will the practice of raising our children to believe that they are Christian, Muslim, or Jewish be recognized as the ludicrous obscenity that it is.[8]

Harris' views echo those of a growing number of people today. Christianity and reason, it is argued, simply do not go together. Such a perspective is not just held by those who would discard Christianity altogether, but by many Christians who see no need for their faith to be supported by rational arguments.

The question one might ask is: what happened to reshape the American religious landscape? Or further, how have faith and reason become divorced from one another? These questions do not have easy answers, but two far-reaching factors have undoubtedly contributed to the current state of affairs. The first is a fundamental shift in the prevailing worldview in North America, particularly as it describes the relationship between faith

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[8] Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2008), 87-88.

and fact. The second is the church's reluctance to engage in a robust discipleship of the mind. Both shifts cry out for a resurgence of apologetics within the church.

A Worldview Shift

A worldview is a mental framework for understanding what the world is and how to operate in it. It includes one's views about the natural and the supernatural, the central problems of humanity and how to approach them, and a grid for determining the rightness or wrongness of behavior. Central to a worldview is the question of how one arrives at knowledge. If one believes in spirits of the dead, then knowledge of the afterworld from such sources is not only legitimate but reliable. If, however, one believes that natural forces and elements are all that exist, then dependable knowledge is limited to what can be observed.

Until the Enlightenment, there was minimal opposition to the idea that knowledge originates from both supernatural and natural sources. Both the natural and supernatural worlds were equally real. Truth about God, while different in content, was nonetheless similar in quality to truth about a Saint Bernard or the Milky Way. With the Enlightenment, however, came the exaltation of reason, and perhaps more importantly the suggestion that reason was fit for the realm of the natural world and unfit for the

world of religious belief.[9] This developed what more than one observer has called a fact/value split[10] wherein faith in the supernatural is merely a product of personal preference divorced from reason, while facts, on the other hand, are relative to the natural world and are rational in nature. So embedded has this fact/value split become in the Western mind that when Christians take a stand on moral issues like abortion or homosexuality and suggest that their stand is based on objective moral truths, they are often quickly dismissed. The secular worldview simply does not see morals and objective truth as operating in the same sphere. The same is said for religious truth in general and Christian truth in particular.

If Christians are to reverse this situation, they must find ways to bridge the world of Christian faith and intellectual reasoning. They must expose false dichotomies and present Christianity as resting on robust and well-reasoned arguments. This was the sentiment of J. Gresham Machen:

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[9] While the Enlightenment provided the surge that sharply and publicly separated faith and reason, there were undoubtedly voices prior to the Enlightenment that spoke of divorcing the two spheres. William of Ockham (1288-1347), for example, believed that "only faith gives us access to theological truths. The ways of God are not open to reason, for God has freely chosen to create a world and establish a way of salvation within it apart from any necessary laws that human logic or rationality can uncover." See Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 434.

[10] David Hume is generally credited with "fathering" the modern fact/value split. In more recent days, Francis Schaefer decried this stance, as has Nancy Pearcey. See Francis Schaefer, *Escape from Reason* and *The God Who Is There* in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982); and Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity,* Study Guide ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

> False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything other than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root.[11]

Unfortunately, rather than rise to the challenge, the church has in large measure embraced the fact/value schism, even if that was not its intention. Instead of challenging the presuppositions of secularism (which are not grounded in any set of observable facts) and presenting a well-reasoned argument for Christianity, it often calls on both believers and unbelievers to accept Christian claims by faith as if reasonable support of that faith is optional or even unattainable. Nancy Pearcey provides a striking example of how Christians have fallen prey to the fact/value dichotomy when she relates a story of a theology teacher in a Christian school. The teacher went to the front of the classroom where he drew a heart on one side of the blackboard and a brain on the other. He then went on to explain that the two are divided when it comes to religion and science; the heart is used for religion, and the brain is used for science.[12] This teacher, and likely

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[11] J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Christianity? And Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 162.

[12] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 19. For a succinct history of the faith/fact split in Western thought, see the entire second chapter, "Keeping Religion in Its Place," 97-121.

many others with him, have settled on a perspective that "bears a family resemblance to fideism in the area of religious knowledge."[13]

If Christians themselves take Christianity to be outside the realm of reason, it will increasingly be seen as a "take it or leave it" proposition in the North American culture. This will also give ample explanation as to why there is an increasing number of religiously unaffiliated people. The church must, therefore, break free of what Michael Goheen calls "the barred cage that forms the prison for the gospel in contemporary western culture."[14] Interestingly, Goheen does not conclude that this "barred cage" is something which the culture has built, but rather it "is the syncretistic accommodation of the church's understanding and forms to the fact-value dichotomy."[15] This, of course, calls for the church to recognize the faulty gap and once again become adept at wedding faith and reason.

As suggested above, the shift in Western worldview has most undoubtedly given reason for those who had little interest in religion to shove it to the side, but it has also profoundly shaped those who still find a home in Christian, if not evangelical, circles. If the world of fact is left to the sciences, then one is hard pressed to believe in literal miracles and the claim that Jesus Christ experienced a historical bodily resurrection. One

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[13] J. P. Moreland, "Philosophical Apologetics, the Church, and Contemporary Culture," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 1 (March 1996): 137.

[14] Michael W. Goheen, "Liberating the Gospel from Its Modern Cage: An Interpretation of Lesslie Newbigin's Gospel and Modern Culture Project," *Missionalia* 30, no. 3 (2002): 362.

[15] Goheen, "Liberating the Gospel," 362-63.

might believe the biblical text as one would believe in a fairy tale, but not as one would trust in a report on the nightly news or in the latest issue of *Scientific American*. As fairy tales often have morals to the story, the role of the theologian who embraces the fact/value divide is not to argue that God's acts in history are evidence of his existence and providence, but it is instead to ferret out the meaning of the text divorced from any real historicity. The Feeding of the Five Thousand simply becomes a story about sharing with one another and the resurrection has nothing to do with providing evidentiary support to Christ's claim to deity. Both are just ancient artistic expressions of the vague renewed spiritual vitality available through religious and moral practice.

It is not difficult to see how disastrous the shift in worldview has been not only upon those who have disregarded Scripture altogether, but upon those who still value Scripture's place in a community of faith. How incumbent it is upon the present-day church to reclaim Christianity as a religion deeply reliant upon rational thought. "Reclaim" is the right word because history tells us that the divide between the world of faith and the world of reason and facts took place in the not so distant past. The most influential book on logic in the 18th century was written by clergyman and hymn writer, Isaac Watts. It discusses, as might be expected from a textbook on logic, perception, propositions, substances, the use of words, and syllogism, among other standard topics in the field of logic. The text was used at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale universities and was printed in some twenty editions.[16] It was titled *Logic: Or, the Right*

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[16] David A Horner, *Mind Your Faith: A Student's Guide to Thinking and Living Well* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 51-53.

Use of Reason, in the Inquiry after Truth, with a Variety of Rules to Guard Against Error in the Affairs of Religion and Human Life, as well as in the Sciences. In its pages we read:

> Now the design of Logic is to teach us the right use of our reason, or intellectual powers, and the improvement of them in ourselves and others. This is not only necessary in order to attain any competent knowledge in the sciences, or the affairs of learning, but to govern both the greater and the meaner [lesser] actions of life. It is the cultivation of our reason by which we are better enabled to distinguish good from evil, as well as truth from falsehood; and both these are matters of the highest importance, whether we regard this life, or the life to come.[17]

The enduring popularity of this book is an indication that faith and reason were once considered heavily overlapping realms. In fact, it was common for Christians to work out their faith eagerly in all areas of life and learning.[18] But as long as faith and reason are kept in different camps, not only in the culture at large, but in the church as well, there is every reason to believe that Christianity will be looked to less frequently as a viable option around which to structure one's life. Thus, an apologetic that corrects this unbiblical worldview becomes imperative in the evangelism and discipleship process. It provides the tools to call into question non-Christian worldviews and in the process

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[17] Isaac Watts, *Logic: Or, the Right Use of Reason, in the Inquiry After Truth, with a Variety of Rules to Guard against Error in the Affairs of Religion and Human Life,* new edition, corrected (London: Crosby & Co. Stationer's Court, 1802), 10.

[18] Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), xiii.

releases individuals from subconscious structural fetters that keep them from understanding a Christ-centered existence.[19]

The Forgotten Mind

The early settlers of North America were largely Christian and they were educated as well. Take, for example, the Puritans, whose men were reported to have a literacy rate between 89 and 95 percent, more than twice as high as England and arguably the highest reading rate in the world.[20] They legislated the formation of grammar schools, founded colleges, and eagerly studied art, science, and philosophy.[21] Education was of extreme importance and seen as a foil to the evils of Satan. In laws requiring grammar schools in large communities, continual reference is made to Satan, "whose evil designs, it was supposed, could be thwarted at every turn by education."[22]

In the middle of the 19th century, however, came the rise of evangelicalism. A growing distrust of political authority spawned by the American Revolution translated into a distrust of ecclesiastical authority. This, combined with the perceived and

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[19] J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1987), 12.

[20] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985), 31.

[21] J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 22.

[22] Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 31-32.

sometimes real laziness of educated but unimpassioned parish leaders,[23] gave reason for listeners to seek new voices. These voices, often dramatic in tone, sought an instantaneous change of heart more than a well-reasoned change of mind. John Leland, a popular Baptist preacher of the early 19th century, who even gained audience with President Jefferson and Congress, took a decidedly anti-intellectual stance in declaring that the simple-minded were more competent than the learned clergy to understand the Bible.[24] This position was similar to the countless Methodist circuit riders who risked life and limb to preach the gospel to those on the fringe of a growing nation. These preachers drew large crowds and effectively used their emotional appeals to move people from sin to grace. No doubt their approach was responsible for many honest conversions and a revived, existential Christianity in which God was likely well-pleased, but with it came a stamp of approval on the de-prioritization of the mind in both the acts of evangelism and discipleship.[25]

The anti-intellectual evangelical movement did not end with the Methodist circuit riders nor with their Baptist counterparts, but continued into the 20th century. In response, historian Mark Noll wrote a scathing critique of the evangelical church in his 1994 book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. His opening words are:

> The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind. An extraordinary range of virtues is found among the sprawling throngs of

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[23] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 261.

[24] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 276.

[25] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 264-66.

> evangelical Protestants in North America, including great sacrifice in spreading the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, open-hearted generosity to the needy, heroic personal exertion on behalf of troubled individuals, and the unheralded sustenance of countless church and parachurch communities. Notwithstanding all their virtues, however, American evangelicals are not exemplary for their thinking, and they have not been so for several generations.[26]

Needless to say, at the time of the book's publication, Noll did not see members of the evangelical church as anywhere near "the most active, most serious, and most open-minded advocates of general human learning" he believed they should be.[27] His critique was not wholly new. Charles Malik, in a 1980 address at Wheaton College, made similar remarks in exhorting his audience to revive intellectual rigor in the church:

> The greatest danger besetting American evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism. . . .
>
> It will take a different spirit altogether to overcome this great danger of anti-intellectualism. . . . For the sake of greater effectiveness in witnessing to Jesus Christ himself, as well as for their own sakes, evangelicals cannot afford to keep on living on the periphery of responsible intellectual existence.
>
> . . . The mind is desperately disordered today. I am pleading that a tiny fraction of Christian care be extended to the mind too. If it is the will of the Holy Spirit that we attend to the soul, certainly it is not his will that we neglect the mind. No civilization can endure with its mind being as confused and disordered as ours is today.
>
> Every self-defeating attitude stems originally from the devil, because he is the adversary, the arch-nihilist par excellence. It cannot be willed by the Holy Spirit. Anti-intellectualism is an absolutely self-defeating attitude. Wake up, my friends, wake up.[28]

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[26] Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 3.

[27] Mark A. Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), x.

[28] Charles Malik, "The Two Tasks," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, no. 4 (December 1980): 294-96.

The present-day result of this anti-intellectual stance is that while the church has a firm and factual basis on which to give sound answers to a skeptical world, it has not chosen this road. Instead it has either hidden itself from intellectual attacks and/or retreated to a religion of the heart. Christians, thus, gladly sing the words, "You ask me how I know he lives? He lives, he lives within my heart," without recognizing that if Jesus does not live outside the heart as one who has historically resurrected,[29] then the Christian's theology "is a mere castle floating in midair and our preaching presumptuous proclamation calling for blind credulity."[30]

It is not surprising then that the church is subject to intellectual intimidation and is even considered dangerous by some because of the "unfounded, irrational beliefs" they are passing on to the next generation. But whether its beliefs are actually being passed on is certainly up for debate. For years there have been cries of a great exodus of young people from the church. Whether or not this is wholly true, there is good indication the church is not providing them with helpful answers.[31] Declaring that Jesus is the right

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[29] Robert Charles Sproul, "Theology and Preaching in the 90's: An Interview with R.C. Sproul," *Preaching* 9, no. 5 (March-April 1994): 19.

[30] Clark H. Pinnock, "Cultural Apologetics: An Evangelical Standpoint," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127, no. 505 (January-March 1970): 58.

[31] See The Barna Group, "Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts," November 6, 2011, accessed October 22, 2013, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/teens-nextgen/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts#.UmcYxfnBOSp; The Barna Group, "Six Reasons Young People Leave the Church," September 28, 2011, accessed October 22, 2013, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/teens-nextgen/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church#.UmcbWfnBOSr.

answer to virtually every question simply is not equipping students with the intellectual answers that can sustain the onslaught of a secularized worldview under which most are being formally educated. C. S. Lewis, in addressing students who wondered whether intellectual pursuits were worthy of effort during wartime, responded in this way:

> To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.[32]

We may not be in the midst of a physical war at this time, but a war for the mind has long been waged, which, of course, makes anti-intellectualism even more perilous.

In eschewing an intellectual approach to Christianity, the church has tried to piggy-back the gospel on the "felt needs" of a listener. No doubt there have been times when this approach has been helpful and effective. Christianity does provide substantive instruction that can be of value in relationships, the pursuit of one's vocation, and common psychological problems such as depression. But if Christianity rests on the cathartic resolution of "felt needs" and not on the truth and reasonableness of the Christian narrative arrived at through intellectual engagement, then what answers does it provide to one who claims no "felt needs?" Or how does it keep Christianity from being viewed as anything more than an emotional crutch if that is the way it pitches its beliefs to unbelievers?[33] Or furthermore, how can it set itself apart from the myriad of other

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[32] C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War Time," *Weight of Glory* (New York, NY: HarperCollins), 58.

[33] Moreland, *Love Your God*, 30.

religions? The answer is that it cannot unless it breaks free from its anti-intellectual stance and embraces the thinking of a sound Christian apologetic.

Further Reasons to Pursue Apologetics in the Local Church

So far it has been argued that the decline of the North American church and its influence in larger culture can at least in part be attributed to a shift in the predominant worldview and to a growing anti-intellectualism in the church. Both conditions call for a strong resurgence of apologetics in the local church to help the church emerge from a faith that is grounded in experience or shallow arguments. But beyond this rationale for apologetic training and teaching in the church, other good reasons exist as well.

First, Scripture itself supports the pursuit of a well-reasoned faith. Indeed the word "apologetics" derives itself from the Greek word *apologia* (ἀπολογία) which in New Testament days meant: "the act of making a defense," or more specifically "a speech of defense."[34] It is used eighteen times in the noun or verb form in the New Testament[35] and on three occasions it is used specifically to describe a well-reasoned defense of the gospel.[36] In the latter of these three verses, we read, "But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer (*apologia*) to anyone who

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[34] BDAG, "ἀπολογία," 117.

[35] Luke 12:11, 21:14; Acts 19:33, 22:1, 24:10, 25:8, 16, 26:1, 26:2, 24, Rom. 2:15; 1 Cor. 9:3, 2 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 12:19; Phil. 1:7, 16; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:15

[36] Phil. 1:7, 16; 1 Pet. 3:15

asks about the hope you possess."[37] Much more will be written about the scriptural foundation for apologetics in chapter two, but suffice to say for now that regardless of the current worldview shift or anti-intellectualism in the body of Christ, there are scriptural reasons for the church to be prepared well with reasoned arguments for the Christian faith.

Second, apologetics works in helping unbelievers come to faith. This is not to say that a well-reasoned argument for Christianity is guaranteed to bring a change in belief—that will never be the case—but it is to say that examining the evidence for Christianity has been instrumental in the conversion of many. Plentiful examples abound, but notable names include C. S. Lewis, Francis Collins, Marvin Olasky, Josh McDowell, Lee Strobel, Nicky Gumbel, and John Warwick Montgomery. Of course, there were often other factors besides an examination of evidence that led these and others to turn to Christianity, but Christian apologetics was nonetheless an important contributor in removing barriers to faith.

One might also say that apologetics is the means by which Christians are able to shepherd others through the myriad of religious options in our pluralistic and global community. Without a reasoned presentation of Christianity relative to other worldviews, one is left with the impression that opting for Christianity has no more basis than any other religious option. Machen echoes these very concerns and calls for a sound apologetic in order to assist others in understanding Christianity to be true:

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[37] All Scripture quotations taken from the *NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006).

> A man can only believe what he holds to be true. We are Christians because we hold Christianity to be true. But other men hold Christianity to be false. Who is right? The question can be settled only by an examination and comparison of the reasons adduced on both sides. It is true, one of the grounds for our belief is an inward experience that we cannot share—the great experience begun by conviction of sin and conversion and continued by communion with God—an experience which other men do not possess, and upon which, therefore, we cannot directly base an argument. But if our position is correct, we ought to at least be able to show the other man that *his* reasons may be *inconclusive*.[38]

Third, apologetics can strengthen and embolden believers. It is not uncommon for Christians to have some of the same questions that non-Christians have: Is God real or is he a figment of our imagination? Is the Bible reliable? Can miracles really happen? How can God be good and yet evil and suffering be so prevalent in the world? Does it matter what you believe as long as you are sincere? Is there really hope in life after death? Christians who are plagued by these questions will likely find it difficult to worship God wholeheartedly and call others to consider following a life in Christ. Imagine if Thomas had not been visited by Jesus and his questions had remained regarding the resurrection of Christ. It is hard to picture him boldly sharing with others and ultimately giving his life in a distant land for the cause of Christianity. The same remains true today. J. P. Moreland, in opening his book *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, relates a story of one who attended his lectures at a local church:

> My life has changed drastically during the past few weeks since you have been teaching and encouraging us to think. I used to be deathly afraid of witnessing and terribly fearful that someone might ask me something about my faith. Whenever I got into any kind of discussion, I was rather defensive and nervous. Well, I have been reading, rather, plowing through some of your lecture notes at church. As I absorb the information and logically understand the foundations for my faith, a calm is resting in my soul. I have been a believer for a long time and the Lord has

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[38] Machen, *What Is Christianity?*, 160-61.

> done marvelous, specific things in my life. But now I understand why I believe, and this has brought me both peace and a non-defensive boldness to witness to others. Please don't stop encouraging people to risk thinking objectively and arriving at conclusions based on logic and fact. My life will never be the same because of this encouragement.[39]

Even as I have completed the studies necessary for the completion of this doctoral project, I have noticed a distinctively greater confidence in sharing my faith with others. While undoubtedly there are questions I still cannot answer, I have an increased sense that I have enough answers to engage most people in constructive dialogue. Perhaps even more satisfying is that I find my own children, who have had to endure me passing on my findings, are becoming more confident in their own faith as well. How empowering it is for Christians to grasp that Christianity is true not just because it is personally satisfying or because they have been brought up that way, but because there is sound evidence to support aligning one's life with the gospel and all its ramifications.

Given the reasons above and the current cultural milieu in which the North American church resides, there is ample rationale and even urgency for the training of believers in Christian apologetics. Such training, of course, would require some expertise on the part of clergy or qualified laity who could then impart information to others. Considering the wide variety of apologetic issues, it would appear valuable for a local church not to rely on a single staff person as the "resident expert," but to develop a team of well-versed individuals to which the congregation can turn. A team of this sort could

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[39] Moreland, *Love Your God*, 20.

make a significant impact on a congregation and on the congregation's circle of influence.

Research Question, Methodology, and Hypothesis

In light of the need for improved apologetic understanding in the North American church context, this doctoral project is designed to help increase such understanding in the local church and to do so by teaming with a select group of lay individuals to provide apologetic training to church attendees. To accomplish this purpose, a specific research question was posed and a methodology to answer the question was developed.

Research Question

The research question addressed in this doctoral project is as follows: "Is it possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetic understanding among those who attend?"

Research Methodology

I serve as the Executive Pastor of BridgePoint Bible Church, Houston, Texas. To answer the research question, I selected a team of six individuals from the church to join with me in the execution of the doctoral project. The six individuals represented somewhat of a cross-section of the church in terms of age and gender. Each was given an apologetics topic to research and was coached to develop live "breakout" presentations to be given at a two-day apologetics conference. The conference was held at BridgePoint Bible Church on April 11-12, 2014. The breakout sessions were presented between the

four “plenary” addresses which I gave. Participants were able to attend all four plenary sessions and three of the six breakout sessions. In all, ten topics were addressed; those marked with an asterisk indicate plenary sessions.

1. The Ramifications of a Godless World*
2. A Look at the Fine-Tuning of the Universe
3. The Moral Argument for the Existence of God
4. The Kalam Cosmological Argument*
5. The Reliability of the Gospels
6. Evidence for the Resurrection
7. Christianity as a Reasonable Quest*
8. Answering the Problem of Evil & Suffering
9. Confronting Myths about Christianity
10. Putting Apologetics into Practice*

To prepare the lay leaders to make their presentation, I met with them over the course of fifteen months. During these meetings, lay leaders were: (1) assigned readings relative to their specific topics, (2) coached in the formation of specific objectives for each presentation, (3) given instruction on how to create a successful presentation, (4) aided in the creation of audio/visual elements, and (5) provided a forum for lay leaders to practice their presentations and receive feedback.

At the beginning of the conference, attendees were assessed with a pre-conference survey. This survey had three sets of questions. The first set of questions provided an indication of each attendee’s apologetic knowledge and confidence. The second set of questions addressed whether the participants knew where to turn with apologetic

questions. The third set of questions addressed the attendee's current interest in and use of apologetics. At the end of the conference, participants were asked the first and second set of questions again and the score differential between pre- and post-conference responses was analyzed. Six weeks after the conference, attendees were re-sent the third set of questions in a follow-up survey to indicate whether there had been (1) a sustained interest in apologetics and (2) an increased use of apologetics.

Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that the research question—"Is it possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetic understanding among those who attend?"—may be answered in the affirmative. As such, it is anticipated this hypothesis will be supported by specific measurable outcomes:

1. Attendees of the conference will improve their scores on the apologetics survey (as measured by comparing pre- and post-conference results) indicating that their understanding of the apologetic issues addressed has improved.
2. Attendees of the conference will indicate in the follow-up survey taken six weeks after the conference that they have seen an increase in their own use of apologetics as well as an increase in their own interest in apologetics.

Parameters of the Project

In this section important definitions and assumptions are explained and the scope and limitations of the project are set forth.

Definitions

Terms used throughout this doctoral project are defined in alphabetical order:

1. **Apologetics** can generally be defined as a defense (or convincing argument in support) of one's position or worldview in order to establish its validity and integrity.[40] In the context of this project, when the term apologetics is used it refers specifically to the defense of the Christian worldview, including the reasonableness of belief in the biblical God, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and the authority of Scripture. It also refers to attempts made to respond to alternative worldviews or objections raised against Christianity. Understood in this way, "apologetics is a ministry designed to help unbelievers to overcome intellectual obstacles to conversion and believers to remove doubts that hinder spiritual growth."[41]
2. **Apologetic Understanding** is the ability of an individual to comprehend the basic contour of major arguments in favor of Christianity. When it said that

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[40] H. Wayne House and Dennis W. Jowers, *Reasons for Our Hope: An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: B&H Academic, 2011), 2.

[41] Moreland, *Love Your God*, 131.

the anticipated outcome of the implementation of this project is an increase in the apologetic understanding of the participants, it is meant that participants will improve their comprehension of the arguments presented such that they even find themselves putting them to use in the weeks following the conference.

3. **Christian Worldview** includes an understanding of God as Creator, humanity as having fallen into sin, God as becoming incarnate in Christ to redeem humanity, salvation through faith in Christ alone, sanctification through the indwelling life of the Sprit, and eternal life with God for only those who have believed. It also includes the understanding that Scripture is the authoritative revelation of the Triune God and that truth is objective in nature.
4. **Lay Leaders** means non-clergy attenders of the church who have been purposely selected for inclusion within this project. The term "lay leader" does not suggest that the individual has any formal recognition as a leader within the congregation. It is anticipated, however, that as a result of the conference the individuals making the presentations will be informally recognized by the congregation as those to whom they can confidently approach for further apologetic understanding.
5. **Local Church** means a regular gathering of a group of disciples who are united by a common belief in the authority of Scripture, a bond of fellowship, and a desire to serve their community in word and deed, and who are under common leadership. The local church in which the research question was tested is BridgePoint Bible Church, Houston, Texas.

6. **Teaming** refers to the fact that the apologetics conference involves presentations by both the lay leaders and me. Furthermore, it means that while the lay leaders were coached me, they were not given presentation scripts. Rather, the presentations represent the individual research, effort, and style of each lay leader.

Assumptions

The following assumptions exist for this project:

1. The Bible is the inerrant Word of God and as such provides reliable support for this doctoral project where indicated.
2. The context of BridgePoint Bible Church has similarities to other North American evangelical churches, and, thus, the results of this project have some applicability to other congregations.
3. The participants of the apologetics conference provided accurate information when completing the surveys.
4. The lay leaders chosen for this project have sufficient ability to understand and communicate the assigned apologetic topics.
5. My status as a participant in the apologetics conference does not significantly impact the validity of the data.

Limitations

The following limitations are influences on the study that place restrictions on the methodology and conclusions:

1. The study is limited by the accuracy of the survey responses provided by the conference participants.
2. The study is limited in its applicability to other churches who have clergy who are well-versed enough in apologetics to lead a team of lay leaders.
3. The study is limited in its applicability to other churches that have lay leaders with the educational tools to absorb apologetic arguments adequately and present them to others.
4. The study is limited by conference participants who chose to complete the pre-conference, post-conference, and follow-up surveys.
5. The study is limited by the wide variance of previous engagement in apologetics among the conference participants.
6. The study is limited by the demographics of BridgePoint Bible Church, which is made up of a large percentage of college-educated, suburban-dwelling adults in a major metropolitan area.
7. The project is limited by the largely evidentialist apologetic approach followed in completion of this study. The use of the evidentialist approach is not meant to devalue the presuppositional or experiential methods, but the

results presented may be of lesser value to proponents of the latter approaches.[42]

8. The project is limited by the somewhat unequal coaching time given to each of the lay leaders. In other words, individuals who needed more help in developing their presentations were given more coaching attention than others.

Organization of the Project

This doctoral project is organized into six chapters, each of which is described below.

Chapter one is an introduction to the doctoral project including the rationale for the study, a presentation of the researchable question, a brief outline of the methodology used to answer the question, and a discussion of the general hypothesis and specific anticipated outcomes. In addition, the limitations and delimitations are presented.

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[42] Taxonomy regarding apologetic approaches varies. Some, like Norman Geisler and Steve Cowan, offer five classifications each although they only overlap on three), while others like Kenneth Boa only offer four groupings. The three methods mentioned here are in line with James K. Beilby's threefold classification. See James K. Beilby, "Varieties of Apologetics," in *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad W. Meister (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 29-38; Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000); Norman Geisler, "Apologetics, Types of," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 41-44; and Kenneth Boa, *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 33-36.

Chapter two is a careful presentation of the biblical and theological foundation for the project. This includes a look at significant scriptural passages related to the use of apologetics, a review of the use of apologetics throughout church history, and biblical support for developing a team of lay apologetic leaders in the local church. The purpose of the chapter is to demonstrate that the effort made by this study is not a house built in vain.[43]

Chapter three is a review of literature pertinent to the topic. As this project engages a wide variety of apologetic issues, I will review a handful of multi-topic volumes, such as Douglas Groothuis' *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith.* To prepare more thoroughly for this doctoral project, however, I also considered various monographs related to specific topics. For example, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* by Gary Habermas and Michael Licona will be reviewed relative to presentation on the historicity of the resurrection, while works like Karl Giberson's *The Wonder of the Universe: Hints of God in Our Fine-Tuned World*, Meister and Dew's *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain*, and David Bently Hart's *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* will help shape arguments for the fine-tuning of the universe, a reasoned response to evil and suffering, and the deconstruction of modern myths about Christianity, respectively.

In addition to discussing standard apologetic questions, attendees of the conference will also be offered help on how to put apologetics to use. A review of

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[43] Ps. 127:1

additional works on practical methodological tips such as those found in Gregory Koukl's *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* or Sean McDowell's *Apologetics for a New Generation*, or John G. Stackhouse Jr.'s *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today*, will be provided.

Finally, in the training of the lay presenters some pedagogical instruction was necessary to aid in the success of each presentation and therefore a review of literature in this subject area is also provided. Such works include Bruce Wilkinson's *The Seven Laws of the Learner: How to Teach Almost Anything to Practically Anyone*, Howard Hendricks's *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive*, Andy Stanley's *Communicating for a Change: Seven Keys to Irresistible Communication*, and William Yount's *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, all of which were consulted in developing a solid pedagogical foundation for the presentations.

Chapter four describes the methodology developed and implemented to answer the research question. The various steps taken to implement the research project, the process and timeline of preparing the lay leaders, a thorough description of the apologetics conference, and an explanation of the pre-, post- and follow-up survey instruments are all presented. In the process the reader will understand how I sought to create a methodology that would confirm the hypothesis.

Chapter five is a report of the implementation of the project with notations as to any discrepancies between the original plan and actual completion. Results of the completed surveys will be presented and pre-, post-, and follow-up survey scores will be compared to discover any significant changes in the apologetic understanding of the

participants. These results will then be analyzed, and a conclusion will be reached as to whether the data supports the hypothesis.

Chapter six will summarize the doctoral project relative to the research question, methodology, and hypothesis as set forth in chapter one. It will also explore the implications of the research for other church contexts, particularly in light of the limitations and delimitations of the study. Furthermore, suggestions will be made for future research based on the experience and results of this study.

Following chapter six, the appendices will include lay leader training materials, survey instruments, presentation outlines, and audio/visual aids.

Summary

The purpose of this doctoral project is to increase the understanding of Christian apologetics in the local church, particularly through an effort to team with lay leaders in the training of those within the church. The research question is: "Is it possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetic understanding among those who attend?" Shifting worldviews, anti-intellectualism in the church, and Scripture itself give credence to posing and answering this question.

The stated hypothesis is that the research question can be answered in the affirmative. To test this hypothesis, a research design has been developed in which I train a team of lay leaders to be presenters along with me at an apologetics conference to be held at BridgePoint Bible Church, Houston, Texas. An increase in the apologetic

understanding of the conference participants will be measured by pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys.

The remaining chapters will provide a detailed report of the implementation and results of the project along with a review of apologetics-related literature. The biblical and theological foundations for the project are found in chapter two.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

The purpose of this doctoral project is to answer a question relative to the teaching and understanding of apologetics in the local church. In order to justify such a purpose properly, it is necessary in this chapter to provide a biblical and theological basis for the study at hand. This will be accomplished, first, by examining Scripture's call to use reason in understanding God's own self-revelation. Second, the use of apologetics in both the Old and New Testaments will be explored with particular attention given to specific examples of how God used apologetics in the Old Testament and how Jesus and the apostles did so in the New Testament. Third, a brief overview of the use of apologetics throughout church history will be provided to show that apologetics is not a contemporary fad but instead has the support of many Christian voices throughout the ages. Fourth, common objections to apologetics will be addressed so as to give the reader further confidence that the pursuit of this study is not superfluous or ungodly. Finally, since this doctoral project requires the training of lay leaders to teach others about apologetics, scriptural support for equipping lay leaders will be provided.

God's Revelation and Human Reason

The use of apologetics inevitably calls for the use of human reasoning abilities. Thus, if apologetics is to be considered something the church should pursue, it must first be established that Scripture is supportive of the use of human reasoning skills. The following discussion takes a look at God's revelation and how, by its very nature, it calls for the employment of the mind and its reasoning capacities.

The church has long recognized that Scripture represents the handiwork of human authors, but more importantly it is the revelation of God through those authors. In saying that God has provided a revelation of himself in Scripture, it is generally meant that he has made certain things about himself and his ways available for review by humanity and, further, that the human recipients of that revelation are capable of understanding what he has revealed. Thus, when Christians declare that God has revealed himself in Scripture, they are not just saying that God said something about himself and his ways, but that he said something that is comprehensible to his human audience. That God expects humanity to understand his revelation and to engage their minds in doing so is made evident by the fact that he regularly calls his audience to respond in accordance with what he has revealed. In other words, God presupposes that the recipients of his revelation will actively engage their minds and use their God-given reasoning skills in understanding what he has revealed and then live accordingly.

When considering the revelation of God, it is also valuable to recognize the emphasis he has placed on the *written* Word. While it is true that some have come to know of God through other means (such as visions, angelic appearances, or the personal

testimony of others), Scripture is insistent that revelation through any other source be tested by the objective standard of the written Word of God.[1] This testing, by its very nature, requires an ability to comprehend language, recognition of any contextual considerations that might impact a proper interpretation of the text, and the skill to compare and contrast the written Word with any other claimed sources of truth. Furthermore, since most are unable to read Scripture in its original languages, it is generally required that Christians rely upon those who have intellectually engaged the text in order to translate it accurately so that readers from many backgrounds may understand it. Of course, the language skills necessary to produce such a translation require years of intense academic study before they can be of benefit. One might say then that God has not only made humanity dependent upon reasoning skills to comprehend God's revelation once it is translated into contemporary languages, but even to have an accurate translation in the first place.

Consider, for example, Martin Luther, a professor at the University of Wittenberg, who came to discover the gospel during his academic preparation for lectures on the book of Romans. His later translation of the Bible (designed to make the Scriptures accessible to the common person) would not have been possible without academic training and years of intellectual engagement with the Scriptures. Furthermore, his translation was dependent upon the work of Erasmus (who earlier had painstakingly prepared an

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[1] Deut.13:1-3; Acts 17:11; Gal. 1:8; 1 John 4:1-3

authoritative edition of the Greek New Testament) and on his colleague, Melanchthon.[2] It is not too much to conclude then that the Protestant Reformation and its "salvation through faith alone" message would not have gained support apart from the well-reasoned and intellectual engagement of men like Luther and his associates.

With the call to use the mind comes the command to attain knowledge. The rise of the postmodern worldview in the last half-century has brought with it an increasing skepticism regarding knowledge. Knowledge, if it exists at all, is merely a social construction that has been manipulated by those in power. Scripture, on the other hand, refutes the postmodern view and is adamant that it is possible for humanity to know things and particularly to know things about God.[3] For example, in Numbers 16:28-30, we read:

> Then Moses said, "This is how *you will know* that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die a natural death, or if they share the fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD does something entirely new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up along with all that they have, and they go down alive to the grave, then *you will know* that these men have despised the LORD!"

Passages like the one above do not give the impression that knowledge of God and his ways is something that comes through extra-mental supernatural implantation, but instead

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[2] Gene Edward Veith, *Loving God with All Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in the Postmodern World*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 22.

[3] For a list of verses that indicate that knowledge, and sometimes even certainty, can be attained, see D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 193-199.

suggest that knowledge is generally attained in concert with an intellect that gathers information and processes it. This does not mean that the intellect alone is adequate in understanding God's revelation or in coming to a salvific knowledge of God, but it does mean that God normatively calls for human reasoning to be engaged as part of the process. In fact, God even invites humanity to reason with him[4] and to seek after wisdom and understanding regardless of the cost.[5]

The invitation God gives to reason with him and come to a rational understanding of himself is not because the use of human reason itself is cause for divine approval, but because as those made in the image of God it is doubtful that we can love God as he has commanded apart from reason. John Piper addresses this exact concern:

> The main reason that thinking and loving are connected is that we cannot love God without knowing God; and the way we know God is by the Spirit-enabled use of our minds. So to "love God with all your mind" means engaging all your powers of thought to know God as fully as possible in order to treasure him for all he is worth.
>
> God is not honored by groundless love. In fact, there is no such thing. If we do not know anything about God, there is nothing in our mind to awaken love. If love does not come from knowing God, there is no point calling it love for God. There may be some vague attraction in our heart or some unfocused gratitude in our soul, but if they do not arise from knowing God, they are not love for God.[6]

In other words, while thinking and reasoning is not the end of humanity, it is an indispensable means to arriving at a knowledge of God that allows for the greatest love of

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[4] Isa. 1:18

[5] Prov. 4:7

[6] John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), loc. 1210-15, Kindle.

him. This is why God calls teachers to study his word diligently and teach its truth accurately,[7] and calls the church to give a rational defense of the faith.[8] One hardly finds it surprising then that Jesus, in summing up the teaching of the Law in a single command, said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart (*kardia*) with all your soul, with all your mind (*dianoia*), and with all your strength."[9] It is notable that both *kardia* (καρδία), and *dianoia* (διάνοια) emphasize the reasoning and thinking aspects of life.[10] For Jesus, utilizing thinking and reasoning skills was not optional, reserved only for those with intellectual gifts. Instead, it is an imperative if we are to love God properly.

Later, a number of objections to the use of Christian apologetics will be addressed. For now, it is important to recognize that some of these objections focus on certain passages of Scripture that can be interpreted to support a non-reasoned or extra-mental faith. Reasoned arguments based on these passages are then used to negate the very role of reason in understanding the revelation of God. This, of course, is self-defeating; one cannot use reasoned arguments of Scripture to dismiss using reason to understand God and Scripture. For God's written revelation to be a useful revelation to humanity, it simply cannot avoid use of the intellect.

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[7] 1 Tim. 4:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:15

[8] 1 Pet. 3:15

[9] Mark 12:30

[10]BDAG, "καρδία," 508; BDAG, "διάνοια," 234.

The aim of the discussion above has been to show that the very nature of God's revelation requires the use of human intellect. Coming to this conclusion is important because reason is inherent in the use of apologetics. However, scriptural support for the use of the mind does not mean that a sufficient case for the specific use of apologetics has been made. For that case to be made it is necessary to take a closer look at both the Old and New Testaments.

Apologetics and the Old Testament

The Old Testament is readily recognized for the Mosaic Law, the history of the Jewish people, the proclamation of the prophets, the heart-felt renderings of the psalmists, and the proverbs of the wise, but rarely is it properly recognized as providing God's apologetic for his own supremacy. Certainly, God revealed his supremacy through such global, space-time events as creation and the flood, but he has also done so in very specific dealings with individuals and nations. A few of these Old Testament apologetic efforts on the part of God will be explored.

Apologetics and the Exodus

After completing his education in the household of Pharaoh[11] such that he attained "all the wisdom of the Egyptians," Moses spent forty years as a desert dweller. As far as he knew he was permanently sidelined from any significant work for God following a

[11] Acts 7:22

botched and murderous attempt to rescue his own people from Pharaoh's brutal slavery. But God was not finished with Moses and called him to return to Egypt to free his people. As a pragmatist, he wondered what would make anyone believe he had heard from God about setting the Israelites free. Specifically, Moses asked: "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?"[12] At this juncture, God could have simply instructed Moses to tell the people to have faith, but instead he provides a powerful apologetic to convince the people of the authority he had given to Moses. He tells Moses when his staff is thrown to the ground, it will turn into a snake; when his hand is put in his pocket, it will become leprous; and when water is taken from the Nile and poured on the ground, it will turn to blood.[13] The authority given by God to Moses was an unseen transaction, but to substantiate the reality of that delegated authority God provided Moses with visible evidence of divine authority. This visible evidence would allow people to come to a reasoned conclusion.

The initial miraculous signs given to Moses were not all God would grant as an apologetic to his people and the Egyptians among which they lived. They were sufficient to give Moses a hearing, but they were not significant enough to convince the Egyptians of Jehovah's authority to emancipate his people. Thus, God sent a series of supernatural disasters to beset the Egyptian people while the Israelites remained unharmed by the

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[12] Exod. 4:1; *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983).

[13] Exod. 4:2-9

plagues. He did so for the expressed purpose of helping people "know that I am the Lord."[14] The plagues eventually moved Pharaoh to release the Hebrews if for no other reason than for the purpose of self-preservation, and the plagues apparently had the intended "apologetic effect" on many in Egypt. The account of the Exodus tells us that in addition to the six hundred thousand Israelite men and their families, many others from other nations joined them in leaving Egypt.[15] Undoubtedly these many others had seen the hand of God and found joining with the Hebrew cause a very reasonable choice. This, of course, was not by accident; God intended for the miraculous events surrounding the Exodus to act as a convincing apologetic wherein the reliability and authority of God would be experientially verified and tested.

Apologetics in the Period of the Judges

As was customary in the days of the judges, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and came under the oppression of the surrounding peoples. Such oppression would give rise to cries of mercy, and God would subsequently intervene with acts of deliverance. Each deliverance acted as an apologetic of the merciful nature of God. On one particular occasion, God chose to deliver his people through a man named Gideon, but when God gave Gideon his marching orders, Gideon doubted if he had rightly heard from God. At this point of uncertainty, God could have told Gideon to exercise faith, but

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[14] Exod. 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 10:2; 14:4, 8

[15] Exod. 12:38

instead he conceded to Gideon's two requests to confirm the promised victory through visible acts that could only be explained by God.[16] The result is that when examining the book of Judges God is seen not only as providing an apologetic by his delivering hand, but even in the pre-disclosure of his saving plans.

In the latter period of the judges a particularly poignant story of God's apologetic activity is found. The Philistines were the Israelite's chief oppressors. After defeating the Israelites in battle, they captured the Ark of the Covenant and took it as the spoils of victory. They placed it in their temple beside the idol of Dagon, likely as a symbol of Dagon's supremacy in battle. But rather than concede defeat, God chose to use the incident as an opportunity to verify his own supremacy. Upon returning to Dagon's temple the day after the ark's arrival, the people of Ashdod found Dagon on the ground before the ark. Apparently they considered this a coincidence and quickly returned Dagon to his exalted position, only to find Dagon once more on the ground the next morning. To make matters worse, the people of Ashdod were afflicted by tumors until they returned the ark to its rightful owners. Undoubtedly, the Philistines had heard stories of the Hebrew God, and God could have let those stories be an adequate revelation of himself to the Philistines. Instead he chose to provide a very tangible apologetic which brought about the intended and reasoned response—the return of the ark.

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[16] Judg. 6:36-40

Apologetics in the Times of the Kings

Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they were told that if they obeyed God and kept his commands they would receive tangible blessings from the Lord in terms of wealth, territorial victory, peace, health, and fertility.[17] If, however, they did not obey the Lord's commands, they would be subject to tangible curses: their wealth would be taken or destroyed, they would be defeated by their neighbors and by far-away nations, they would become subject to terrible diseases, and their cities would be placed under siege.[18] In other words, God was willing to verify his revelatory covenant with Israel regardless of their course. If Israel obeyed, God would show himself to be real by the blessings he poured out; if they disobeyed, he would show himself to be real by the curses he would pour out. The history of the kings plays this out. When kings, like Hezekiah or Josiah, rely upon God and obey his commands, victory and prosperity are given. Conversely, when wicked kings like Ahab and Hoshea do evil in the eyes of the Lord and worship other gods, defeat and destruction soon follow. God did not hide his pleasure or displeasure; he continually gave the kings physical and historical evidence for the worthiness of following him.

Among the kings, Solomon provides an excellent example of God's willingness to live up to his covenant and thereby provide an apologetic of himself. Upon receiving the

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[17] Deut. 28:1-14

[18] Deut. 28:15-68

throne, Solomon sought to honor and worship the Lord. When granted a request, rather than ask for wealth, Solomon asks God for wisdom and understanding.[19] God is well pleased with the request and gives Solomon not only wisdom but wealth and power as well. At the beginning of his reign, Solomon understood what these gracious gifts of God would mean, namely, that he would grow in splendor and that the name of the Lord would become famous. At the temple dedication, he offers these words:

> Foreigners, who do not belong to your people Israel, will come from a distant land because of your reputation. When they hear about your great reputation and your ability to accomplish mighty deeds, they will come and direct their prayers toward this temple. Then listen from your heavenly dwelling place and answer all the prayers of the foreigners. Then all the nations of the earth will acknowledge your reputation, obey you like your people Israel do, and recognize that this temple I built belongs to you.[20]

What Solomon understood early in his reign is that the blessings of God were given as an apologetic to the surrounding nations, and, because of them, nations would come and worship the Lord. This was played out when the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon to verify all she had heard of his wealth and wisdom. To her surprise the reports she had received of the splendor of Solomon's kingdom were understated, and ultimately she declares, "Praise be to the Lord your God."[21] Unfortunately, Solomon lost his way, began to worship other gods, and soon the positive apologetic influence of the throne of Israel diminished.

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[19] 1 Kings 3:9

[20] 1 Kings 8:41-43

[21] 1 Kings 10:9

Apologetics and the Prophets

In the Old Testament, God primarily chose to speak to his people through prophets. These prophets were subject to verification. God understood that there would be those who for the sake of personal gain would declare their words to be from God even though they were not. As such, he provided two simple tests to verify the God-originated nature of any prophecy and thereby the real nature of the prophet. The first test was whether the prophet's prediction was actually fulfilled. If a prophet said such and such would happen and it did not, then that person did not speak on behalf of the Lord.[22] Secondly, if the prediction came to pass or if the prophet performed some miraculous sign, but the prophet's teaching contradicted what had already been established in the Mosaic Law, his words were to be dismissed.[23] These tests were put in place specifically to answer the inevitable and reasonable question, "How can we tell that a message is not from the LORD?"[24] In other words, while God would use the prophets as a tool to provide an apologetic of his authority, he also provided an apologetic so that the prophets themselves could be tested as bearers of reliable knowledge.

One role of the biblical prophet was to mediate a divine commentary on contemporary events and reveal the consequences associated with present or anticipated

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[22] Deut. 18:21-22

[23] Deut. 13:1-3

[24] Deut. 18:22

behavior on the part of the prophet's audience.[25] Those who did not heed the instructions and warnings would endure the wrath of God. While this wrath certainly had a punitive purpose, it is also had a definitive apologetic aim. This is best recognized in the record of Ezekiel. Throughout his tenure, Ezekiel told the nation of Judah that certain destructive acts were soon to come upon her because of a refusal to follow God's decrees. The revelatory purpose of this discipline, however, is not left unclear. Some sixty times in the book, God declares that the purpose of his future action against Judah was to help them see that he is the Lord.[26] In fact, the most common phrase in the book is: "Then they will know that I am the LORD" or something similar. In other words, God did not bring judgment because he found pleasure in doing so (he indicates precisely the opposite in Ezekiel 18:22), but because the fulfillment of prophesied discipline was the necessary apologetic to help people recognize him as Lord.

In addition to their prophetic utterances, the prophets were also employed to display the power of God visibly. Perhaps the most vivid instance of this is Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal.[27] Sickened by the people's worship of this false god and their allegiance to false prophets, Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to verify the existence and power of their god. In the process, he sets up a *modus ponens* argument

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[25] See, for example, 1 Sam. 12:7-12; Dan. 4; Obad.; Hag. 1:7-11; Jon. 3:4; Nah. 1-3

[26] See, for example, Ezek. 6:7, 11:10, 13:14, 20:20, 26:6 30:8, 39:6

[27] 1 Kings 18:18-46

of sorts for the reality and authority of Jehovah and the non-existence of Baal. The argument is as follows:

1. If Baal is real he will answer your prayers and consume your sacrifice, and if Jehovah is real he will answer my prayers and consume my sacrifice.
2. Baal did not answer your prayer and consume your sacrifice, and Jehovah answered my prayer and consumed my sacrifice.
3. Therefore, Baal is not real, and God is.

Upon seeing this argument played out in a live-action demonstration, the people recognize its soundness and captured and slaughtered the prophets of Baal. The evidential apologetic of God as mediated by Elijah simply had too much force to deny, even if only a fraction of the population was predisposed to following Jehovah.[28]

The prophets largely speak to the nations of Israel and Judah, but they were not averse to speaking to other nations as well. The book of Amos, for example, records prophetic words to six different nations before Israel and Judah are addressed, and books like Obadiah and Nahum are wholly directed at non-Hebrew peoples. Furthermore, God uses miraculous events among these peoples just as he did among the Jews. Examples include the interpretation of dreams that led to the physical sustenance of Egypt and many surrounding nations;[29] the exodus events described earlier; the preservation of

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[28] 1 Kings 19:18

[29] Gen. 41

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace,[30] Daniel in the lion's den;[31] the healing of the Aramean commander, Namaan,[32] and the calming of the storm when Jonah is thrown into the sea.[33] The use of this apologetic method meant that there were those among the non-Hebrew nations who would declare as Namaan did, "For surely I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel!"[34]

It can be argued then that through the activity of the Old Testament prophets God verifies the value of apologetics not only for his own people who have a God-centered heritage, but for those who previously were "outside the camp" and who possessed little previous knowledge of Jehovah. Indeed through his prophets he provides a rational basis for obedient trust in God. Along these lines, J. P. Moreland notes,

> Regularly, the prophets appealed to evidence to justify belief in the biblical God or in the divine authority of their inspired message: fulfilled prophecy, the historical fact of miracles, the inadequacy of finite pagan deities to be a cause of such a large, well-ordered universe compared to the God of the Bible, and so forth. They did not say, "God said it, that settles it, you should believe it!" They provided a rational defense for their claims.[35]

What Moreland suggests regarding the activity of the prophets can be expanded to summarize the activity of God throughout the Old Testament. God did not just say, "I

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[30] Dan. 3

[31] Dan. 6

[32] 2 Kings 5:1-5

[33] Jon. 1:15-16

[34] 2 Kings 2:15

[35] Moreland, *Love Your God*, 132.

said it, that settles it, you should believe it!" Instead he provided a rational defense of his claims often in the most visible and accessible of forms.

Apologetics and the New Testament

The New Testament provides a very strong case for the use of apologetics by the contemporary church. This case is built on several sources of evidence including New Testament terminology, the apologetic motive of the Gospels and Acts, the use of apologetics in the proclamation of the early church, and the apologetic arguments of Jesus himself. Each of these sources of evidence is discussed below.

Key New Testament Words that Indicate the Importance of a Reasoned Faith

As indicated earlier, the very means of the *written* Word to communicate the revelation of God calls for reason by those who would read it and seek to heed its call. But in addition to the implied prerequisite of reason associated with biblical literature, there are specific terms in the New Testament that highlight the value of a reasoned faith, particularly as it relates to presenting the gospel to unbelievers. Four such terms are examined here.

1. ***apologia*** (ἀπολογία); ***apologeomai*** (ἀπολογέομαι). The Greek noun *apologia* means "the act of making a defense," or, more specifically, "a speech of defense,"[36] while the Greek verb *apologeomai* means "to speak in one's own

[36] BDAG, "ἀπολογία," 117.

defense against charges presumed to be false."[37] Together, the two terms are used eighteen times in the New Testament.[38] In some instances, the terms are used in regards to a defense of one's status or worthiness;[39] in other occurrences, they are used in conjunction with Paul's defense against civil charges.[40] As all these charges were related to the gospel, Paul's defense was not just a means to free himself from civil penalties but to persuade his listeners for the sake of the gospel.[41]

On three occasions *apologia* is used specifically for a well-reasoned defense of the gospel.[42] In Philippians 1:7 and 16, Paul speaks of his time in prison and states that he is behind bars because of his *apologia* for the gospel. He does not decry his incarceration as though the reasoned defense of the gospel was not worthy of his present suffering; rather, he rejoices knowing that his work has been part of the "fruitful labor" he hopes to continue.[43] Later, Peter does more than describe his own *apologia* of the gospel, but calls

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[37] BDAG, "ἀπολογένομαι," 116.

[38] Luke 12:11, 21:14; Acts 19:33, 22:1, 24:10, 25:8, 16, 26:1, 26:2, 24, Rom. 2:15; 1 Cor. 9:3, 2 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 12:19; Phil. 1:7, 16; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:15

[39] 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:1, 12:19

[40] Acts 19:33, 22:1, 24:10, 25:8, 16, 26:1, 26:2, 24

[41] See, for example, Acts 26:24-28

[42] Phil. 1:7, 16; 1 Pet. 3:15

[43] Phil. 1:15-22

on his readers to be prepared to give their own: “But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer (*apologia*) to anyone who asks about the hope you possess.” Note that Peter does not consider this optional for disciples of Christ, even if they live among those who may persecute them, as was the case for Peter’s original audience. This presupposes that such an *apologia* has the means to be effective among those who are highly resistant to the claims of Christ. Thus, the above-referenced occurrences of *apologia* or *apologeomai* provide substantial biblical support for the use of reasoned arguments by the Christian.

There are two occurrences of *apologeomai* that upon first reading give a different impression, and therefore are important to consider (Luke 12:11 and 21:14). In both references Jesus tells his disciples that one day they will be brought before synagogues and prisons, kings and governors. On those occasions he instructs them to not worry about how they would make a defense. This could be taken to mean that defending the faith is not something Christ calls his followers to do, but in light of other New Testament teaching, it seems more reasonable to take these statements as a call *against worrying* about how to handle future interrogation. It is helpful to note when considering these verses that Jesus did not say the disciples would not exercise a defense. He said they need not be concerned about rehearsing one, because in any given situation wisdom would be given by the Holy Spirit as to what words should be spoken. Later when the disciples make a defense in just the situations Jesus predicted, the arguments used are not something new to them

as if implanted "on the fly" by the Holy Spirit. Rather, they were consistent with well-studied claims of the Messiah's identity learned under Jesus' leadership. In other words, the disciples were not to rehearse what to say, not because God would give them clarity as to what to say that they had not already learned, but because God would give them the understanding of the proper words to say in a particular situation. In fact, what is remarkably new for the disciples when placed in these life-threatening situations is not the message they would share, but the boldness to employ what they had learned under Jesus.[44] This, then, would seem to indicate Jesus was not so much advocating a lack of intellectual preparation, but instead was calling the disciples not to fret over how they would specifically answer their eventual detractors.

2. ***bebaioō*** (βεβαιόω). The verb *bebaioō* means "to put something beyond doubt"[45] or "to cause someone to be firm or established in belief";[46] it occurs eight times in the New Testament.[47] One occurrence takes place in the long

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[44] See, for example, Acts 4:1-20

[45] BDAG, "βεβαιόω," 172-73.

[46] "βεβαιόω," *Scripture Direct*, downloaded software, version 1.1.3, May 30, 2010. Meanings cited in Scripture Direct software are from Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* 1 & 2, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989).

[47] Mark 16:20; Rom. 15:8; 1 Cor. 1:6, 8; 2 Cor. 1:21; Phil. 1:7; Heb. 2:3, 6:16

ending of Mark and states that Jesus caused people to *believe* his word through miraculous signs.[48] In Romans 15:8, we are told "that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to *confirm* the promises given to the patriarchs." Thus, Paul indicates that the incarnation acted as an apologetic by confirming the promises of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah and the coming kingdom. Another important use of *bebaioō* occurs in Philippians 1:7 in conjunction with the term *apologia*. Here Paul connects his defense (*apologia*) of the gospel with his efforts to confirm the truthfulness of the gospel (*bebaiōsis*) for the sake of others coming to faith. By linking the noun form of *bebaioō* with the noun *apologia*, the indication is that Paul saw it as appropriate for Christians, and even worthy of the risk of imprisonment, to engage in apologetics for the express purpose of persuading others to faith in Christ.

3. ***dialegomai*** (διαλέγομαι). The verb *dialegomai* means "to engage in speech intercourse" and often involves an exchange of opinions and argumentation.[49] It occurs sixteen times in the New Testament text. On some occasions the word is used to describe the disciples' own internal squabbling during Jesus' ministry,[50] but the preponderance of uses describe Paul's attempt to persuade

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[48] Mark 16:20

[49] BDAG, "διαλέγομαι," 232.

[50] Matt. 16:7; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46, 47

listeners during his missionary journey to trust in Christ. He is found to be arguing for the gospel in the synagogues,[51] in the lecture hall of Tyrannus,[52] among the people of Troas,[53] and during his trial before Felix.[54] In validation of Paul's public apologetic discourses, he received a vision in Corinth in which the Lord instructed him: "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent."[55] This instruction was given even after he argued in the synagogue with little immediate results.

4. ***peitho*** (πείθω). The verb *peitho* means "to cause to come to a particular point of view or course of action;"[56] it occurs twenty-five times in the New Testament. As with *dialegomai* the most significant uses for this study are in the context of Paul's ministry. For example, in Ephesus he not only argues (*dialegomai*) about the kingdom of God in its synagogue, but does so with the aim of persuading (*peitho*) his listeners.[57] Evidently he was rather effective,

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[51] Acts 17:2, 17, 18:4; Paul argued for the gospel but did not argue in the pejorative sense. See Acts 24:12.

[52] Acts 19:9

[53] Acts 20:7

[54] Acts 24:25

[55] Acts 18:9

[56] BDAG, "πείθω," 791.

[57] Acts 19:8

because a local businessman named Demetrius decries Paul's persuasiveness as it was causing a loss to his idol-making venture.[58] Another important occurrence of *peitho* is found in 2 Corinthians 5:11 where Paul says that because of fear of the Lord he and his companions seek *to persuade* others; Christ's love compels them to do no less.

New Testament terminology is rather convincing when it comes to advocating the use of apologetics by the church. By examining the language chosen to describe apostolic activity and teaching, it is evident that the New Testament writers believed that part of the mission of the church is to provide a strong, reasoned case for the gospel that would persuade observers to receive Christ. Had it been their perception that people would largely come to Christ through other means, it is unlikely they would have repeatedly placed themselves in life-threatening positions in order to present an apology for the worthiness of the gospel.

The Gospels and Acts as Apologetic Documents

Various words, verses, and passages may be examined within the Gospels and Acts to support the propriety of apologetics for the church today, but just as persuasive is the overall intent of the books. While one may argue that there are other authorial purposes, it is hard to dismiss the claim that the Gospels and Acts in large measure act as apologetic tools. It certainly is not inappropriate to call Matthew's gospel an apologetic to

[58] Acts 19:23-27

the Jews. Over and over again, Matthew points out how the life of Christ fulfilled the teachings of the Jewish Scriptures in order to persuade what he considered his primary audience. Even at the end of his narrative, Matthew is certain to include an apologetic for the empty tomb of Jesus. Undoubtedly some of his listeners would come across the soldiers who had been paid to say the disciples had stolen the body,[59] so Matthew included a reasonable explanation for this alternative account.

John's gospel is no less apologetically oriented. John presents Jesus as God incarnate in his opening words and then spends the remainder of the pages relating stories and teaching that validate John's initial claim. In particular, John seems to highlight Jesus' miracles as evidence in support of Jesus' identity claims. Along these lines, William Lane Craig notes,

> John's use of Jesus' miracles, which he calls 'signs,' is particularly interesting because John places them not in the context of the kingdom of God and its triumph over Satan (there are, for example, no exorcisms in John), but in the context of the authentication of Jesus' claims.[60]

That his editorial purpose was apologetic in nature is exposed in some of his closing words:

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[59] Matt. 28:11-15

[60] William Lane Craig, "Classical Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, loc. 614, Kindle.

> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but *these are written so that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.[61]

Luke-Acts is most decidedly apologetic in nature due to Luke's care in providing details about people and places so that corroboration was easily possible by his readers. The original recipient of his biographical accounts was Theophilus, likely a political official or at least a person of advanced status,[62] and Luke's intent in writing was that Theophilus "may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."[63] Accordingly Luke's biography was not a haphazard or shoddy effort to piece together a few stories of Jesus, but was carefully crafted with evidence that met contemporary standards for recording historical accounts.[64] Furthermore, as apologetic biography, Luke-Acts fits well into known ancient historiography as it was not uncommon for

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[61] John 20:30-31; There is debate over whether John's gospel was written with missionary or edificatory intent. In other words, there is a question as to whether John wrote it as an "apologetic" to non-Christians or as a means to build up and equip the church. For a discussion on the matter, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 200-10.

[62] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary of the New Testament, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 44.

[63] Luke 1:4

[64] See Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 1st paperback ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) for a thorough examination of Luke's biographical methods and how they compared with the highest standards of historical research of his day.

minority peoples, including Jewish historians, to provide reasons why their culture, traditions, and beliefs were not inferior to that of the Greeks.[65]

The apologetic intent of Mark is less obvious than perhaps for the other gospels, but at the very least there is good reason to believe that Mark penned his work not just for Christian insiders, but also for those unfamiliar with the Jewish way of life. This is evidenced by Mark's explanatory comments for non-Jews. For example, in Mark 5:41 he explains that "*Talitha koum*" means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!", and in Mark 7:3-4 he explains the Jewish custom of ceremonial washing before eating. If it were not important for Christians to provide a reasonable explanation of the gospel to those outside of Jewish circles (whether Gentile Christians or unbelievers) Mark would not have made the effort to use inclusive language; however, because he desired his readers to make sense of his gospel account, he provided necessary explanations.

Together, then, the Gospels and the Acts have a decidedly apologetic purpose, even if this is not their only purpose. Most certainly they leave the reader a biographical account of the life of Jesus and the early church, but there is good evidence that these accounts were written with the express purpose of persuading the recipients that the Jesus whose life is presented is the Christ and is worthy of their allegiance. Those who had contact with Jesus during his ministry on earth would frankly have little personal need for the books as they could rely on their own experience of the events. But for those who had

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[65] Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 93.

heard little to nothing, the Gospels and Acts provide information on which a reader can make their own reasoned conclusion regarding the identity of Jesus.

Apologetics and the Proclamation of the Gospel in the Early Church

A study of the proclamation of the early church leaders gives every indication that well-reasoned arguments accompanied by testable evidence was indispensable to the growth of the church. Regularly they are found arguing, persuading, and convincing any who would listen.[66] Those who are involved in such activity are not derided as using fleshly, humanistic attempts to win souls, but rather are recognized as those who were filled by the Holy Spirit.[67] In addressing Jewish audiences, the apostles often appealed to fulfilled prophecy, miracles that could be confirmed by fellow Jews who had witnessed them, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When addressing Gentiles who did not accept the Old Testament as authoritative, they appealed to God's work in nature to establish the basis for monotheism and then presented the resurrection as a means of supporting Christian particularism.[68] All this was done not for information's sake, but to compel listeners to call on Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Four particular instances of gospel proclamation, involving three different church leaders, are examined here.

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[66] See Acts 2:22-40; 5:40; 6:9, 11; 15:7; 16:15; 17:2, 4, 17; 18:4, 13-14, 19; 19:8-9, 26; 20:7 ,9; 23:9; 24:12, 25; 25:14, 16; 26:9, 25-26, 28; 28:20, 23-24

[67] Peter J. Grant, "The Priority of Apologetics in the Church," in *Is Your Church Ready? Motivating Leaders to Live an Apologetic Life,* ed. Ravi Zacharias and Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 56.

[68] Craig, "Classical Apologetics,"loc. 627-29.

Peter in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14-40)

At Pentecost, the disciples receive the Holy Spirit and immediately begin to speak to the Jewish crowd that had come to Jerusalem from many different nations. Derided at first for their miraculous ability to speak numerous unlearned languages, Peter begins a defense both of the disciples themselves and, even more importantly, of Jesus. In regards to the latter, Peter's reasoning is multi-faceted. He starts with the declaration that it was God himself who attested to the credibility of Jesus and he did so by the evidence of miracles, wonders, and signs,[69] all of which the visitors to Jerusalem could have easily corroborated by speaking to Jerusalem natives. Second, Peter appeals to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,[70] historical events that once again could be corroborated through local eyewitness testimony. Third, Peter draws on the Jewish Scriptures to substantiate both the resurrection[71] and the divine authority demonstrated by the resurrection.[72] With this evidence in place, Peter concludes, "Therefore let all the house of Israel *know beyond a doubt* that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ."[73] Apparently, Peter's argument was found reasonable, as people were

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[69] Acts 2:22

[70] Acts 2:24

[71] Acts 2:25-27

[72] Acts 2:34

[73] Acts 2:36

"acutely distressed" by what they heard and responded in the thousands to Peter's later plea to repent and be saved.[74] When examining this scene it is important to note that the force of Peter's preaching was not personal testimony or emotional appeal; rather, it was an apologetic argument on the basis of historical facts concerning Jesus[75] and their relationship to prophetic Scripture.

Apollos in Ephesus and Achaia (Acts 18:24-28)

Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria. It is noted that he was an "eloquent" or "learned" speaker,[76] likely a product of the highly intellectual culture of Alexandria, which was also home to the world's premiere library.[77] He had a thorough understanding of the Scriptures and apparently had come to hear of the life of Christ about whom he accurately and passionately spoke in Ephesus.[78] After receiving more complete information of post-Pentecost Christian living, presumably about the indwelling life of the Holy Spirit, Apollos eagerly traveled to Achaia to continue his teaching of the gospel.[79] Upon arriving, he engaged the Jewish leaders in public debate and refuted their

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[74] Acts 2:37-41

[75] Machen, *What Is Christianity?*, 121.

[76] Acts 18:24

[77] Veith, *Loving God*, 18-19.

[78] Acts 18:4-25

[79] Acts 18:26-27

arguments by "demonstrating from the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus."[80] Although we are not given the contour of Apollos' arguments, he nonetheless provides a vivid example of one who eagerly uses his intellect to present an accurate, compelling case for Christ, which is ultimately the aim of all good Christian apologetics.

Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4)

It was customary on Paul's missionary journeys to begin by presenting his case for Christ in the local synagogue. In Thessalonica, we are told that the Apostle went to the synagogue on three successive Sabbaths where "he *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures, *explaining* and *proving* that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead."[81] The three verbs describing Paul's activity do not in any way suggest a haphazard approach. Paul used his own intellect, which was largely formed under the direction of the famed Gamaliel, to formulate arguments that led to persuasive conclusions. As his audience was made up of Jews as well as God-fearing Greeks who likely recognized the authority of the Old Testament, Paul built his arguments on the common ground of Jewish Scriptures. We are told that as a result of his preaching some "were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large group of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women."[82] From time to time, it is argued that no one is saved by apologetics.

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[80] Acts 18:28

[81] Acts 17:2-3, NIV

[82] Acts 17:4

While this might be true in the sense that it is God who is the author of salvation, Paul's efforts provide strong evidence that God uses intellectual arguments as an important means of bringing about that salvation. These arguments are not part of a "canned" approach but are built on the common ground between the apologist and his audience, something which is particularly evident in Paul's tenure in Athens.

Paul in Athens (Acts 17:16-34)

This passage, perhaps more than any other, shows the nuanced use of apologetics by the Apostle Paul. Athens was a center of both philosophical thought and Greek idol worship, and required Paul to present his message in a manner that would not be dismissed out of hand. He begins as usual by reasoning in the synagogues both with Jews and God-fearing Greeks by pointing to Old Testament prophecy, but it is when he ventures into the marketplace and catches the ear of a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers that the excitement begins. In their initial debate, some were not impressed with Paul's teaching about Jesus and his resurrection and label him a "foolish babbler." It even appears as if their thoroughly non-Christian worldview made it difficult to understand what Paul was saying; the best they could discern is that he was "a proclaimer of foreign gods."[83] Enough listeners were intrigued by his words, however, that they took

[83] Acts 17:18

him to the Areopagus, the public location where those "who deemed themselves the custodians of new ideas"[84] would listen and debate the latest philosophies.[85]

After being prompted to give meaning to the "surprising things" he had been teaching publicly, Paul lays out his case at the Areopagus. His first words are insightful as they do not distance himself from his idol-worshipping audience, but rather seek to build bridges:

> Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in all respects. For as I went around and observed closely your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: "To an unknown god." Therefore what you worship without knowing it, this I proclaim to you.[86]

We know Paul was rather disturbed by the many idols in Athens,[87] but he does not attack what was most certainly abhorrent to him, nor does he turn to the Hebrew Scriptures about which they would have known little. Rather, he finds common ground. Like him, they are religious. Like him they are earnest about the proper recognition of the supernatural. He recognizes this commonality and uses it as a bridge to share about the one true God. He even begins his speech with the same words found in Socrates'

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[84] Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grover, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 35.

[85] Acts 17:21

[86] Acts 17:22-23

[87] Acts 17:16

Apology— "Men of Athens."[88] All this was no accident, for "Paul knew the wisdom of adapting his tone and general approach to the particular audience or readership being addressed at the time."[89]

As his monologue unfolds, Paul declares that he will make known what the Greeks worshipped as "Unknown." In doing so, he begins by defining God as the one who has made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He is personal in that he gives every being life and breath and determines when and where each nation will live, but he is also transcendent in that he is utterly without need of human service.[90] Remarkably, the God Paul defines orchestrates history with one purpose in mind: "so that they [humanity] would search for God and perhaps grope around for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."[91] While this definition of God was not meant to tickle his listeners' ears, it clearly draws from some of the Greeks' own

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[88] H. Wayne House, "A Biblical Argument for Balanced Apologetics: How the Apostle Paul Practiced Apologetics in the Acts," in *Reasons for Faith: Making a Case for the Christian Faith*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 71.

[89] F. F. Bruce, "The Book of Acts," *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 334.

[90] Acts 17:24-26

[91] Acts 17:27

thinkers.[92] The Stoics were essentially pantheistic and viewed God as the world-soul. The Epicureans, on the other hand, did not deny the existence of gods, but believed they took no interest in the affairs of humanity.[93] What Paul offers is distinct from the ideas of those who brought him to the Areopagus, but he offers it nonetheless knowing that the proper defining of terms is necessary if confusion is to be avoided as the argument progresses.

What should not be missed in analyzing Paul's words at the Areopagus is that he begins with an argument for the existence of God, or at least the existence of a single God. This was unnecessary when he spoke in the synagogues as that was a given among Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, but it was imperative for his audience in Athens to understand. It can be said then that Paul's approach took into account the starting place of his listeners. In the 1970s, a diagnostic evangelism scale was offered by James Engel that quickly found its way into Bible schools and seminaries. The "Engel Scale" was used to measure how far someone might be away from conversion (represented by the negative end of the scale) and how mature a believer had become (as represented by the positive end of the scale). The low end of the scale (-8) was indicative of those who had an

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[92] See a comparison between Paul's words and the thinking of Stoic and Greek philosophers in Brian Godawa, "Storytelling and Persuasion," in *Apologetics for a New Generation: A Biblical and Culturally Relevant Approach to Talking about God*, ed. Sean McDowell (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 125-30.

[93] Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 330-31.

"awareness of Supreme Being, but no effective knowledge of the Gospel."[94] Had Paul used this scale to assess the Athenians, he would have been at a loss as his audience did not even have a belief in a single Supreme Being. He needed to begin by establishing that fact, which is what he wisely did.

At this point in his argument, Paul turns to two quotations from Greek poets. The impression is that he understood that his initial definition of God may distance himself from his listeners, so he seeks to encourage their listening by garnishing support from familiar voices. The first quote appears to be the fourth line of a poem authored by Epimendes the Cretan (ca. 600 BC): "For in thee we live and move and have our being." The second is part of the fifth line of the *Phainomena* written by Aratus (c. 300 BC): "for we are truly his offspring."[95] The inclusion of such quotes tells us that Paul was not afraid of borrowing fragments of embedded truth in other cultures and using them as points of contact with those he was seeking to persuade. It also indicates that Paul was not afraid to spend time understanding other cultures or, at the very least, drawing upon what he may have learned in his younger days in the intellectual climate of his hometown of Tarsus.[96] Furthermore, it gives credence to the idea that, like Paul, "Christians need to learn how to

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[94] Gregory E. Ganssle, "Making the Gospel Connection," in *Come Let Us Reason: New Essays in Christian Apologetics*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), 12. Ganssle provides an adapted form of the Engle's Scale which he cites from James F. Engel and Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 45.

[95] Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 338-39.

[96] Veith, *Loving God*, 17.

be bilingual, translating the perspective of the gospel into language understood by our culture."[97]

Having instructed the Athenians on a proper view of God, Paul offers his first prescription. He argues that since humanity is the offspring of God he should not be thought of as anything akin to the idols that were crafted and worshipped in the city. Adding urgency to this admonition, Paul says that God in the past overlooked the ignorance of those who were confused on the matter, but that he is now calling people to repent because divine justice was soon to be meted out. Most surprisingly, this justice would be administered not by a distant God, but by a man—a man whose right to judge had been certified by his own resurrection from the dead!

Mentioning the resurrection of the dead proved to be the end of his public presentation; it also proved to be pivotal. He had offered a reasoned case that was culturally sensitive, but in the end his audience would have to evaluate the claim of the resurrection and its ramifications. Some immediately rejected the idea. Others wanted to hear more, and of them a few became believers including a member of the Areopagus and a prominent woman.[98]

At Athens, Paul sized up his audience. He did not disparage their religious interest. He defined terms and established the existence of a personal and transcendent God who created the universe. Furthermore, he supports the existence of this God by

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[97] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 67.

[98] Acts 17:34

using the Athenians' own revered poets. He then urgently calls for a new religious view in light of a coming divine judgment and introduces Jesus, the resurrected and soon returning judge. In presenting Jesus as the resurrected judge, Paul created a line in the sand for those who would listen, but not before building a case that made sense to his listeners. In doing so, Paul provided a vivid example of apologetics at work amidst those who share very little in common with the Christian worldview.

Apologetics Encouraged in the Epistles

The disciples readily defended the faith in their own ministry through the use of reasoned argument. It would not be surprising then to see them teach others to do the same.

Paul Encourages Use of the Mind

Paul was not anti-intellectual. Prior to becoming a believer, he had been well-educated, and his missionary efforts and epistles indicate that he put that education to use. He did not see mental engagement as a hindrance to understanding or living the gospel, but, when Spirit-guided, as an essential part of being a mature believer. For example, after laying out an argument for salvation through faith alone in the opening eleven chapters of Romans, Paul shifts his instruction to how the believer should live. In doing so, he highlights the centrality of the mind in Romans 12:1-2:

> Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.

For Paul, the renewing of the mind was essential to wisdom-filled discipleship as it allowed believers to "tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God."[99] Never does he encourage intellectual laziness or neglect, but rather calls believers to "take every thought captive to make it obey Christ," knowing that zeal without knowledge can be dangerous,[100] not just for the life of the believer but also for unbelievers who would receive ill-formed or inaccurate arguments for the faith.

Paul Calls Church Leaders to Defend the Faith

In his letter to Titus, Paul sets out a number of qualifications for those who would lead local congregations. As one might expect, the qualifications call for elders not to be quick-tempered, violent, or seek after dishonest gain. But also among the qualifications is that a church leader "hold firmly to the faithful message as it has been taught, so that he will be able to give exhortation in such healthy teaching and correct those who speak against it."[101] That is, Paul says that elders must be those who can recognize the truth, teach it well to others, and defend against false teaching—all qualities fitting of an apologist, even if they are valuable for other broader roles of an elder. Consistent with

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[99] 2 Cor. 10:4-5

[100] Rom. 10:1-3

[101] Titus 1:9

this qualification, Paul directs the young church leader, Timothy: "And the Lord's slave must not engage in heated disputes but be kind toward all, an apt teacher, patient, *correcting opponents* with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance and then knowledge of the truth."[102] With these words, Paul provides the shape of God-pleasing apologetics applicable to all church leaders: not argumentation, but a virtuous defense of the truth for the sake of drawing others to repentance and knowledge.

Paul Uses Apologetics to Correct False Teaching

The young church at Corinth had its share of missteps from gross immorality to lawsuits among believers and from participating in idol worship to blatant selfishness around the Lord's Supper. Among the worrisome struggles was their doubt of bodily resurrections. Of course, if resurrections were categorically impossible, this would mean that Christ himself did not rise from the dead and the Christian faith would be futile.[103] So Paul instructs the church by reminding them of the historical facts surrounding the resurrection: Christ died, he was buried, and he rose from the dead—the latter of which is attested to by those to whom the risen Christ appeared, including Peter and the disciples, five hundred others, James, and then Paul himself.[104] Presumably each of these witnesses

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[102] 2 Tim. 2:24-25

[103] 1 Cor. 15:12-19

[104] 1 Cor. 15:2-8

could have been investigated by the recipients of Paul's letter.[105] In other words, the Apostle creates an apologetic for the historicity of the resurrection, and then calls his readers to reconsider the evidence and correct their thinking on the matter.

Peter Teaches Apologetic Readiness

The early church knew persecution from the very beginning, both from the Jewish religious authorities and from intolerant Roman rule. Christians often felt the weight of this persecution, and as such Peter addresses the proper response of the Christian. He says the response is to be one of kindness and respect such that evil is not repaid with evil but with blessing. Furthermore, he suggests this counter-intuitive reply to evil would bring about questions and that Christians should be ready to answer them. He says, "But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess."[106] It is evident by Peter's words that he anticipates that answering the questions of unbelievers would be somewhat fearful, but he tells his readers to "set Christ apart as Lord." These words are not only important to help one overcome fear, but also to let the Christian know that defense of the faith is more than a fleshly attempt to convince others the Christian is right. Apologetics, when rightly coupled with "gentleness and respect,"[107] is what is done when we recognize God to be

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[105] Craig, "Classical Apologetics," loc. 630-40.

[106] 1 Pet. 3:15

[107] 1 Pet. 3:16

Lord; it is a matter of ascribing to Christ his proper Lordship over our lives. This is why Peter says that Christians should not remain sequestered from their distracters, but "always be ready to give an answer," a theme D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones recognizes in the following comments:

> There is an intellectual case for the gospel, apologetics is a valid part of theology and . . . every Christian should be active in that. So, as men attack the gospel on these various grounds, we should be able to meet their objections and give our reply. It means activity on our part, it means studying and familiarizing ourselves with the facts. Nowhere do I find in the New Testament a picture of the Church as a body of people who spend the whole of their time singing or just relating their experiences and having a so-called good time spiritually. Not at all! They are called to the defence of the gospel; the attack is there and we must say something in reply.[108]

As Lloyd-Jones notes, an intellectual case for the gospel is an important part of the church's witness. Certainly the church is to act as a witnessing community by the way it cares for its own and in the way it cares for those outside the community, but the testimony of the apostles both in word and in deed is that the witness should also be accompanied with a rational explanation and defense of the gospel.

Jesus and Apologetics

Jesus is not often thought of as an apologist. He is noted for his teaching about the kingdom, his miracles, his authority over the demonic world, and his fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Each of these standout features of the life of Christ, however, can

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[108] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Life of Joy and Peace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 63. These words were written relative to Paul's words in Philippians 1:7, but apply similarly to Peter's words in 1 Peter 3:15.

be understood as an apologetic regarding his own identity as God incarnate. Craig Hazen recognizes the same in his comments about Christ as an apologist:

> It is very important to understand that in justifying the task of Christian apologetics throughout the history of the church, it was Jesus himself who set the stage. He did this not by writing apologetic tracts and treatises but by creating what I shall call here an "ethos of demonstration" among his followers. Jesus demonstrated the truth of his message and his identity over and over again using nearly every method at his disposal, including miracle, prophecy, godly style of life, authoritative teaching and reasoned argumentation.[109]

Jesus' efforts to demonstrate the truth of his message and identity is best understood in light of the fact that Jesus did not consider his words "self-attesting." Indeed Christ himself declared that the validity of his teaching rested on external attestation. In John 5:31 he says, "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true." He then goes on to state a number of sources that bore witness to his claim as the Messiah, namely John the Baptist;[110] the works, or miracles, which God have given him to do;[111] God's own words;[112] the Old Testament Scriptures;[113] existential knowledge tied to obedience;[114] the

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[109] Craig Hazen, "Defending the Defense of the Faith," in *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview,* ed. Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 39.

[110] John 1:36, 5:33

[111] John 5:36

[112] Matt. 3:17; John 5:37

[113] John 5:39, 46; Luke 24:25-27

[114] John 7:17

Holy Spirit; and eventually the testimony of the disciples.[115] While Jesus says he personally does not need testimony from human sources to validate his own identity as God incarnate, he recognizes its value in helping people come to salvation: "You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. I do not accept human testimony, but I say this so that you may be saved."[116] Suffice it to say, Jesus recognized the value of providing a rational and corroborated defense when it came to his own identity and teaching.

Jesus' miracles play a particularly important role in attesting to his identity. When John the Baptist found himself in prison (awaiting what was to be his eventual execution) and apparently began to doubt his original declaration that Jesus was the awaited Messiah, he sent his disciples to find Jesus and ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus' response was, "Go tell John what you hear and see: The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news proclaimed to them."[117] Jesus could have said, "Come on, John. You should know better. Of course, I am the Messiah, don't you believe

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[115] John 15:27; Phillip Anthony Gray, "Training Preachers in Christian Apologetics in the 21st Century" (DMin thesis, Erskine Theological Seminary, 1999), 212-13.

[116] John 5:33-34

[117] Matt. 11:3-5

me?" Instead, Jesus pointed to his miracles as his apologetic.[118] These miracles not only indicated that Jesus was full of power (as would be in keeping with one who claimed to be divine), but they also confirmed Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture[119] and the fact that the kingdom of God, which Jesus declared to be at hand, had actually come.[120] In other words, Jesus' miracles were a multi-dimensional apologetic that confirmed his identity from several standpoints.

Another instructive use of miracles as an apologetic occurred when Jesus was met by four men dropping a paralyzed man into a crowded home.[121] Although he knew they sought the healing of their friend, Jesus addresses the situation by telling the paralyzed man that his sins are forgiven. Immediately the religious leaders recognize the gravity of his statement. One may forgive an offense done against them, but only God can forgive sin in general. In other words, the religious leaders understood that when Jesus purported

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[118] In addition to pointing to his own miracles as an apologetic, it is quite possible Jesus' words also referred to the messianic expectations of his day or that of the Old Testament prophets. The Dead Sea Scrolls describe the Messiah as one who would set prisoners free, open eyes of the blind, raise up those who are bowed down, make alive the dead, and send good news to the afflicted. In other words, by replying in the manner he did, Jesus was giving John and his disciples reasons to believe in his messiahship that would have been compelling to first-century Jews. See Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), loc. 487-509, Kindle.

[119] Jesus' words to John's disciples echo Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1.

[120] For a more thorough explanation of the apologetic nature of Jesus' miracles, see "Diminished Deeds: A Fresh Look at Healings and Miracles," in Evans, loc. 1647-1881.

[121] Mark 2:1-12; Matt. 9:2-8; Luke 5:17-26

to forgive the man's sin, he was making a case for his own divinity. How did Jesus substantiate his claim as the Son of Man who stands in the position of authority to forgive sins before the onlookers? He did so through external verification, through the apologetic healing of the paralytic. Hazen comments on this very scene:

> I suppose any religious teacher could have wandered into Capernaum and made spiritual statements such as "your sins are forgiven" and convinced at least a few people to believe that a real activity in the unseen, spiritual world had taken place. But Jesus' goal on this occasion and on many that followed . . . was to help those in attendance have good reason to "know" that he had authority from God and, by implication in the case of the paralytic, that he was the divine Son of God.[122]

In effect Jesus says, "If you don't believe my words by themselves, at least believe me based on my miracles." He says essentially the same just months before his crucifixion:

> Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.[123]

The use of miracles as a defense of his claims certainly seemed to have had its effect, as the crowds that followed Jesus continued to grow. These crowds found their way to Jesus at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. There he orders the tomb opened and, then, prior to raising Lazarus to life, prays: "Father, I thank you that you have listened to me. I knew that you always listened to me, but I said this *for the sake of the crowd* standing around here, that *they may believe that you sent me*."[124] Once again Jesus shows

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[122] Hazen, "Defending the Defense," 38.

[123] John 10:36-38, NIV

[124] John 11:41-42

that he knew the impact of visible miracles and was not afraid to use them as a key apologetic for his claims.

In addition to the use of miracles, Jesus employed strong reasoning skills on several occasions in order to substantiate his teaching. Jesus was particularly drawn to *a fortiori* arguments.[125] For example, when Jesus seeks to support his claim that God will answer those who seek him, he presents the following argument:

> Is there anyone among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him![126]

The form of the argument can be presented in this way:

1. Even though parents are evil they do not typically give their children something dangerous when they ask for something wholesome; instead they give them something good.
2. It is much more likely that God, who is utterly good, will give good gifts to those who ask.
3. Therefore, if it is reasonable to ask for good things from your earthly parents, it is even more reasonable to ask for good things from your heavenly father.

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[125] An *a fortiori* argument takes existing confidence in a particular proposition to argue in favor of confidence in a second proposition by suggesting that there is more reason to believe in the second than the first. For examples of Jesus using this form of argument, see Luke 12:4-5, 6-7, 24, 27-28, 54-56, 14:1-6; 18:1-8.

[126] Matt. 7:9-11

Jesus provides the same kind of *a fortiori* argument when he is accused of breaking the Sabbath by healing a crippled woman. In response, he says:

> You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from its stall, and lead it to water? Then shouldn't this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be released from this imprisonment on the Sabbath day?[127]

Once again we can put Jesus' words in the form of a sound *a fortiori* argument.

1. The Jews lawfully see to the well-being of animals on the Sabbath.
2. The well-being of a woman who has been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years is more important than that of an animal.
3. Therefore, if it is lawful to help an animal on the Sabbath, then it is at least equally lawful to heal a woman on the Sabbath.[128]

The impact of this type of apologetic argument by Jesus was significant. Luke tells us that "all his opponents were humiliated," and those who were disposed to Jesus "were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing."[129]

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[127] Luke 13:15-16

[128] Douglas Groothuis, "Jesus: Philosopher and Apologist," *Christian Research Journal* 25, no. 2 (2002): 49.

[129] Luke 13:17

In addition to *a fortiori* arguments, Jesus used *reductio ad absurdum* arguments in defense of his identity.[130] For example, when Jesus is accused of casting out demons by the power of Satan, he responds in this way:

> Every kingdom divided against itself is destroyed, and no town or house divided against itself will stand. So if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?[131]

The *reductio ad absurdum* argument can be broken down in this way:

1. If I drive out demons by the power of Satan, Satan's kingdom would be divided.
2. If Satan's kingdom were divided, it would be ruined.
3. It is absurd to think that Satan's kingdom is ruined based on the evidence of continued demonic activity.
4. Therefore, Satan's kingdom is not divided.
5. Therefore, I do not act by the power of Satan when I drive out demons.[132]

The purpose in laying out Jesus' arguments here is not to apply philosophical labels to Jesus' rhetoric, but rather to support the contention further that Jesus understood the importance of using sound reasoning in defending his own identity and the nature of

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[130] This type of argument is used to expose the weakness of a given proposition by showing that its premises lead to absurd or illogical conclusions. See also Matthew 22:41-46.

[131] Matt. 12:25b-27a

[132] Groothuis, "Jesus: Philosopher and Apologist," 52.

the kingdom. As J. Gresham Machen concludes, "Even our Lord, who spoke in the plenitude of divine authority, did condescend to reason with men."[133] And if Jesus was willing to reason with men, the church is on solid ground when it seeks to do the same, particularly when we see the language of the New Testament, the missionary activity of the early church, and the teaching of the apostles also supporting the same.

Apologetics in Church History

If it is rightly said that both the Old and New Testament support the use of apologetics, we ought to find apologetic arguments readily employed by those who are recognized as key figures in church history. When one searches the original writings and discourses of church leaders, this is just what is found. A few of these leaders and their apologetic efforts are discussed below.

Justin Martyr (ca. 114-165) and Athenagoras of Athens (d. after 177) were among the earliest noted apologists and they stood against those who charged Christians to be atheists. In his *Embassy for the Christians*, Athenagoras defended Christianity before the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius by stating that when others who had openly declared there is no God are charged with atheism, the Roman state is proper in their judgment. But the charge of atheism could hardly be true for those who

> distinguish God from matter, and teach that matter is one thing and God another, and that they are separated by a wide interval (for that the Deity is uncreated and

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[133] Machen, *What is Christianity?*, 127.

> eternal, to be beheld by the understanding and reason alone, while matter is created and perishable), is it not absurd to apply the name of atheism?[134]

Justin similarly dismissed the charge of atheism in his *First Apology*,[135] and in other writings is found defending the resurrection:

> But even in the case of the resurrection the Saviour has shown us accomplishments, of which we will in a little speak. But now we are demonstrating that the resurrection of the flesh is possible, asking pardon of the children of the Church if we adduce arguments which seem to be secular s [sic] and physical: first, because to God nothing is secular, not even the world itself, for it is His workmanship; and secondly, because *we are conducting our argument so as to meet unbelievers*. For if we argued with believers, it were enough to say that we believe; but now we must proceed by demonstrations. The *foregoing proofs* are indeed quite sufficient to evince the possibility of the resurrection of the flesh; but since these men are exceedingly unbelieving, *we will further adduce a more convincing argument* still,—an argument drawn not from faith, for they are not within its scope, but from their own mother unbelief,—I mean, of course, from physical reasons. For *if by such arguments we prove to them that the resurrection of the flesh is possible*, they are certainly worthy of great contempt if they can be persuaded neither by the deliverances of faith nor by the arguments of the world.[136]

What is of particular note in this defense of the resurrection is that Justin goes on to defend his use of apologetics before the church as well. He understands that his

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[134] Athenenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians by Athenagoras the Athenian: Philosopher and Christian*, trans. B. P. Pratten, ch. vi, Early Christian Writings, accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/athenagoras-plea.html.

[135] See Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Roberts-Donaldson English Translation, ch. v and vi, Early Christian Writings, accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-firstapology.html.

[136] Justin Martyr, *Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection*, Roberts-Donaldson English Translation, ch. v, Early Christian Writings, accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-resurrection.html, emphasis added.

arguments are based on reason and not faith, and he argues that while faith is the language of those who already believe, reason is what must be employed when debating with outsiders the matter of God and the resurrection of Christ.

It is not surprising then that in his writings Justin discussed at length fulfilled prophecy and offered it as a "proof," declaring:

> Though we could bring forward many other prophecies, we forbear, judging these sufficient for the persuasion of those who have ears to hear and understand; and considering also that those persons are able to see that we do not make mere assertions without being able to produce proof, like those fables that are told of the so-called sons of Jupiter.[137]

He uses prophecy as evidence again when arguing against the Jews in *Dialogue with Trypho*,[138] as does Tertullian (ca. 160-220) in *An Answer to the Jews*.[139] For both men, the validity of the gospel could be rationally defended, and fulfilled prophecy was a reasonable proof.

Perhaps the most important apologist of the third century was Origen (ca. 185-254), who responded to Celsus' criticisms of Christianity. In his lengthy *Contra Celsum*, he argued against what Celsus saw as the philosophical, ethical, and historical shortcomings of Christianity. For example, Origen contended that (1) Jesus did not do his

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[137] Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, ch. lii.

[138] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Roberts-Donaldson English Translation, ch. li-liv, Early Christian Writings, accessed January 14, 2014, http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html.

[139] Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, trans. S. Thelwall, ch. viii-xi, Early Christian Writings, accessed January 14, 2014, http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian08.html.

miracles by sorcery, (2) Jesus' resurrection is better explained apart from hallucination, and (3) the miracle stories of paganism do not offer the same credibility as those of the Gospels.[140]

Augustine joined the earliest church fathers in apologetic efforts after he himself was persuaded by a well-reasoned faith. Prior to his conversion, Augustine was a member of a religious cult named after its third-century founder, Mani. Augustine, however, had intellectual doubts about Manichaeanism, and as he was able to receive only shallow and poorly reasoned answers to his concerns, he abandoned his cultic beliefs. Not long after, Augustine found himself in dialogue with two Christian leaders, Ambrose and Pontitianus, who unlike Manichaean counterparts could intelligently address his questions and concerns.[141] Eventually, Augustine converted to Christianity and developed his own apologetic specifically aimed at the Manichaens.[142] Augustine would also defend many doctrines of the faith, including an orthodox view of Jesus' deity, and even addressed the question of evil and free will.[143]

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[140] Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), loc. 658-70, Kindle.

[141] Moreland, *Love the Your God*, 42.

[142] Augustine, *On the Morals of the Manichaeans*, trans. Richard Stothert, rev. and ed. Kevin Knight., accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1402.htm.

[143] Augustine, "Evil and Free Will," in *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, eds. Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 419-21.

Another use of apologetics became important with the rise of Islam. Theodore Abu Qurrah (ca. 775-830) responded to the charge that Christians, in holding to the doctrine of the Trinity, advocate a form of polytheism. In *On the Trinity*, he writes that the failure of Muslims to recognize Christianity as monotheistic is their failure to grasp the distinction between "persons" and "natures." If they understood the difference they could understand that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons, but are of one nature.[144] John of Damascus similarly argued against Islam, criticizing the claim of Muhammad as prophet. He did so on the basis that Muhammad provided no evidence for the divine inspiration of his message and that he falsified his claim to prophet-hood by endorsing sexual immorality. In regards to the former, John offers an *a fortiori* argument along the following lines:

1. The Qur'an stipulates that marriages and business transactions require witness.
2. No witnesses are provided that indicate that Muhammad came from God.
3. Since witnesses are required for the lesser concerns of marriages and business, they are certainly required to verify prophet status.
4. Since Muhammad has no witnesses to his prophetic status, he should not be considered a prophet.[145]

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[144] House and Jowers, *Reasons for Our Hope*, 163-64.

[145] House and Jowers, *Reasons for Our Hope*, 164-65.

Anselm (1033-1109) and Aquinas (1225-1274) stand as significant apologists in the heart of the Middle Ages. Anselm, like Augustine, viewed faith as preceding understanding, but nonetheless offered arguments that faith itself was reasonable.[146] The most famous of his apologetic endeavors was the development of the ontological argument, which posits that the idea of an unsurpassably great being is logically inescapable. Another of Anselm's major contributions to apologetics is found in his book *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why the God-man"), in which he argues that God became a man because, as an infinite being, he is the only one who could provide infinite atonement for man's sin.[147] Aquinas was a prolific defender of the faith. In answering objections to the faith, including the claim that suffering is a defeater of God, he develops the cosmological argument in *Summa Theologica*:

> In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. . . . But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will be there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.[148]

This cosmological argument is offered alongside a teleological argument in which Aquinas argues:

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[146] Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, loc. 727-32.

[147] Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, loc. 733-65.

[148] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2nd and rev. ed, 1920, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican, 1 p, Q2, Art 3, New Advent, accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm.

> We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. . . . Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; . . . Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.[149]

With these arguments in hand, Aquinas replies to the objection of evil, stating:

> Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil. This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow such evil to exist and out of it produce good.[150]

The Reformers' contribution to Christian apologetics is limited in the traditional sense of apologetics. More often than not their arguments are not towards those that deny God, but relative to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, the Reformers, because of their views on the depravity of man, did not see reason as the means by which men would come to faith. John Calvin writes, "It is preposterous to attempt, by discussion, to rear up a full faith in Scripture."[151] This is not to say, however, that Calvin was fully resistant to the use of reason if for no other reason than "to stop . . . obstreperous mouths" of unbelievers. Calvin, while believing "the Spirit is superior to reason" still believed that Scripture could be supported by reasonable argument:

> It is true, indeed, that if we choose to proceed in the way of arguments it is easy to establish, by evidence of various kinds, that if there is a God in heaven, the Law, the Prophecies, and the Gospel, proceeded from him. Nay, although learned men,

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[149] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1 p, Q2, Art 3.

[150] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1 p, Q2, Art 3.

[151] John Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 1, ch. 7, sec. 4, accessed November 6, 2013, http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/calvin/bk1ch07.html#four.htm.

> and men of the greatest talent, should take the opposite side, summoning and ostentatiously displaying all the powers of their genius in the discussion; if they are not possessed of shameless effrontery, they will be compelled to confess that the Scripture exhibits clear evidence of its being spoken by God, and, consequently, of its containing his heavenly doctrine.[152]

With the rise of deism, skepticism, and atheism in the days of the Enlightenment and following, we find a number of new apologists. Joseph Butler (1692-1752) wrote what is recognized as the most important criticism of deism ever published. In his *Analogy of Religion*, he undermines the deists' arguments against Christian particularity and what they called obscure evidence in favor of Christianity.[153]

William Paley, on the other hand, took on atheists in his long-recognized work *Natural Theology*. There he addresses objections still common today: God is nothing but a god of the gaps; only the results of supposed divine design are ever seen, never the act itself; organisms have "flawed designs" (as evidenced, for example, by vestigial organs) which point at best to an imperfect designer; and chance cannot be discounted simply because of improbabilities. It is in *Natural Theology* that Paley introduces the famous "watchmaker" design argument to explain how the design of the universe inevitably points to a designer:

> In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a *stone*, and were asked how the stone came to be there; I might possibly answer, that, for any thing I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever; nor would it be perhaps so easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer that I had before given, that, for any thing I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the

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[152] Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, ch. 7, sec. 4,

[153] House and Jowers, *Reasons for Our Hope*, 181-85.

> watch as well as for the stone? why is it not admissible in the second case as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, *viz.* that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive—what we could not discover in the stone—that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, *e.g.* that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or any other order, than that which in they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none that would have answered the use that is now served by it. . . . This mechanism being observed . . . the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker—that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer, who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.[154]

The French mathematician and scientist, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), added his voice of reason to the others, and is best known for his practical apologetics. While offering a list of "proofs" for Christianity that included the design argument, the witness of the apostles, and fulfilled prophecy,[155] he argues that even if reason could not decide the matter one is nonetheless wise to bet on the Christian proposition:

> "God is, or he is not." But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which separated us. A game is being played at the extremity of infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? . . . Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.[156]

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[154] William Paley, *Natural Theology*, London edition (New York, NY: American Tract Society, 1881), 1, accessed November 6, 2013. https://archive.org/stream/naturaltheology00pale#page/n23/mode/2up.

[155] House & Jowers, *Reasons for Our Hope*, 191.

[156] Blaise Pascal, "The Wager," in *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 96-97. Originally published in *Pensées*, 1669.

All told then, we see that church history supports the use of reasoned arguments to defend the faith. These voices create "a great cloud of witnesses" of those who walked by faith in the use of apologetics in obedience to Scriptures and for the defense and advancement of the kingdom. Add to these witnesses modern apologists like C. S. Lewis, Norman Geisler, Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig, Alister McGrath, and Ravi Zacharias, and the present-day church has good support in pursuing apologetics.

A Response to Objections to Christian Apologetics

Thus far, it has been argued that the use of Christian apologetics by the present day church is supported by New Testament terminology, Old and New Testament narrative and teaching, and the use of apologetics throughout church history. Despite the strong case in its favor, there remain objections to the use of apologetics, and it is helpful to address the more common criticisms individually.

Does Scripture Not Tell Us That Knowledge Puffs Up (1 Cor. 8:1-3)?

It is true that knowledge can lead to an arrogance that is at odds with Scripture's call to love, but as noted earlier Scripture is also adamant that we can and should know things to be true.[157] Thus, when we consider Paul's words in 1 Corinthians, it is best to take them not as antithetical to the pursuit of knowledge, but against any pride that may come with intellectual attainment. In other words, "The proper response to [Paul's]

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[157] Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 193-99.

warning is humility, not ignorance!"[158] This, one might argue, is why Scripture does not shy away from calling us to love God with all our minds and says that when we do not pursue knowledge we do so at our own peril.[159] Certainly, the mind may be used to act arrogantly towards God and others, but it is also a God-given means by which we may love God and, thus, should not be neglected.

Does Knowledge of God Not Come through Divine Revelation and Not the Use of Logic?

It is true that God must open our eyes that we might come to a worshipful and salvific understanding of him.[160] The psalmist declares such when he writes, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."[161] But this is not to say that God does not use logic as a means by which to open our eyes. Earlier in discussing the ministry of Jesus, it was noted that Jesus used standard philosophical forms in the presentation of theological arguments. Furthermore, when Jesus explained to his disciples the meaning of parables, he does not do so by illogical or mystical means; rather, he teaches them truths of the kingdom through discernible metaphors. With Jesus as our example we can use logic with the hope that God might use it as a means to bring divine revelation to others.

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[158] Moreland, *Love Your God*, 61.

[159] Hosea 4:6; Isa. 5:13; Piper, *Think*, loc. 2196-98.

[160] John 6:44

[161] Ps. 119:18

Does Scripture Not Teach That People Are Converted by Faith Not by Reason?

Both Reformed and Arminian thinkers agree that spiritual birth comes by faith and not through the process of reason. But this does not mean that faith is not encouraged by reason or that reason is not necessary for faith. The Bible gives every sense that those who are saved are normatively saved after having understood something about God, namely that righteousness comes by faith in the merciful work of God in Christ. One frankly cannot come to faith without having faith in something, and that "something" requires mental apprehension. Machen agrees with this very sentiment:

> No conversion is ever wrought simply by argument. . . . But because intellectual labor is insufficient it does not follow, as is so often assumed, that it is unnecessary. God may, it is true, overcome all intellectual obstacles by an immediate exercise of His regenerative power. Sometimes He does. But He does so very seldom. Usually He exerts His power in connection with certain conditions of the human mind.[162]

Does the Use of Apologetic Arguments Not Undermine the Work of the Holy Spirit?

The entire Christian life is to be lived in the Spirit.[163] That is, our work and our praise *and* our evangelistic efforts are to be led by the Spirit. In the New Testament, we see men who are led by the Spirit, including Jesus himself using reasoned arguments to encourage faith. This would suggest that rather than undermining the work of the Holy

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[162] Machen, *What Is Christianity?*, 166.

[163] Rom. 8:5-11; Gal. 5:16

Spirit, the use of apologetics likely places us in step with the Spirit. Thus, while it is true that it takes the Spirit for a person to understand the things of God,[164] it may also be that the Spirit works through us to use apologetics so that we can in turn lead others to saving faith. This is the point R. C. Sproul makes when he writes, "We must take the trouble to do our work before the Spirit does his work, because the Spirit does not ask people to put their trust and faith and affection in nonsense or absurdity."[165]

Do We Not Just Need to Expose People to the Word of God?

It may be true that there are those who upon reading the Bible are taken by what they read or hear and find themselves, without the persuasion of others, placing their faith in Christ apart from any particular arguments to do so. But there seems to be a considerably greater number who, once exposed to the Word of God, must wrestle to understand what they read and then become convinced of its validation. This effort to understand is often indispensable to a person's eventual faith. In fact, as John Piper notes, hearing without understanding is meaningless:

> It is true Paul says in Romans 10:17 that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." So hearing is important. But Jesus says that hearing without understanding produces nothing. When we hear the Word of God, Paul says, we must "think over" what we hear. Otherwise, we will fall under the indictment of Jesus: "Hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matt. 13:13).[166]

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[164] 1 Cor. 2:14

[165] R. C. Sproul, *Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Crossway, 2009), 25.

[166] Piper, *Think*, loc. 867-69.

Consider further the great many efforts at the translation of the Scriptures that have been made. If it is true that people only need to hear the Word of God (and need not be mentally engaged in understanding the text), then one could simply read it in its original languages without having any comprehension of it? This strategy, of course, has not proven to be effective because people must be engaged at the level of the mind to come to faith.

If at the Fall Humanity's Reasoning Skills Became Depraved, How Can We Think That Apologetic Arguments Will Have Any Effect?

Scripture is resolute that humanity is fallen and depraved, but this does not keep God from calling us to reason with him or providing evidence in order to encourage our faith, as was discussed above in the section covering apologetics in the Old and New Testaments.[167] While it is true that human depravity means the image of God in humanity has been tainted, it has not been completely eroded. God's post-fall declaration that the death penalty is warranted based on the image of God in humanity is evidence enough that some remnant of the image remains.[168] Further, since God uses reason and appeals to the mind throughout Scripture, we can deduce that God does not see humanity's reasoning abilities as having been completely eclipsed by the fall. J. P. Moreland agrees when he writes:

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[167] Isa. 1:18

[168] Gen. 9:6

> The doctrine of total depravity does not mean that the image of God is effaced, that sinners are as evil as they could possibly be, or that the intellect, emotions, and will are gone or completely useless. Rather, total depravity means that the entire person, including the intellect, has been adversely affected by the Fall and is separate from God. The sinner alone cannot extricate himself from this condition and cannot merit God's favor or commend himself to God on the basis of his own righteousness. Further, the entire personality is corrupt but not inoperative, and every aspect of our personality has a natural inclination to run in ways contrary to God's ways. However, none of this means that reason, considered in itself, is bad.[169]

Since reason itself is not considered bad, we see Scripture, despite our depravity, regularly calling us to use our mind not only in coming to faith but also in leading others to faith. It does so because of a presumption that a reasoned explanation of the Christian faith can be effective.

Does the Argumentative Nature of Apologetics Not Make it Unbiblical?

It is true that God does not want believers to be engaged in foolish arguments,[170] but to consider apologetics a form of foolish arguments is to misunderstand apologetics. Apologetics is about setting forth good reasons for one to embrace the Christian worldview; it is not about arguing with people. As Paul makes clear in both 1 Peter 3:15 and 2 Timothy 2:24-25, Christians are to provide answers to those who ask and correct those who oppose them, but to do so with kindness and gentleness. One way to think of the apologist is as a purveyor of truth. A good salesperson sets forth all the reasons why

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[169] Moreland, *Love Your God*, 59-60.

[170] Phil. 2:14; 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9

someone should buy something, but they do not argue with a potential customer.[171] So should be the case with the Christian apologist.

But Learning to Use Apologetics Is Hard Work; Is It Really for Everyone in the Church?

Undoubtedly the use of apologetics takes some reading, preparation, and perhaps even formal training, and most certainly there are those who have a greater God-given ability to absorb and present apologetic arguments. But this does not excuse the follower of Christ who earnestly seeks to see the lost saved from spending at least some time learning well-reasoned ways to explain and defend the gospel. For this reason, the person with one "talent" in terms of apologetic capacity should put that talent to use, and the one with many talents should put the many talents to use.[172]

Paul Derides Philosophy in 1 Corinthians 1:20 and Colossians 2:8, So Why Should We Embrace Apologetics When It Involves So Much Philosophy?

In both of these passages, Paul is not arguing against philosophy in general (that is, the use of sound, systematic thinking), but rather against the "philosophy of this age," which in Paul's day would have included Stoicism or Epicureanism. In Colossians, in particular, we see Paul crafting a very careful argument just after his remarks in

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[171] Judy Salisbury, "Creating an Apologetic Climate in the Home," in *Is Your Church Ready? Motivating Leaders to Live an Apologetic Life*, ed. Ravi Zacharias and Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 91.

[172] Matt. 25:14-30

Colossians 2:8. He speaks of Christ's deity and the life and power that are given to those who are in Christ; these are his premises.[173] Then, he draws a conclusion based on these premises:

> Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.[174]

This argument (the purpose of which seems to expose the kind of false philosophy Paul was calling out) follows basic tenets of sound philosophy and gives every reason to discount the idea that God is against philosophy in general in Colossians 2:8.

In regards to the 1 Corinthians passage, there is also good reason to believe that Paul is not addressing philosophy in general, but rather worldly philosophy and worldly wisdom. This conclusion is supported by the fact that, in addition to calling out the eloquent use of argument to arrive at "wisdom" (something which was highly prized in Hellenistic culture),[175] Paul also paints a positive picture of the pursuit of wisdom. He says that the preaching of Christ is the "wisdom of God" in Colossians 1:24 and, perhaps more revealing, he contrasts the wisdom of God (which he readily teaches) with the wisdom of the world: "We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature,

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[173] Col. 2:9-15

[174] Col. 2:16-17

[175] Gordon D. Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," *The New International Commentary of the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 74-75.

but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing."[176] Therefore, an examination of both Colossians 2:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:20 suggest that Scripture does not speak categorically against the use of philosophical arguments, but speaks against bad philosophy.

Did Jesus Not Say That the Kingdom of Heaven Was Hidden from the Wise and Learned, But Revealed to Those Who Are Like Children?

Yes, Jesus did utter these words in Luke 10:21, but the questions we must ask are: what is it about the wise and learned that keeps the gospel hidden from them, and what is it that allows the kingdom of heaven to be revealed to children? If we are to understand the passage to mean that a person must become like a child in their thinking and reasoning ability, then most undoubtedly it would not have been revealed to the Apostle Paul, any of the other apostles, or the likes of men like Apollos, as evidenced by the reasoning that is on display in Acts and the epistles. Jesus' words in Matthew 18:3-4 give us the best indication of what it is about children that disposes one to faith: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, *whoever humbles himself like this child* is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." When looking to the nature of children to describe a key element to entering into the kingdom, Jesus specifically points out humility. It is humility, then, not

[176] Col. 2:6

child-like reasoning that is the best understanding of Jesus' admonition to be like little children.[177]

Is Loving People Not a Better Way to Encourage People into the Kingdom than Apologetics?

Scripture undoubtedly calls us to love people[178] and tells us that our love can act as a powerful witness.[179] Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that many people point to the importance of a caring relationship in their coming to faith in Christ. However, even if such evidence suggests that more people come to faith because of the love of others as opposed to reasoned argument, this would not discount that, for some, reasoned argument was a pivotal element in their conversion. In some cases, people may come to faith mostly because of the love they have experienced from Christians, in other cases love and some apologetic arguments may play an equal role, and in still other cases apologetics arguments may be the most important factor in encouraging someone to Christ. Perhaps this is why we see the Apostle Paul as apt to act as a nursing mother to the caring Thessalonians[180] as he was an apologist to the thoughtful Bereans[181] or the

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[177] For a thorough exposition of Luke 10:21, see Piper, *Think*, loc. 1757-1912.

[178] Matt. 22:39; John 15:12

[179] John 13:35

[180] 1 Thess. 2:7

[181] Acts 17:11-15

philosophical Athenians.[182] When it comes to loving others and apologetics, it is not an either/or issue, but a both/and calling.

Is the Apologetic Enterprise Still Valid in a Postmodern Society?

As explored in the first chapter, a significant shift has occurred in the worldview of many in North America, a shift which in part can be attributed to a postmodern mindset. It is debatable, however, just how postmodern the average thinker really is.[183] Postmodernism at its core is about epistemology, and specifically about the inability to access objective knowledge. On certain issues individuals gravitate toward a postmodern perspective; however, when it comes to personally important issues, individuals generally remain adamant that objective truth exists. Furthermore, in the practice of everyday life people behave as moderns, not postmoderns, in the sense that they really do believe that a car moving fifty miles an hour can kill them. Furthermore, they do not believe that belief in the people-killing capacities of cars is just a language game or social construction. One important element of apologetics is to help others recognize that truth does exist and that truth is equally valid in the realms of the natural and the supernatural. In other words, the

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[182] Acts 17:16-34

[183] See William Lane Craig's comments regarding whether we live in a postmodern society. William Lane Craig, "Do We Live in a Post-Modern Society?" Reasonable Faith, accessed January 15, 2014, http://www.reasonablefaith.org/do-we-live-in-a-post-modern-society. A counter to the argument set forth here is found in Myron B. Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

apologetic enterprise is a valuable tool in helping rescue people from the postmodern milieu.[184]

Concluding Remarks Regarding Questions about Apologetics

Responses to the above objections to apologetics are meant to counter those who would easily cast its use aside, but there is a sense in which a defense of apologetics is unnecessary since, as Ravi Zacharias so aptly states, apologetic arguments have an uncanny way of defending themselves.

> Apologetics is a subject that ends up defending itself. The one who argues against apologetics ends up using argument to denounce argument. The one who says apologetics is a matter of pride ends up proudly defending one's own impoverishment. The one who says conversion is a matter of the heart and not the intellect ends up presenting intellectual arguments to convince others of this position. So goes the process of self-contradiction.[185]

As Zacharias points out, the self-defeating argument against intellectual arguments is reason enough to doubt objections to the use of apologetics by the church.

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[184] For material that addresses the shortcomings of postmodernism and the church's response, see R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005) and D. A. Carson's *Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications*.

[185] Ravi Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith We Defend* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), xii-xiii.

Training Others to Teach Apologetics

A major component of this doctoral project is the use of lay leaders in the apologetics conference. It would be possible for me to lead all sessions of the conference, but there are reasons to believe it is important for others in the church to be trained and equipped for ministry in the body. First, Scripture specifically calls Christian leaders to train up leaders underneath them who will in turn train others. Second, it is valuable for the congregation to have models of lay people who have wrestled intelligently with questions of Christianity. Third, it is helpful for apologetics knowledge to be spread among the body so that the longevity of knowledge is better secured.

Paul's instruction to Timothy provides the clearest call to training up leaders: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul taught Timothy in the ways of the Lord and in turn asked Timothy to train others who would then in turn teach others. This is reminiscent of Jesus' own investment in his disciples as well as his departing words: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19-20a). From these words it can be argued that part and parcel to observing Jesus' commands is teaching others to obey Christ's command (which in turn includes going and teaching others). Thus, it is Jesus himself establishes the cycle of teachers teaching teachers.

Paul's writings also give an indication of the importance of having living models who know the Scriptures well enough to teach others in the local congregation (1 Tim. 3:1-7). The value of this instruction is not just that the local church will not go awry, but

so that those who see living models might be encouraged to live a similar life. This is why the writer of Hebrews calls his readers not only to look up to leaders in the church, but to watch their lives and imitate them.[186] Establishing lay leaders as apologetic experts not only provides sources for answers, but also communicates to others in the body that they too can attain similar understanding with some effort.

Paul also recognized that Christ, in his wisdom, dispersed the gifts necessary for a mature church. In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul writes:

> It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.

What is noteworthy here is that when Paul speaks of different roles, he speaks of them in the plural. The church is not to be limited to only one pastor, one prophet or one evangelist, but a plurality of gifted leaders as the Lord provides. From a practical standpoint, this allows even particular roles, such as that of teacher, to be filled by a variety of "experts" on different topics. One benefit of dispersing knowledge in this way is that if one person is called elsewhere or perhaps passes away a congregation does not lose all of its knowledge.

Because Scripture specifically calls churches to (1) be in the business of training up leaders, (2) have models of those living out a reasoned faith, and (3) disperse the work of God through a plurality of leaders, there is every reason for the local church to do the

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[186] Heb. 13:7

same today. Therefore, training lay leaders in areas of apologetics, as is the design of the present project, is reasonably supported.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a biblical and theological rationale for this doctoral project and particularly for its research question: "Is it possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetic understanding among those that attend?" This was accomplished in this chapter, first, by examining Scripture's call to use reason in the comprehension of God's self-revelation. Indeed it was shown that human understanding of God's revelation presupposes and even demands the use of reason. Thus, appealing to reason in the apologetic enterprise is not at odds with the nature of Scripture. Second, the specific use of apologetics in both the Old and New Testaments was explored with particular attention given to examples of Jesus and the apostles. In addition, the apologetic-laden terminology in the biblical text was revealed. In each case, substantial and instructive examples exist of apologetics being employed by Spirit-led leaders. Third, a brief overview of the use of apologetics in church history was sketched and indicated that the contemporary use of apologetics is not a fad. This overview indicated that many of today's apologetic arguments are similar to those that were offered in the days of the early church fathers. Fourth, common objections to apologetics were addressed and found to be wanting. While certain objections might point to possible excesses (such as the attainment of knowledge for prideful motives), in no case do they give reason for a moratorium on the use of apologetics. Finally, because this doctoral project requires

training lay leaders to teach others about apologetics, scriptural evidence for the value of equipping lay leaders was provided. Together each of these strands of support gives strong rationale for the question this doctoral project addresses.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written over the last fifty years in regards to apologetics with a substantial increase in published material in the last twenty years. The increase in apologetic works is likely a reflection of the changing cultural landscape. When the North American culture at large was generally open to Christian thought and retained more elements of a Christian worldview, the need for apologetic arguments was of lesser importance. Now that the culture has been broadly influenced by secular and pointedly non-theistic thinking, it has become imperative that Christians provide a reasoned case for Christianity. The rise in published materials has helped meet the increased demand.

Before discussing the outstanding contributions to apologetic thought available today, it should be mentioned that this doctoral project is not the first to involve training of those within the church. Several others have sought to complete doctoral projects aimed at incorporating apologetics into the church. For example, Phillip Gray specifically considered the training of other vocational preachers in apologetics;[1] Richard Brown, Jr. addressed apologetics in his doctoral project as a part of a large student ministry

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[1] Phillip Anthony Gray, "Training Preachers in Christian Apologetics in the 21st Century" (DMin thesis, Erskine Theological Seminary, 1999).

curriculum;[2] and Thomas Francis, Jr., and Wade Humphries trained laity in apologetics as an integral part of larger evangelism aims.[3] These projects have some commonality with this doctoral project, but none specifically involve teaming with lay leaders to train others in apologetics. Furthermore, while these other doctoral projects are helpful in understanding how others have sought to provide apologetics training of some sort or another, ultimately it is the published work of seasoned apologists that provide the foundation on which this doctoral project rests. What follows, then, is a discussion of chief contributors to various apologetic arguments.

In some cases apologists have sought to address many issues through multi-topic volumes, but many works address a single topic or subset of topics. In this literature review, applicable works will be reviewed by topic whether or not the materials are from a monograph or part of a larger work. Additionally, pertinent non-Christian works that support Christian apologetic aims will be included. In addition to the review of literature for the apologetic topics addressed in this project, a short review of literature related to general pedagogical issues will also be included as this doctoral project includes not only the teaching of apologetics, but the training of leaders to teach others. Overall, it is the

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[2] Richard Stanley Brown, Jr., "A Strategy to Equip Youth Leaders into Developing Strategic, Balanced, and Strong Local Church Student Ministries" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2012); Thomas William Francis, Jr., "Training Church Members to Integrate Apologetics with Evangelism at First Baptist Church of Walton, Kentucky" (DMin thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

[3] Thomas William Francis, Jr., "Training Church Members to Integrate Apologetics with Evangelism at First Baptist Church of Walton, Kentucky" (DMin thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

intent of this chapter to give those interested in pursuing any of the apologetic topics further understanding of the major contributors and the contour of their arguments for each topic area.

The Ramifications of a Godless World

William Lane Craig is Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology. In the opening chapter of his most recent book, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision,* Craig tackles the question, "What difference does it make if God exists?" and in doing so re-works material that was earlier published in *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*.[4] Craig's claim is that if there is no God, there is no meaning, purpose, or value to human life. Each is simply an illusion, "despite our subjective beliefs to the contrary."[5] Craig defines *meaning* as that which has to do with significance, *value* as that which pertains to good and evil, right and wrong, and *purpose* as that having to do with the goal or reason for something.

In regards to meaning, Craig argues that if everyone passes out of existence when they die, then there is no significance to any human accomplishment. In making this claim, he does not say that certain accomplishments might not be relatively important while on Earth, but rather, if all efforts in life lead to the same end, namely destruction,

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[4] William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 29-52; William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 65-90.

[5] Craig, *On Guard*, 30.

one must wonder if any one life can be said to be of greater meaning than another. In fact, since human destination in a Godless world is no different than that of a pig or a plant, humankind cannot even be said to have more significance than other living organisms in the universe.

When addressing value, Craig notes that if life ends at the grave, then the manner in which one lives life is of no ultimate consequence. There is neither moral content in any action nor any attending moral consequences. As such, it does not matter if one brutally and randomly kills others or spends all of life helping the most desperate in need; either course of action is of precisely equal and zero value. Craig puts it this way:

> In a world without God, who's to say whose values are right and whose are wrong? There can be no objective right and wrong, only our culturally and personally relative, subjective judgments. Think of what that means! It means it's impossible to condemn war, oppression, or crime as evil. Nor can you praise generosity, self-sacrifice, and love as good. To kill someone or to love someone is morally equivalent. For in a universe without God, good and evil don't exist—there is only the bare, valueless fact of existence, and there is no one to say you are right and I am wrong.[6]

Finally, when speaking of purpose, Craig asserts that a universe created by chance means that everything in that universe is without purpose. Organisms will come and go, the universe will keep expanding, and life will no longer exist. Even if life does in some form or fashion continue to exist, it would still have no purpose, no end for which it was made. Craig asserts that in that case, "As for man, he's a freak of nature—a blind product

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[6] Craig, *On Guard*, 35.

of matter plus time plus chance," and we are "just a miscarriage of nature, thrust into a purposeless universe to live a purposeless life."[7]

Craig's proposition may, at first reading, seem a bit harsh—the effort of a Christian conservative to paint in a dishonest way the atheistic and naturalistic perspective as so bleak that no one would want to cast their lot in that direction. But Craig's conclusions are not just his own, they are the same as those who embrace the atheistic position. British biologist Richard Dawkins writes,

> In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.[8]

Stephen Jay Gould, in trying to explain the source of resistance to Darwinism, tells us it resides in the lack of purpose that is integral to the theory. According to Gould, "Darwin argues that evolution has no purpose. Individuals struggle to increase the representation of their genes in future generations, *and that is all*."[9] Cornell professor William Provine concurs when he states,

> Let me summarize my views. . . . There are no gods, no purposes, no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain I am going to be dead. That's the end for me. There is no

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[7] Craig, *On Guard*, 37.

[8] Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1995), 133.

[9] Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* (London: W. H. Norton, 1977), 12, emphasis added.

> ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning to life, and no free will for humans, either.[10]

The purposelessness entailed by an atheistic view of life should bring people to despair, and for some it has. But for many, Craig points out, despair is sidestepped by subjectively assigning meaning even when there is none. This, Craig says, is intellectually inconsistent:

> If God does not exist, then life if objectively meaningless; but man cannot live consistently and happily knowing that life is meaningless; so in order to be happy he pretends life has meaning. But this is, of course, entirely inconsistent—for without God, man and the universe are without any real significance.[11]

Atheist Loyal Rue, Professor Emeritus at Luther College, agrees with Craig, but says this sort of conflict is necessary for humans to be psychologically sound. That is, humanity must deceive itself into thinking that rationality and morality are true in order to avoid becoming crazy and destructive. He calls this a "Noble Lie"—noble because it brings a sense of meaning even where there is none.[12] Ultimately, concludes Craig, "living a lie" is the position in which the atheist is placed if he is to escape the utter despair incumbent in a meaningless existence.

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[10] William B. Provine and Phillip E. Johnson, "Darwinism: Science or Naturalistic Philosophy? A Debate Between William B. Provine and Phillip E. Johnson at Stanford University, April 30, 1994," *Origins Research* 16, no .1, accessed March 4, 2013, http://www.arn.org/docs/orpages/or161/161main.htm.

[11] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 79.

[12] See Loyal Rue, *By the Grace of Guile: The Role of Deception in Natural History and Human Affairs* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994).

In regards to value, Craig also sees atheists as living inconsistently more often than not. He notes that Bertrand Russell, though an atheist who did not believe that objective ethical values existed, nonetheless readily denounced war and any restrictions on sexual freedom. Friedrich Nietzsche, who disdained the idea of good and evil, could not accept anti-Semitism and Nazi-German nationalism, and nor could Jean-Paul Sartre. Even New Atheist Richard Dawkins, who was quoted earlier as having no belief in good and evil, is a strident moralist, condemning the harassment of homosexuals and religious indoctrination of children. He has even developed his own Ten Commandments, "all the while marvelously oblivious to the contradiction with his ethical subjectivism."[13] As Francis Schaeffer noted well before Craig did, "To say I am a machine is one thing; to live consistently as if this is true is quite another."[14]

J. P. Moreland, in *Scaling the Secular City*, recognizes that some have tried to escape the conundrum of which Craig speaks by positing that objective morals exist as brute facts of the universe; they are like Platonic forms that have been in play as long as the universe.[15] But, as Moreland notes, there are serious shortcomings to this view, a few of which will be mentioned here. First, even if such brute morals exist, that says nothing about whether we *ought* to live up to them. If for some reason we ought to live according

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[13] Craig, *On Guard*, 43.

[14] Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982), 68.

[15] See Moreland's discussion on "Immanent Purpose and Transcendentalism" in Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City,* 122-28.

to them, one must wonder how we can choose to live up to them since atheism dismisses free will. Second, Moreland believes the theory of evolution creates a significant defeater of floating objective morals:

> If evolutionary theory is all there is to the development of the cosmos from the Big Bang to man, then any view which postulates the brute existence of morals would seem to do so in an ad hoc way. The general background theory would count against the veridicality of the claim to know that morals exist, even though it would be logically possible for them to exist.[16]

Third, Moreland, argues that even if objective morals are part of the "furniture of the universe, it is hard to see why they would have whatever to do with humans."[17] In our universe, there are all kinds of gases and planets, and stars, why should it be that the morals that exist in the universe apply only to one species on one planet?[18] With these counter-arguments, Moreland finds himself in step with Craig in suggesting that when atheists seek to ground objective morals they do so without a worldview that can consistently or easily support them.

In addition to the forfeiture of meaning, value, and purpose inherent in atheism, others have noted additional losses as well. For example, C. S. Lewis, in *The Case for Christianity*, questions whether the atheistic point of view supports human rationality:

> Supposing there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case, nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. It is merely that when the atoms inside my skull happen, for physical or chemical reasons, to arrange themselves in a certain way, this gives me, as a by-product, the

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[16] Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, 125.

[17] Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, 126.

[18] Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, 126.

> sensation I call thought. But, if so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? . . . But if I can't trust my own thinking, of course I can't trust the arguments leading to Atheism, and therefore have no reason to be an Atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I cannot believe in thought: so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God.[19]

Paul Copan, in his presentation of "A Moral Argument," says much the same:

> So not only is objective morality undermined if naturalism is true; so is rational thought. Our beliefs may help us survive, but there's no reason to think they're true. So we may firmly believe that human beings are intrinsically valuable or that we have moral obligations or that we have free will or our choices really matter. This cluster of beliefs may help the *Homo sapiens* survive, but they may be completely false. So if we're blindly hardwired by nature to form certain beliefs because of their survival-enhancing value, then we can't have confidence about the truth-status of these beliefs.[20]

Beyond the loss of objective rationality, others note that atheism also does away with objective beauty. This was David Hume's perspective:

> Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others.[21]

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[19] C. S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1943), 32. *The Case for Christianity* later became the opening chapters of *Mere Christianity*.

[20] Paul Copan, "A Moral Argument," in *Passionate Conviction: Contemporary Discourses on Christian Apologetics*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 89.

[21] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," *English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay*, vol. XXVII, The Harvard Classics, ed. Charles W. Eliot (New York, NY: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14), accessed November 18, 2013, http://www.bartleby.com/27/.

But again, atheists can have a difficult time maintaining that beauty is just in the eye of the beholder. Schaeffer makes this very point when he shares the story of Bernard Berenson, an ardent atheist, who nonetheless was boisterous in his attack on modern art. Schaeffer states, "No man like Berenson can live with his system,"[22] but must take a leap into another worldview out of desperation.[23]

Finally, there are those who recognize that love itself is killed at the altar of atheism. At the very least, in a Godless world love is reduced to nothing more than a chemical reaction akin to the fizz created when baking soda and vinegar are combined. Jean-Paul Sarte admitted the existential impact this kind of reality would have on his fellow man:

> The man who wants to be loved does not desire the enslavement of the beloved. He is not bent on becoming the object of passion, which flows forth mechanically. He does not want to possess an automaton, and if we

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[22] Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 69.

[23] See also Crispen Sartwell's remarks about objective beauty. Despite his atheistic stance, he writes in support of objective beauty: "If beauty is entirely subjective—that is, if anything that anyone holds to be or experiences as beautiful is beautiful . . . then it seems that the word has no meaning, or that we are not communicating anything when we call something beautiful except perhaps an approving personal attitude. In addition, though different persons can of course differ in particular judgments, it is also obvious that our judgments coincide to a remarkable extent: it would be odd or perverse for any person to deny that a perfect rose or a dramatic sunset was beautiful. And it is possible actually to disagree and argue about whether something is beautiful, or to try to show someone that something is beautiful, or learn from someone else why it is." Such remarks would seem inconsistent with atheism, unless one looks to some sort of universal Platonic forms of beauty. These forms, of course, would be subject to the same shortcomings for moral Platonic forms as addressed by Moreland and noted above. Crispin Sartwell, "Beauty," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2012 Edition),* ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed November 13, 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/beauty.

> want to humiliate him, we need try to only persuade him that the beloved's passion is the result of a psychological determinism. The lover will then feel that both his love and his being are cheapened . . . If the beloved is transformed into an automaton, the lover finds himself alone.[24]

Since few want to find themselves alone, atheist or not, love continues to be pursued even if it makes little sense in a Godless world.

In the discussion above, William Lane Craig's argument relative to the ramifications of a world without God has been detailed, while the contributions of J. P. Moreland, Francis Schaeffer and others have been considered as well. Interestingly, they do not seem to stand alone, as if calling across a great divide trying to convince intellectual atheists. Instead they often echo the sentiments of atheists from David Hume to Richard Dawkins and from Jean-Paul Sartre to Loyal Rue.

There is one more contributor to the discussion, however, that should not be forgotten: the author of Ecclesiastes. If not Solomon himself, the writer had access to great wealth and power, and with it sought to find meaning "under the sun." That is, he sought to discover if meaning, purpose, and value could be found apart from looking to the divine, and by operating solely as if the physical world was all that existed. He did not pursue his answers in the realm of thought only but also in experience, and pursued pleasure, education, wealth, and achievement at every turn. At the end of his experiment, he arrives at his conclusion: "'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the Teacher. 'Utterly

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[24] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York, NY: Citadel Press, 1956), 343.

meaningless! Everything is meaningless.'"[25] Thus, it could well be argued that the modern apologist, in suggesting that there is no meaning, value, or purpose apart from God, is not presenting a modern argument but one with ancient roots.

The Fine-Tuning Argument

Observers have long looked at the universe and concluded, based on its order and beauty, that there must be an intelligent and powerful being who created the cosmos. This conclusion did not end with the beginning of the scientific age but, for many, is increasingly reinforced as more and more is discovered about earth and the universe. The fine-tuning argument for God is relatively simple; it states that the conditions that allow for life in the universe, and particularly life on earth, are so unlikely that it is best accounted for by the fine-tuning actions of God. A review of literature indicates that there is general consensus among both theistic and non-theistic scientists regarding the "fine-tuned" nature of the universe; the great question, therefore, is not whether the universe has been fine-tuned, but to what or to whom this fine-tuning should be attributed.

The Evidence for a Fine-Tuned Universe

As cosmological data mounted in the 20th century, it was observed that a number of life-supporting characteristics which Earth enjoys could have been otherwise. In fact, the data kept suggesting that the common denominator among the conditions which

[25] Eccl. 1:2, NIV

describe the universe is that they promote intelligent life on earth. This phenomenon became recognized as the "Anthropic Principle." First coined by Brandon Carter in 1974, the term "Anthropic Principle" became popularized in John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tippler's *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*.[26] Here the authors not only present a number of extraordinarily fine-tuned cosmological "coincidences" necessary to the existence of intelligent observers, but also defend teleology, stating that "teleology has on occasion led to significant scientific advances."[27] Although Barrow and Tippler's purpose was far from arguing for God or a super-being, they nonetheless opened the door wide to recognizing the necessity of certain constants of nature if life is to exist in the universe.

The Coincidental Constants

While *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* provided examples of the fine-tuned constants which govern the universe, others have brought clarity to these constants. Martin Rees did just that in *Just Six Numbers*,[28] a book which, as the title suggests, explores how life would not be possible on earth if any one of six cosmological constants presented were slightly un-tuned. These constants, as explained by Rees, are:

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[26] John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, paperback ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[27] Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, 11.

[28] Martin Rees, *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces that Shape the Universe* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000).

1. The ratio of electromagnetic force to the force of gravity. If this ratio were slightly smaller, "only a short-lived miniature universe could exist: no creatures could grow larger than insects, and there would be no time for biological evolution."[29]
2. The strong nuclear force which defines the strength with which atomic nuclei bind. This force has a value of 0.007. If it "were 0.006 or 0.008, we could not exist."[30]
3. The amount of matter in the universe, which tells us the relative importance of gravity and expansion energy in the universe. If the ratio of gravity/expansion energy were too high, "the universe would have collapsed long ago; had it been too low no galaxies or stars would have been formed."[31]
4. Cosmic anti-gravity, which controls the expansion of the universe. This force is very small; if it were not, "its effect would have stopped galaxies and stars from forming, and cosmic evolution would have been stifled before it even began."[32]
5. The binding force of gravity as a proportion of their 'rest-mass energy,' or about 1/100,000. If this ratio were smaller, the universe "would be a violent

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[29] Rees, *Just Six Numbers*, 2.

[30] Rees, *Just Six Numbers*, 2.

[31] Rees, *Just Six Numbers*, 2.

[32] Rees, *Just Six Numbers*, 3.

place, in which no stars or solar systems could survive, dominated by vast black holes."[33]

6. The number of spatial dimensions, which is three. Life could not exist if the number of dimensions was fewer or greater.[34]

This list has been further expanded by others like Paul Davies,[35] Robin Collins,[36] and Hugh Ross. Ross appears to provide the most exhaustive list as he addresses some 140 different constants that must be within a very small range for there to be life anywhere in the universe, let alone on earth.[37] Many have likened these constants to dials on a control panel; all must be turned to just the right setting in order for life to exist.

The Evidence for a Fine-Tuned Earth

Not only are fine-tuned constants necessary for intelligent life forms to exist anywhere in the cosmos, it has also been noted that there are some extraordinarily rare characteristics about planet Earth that render it particularly conducive to life. In other

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[33] Rees, *Just Six Numbers*, 3.

[34] Rees, *Just Six Numbers*, 3.

[35] See Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma: Why Is the Universe Just Right for Life?* (2006; repr., New York, NY: First Mariner Books, 2008).

[36] Robin Collins, "The Teleological Argument: An Exploration of the Fine-Tuning of the Universe," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 202-81.

[37] Hugh Ross, *Why the Universe Is the Way It Is* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), Appendix C.

words, not only must certain features exist in the universe for life forms to appear, so also certain additional features must be true of our planet for life to be specifically found here. This is perhaps best explored by Peter D. Ward and Donald Brownlee in *Rare Earth: Why Complex Life is Uncommon in the Universe*. They note some of Earth's life-conducive characteristics to be: its location relative to the sun, the size of the moon relative to the Earth (which keeps the Earth's axis just right), the amount of water on its surface, its oxygen rich/carbon poor atmosphere, and its very thin outer crust that allows plate tectonics, among other things. John Gribbin picks up the discussion in *Alone in the Universe: Why Our Planet Is Unique* and looks at many of the same improbable features of Earth. He concludes, "The reasons why we are here form a chain so improbable that the chance of any other technological civilization existing in the Milky Way Galaxy at the present time is vanishingly small."[38] Just how small? Hugh Ross tries to answer the question by assigning probabilities to the parameters for a planet suitable to supporting advanced life as well as for a planet with a suitable ecosystem to support such life. His calculations suggest odds of 10^{281} and 10^{390}, respectively.[39] Considering that the

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[38] John Gribbin, *Alone in the Universe: Why Our Planet Is Unique* (Hoboken, NY: Wiley, 2011), 205.

[39] Hugh Ross, Appendix C.

maximum possible number of planets in the universe is estimated to be 10^{22}, the evidence is not only that the universe has been fined-tuned for life, but so also has planet Earth.[40]

A Twice-Privileged Planet

The idea that the universe has been fine-tuned for life and that Earth in particular has special properties conducive to life has been readily appreciated for several decades, but few recognized how unique Earth's observational platform is for seeing the fine-tuned constants. Fewer still saw any significant correlation between the narrow set of conditions that allow life to exist on Earth and the narrow set of conditions that provide perhaps the best vantage point possible for seeing the rest of the universe.

This began to change, however, with the work of Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards and the publication of *The Privileged Planet*.[41] Here Gonzalez and Richards review some of the features that make the planet suitable for life, but more importantly they expose how those same features are important for observation of the universe. For example, they note the importance of the moon in maintaining a properly tilted Earth, but they also note how the same moon is perfectly suited to create solar eclipses. It is these solar eclipses which, in turn, allow for otherwise unavailable observations to confirm

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[40] Hugh Ross, Kenneth Samples, and Mark Clark, *Lights in the Sky and Little Green Men: A Rational Christian Look at UFOs and Extraterrestrials* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), Appendix C.

[41] Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards, *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos Is Designed for Discovery* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2004).

general relativity or the formation of stars.[42] The transparent property of Earth's atmosphere presents another example: it lets in the light necessary for temperature regulation and photosynthesis, but it also allows for humans to view the heavens.[43]

Similarly, the Earth's location outside of the "dusty" regions of the Milky Way not only precludes galactic interference disruptive to life, it also provides a clear vantage point to peer even beyond our own galaxy.[44] Based on evidence like this, they conclude,

> Our local environment, centering on the near-present time and Earth's surface, is exceptional and probably extremely rare, with respect to both its habitability and its measurability. Further, the evidence suggests that in our universe these two properties are yoked, that those highly improbable places best suited for the existence of complex and intelligent observers also provide the best overall conditions for making diverse and wide-ranging scientific discoveries.[45]

What makes this "yoking" particularly odd is that it does not seem to be in anyway necessary:

> If we did not know otherwise, in fact, we might even expect that the habitability of an environment would detract from its measurability. For instance, intergalactic space, which is obviously low on the scale for habitability, is "better" for seeing distant galaxies than is the surface of a planet with an atmosphere. We might suspect this is generally true. . . . But when we combine the various phenomena that need measuring and observing, it turns out that the opposite is the case.[46]

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[42] Gonzalez and Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, 1-19.

[43] Gonzales and Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, 65-68.

[44] Gonzalez and Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, 146-51.

[45] Gonzalez and Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, 221.

[46] Gonzalez and Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, 305.

Furthermore, in response to those who take an evolutionary perspective, Gonzalez and Richards note that the observability of the universe "was irrelevant to the needs of ancient man. That is, knowledge derived from such phenomena provided no survival advantage to our ancestors."[47] The discovery of Earth's unique vantage point in the universe begs for an explanation. At the very least, it calls for dismissal of the Copernican Principle, or the Principle of Mediocrity. If we are, as Carl Sagan said, "a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark,"[48] we are lonely not because we are ordinary, but because we are extraordinarily fit for life and discovery.

Interpreting the Data

While debate will always exist as to what counts towards legitimate fine-tuning data, consensus among those representing a wide variety of schools is that the universe requires its unique features if it is to sustain life anywhere in the cosmos. The Earth's characteristics simply could not have been widely different than they are if complex, intelligent life was to flourish. But why is this the case? Different voices suggest different possibilities.

Paul Davies, in *The Goldilocks Enigma*, suggests seven different possible answers:

1. The universe is absurd and just happens to be the way it is.

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[47] Gonzalez and Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, 305.

[48] Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1994), 7.

2. The universe has some deep underlying unity that necessitates the universe being as it is. Eventually a Theory of Everything will explain why the universe and Earth are just as they are.
3. Multiple universes exist. These universes have a wide variety of characteristics. Given enough universes, it is inevitable that there is one like our own.
4. "The universe is created by God and designed to be suitable for life because the emergence of sentient beings is part of God's plan."
5. There is some underlying life principle "that constrains the universe/ multiverse to evolve towards life and mind."
6. The universe explains itself. There is some kind of "causal loop" where the universe cannot help but create itself.
7. The universe is not the real world and is just some kind of virtual reality show that some unknowable agent has caused.[49]

Davies own "inclinations" tends in the direction of 5 and 6, as he concludes,

> I cannot accept these features as a package of marvels that just happen to be, that exist reasonlessly. It seems to me that there is a genuine scheme of things—the universe is "about" something. But I am equally uneasy about dumping the whole set of problems in the lap of an arbitrary god or abandoning all further thought and declaring existence ultimately to be a mystery.[50]

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[49] Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma*, 261-67.

[50] Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma*, 267-68.

In contrast to Davies, William Lane Craig limits his approach to answering the why question of fine-tuning to just three possibilities: chance, necessity, and design.[51] The chance option overlaps Davies' option 1 and perhaps option 3. The necessity option could be said to overlap Davies' options 2, 5, and 6, while the design option could cover Davies' options 4 and 7. Craig dismisses the necessity option as being "fantastically implausible,"[52] for every indication "is that life-prohibiting universes are not only possible but far, far more likely than any life-permitting universe."[53]

In regards to chance, Craig's examination leans on the design inference theory of William Dembski, which essentially states that when there is an event that conforms to an independently given pattern and that pattern is complex (such as being dealt a Royal Flush three times in row), we should seek an explanation apart from chance. Given that the probability of the constants of the universe are "vanishingly small" and also given that the finely-tuned conditions requisite for life represent an independent and complex pattern, "one is 'warranted in inferring' that the physical constants and quantities given in the Big Bang are not the result of chance."[54] With necessity and chance both eliminated, Craig posits design by an intelligent designer as the most plausible option.

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[51] See Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 161-172; Craig, *On Guard*, 11-124; and William Lane Craig, "Design and the Anthropic Fine-Tuning of the Universe," in *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science*, ed. Neil A. Manson (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 155-75.

[52] Craig, *On Guard*, 112.

[53] Craig, *On Guard*, 113.

[54] Craig, "Design and Anthropic Fine-Tuning," 162-65.

Although ending with the same results, Robin Collins addresses the why of fine-tuning differently than Davies or Craig. His approach is to consider the atheistic explanation and the theistic explanation and then select which of the two options is most plausible. It is not that other options do not exist, but as these are the predominant options he believes that limiting himself to these two is legitimate. Formally, his argument is framed in this manner:

1. The existence of the fine-tuning is not improbable under theism.
2. The existence of the fine-tuning is very improbable under the atheistic version of the single-universe hypothesis.
3. From premises (1) and (2) . . . it follows that the fine-tuning data provide strong evidence to favor the design hypothesis over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.[55]

Collins considers premise 1 uncontroversial, for "if God is an all good being, and it is good for intelligent, conscious beings to exist, it is not surprising or improbable that God would create a world that could support intelligent life."[56] Premise 2 is supported in largely the same way as Collins dismisses the chance option by saying that if

> the initial conditions of the universe and the fundamental parameters of physics are thought of as a dart board that fills the whole galaxy, and the conditions that are necessary for life to exist as a small one-foot wide target. . . . it would be

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[55] Collins, "A Scientific Argument," 75-91.

[56] Collins, "A Scientific Argument," 78.

> highly improbable for the fine-tuning to occur under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis—that is, for the dart to hit the target by chance.[57]

Responding to Critics of the Design Inference

If life in the universe, and on Earth in particular, requires a vast array of factors to be fine-tuned with great precision, and if the odds of that fine-tuning are infinitesimally small, what sort of objections or alternatives are there to concluding that an intelligent designer must be involved? There are several, and it is helpful to understand the theistic responses to those objections. Stephen M. Barr provides a good list of these objections or alternatives in *Modern Physics and Ancient Faith*.[58]

First, it has been suggested that since we do not know with certainty what the parameters of a life-producing and life-sustaining cosmos are, we cannot truly assess how unlikely it is that our present universe has such parameters. Barr replies that while certainty on this matter is not possible, given the complexity of the factors involved, it is possible to have "a great deal of confidence" with regard to at least some features such as the age of the universe and the variety of elements. Since the question of fine-tuning is one of plausibility and not certainty, the theist is justified in arguing that life-giving

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[57] Collins, "A Scientific Argument," 78.

[58] Stephen Barr, *Modern Physics and Ancient Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2006).

parameters consistent with current scientific understanding are more plausible than scenarios which are conjured up without any substantial support.[59]

Second, it has been argued by some that science will eventually provide explanations for anthropic coincidences. While this might be true, it is arguable as to whether this is a real objection. As Barr writes,

> [E]ven if all the physical relationships needed for life to evolve were explained as arising from some fundamental physical theory, *there would still be a coincidence*. . . . If life requires dozens of delicate relationships to be satisfied, and a certain physical theory requires dozens of delicate relationships to be satisfied, *and they turn out to be the very same relationships*, that would be a fantastic coincidence.[60]

Third, it may be argued that if there is some grand, unified theory of everything that requires the cosmic constants to fall within a small range, would a divine designer even have a free, intelligent choice in the matter? Barr answers yes. Since there is conceivably an infinite number of grand unified theories that could be chosen, God retains unlimited maneuverability. Also, there is no logic that would require that any grand, unified theory would need to exist in the first place.[61]

Fourth, some have proposed the idea of many domains as a plausible explanation for the coincidence of life permitting parameters in the cosmos. The many domains approach suggests that while the whole universe is subject to the same underlying fundamental laws, different parts of the universe appear to have different physical laws at

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[59] Barr, *Modern Physics*, 143-45.

[60] Barr, *Modern Physics*, 145-46.

[61] Barr, *Modern Physics*, 146-47.

certain states. Since it is possible that there are a great number of domains, it is highly likely that at least one would have life-permitting properties. But whether this explanation effectively dismisses anthropic coincidences is dubious, for as Barr states, "having laws that lead to the existence of domains of a sufficiently rich variety to make life inevitable would *itself* qualify as an anthropic coincidence."[62]

Fifth, and perhaps most commonly, a multiverse explanation is posited for the anthropic coincidences. In other words, rather than there being one universe with many domains operating under the same fundamental laws, there are many universes which are not subject to any of the same laws. These universes are infinite, or at least great in number; thus, according to multiverse proponents it is not surprising that at least one is capable of producing life. In response, Barr questions why it is necessary that any of the universe exists. Furthermore, he asks why, if there are so many universes, would it not be necessary that universes of every description exist (including ones in which there are atheists who errantly come up with multiverse theories).[63]

On the issue of multiverses, Robin Collins offers even more rebuttals. First, he suggests that "we should prefer hypotheses for which we have independent evidence or that are natural extrapolations from what we already know."[64] If this is true, then

> In the case of fine-tuning, we already know that minds often produce fine-tuned devices, such as Swiss watches. Postulating God—a supermind—as the

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[62] Barr, *Modern Physics,* 154.

[63] Barr, *Modern Physics,* 155-56.

[64] Collins, "A Scientific Argument," 81.

> explanation of the fine-tuning, therefore is a natural extrapolation from we what already observe minds to do. In contrast, it is difficult to see how the atheistic many-universes hypothesis could be considered a natural extrapolation of what we observe.[65]

Second, like Barr, Collins wonders why there has to be any universes at all. If there are multiverses, the question of how the universes are generated remains.[66] Third, Collins recognizes that any universe generator must not just randomly select the parameters of physics, it must also select the very laws of physics. This makes the multiverse hypothesis "even more farfetched."[67] Fourth, many-universe scenarios do not do a good job of explaining the extraordinary beauty, elegance, harmony, and ingenuity that so many have recognized in the universe. While the theistic explanation easily accounts for such features, the atheistic multiverse hypothesis can only call this a remarkable coincidence.[68] Finally, Collins wonders how it is that the highly ordered arrangement of the universe is explained by the multiverse hypothesis. Would not the second law of thermodynamics suggest that order would at best be in just a small patch of the universe and not the whole?[69]

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[65] Collins, "A Scientific Argument," 81.

[66] Collins, "A Scientific Argument," 81-82.

[67] Collins, "A Scientific Argument," 82.

[68] Collins, "A Scientific Argument," 82.

[69] Collins, "A Scientific Argument," 82-83.

In addition to the responses by Barr and Collins, others also have issues with the atheistic rebuttals to or alternative explanations of the fine-tuning argument. John Polkinghorne is not at all convinced that an infinite collection of anything, let alone universes, is a "guarantee that it will contain one with any particular property. There are an infinite number of even integers, but one will never be found with the property of oddness."[70] Thus, why should one assume that an infinite, or near infinite, number of universes are sufficient enough to produce one life-producing universe?

John Lennox, in response to Stephen Hawking's claim that the laws of the universe can themselves cause the universe apart from any intelligent intervention, reminds his readers that laws can never bring anything into existence, but "can only act on something that is already there."[71] This is not Lennox's only problem with Hawking. He also finds it problematic when Hawking says that the universe came from *nothing*, or when he claims the universe can cause itself. The first claim is not accurate because the *nothing* Hawking posits is really *something* (for example, the law of gravity or quantum fluctuations). The latter claim is self-contradictory because, "If . . . we say 'X creates X,'

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[70] John Polkinghorne, "God and Physics," in *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology, An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 463-70.

[71] John Lennox, *God and Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2011), loc. 850, Kindle. In this book Lennox is responding to Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York, NY: Bantam, 2010).

we imply that we are presupposing the existence of X in order to account for the existence of X."[72]

Finally, William Lane Craig is particularly pointed in addressing the suggestion that we should not be surprised that we observe a universe that permits intelligent life since only if this were the case would we be here to observe it. This was essentially Barrow and Tippler's contention:

> We should emphasize again that the enormous improbability of the evolution of intelligent life in general and *Homo sapiens* in particular at any randomly chosen point in space-time does *not* mean we in particular exist here. . . . [O]nly if an intelligent species does evolve in a given space-time location is it possible for its members to ask how probable it was for an intelligent species to evolve there.[73]

But Craig says it does not follow that since we are alive to observe life-permitting conditions that we should not be surprised by the life-permitting conditions in the first place. To illustrate this point, Craig borrows from John Leslie's firing squad illustration:

> Suppose you are dragged before a firing squad of 100 trained marksmen, all of them with rifles aimed at your heart, to be executed. The command is given; you hear the deafening sound of the guns. *And you observe that you are still alive*, that all of the 100 marksmen missed! Now while it is true that . . . you should not be surprised that you do not observe that you are dead, nonetheless it is equally true that . . . you should be surprised that you do observe you are alive. Since the firing squad's missing you altogether is extremely improbable, the surprise you expressed . . . is wholly appropriate, though you are not surprised that you do not observe you are dead, since if you were dead you could not observe it. Similarly, while we should not be surprised that we do not observe that the fundamental features of the Universe are not fine-tuned for our existence, it is nevertheless true that…we should be surprised that we do observe that the fundamental features of

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[72] Lennox, *God and Stephen Hawking*, loc. 314-15.

[73] Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Principle*, 566.

> the universe are fine-tuned for existence, in view of the enormous improbability that the Universe should possess such features.[74]

Given the generally agreed upon improbability of a life-permitting universe and a life-permitting Earth, the question of why we have such a universe must be confronted. While different options are available to answer this question, it should be the aim of honest inquirers to seek the most plausible. Theism's case that an intelligent designer best accounts for the evidence is difficult to trump. While other arguments might be possibilities, we have "this world" experience that intelligence is a very plausible explanation for complexity that is not easily explained by chance or necessity. This is why even atheists like the eminent Fred Hoyle have had to admit:

> A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question.[75]

The Moral Argument

The moral argument for the existence of God is generally considered under the broader heading of teleological or design arguments. In general, it defends the existence of objective morals, and then argues that their existence flows from a transcendent being.

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[74] Craig, "Design and Anthropic Fine-Tuning," 169-70. The illustration was originally found in John Leslie, *Universes* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[75] Fred Hoyle, "The Universe: Past and Present Reflections," *Engineering and Science* (November, 1981): 12.

As just one strand of the design argument, the moral argument is generally presented alongside fine-tuning arguments or biological design arguments and consumes a chapter or section of a multi-topic work like Douglas Groothuis' *Christian Apologetics*. However, in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?*,[76] we find an entire work dedicated to the topic of the moral argument. It begins with an edited transcript of a 2001 debate between William Lane Craig and Paul Kurtz,[77] continues with contributions from others on both sides of the debate, and ends with closing responses by Craig and Kurtz. Although there are some valuable perspectives provided by the detractors of the moral argument in this volume, this literature review will focus on the chapters authored by supporters of the moral argument before including the contributions of others not featured in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?*

William Lane Craig

The book begins with the Kurtz-Craig debate transcript. Craig is the second to speak and begins his opening statement by unequivocally stating that he believes a person can be moral without a belief in God. At the same time, he tells his audience that the moral argument is not about whether it is possible to be good without *belief* in God, but

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[76] Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King, eds., *Is Goodness without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

[77] Paul Kurtz was professor emeritus at the State University of New York at Buffalo until his death in 2012. He was a strong proponent of secular humanism and a prominent skeptic.

whether it is reasonable to conclude there is anything that we can objectively call good if there is no God. More specifically, Craig sets out to defend two propositions: (1) if theism is true, we have a sound foundation for morality, and (2) if theism is false, we do not have a sound foundation for morality.[78] In defense of the first proposition, Craig says that morality is rooted in the holy and loving nature of God, who "supplies the absolute standard against which all actions are measured."[79] In addition, Craig argues that because God holds all persons accountable for their actions, theism not only provides the basis for objective morals, but also the assurance that in the end the scales of justice will be balanced.[80]

The larger part of Craig's debate argument concerns the second proposition. He contends that because the atheistic view of life considers humanity "accidental byproducts of nature" one cannot argue for human morals any more than for other organisms of nature. Accordingly, Craig states,

> Thus, if there is not God, then any basis for regarding the herd mentality [of moral behavior] by Homo sapiens as objectively true seems to have been removed. Some action—say, rape—may not be biologically or socially advantageous and so in the course of evolution has become taboo; but on the atheistic view there's nothing really wrong about raping someone. Such behavior happens all the time

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[78] Paul Kurtz and William Lane Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate: Is Goodness without God Good Enough?" in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?* ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 30.

[79] Kurtz and Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate," 30.

[80] Kurtz and Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate," 31.

> in the animal kingdom. . . . [T]he rapist who chooses to flout the herd mentality is doing nothing more serious than acting unfashionably.[81]

In addition to this point, Craig argues that even if there was a case to be made for objective morals and duties, there is no moral accountability. Whether "one lives as a Stalin or a saint," there is no difference because life ends at the grave.[82] This means, among other things, that if altruism is only a result of evolutionary conditioning, the altruist is ultimately "just stupid," because

> [A] firefighter rushing to a burning building to rescue people in anger or a policeman who sacrifices his life to save those of his comrades does nothing more praiseworthy, morally speaking, than an ant that sacrifices itself for the sake of the ant heap.[83]

In developing his argument through the course of the debate, Craig clarifies two substantial features of his argument. First, he notes that his propositions are conditional in nature. That is, they state "*if* God exists" or "*if* God does not exist." Thus, when using the moral argument Craig is not so much defending the existence of God as he is trying to expose the implications of a God-present or God-absent world.[84] Secondly, Craig suggests that the atheist's case is weakened because he must fight on two fronts. Atheists must fight against the idea that theism does indeed provide a rational basis for moral

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[81] Kurtz and Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate," 32.

[82] Kurtz and Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate," 33.

[83] Kurtz and Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate," 33.

[84] Kurtz and Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate," 37.

objectives, duties, and accountability, and they must debunk the conclusion that nihilism is the most reasonable response if atheism is true.[85]

Although Craig's argument does not require the substantiation of the existence of God, it is clear that Craig's purpose in presenting the argument is to move people to the conclusion that God does indeed exist. His assumption is that when pressed, people are generally unwilling to discard their intuitive sense that moral objectives do exist and embrace nihilism. In other words, Craig believes that if he can help people understand that moral objectives only make sense within the framework of theism, their intuition regarding moral objectives will move them to conclude that God exists. Putting this line of thought into the framework of a formal argument, as does Craig, it reads:

1. If God does not exist, objective morals do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.[86]

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[85] Kurtz and Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate," 30-33.

[86] Craig, *On Guard*, 129

C. Stephen Layman

C. Stephen Layman is professor of philosophy at Seattle Pacific University and has frequently written on God and morality, and specifically on the moral argument.[87] In his book, *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?*, Layman explains that, unlike Craig, he does not believe that if theism is false, there are no moral objective truths. He does not dismiss the possibility out of hand, but he does believe there are other plausible meta-ethical theories such as moral Platonism that could account for the existence of objective moral truths without God.[88]

Layman's argument, thus, takes a different shape than that of Craig. First, he argues that moral theorists are right in generally agreeing that moral reasons are overriding. That is, although it might be in one's own self-interest to sleep in late and lie about traffic causing a delay, moral reasons override self-interest and encourage one to get up on time or at least speak honestly about her tardiness. But then Layman adds a

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[87] For example, see C. Stephen Layman, "Why Be a Superhero? Why Be Moral?," in *Superheroes and Philosophy*, ed. Tom Morris and Matt Morris (Chicago, IL: Open Court Press, 2005), 161-176; C. Stephen Layman, "God and the Moral Order: Replies to Objections," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (April 2006): 304-316; C. Stephen Layman, "God and the Moral Order," in *Ethical Theory*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); C. Stephen Layman, *Letters to Doubting Thomas: A Case for the Existence of God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 229-249.

[88] It is important to note that in making the case against Craig, Layman is only arguing against the impossibility of objective morals apart from God. He is not arguing against Craig's case that God is necessary for there to be objective moral duties or moral accountability.

second argument: "If there is no God and no life after death, then the Overriding Reasons Thesis is not true."[89] To substantiate his point, he presents a story in which a woman in great poverty is presented with an opportunity of dishonest gain that will almost certainly relieve her of a lifetime of poverty and will also most certainly not be discovered by others. In Layman's view, without the second thesis regarding God's existence and the possibility of gain or loss after death, any overriding reason to choose the path of honesty and poverty over dishonesty and abundance is without force or prudence.[90]

John E. Hare

John E. Hare is Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale University and has written extensively on the topic of God and morality, most notably in *God and Morality, God's Call, The Moral Gap*, and *Why Bother Being Good?*[91] The latter two are largely centered on developing a moral argument for the existence of God and impact the shape of his contribution to *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?* Hare's argument takes on a decidedly different contour than either Craig's or Layman's

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[89] C. Stephen Layman, "A Moral Argument for the Existence of God," in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?*, 54.

[90] Layman, "A Moral Argument," 55.

[91] John E. Hare, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007); John E. Hare, *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); John Hare, *Why Bother Being Good? The Place of God in the Moral Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

and asks, "Is Moral Goodness without Belief in God Rationally Stable?" which is the title to his chapter. Before defending his answer in the negative, he states, "to say that a morally good life without belief in God is rationally unstable is not to say that it is impossible."[92] This statement has him agreeing with Craig and most other theists that belief in God is not a pre-requisite for moral behavior. For Hare, however, the question is not whether it might be possible on some level, but whether it is rational to believe it can be attained consistently apart from God given what we know of human experience.

Along these lines, Hare believes it is not inappropriate to seek one's own happiness, but that morality calls us to place our own happiness at no greater level than equal to the happiness of others so as to create the highest good for all. Unfortunately, history has shown us that much of what makes human experience miserable is an inability to do exactly this. For Hare *oughts* imply *can*; if a person is unable to do something, we do not consider him or her morally culpable. Since humans have proven unable to produce on a consistent level the highest good through moral behavior, is it rational to believe that such behaviors are indeed moral in nature since *oughts* are not accompanied by *can*? Hare answers it is not.

Rather than stop here, Hare goes on to suggest that theism does rationally support morality, and it does so based on the possibility afforded by God of creating "a collective and consistent happiness."[93] For those who do not believe in God, there is a gap between

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[92] John Hare, "Is Moral Goodness without Belief in God Rationally Stable?," in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?*, 85.

[93] Hare, "Is Moral Goodness without Belief in God Rationally Stable?," 88.

morality's demand and human's capacity to fulfill the demand. This gap, however, is filled in the theist's account of the world by inserting God's revelation. This revelation, in turn, reorders humanity's preoccupation with self and subsequently offers regeneration in order to assist in one's ability to reorder priorities. For Hare, the theist's position (particularly relative to the atheist's stance) is rationally stable because "God is both the source of the moral demand on us and the enabler of our compliance."[94]

Richard Swinburne

Richard Swinburne is emeritus Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion, University of Oxford, and has written several books related to apologetics, including *The Coherence of Theism*, *The Existence of God*, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* and *Faith and Reason*.[95] In his essay, "What Difference Does God Make to Morality?,"[96] Swinburne disagrees with Craig that objective morals require the existence of God and instead believes that the existence of God makes a significant difference in the content and knowledge of morality as well as in the seriousness with which one approaches morality. Thus, Swinburne does not propose a moral argument for

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[94] Hare, "Is Moral Goodness without Belief in God Rationally Stable?," 90.

[95] Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[96] Richard Swinburne, "What Difference Does God Make to Morality?," in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?*, 151-63.

the existence of God, only the argument that if God does exist it makes a substantial difference.

Swinburne's argument for why morals do not necessarily entail the existence of God revolves around the idea that objective morals are epistemologically basic and exist in all possible worlds. If theists and atheists can know them to be true and if they are true in all possible worlds, then Swinburne believes it cannot be said that their existence is contingent on God: "The existence of God makes no difference to the fact that there are necessary moral truths."[97] It is not clear, however, that Swinburne's argument is a defeater of Craig's proposition. Craig does not argue that atheists cannot know moral truths or that they are not true in all possible worlds; rather, he argues that moral truths have no plausible reason for their existence apart from God, an issue which Swinburne never directly addresses.

Swinburne's case that the existence of God makes a great difference is multifaceted. He argues, first, that the existence of God shapes contingent moral truth. For example, if being thankful to benefactors and seeking to please them is a necessary moral truth, then it is a contingent moral truth that we should be thankful to God and obey his commands if he does indeed exist.[98] Second, the existence of God "makes morality a much more serious matter than it would be otherwise" because of its impact on

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[97] Swinburne, "What Difference Does God Make," 155.

[98] Swinburne, "What Difference Does God Make," 155-56.

our future.[99] This argument coincides with Craig's understanding that theism gives a basis for moral accountability. Third, Swinburne says that if God exists and made us from nothing and sustains the laws of nature that work in our favor, then we owe him a great debt, which undoubtedly makes a difference in our morality.[100] Finally, Swinburne suggests that God makes a difference because of the knowledge he can provide regarding moral truths. He is able to help us discover what we are incapable of discovering ourselves, both in regards to necessary moral truths and contingent moral truths.[101] On this point, he overlaps with John Hare in that God is presented as one who can give us what it takes to do what we ought.

The contributors to theistic moral argument in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?* provide a good sampling of the representative thought on the topic and expose some of the best thinkers. Two additional contributors, however, are worthy of mention. One is C. S. Lewis, and the other is Paul Copan.

C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis opened his popular defense of "mere Christianity" (which was first broadcast on the BBC, later published in *The Case for Christianity*, and subsequently *Mere Christianity*) with a moral argument. While he certainly helps his listeners see the

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[99] Swinburne, "What Difference Does God Make," 159.

[100] Swinburne, "What Difference Does God Make," 157-59.

[101] Swinburne, "What Difference Does God Make," 159-60.

causal relationship between God and the existence of objective moral laws, perhaps his greatest contribution is the means by which he undergirds one's confidence in the existence of such morals laws.

Lewis supports the case for objective moral laws by exposing how humans, like it or not, cannot help but appeal to some "Law of Right and Wrong" or "Rule of Decent Behavior." Two men may quarrel, but their quarrel is never about whether fairness is a legitimate standard, only about which one is acting in accordance to that standard.[102] This is because fairness, or unselfishness, or promise keeping, is part of an objective moral law. We might want to pass these off as local societal convention, evolutionary herd instinct, or learned response, but none of these arguments sit well with Lewis.

Lewis says that what is right and wrong is recognized in virtually every culture. There might be particular aspects of the law that differ from society to society (e.g., the appropriate number of wives), but the basic tenets are largely the same (e.g., nearly all society holds that you should keep your hands off another man's wife).[103] Lewis dismisses the claim that morals are herd instincts because of their status as adjudicators over our primal urges: "The Moral Law isn't any one instinct or any set of instincts: it is something which makes a kind of tune (the tune we call goodness or right conduct) by

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[102] Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*, 3-7.

[103] Lewis gives evidence of the similarity between the moral beliefs of different cultures in C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (1943; repr., New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 91-109.

directing the instincts."[104] In other words, the Moral Law is what determines which instincts should be obeyed in any given circumstance. Finally, he argues against the idea that because we learn morals from parents and teachers they are simply human inventions. This is certainly not so, says Lewis, for in that case we would have to dismiss multiplication facts as simply human inventions because we learn them from others as well.[105]

After presenting his arguments and counter arguments for objective morals, Lewis ultimately argues that the moral argument is better than design arguments which are based on the make up of the universe because it tells us something more about the designer: "You find out more about God from the Moral Law than from the universe in general just as you find out more about man by listening to his conversation than by looking at a house he has built."[106]

Paul Copan

Paul Copan is Professor and Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He is the author of numerous popular apologetics

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[104] Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*, 10.

[105] Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*, 10-11.

[106] Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*, 25.

books[107] and has frequently presented the moral argument in books like *To Everyone an Answer*, *Passionate Conviction*, and, most recently, *Legitimizing Human Rights*.[108] One of his most robust defenses of the moral argument is a chapter in *The Rationality of Theism*,[109] in which he offers two main arguments as well as a response to the *Euthyphro* question, features which are common to his other works as well.

His first argument is that moral values are properly basic; that is, "to deny them is to reject something fundamental about our humanness,"[110] as would be the case if we rejected all logical truths or epistemic beliefs. Along these lines Copan writes,

> Although these *prima facie* beliefs may be defeasible, in the absence of any decent defeaters for holding them there is just no good reason to reject them. . . . Similarly, many of our moral prescriptions are so inescapable that we would do serious damage to our noetic structure in rejecting their validity.[111]

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[107] See, for example, Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004); Paul Copan, *How Do You Know You're Not Wrong? Responding to Objections That Leave Christians Speechless* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005); Paul Copan, *That's Just Your Interpretation: Responding to Skeptics Who Challenge Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001); and Paul Copan, *"True for You, but Not for Me": Overcoming Objections to Christian Faith*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2009).

[108] Paul Copan, "A Moral Argument," in *To Everyone an Answer*, 108-23. Paul Copan, "A Moral Argument," in *Passionate Conviction*, 79-92; Paul Copan, "Grounding Human Rights: Naturalism's Failure and Biblical Theism's Success" in *Legitimizing Human Rights: Secular and Religious Perspectives*, ed. Angus J. L. Menuge (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 11-32.

[109] Paul Copan, "A Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (London: Routledge, 2003), 149-74.

[110] Copan, "A Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism*, 150.

[111] Copan, "A Moral Argument" in *The Rationality of Theism*, 151.

His second argument is that objective morals are a much better fit in the theistic perspective than in the non-theistic perspective. It is his thesis that "in deciding between two competing hypotheses, we should look for (a) the more natural (less ad hoc) transition from the overall theory to the entity in question, (b) the more unified theory, and (c) the more basic theory."[112] For Copan, theism wins out on all counts and should thus be seen as the more adequate answer for the properly basic belief we have in moral objectives.

Finally, it is common for Copan in his writings to include a response to the *Euthyphro* question which is often raised as an insurmountable dilemma for theists. The question is from Plato's *Euthyphro* dialogue, when Socrates ponders: "Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?"[113] The dilemma exists if one chooses the first option, since it makes God's moral judgments appear arbitrary. If, however, the second option is chosen, then there is a moral code that stands outside of God to which God is subservient. Copan considers this to be a false dilemma and that God's own character grounds goodness with no need to look elsewhere.

Of course, an atheist may then ask if the character of God is good because it is God's character or is God character's good because it is good. To this Copan offers six

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[112] Copan, "A Moral Argument" in *The Rationality of Theism*, 154.

[113] Cited in Copan, "A Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism*, 151. Copan references the quote as from Plato, *Euthyphro* 10a, in *Plato, The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. Lane Cooper (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 178.

responses, two of which are presented here. First, if the naturalist is correct and there is a real dilemma, then would not this dilemma apply to her as well? For certainly we can also ask the atheistic moral realist: "Are . . . moral values good simply because they are good, or is there some independent standard of good to which they conform?"[114] Second, Copan suggests that "the naturalist's query is pointless since we must eventually arrive at some self-sufficient and self-explanatory stopping point beyond which the discussion can go no further."[115]

Considered together, the case argued by these diverse thinkers makes the moral argument formidable. It posits God as the necessary source of morality, but just as importantly it presents our knowledge of objective morality as properly basic. In doing so, it offers an argument in which the foundational premise is not substantiated by "something out there," but by humanity's intuitive sense that there are objective morals. This is perhaps why Lewis offers it as his main argument for the existence of God and why Craig, even though he admits to a personal preference for the Kalam cosmological argument, has found the moral argument to be more effective.[116]

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[114] Copan, "A Moral Argument" in *The Rationality of Theism*, 166.

[115] Copan, "A Moral Argument" in *The Rationality of Theism*, 166.

[116] Craig, *On Guard*, 144.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

The Kalam cosmological argument for the existence of God is not new to the apologist's handbag. Its history goes back at least to the 6th century, but the modern use of the argument has largely been spearheaded by William Lane Craig. Craig completed his first Ph.D. at the University of Birmingham, England.[117] He titled his dissertation "The *Kalām* Cosmological Argument," which, since its completion in 1979, has been Craig's hallmark defense for the existence of God. In addition to publishing his dissertation by the same title,[118] he includes significant sections on the topic in his more popular works *Reasonable Faith*[119] and *On Guard*,[120] and has used the argument in countless public debates and presentations.

The proposed formulation of the Kalam cosmological argument is rather simple, involving two premises and a single conclusion:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.

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[117] Craig begins *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* with a thorough history of its origination and development. Its earliest proponent appears to be John Philoponus, a 6th century Christian philosopher, scientist, and theologian. Because the argument is largely in defense of a monotheistic God, it later became attractive to both Muslims and Jews and was significantly developed by Saadia ben Joseph (882-942) and al-Ghāzāli (1058-1111) before being championed by St. Bonaventure (1221-1274). It was al-Ghāzāli in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers* who fully developed the argument, and since al-Ghāzāli was of the *kalam* movement of Arabic thought and philosophy, Craig aptly used the term to name the argument for contemporary discourse. William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 3-60.

[118] Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*.

[119] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 111-56.

[120] Craig, *On Guard*, 127-46.

2. The universe began to exist.

3. Therefore the universe has a cause of its existence.

Craig contends that if the two premises can be substantiated then the conclusion follows, and thus spends the bulk of his text defending the premises.

Craig defends the second premise first and does so with two philosophical arguments and two empirical confirmations. The first philosophical argument has to do with actual infinities. Craig argues that while potential infinities exist, actual infinities do not exist in the real world. He states his case with some rather heady mathematical diagrams as well as with some more accessible examples that reveal the absurdities which would exist if actual infinities occurred in the real world. One such illustration is "Hilbert's Hotel," which was conceived by David Hilbert, one of the most influential mathematicians of the late 19th and early 20th century. Hilbert concludes, "the infinite is nowhere to be found in reality. It neither exists in nature nor provides a legitimate basis for rational thought. The role that remains for the infinite to play is solely that of an idea."[121] Without actual infinites, Craig argues, the universe simply could not have existed in eternity past.[122]

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[121] David Hilbert, "On the Infinite," in *Philosophy of Mathematics*, ed. Paul Benacerraf and Hilary Putnam (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), accessed January 16, 2014, http://www.math.dartmouth.edu/~matc/Readers/HowManyAngels/Philosophy/Philosophy.html Also quoted in Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 87.

[122] Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 102.

Craig's second philosophical argument in support of the second premise is that the formation of an actual infinite by successive addition is an impossibility. This argument does not assume that actual infinites cannot exist, but says that even if they did exist it would be impossible for a temporal series of events to become an actual infinite no matter how much time is allowed. This is so for the simple reason that another event could always be added to the series.[123] Without the possibility of arriving at an actual infinite, one is left asking how one could arrive at the present if the universe is infinitely old. The answer, of course, is that one cannot, and the second premise is further supported.

The two philosophical arguments for the second premise can be traced back to the medieval contributors mentioned above, but Craig goes on to add two "empirical confirmations" that derive themselves from modern science. The first of these confirmations is the well-supported Big Bang Theory. Though initially resisted by the likes of Albert Einstein, observations by Edwin Hubble and the discovery of microwave background radiation by Penzias and Wilson eventually made the beginning of an expanding universe a finite time ago a conclusion few would deny. In his 1979 work, Craig mentions two attempts to bypass the conclusion—namely the Steady State Theory and the oscillating model—and then adds other efforts in his later work, *Reasonable*

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[123] Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 103.

Faith.[124] He shows the shortcomings of each alternative model, and in the latter publication agrees with the words of the non-theist cosmologist, Alexander Vilenkin:

> It is said that an argument is what convinces reasonable men and a proof is what it takes to convince even an unreasonable man. With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past-eternal universe. There is no escape: they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning.[125]

The second empirical confirmation concerns the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which in the broadest sense means there is a "general tendency towards leveling in nature"[126] such that less ordered states are more probable over time. Because the universe is a closed system, with no energy going in and out of it, it is argued that if the universe had an infinite past, equilibrium would have already been achieved and the present temperature, pressure, and gases, of the universe would be uniform. Since this is not the case, Craig says we have one more piece of support for the premise that the universe came into existence at a finite time in the past.

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[124] See Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 128-39, 144-50, where Craig addresses the Steady State Model, oscillating models, vacuum fluctuation models, chaotic inflationary models, quantum gravity models, string scenarios, inflationary multiverse theories, and baby universes, and discusses their inability to sidestep a finite universe.

[125] Cited in Craig, *On Guard*, 92. Craig references Alexander Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2006), 176. Vilenkin essentially repeats this conclusion in a paper presented with Audrey Mithani at a 2012 Cambridge conference celebrating Stephen Hawking's 70th birthday. See Audrey Mithani and Alexander Vilenkin, "Did the Universe Have a Beginning?," accessed November 12, 2013, http://arxiv.org/pdf/1204.4658v1.pdf.

[126] Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument,* 130.

Craig began his dissertation by defending the second premise because at the time of its writing there were few he believed would find fault with the first premise since even skeptics of the past had upheld it. In fact, before offering any support of the first premise, Craig boldly states, "For the first premise is so intuitively obvious, especially when applied to the universe, that probably no one in his right mind *really* believes it to be false."[127] Nonetheless, he offers two short defenses. The first is the argument from empirical facts which he considers overwhelming: "Constantly verified and never falsified, the causal proposition may be taken as an empirical generalisation enjoying the strongest support experience affords."[128] The second argument is based on the *a priori* category of causality wherein the causal principle is defended by the Kantian-derived idea that the mind brings the *a priori* category of causality to all experience.[129]

Craig admittedly spent little time defending the first premise in his 1979 publication, because, as mentioned, he figured few would bother attacking it. As others began to interact with his material and enter into the debate, he found there was more resistance than he anticipated. In fact, in *Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology*, a work which represents a 1993 debate between Craig and philosopher Quentin Smith, Smith pronounces, "The fact of the matter is that the most reasonable belief is that we

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[127] Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument,* 141.

[128] Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 145.

[129] Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 145-48.

came from nothing, by nothing and for nothing."[130] Thus, in his later works, Craig adds to his defense of the first premise.[131] First, because some find in the seemingly indeterminate generation of matter at the quantum level a possibility for the universe as a whole to be generated out of nothing, Craig exposes the somewhat misleading nature of the quantum argument. He notes that quantum theories have to do with particles originating out of a "vacuum," and that the vacuum described is not nothing, but rather a sea of fluctuating energy governed by physical laws that have a physical structure.[132] For Craig, the use of these theories in support of something coming from nothing is most certainly disingenuous. Secondly, Craig responds to critics of the first premise by asserting the absurdity of something coming from nothing; for if something can come from nothing, then why does not anything or everything come into being from nothing. He pointedly asks,

> Why don't bicycles and Beethoven and root beer just pop into being from nothing? Why is it only universes that can come into being from nothing? What makes nothingness so discriminatory? There can't be anything about nothingness that favors universes, for nothingness doesn't have any properties. Nor can anything constrain nothingness, for there isn't anything to be constrained![133]

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[130] William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 135

[131] See Craig, *On Guard*, 75-78; Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 111-116; William Lane Craig, "The Cosmological Argument," in *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 91-93.

[132] Craig, *On Guard*, 76.

[133] Craig, *On Guard*, 77.

Having set forth a defense of the first and second premises of his Kalam cosmological argument, Craig finds the conclusion inescapable: the universe has a cause. But more than recognizing that the universe has a cause, Craig goes on to say it may be plausibly argued that this cause is a personal being who freely chose to create the world independent of any pre-existing conditions. In *On Guard*, Craig expands on the nature of this personal God:

> In my view, then, God existing alone without the universe is changeless and timeless. His free act of creation is simultaneous with the universe's coming into being. Therefore, God enters into time when He creates the universe . . .
>
> The *kalam* cosmological argument thus gives us powerful grounds for believing in the existence of a beginningless, uncaused, timeless, spaceless, changeless, immaterial, enormously powerful Personal Creator of the universe.

Although coming to a conclusion in favor of theism, Craig is also careful to recognize the limitations of the argument:

> The *kalam* cosmological argument leads us to a personal Creator of the universe, but as to whether this Creator is omniscient, good, perfect, and so forth, we shall not inquire. These questions are logically posterior to the question of his existence. But if our argument is sound and a personal creator of the universe really does exist, then surely it is incumbent upon us to inquire whether He has specially revealed Himself to man in some way that we might know Him more fully or whether, like Aristotle's unmoved mover, He remains aloof and detached from the world that He has made.

Overall, the distinctive feature of Craig's Kalam argument relative to other cosmological arguments is the premise that the universe came into existence. R. Douglas Geivett indicates that this unique feature gives the argument at least four advantages: (1) the claim that the universe came into existence fits nicely with the *ex-nihilo* creation account of Genesis 1, (2) the claim that the universe began to exist makes it more intuitive than the claim that the universe is contingent—a feature common to other cosmological arguments, (3) for those using the argument from contingency, the claim

that the universe had a beginning is one more indication it is indeed contingent, and (4) the claim that the universe had a beginning has both philosophical and scientific support.[134]

As mentioned earlier, since the publication of Craig's dissertation, he has presented his Kalam argument on countless public stages and has willingly allowed for its scrutiny as its chief proponent. While others have written short chapters or articles on the Kalam argument, they borrow largely from Craig and do not add significantly to his presentation of the argument. On his website, *Reasonable Faith*, Craig offers transcripts of numerous debates with the likes of Stephen Law, Lawrence Krauss, Edwin Curley, Michael Tooley, and more, eleven of which have to do with the existence of God wherein Craig offers the Kalam cosmological argument in one form or another.[135] Two debates have been published in book form: one with Quentin Smith, as mentioned earlier, and one

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[134] R. Douglas Geivett, "The Kalam Cosmological Argument," in *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview: Essays in Honor of Norman L. Geisler,* ed. Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 63-64.

[135] See a listing of debate transcripts at http://www.reasonablefaith.org/debate-transcripts.

with the late Antony Flew.[136] An additional published critique of Craig's argument is offered by Paul Draper.[137]

As might be expected, in the course of public debate Craig has been confronted with criticism, some of which he addresses in a chapter entitled, "Objections So Bad I Couldn't Have Made Them Up (or, the World's 10 Worst Objections to the Kalam Cosmological Argument)."[138] There he counters objections to the form of the argument, the first and second premises, and the conclusion. While he does not claim in this article that all critiques of his argument are without merit, he does find many objections easily dismissible due to a misuse of terms or logical fallacies. All in all, Craig's Kalam cosmological argument continues to stand the test of time and demands a reasoned response by detractors.

The Historical Reliability of the Gospels

Christianity is unique among the major world religions in that it ties its beliefs, ethics, and worldview to God's historical engagement in the world, and particularly the incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, the trustworthiness and authority of Christian

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[136] William Lane Craig and Antony Flew, *Does God Exist? The Craig-Flew Debate*, ed. Stan W. Wallace (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

[137] Paul Draper, "A Critique of the Kalam Cosmological Argument," *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 5th ed., ed. Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), 45-51.

[138] William Lane Craig, "Objections So Bad I Couldn't Have Made Them Up (or, the World's 10 Worst Objections to the Kalam Cosmological Argument)" in *Come Let Us Reason*, ed. Copan and Craig, 51-65.

orthodoxy is tied to the historicity of Jesus' life on earth, particularly as it is recorded in the Gospels of the New Testament. If it is unreasonable to believe in the historicity of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christian position is poorly grounded. Conversely, if it is reasonable to believe in the historicity of the Gospel narratives, then the call to follow Christ is compelling.

For many Christians the historicity of the Gospels is a given. If it is in the Bible, then it happened as recorded. While this argument may be convincing for those who presuppose the historicity of Scripture, it is not a compelling argument for those who stand on the outside seeking to discern whether the Gospel accounts reflect historical events, legend, Christian dogma, a deliberate attempt to deceive, or some kind of hybrid. Thus, it is important that the Christian be prepared to provide something beyond "It's true because the Bible says it's true." New Testament scholar Craig A. Evans writes,

> Some conservative Christians will, of course, simply respond by saying, "Whatever the New Testament Gospels say Jesus said or did I accept as historical." That may work for those who already accept the inspiration and authority of the Bible. But what about those who would like to have sound, compelling reasons for accepting the Gospel narratives as reliable? Telling them that the Bible is inspired and therefore true without providing any criteria that historians would recognize will not satisfy them. After all, don't Mormons say the same thing with respect to the Book of Mormon? Don't Muslims affirm the inspiration of the Qur'an? One holy book after another could be appealed to in this manner. Is this the only defense that can be made?[139]

Fortunately, there are defenses that can be made other than appealing to an *a priori* commitment to Scripture's historicity. These defenses cover many fronts, including the genre of the Gospels, the input of eyewitnesses, the transmission of the narratives

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[139] Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, loc. 539-43.

both before (oral) and after (textual) they were first recorded, evidence inside and outside the Gospels, alleged contradictions, the existence of other gospels, and the problem of miracles. Books such as Craig Blomberg's *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*[140] or the more accessible *Can We Trust the Gospels?*[141] by Mark D. Roberts touch on many of these issues, but other works lend significantly to any one or more of the above topics and will be considered below.

The Question of Literary Genre

It is not uncommon for Christians to defend the historicity of the New Testament in general, or the Gospels in particular, by addressing questions of transmission. Transmission is an important issue, but if the Gospel text is clearly not indicative of a literary genre common for other historical accounts from the same period, transmission may become a moot point. In other words, if the literary style and structure of the Gospels has more in common with mythologies than with historical accounts, perfect transmission lends nothing to the argument of historicity.

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[140] Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

[141] Mark D. Roberts, *Can We Trust the Gospels? Investigating the Reliability of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

Craig S. Keener provides a good overview of genre possibilities for the Gospels in *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*.[142] He considers the options of folk literature, memoir, novel, drama or mythography, and the idea that the Gospels are a genre unto themselves. All of these options, however, pale considerably in light of the option of biography (or *bios*), since "we have numerous examples of surviving biographies within a few decades after the Gospels, and others much earlier."[143] It is with these surviving biographies that the Gospels most readily compare. This conclusion is particularly supported in Richard Burridge's book, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*.[144] Here he concludes:

> [T]he gospels all share an identical genre, that of Βίος, and also make up a subgenre within that genre, namely Βίοι Ἰησου. . . . [T]he idea that the gospels are Βίοι would be untenable if no connection with Hellenistic literary culture was possible for their authors and readers. In fact, not only is such a link possible, it is demanded by the generic features of the texts themselves and also by the social setting of early Christianity.[145]

As Burridge explains, the Gospel writers wrote in the literary form they did because the form already existed in their day, and further, their immediate audience understood what

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[142] Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

[143] Keener, *The Historical Jesus*, 78.

[144] Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 2nd ed. (Dearborn, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

[145] Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 254-55.

they wrote because that literary form was commonly recognized and understood for what it was, namely biography.

It is important to note, however, that ancient biographies should not be treated as modern biographies. This is not to say that they are not historical in nature, but that ancient biographies were meant to magnify heroes and provide models for moral instruction.[146] As Keener recognizes, "Such histories tended to be 'encomiastic,' magnifying heroes, but . . . such an emphasis does not make them fictitious."[147] Thus, while the Gospels are sometimes dismissed as non-historical because they so obviously lift up Jesus, such magnification is arguably a mark of their ancient historicity. This is especially the case since ancient writers had documented concerns for accuracy in recording historical events, even if they had greater rhetorical goals than today's biographers. To this point, Keener notes, while "many historians did not achieve common ideals of accuracy. . . . [h]istory was supposed to be truthful, and historians harshly criticized other historians whom they accused of promoting falsehood, especially when they were thought to exhibit self-serving agendas."[148] One can conclude, then, that the

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[146] Keener, *The Historical Jesus*, 78.

[147] Keener, *The Historical Jesus*, 80.

[148] Keener, *The Historical Jesus*, 96.

apologist is not misguided in contending that the historicity of the Gospels is plausible despite the magnification of Jesus or any other noticeable rhetoric features in the text.[149]

The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony

While the Gospels are representative of ancient biographies, it can also be said that their historical content is the result of immediate human testimony by witnesses of the events. This is precisely the thesis of Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*.[150] In this work, Bauckham exposes the primacy of eyewitnesses in Greco-Roman historiography, with greatest weight given to the historian as eyewitness and secondary weight given to the investigation of those who were eyewitnesses.[151] Thus, while modern history might exalt the dispassionate observer, the ideal ancient historian was one who, as a participant, was "closest to the events and whose direct experience enabled him to understand and interpret the significance of what he had seen."[152] There is evidence this was the approach of the early keepers of the Gospel accounts.

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[149] For a full discussion on ancient historiography and how the Gospels compare to other ancient historical literature, see Keener, *The Historical Jesus*, 109-25.

[150] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

[151] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 21-24.

[152] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 9.

In particular, Bauckham refers to Papias, an early second-century Christian leader who was an acquaintance of the prophetess daughters of Phillip (one of the Seven of Acts 6). Papias writes,

> I shall not hesitate also to put into properly ordered form for you [singular] everything I learned carefully in the past from the elders and noted down well, for the truth of which I vouch. For unlike most people I did not enjoy those who have a great deal to say, but those who teach the truth. Nor did I enjoy those who recall someone else's commandments, but those who remember the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and proceeding from the truth itself. And if by chance anyone who had been in attendance on (*par ēkolouthēkōs tis*) the elders should come my way, I inquired about the words of the elders—[that is,] what [according to the elders] Andrew or Peter said (*eipen*), or Philip, or Thomas or James, or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and whatever Aristion and the elder John, the Lord's disciples, were saying (*legousin*). For I did not think that information from books would profit me as much as information from a living and surviving voice (Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. 3.39.3-4).[153]

What is telling about this and what Bauckham highlights is the concern Papias had for investigating those closest to the actual events and those who had personally heard the words of Jesus and the apostles.

There is good reason to believe this would have been the concern of a first-century historian as well. Thus, while some seek to dismiss the Gospels as a developed legendary account without historical controls, the evidence is that the early church was adamant in ensuring that only stories rooted in eyewitness accounts were preserved and forwarded. One should not be surprised then by the prologue to Luke's Gospel:

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[153] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 15-16. Bauckham makes the following notation in regards to this quote: "Apart from the first sentence and the translation of *parēkolouthēkōs tis* as 'anyone who had been in attendance on,' this translation is from Lightfoot, Harmer, and Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 314, with the words in square brackets added."

> Now many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, like the *accounts passed on to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning*. So it seemed good to me as well, because I have followed all things carefully from the beginning, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know for certain the things you were taught.[154]

Nor should one be surprised to find Gospels written by eyewitnesses Matthew and John, or by Mark, who had direct access to Peter's eyewitness accounts.

Oral Transmission

The eyewitness accounts found in the Gospels were not recorded as they were happening. While there is ongoing debate about the date of each of the Gospels, the collection is generally dated between three and six decades after the death of Christ. This means that the stories related in the Gospels were first orally communicated before they were transmitted by text. With oral transmission comes the issue of memory, as the events had to be remembered apart from reference to a written text. The question is therefore raised, Is it possible to remember events accurately over time? This is precisely the question that Robert McIver addresses in *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels*.[155] In reviewing the literature on memory research, McIver notes that while there is undoubtedly a loss of memory about details of any experienced event with the passage of time, there is evidence that accurate memories about certain kinds of events can be

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[154] Luke 1:1-4

[155] Robert K. McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

maintained over a thirty to sixty year time frame. This evidence includes (1) the stability of memory after the initial loss of certain details in the first three to four years after an event,[156] (2) a higher retention rate for that which is visually experienced and not just verbally experienced,[157] (3) improved memory of events which for the participant are "of greater salience, emotional involvement, or more pleasant,"[158] (4) the proven possibility of retaining personal event memories for several decades,[159] and (5) the indicated ability of personal event memories to get the gist of an event right even if some specific details are wrong.[160]

McIver also delves into the study of collective memory, or memory that is held by a community about an event. On this issue he notes that studies indicate collective memory "only very rarely contains information that is unrelated to actual events"[161] and that "there are strict limits to innovations that can be introduced into the collective memory that any group has for its founder. Any newly introduced materials must be

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[156] McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and Gospels*, 35-40.

[157] McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and Gospels*, 37-38.

[158] McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and Gospels*, 33.

[159] McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and Gospels*, 49-58. Personal event memories are defined as those that represent a specific event that took place at a particular time and place, include a detailed account of a person's own personal circumstances when the event occurred, and are accompanied by various sensory images.

[160] McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and Gospels*, 58.

[161] McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and Gospels*, 186.

consistent with what is remembered of the founder's doings and sayings."[162] Thus, McIver concludes that despite the imperfectness of memory,

> it must not be overlooked that eyewitness testimony is generally reliable, and the eyewitness memories that lie behind the Gospel accounts should therefore be approached with an attitude that expects them to be a generally reliable record of Jesus' sayings and doings.[163]

When considering oral tradition, Kenneth Bailey's article, "Informed Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels,"[164] is particularly insightful. Bailey has specialized in Middle Eastern New Testament Studies and has had extensive life experience in the Middle East. In watching how stories are maintained in Middle Eastern culture, he has noted that oral knowledge is maintained neither through informal uncontrolled tradition (where "knowledge" is re-crafted over and over with little concern for the original event) nor through formal controlled tradition (wherein knowledge is kept through strict, formal, and verbatim recitation processes).

Instead, it is maintained by an informal controlled tradition in which the contour of knowledge is consistent with the original event, but in which certain flexibility is given to "approved" storytellers (those who have long been a part of the community) to emphasize certain parts of the story or to shape the flow of dialogue. Such flexibility, however,

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[162] McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and Gospels*, 186.

[163] McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and Gospels*, 186.

[164] Kenneth E. Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Themelios* 20 (1995): 4-11. The article was originally published in the *Asia Journal of Theology* 5 (1991): 34-54.

never allows for the basic story line to be altered: "To change the basic story-line while telling that account . . . is unthinkable. If you persisted, I think you would be run out of the village."[165] The effectiveness of informal controlled tradition in maintaining an account of the original event without substantial change has been documented by Bailey to be effective for at least one hundred years, if not many centuries.[166]

Based on such information, Bailey concludes,

> It is my suggestion that up until the upheaval of the Jewish-Roman war *informal controlled* oral tradition was able to function in the villages of Palestine. Those who accepted the new rabbi as the expected messiah would record and transmit data concerning him as the source of their new identity. . . . [T]he Jewish-Roman war would have disrupted the sociological village structures in which the *informal controlled* tradition functioned. However, anyone twenty years old and older in that year would have been an authentic reciter of that tradition. . . . Not everyone who lived in the community in the village and heard stories of Jesus was authorized to recite the tradition. The witness was required to have been an *eyewitness* of the historical Jesus to qualify. . . . Thus, at least through the end of the first century, the authenticity of that tradition was assured *to the community through specially designated authoritative witnesses*.[167]

These "designated authoritative eyewitnesses" would have been the apostles themselves or those who were also with Jesus during his earthly ministry; it is they who would have ensured that the ministry of Christ on earth be remembered properly. As Richard Bauckham notes,

> The fact that these informants—whether the Twelve or other disciples—were not only eyewitnesses but also prominent teachers in the early Christian movement shows . . . that they did not merely start the traditions going and then withdraw

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[165] Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition," 8.

[166] Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition," 7-9.

[167] Bailey, "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition," 10.

> from view but remained for many years the known sources and guarantors of traditions of the deeds and words of Jesus.[168]

Thus, it is safe to say that oral transmission in Middle Eastern culture is a far cry from the "telephone game" that is frequently used to discount the accuracy of the Gospel records.[169] In the telephone game, there are no controls after the first transmission, but in the case of the accounts concerning the life of Jesus, there would have been controls throughout the transmission process that would have ensured its accuracy.

Textual Transmission

The Apostle Paul tells us in his first extant letter to the Corinthians that the narrative of Christ that he had passed on was the same as had been passed to him.[170] That is, he confirmed that he had maintained the accuracy of the oral transmission of events. Eventually, however, the church recognized the need to record in written form the life of Christ, likely because the living eyewitnesses were becoming fewer and because, as the church spread, there were those who would seek to distort the Gospel story. The original manuscripts for each of the Gospels have not been identified (nor it is it likely that they could be identified as original even if found), and only copies of the manuscripts remain.

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[168] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 30.

[169] For a more thorough analysis of the inappropriateness of the telephone game as an analogy of first century oral tradition, see Roberts, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 71-81.

[170] 1 Cor. 15:3-4

The question that must therefore be addressed is: can we trust the accuracy of the manuscripts in representing the originals?

The question of textual transmission is addressed in a number of works including Bruce Metzger's *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*,[171] as well as more accessible books such as *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* by F. F. Bruce,[172] *Can We Trust the Gospels?* by Mark D. Roberts,[173] *Is the New Testament Reliable?* by Paul Barnett,[174] and *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text and Canon* by Arthur G. Patzia.[175] As these texts indicate, the earliest extant Gospel manuscripts date only to the second century, with no complete collection of the Gospels dated before the fourth century. This presents a problem for the historicity of the Gospels if there is reason to believe that the text was altered between the original writing and the extant documents. Confidence as to whether the extant copies are reflective of the original, however, is greatly increased when there are a large number of manuscripts and when the manuscripts date near the original.

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[171] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[172] F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

[173] Roberts, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*.

[174] Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

[175] Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text and Canon*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

In regards to the New Testament, more than five thousand extant manuscripts exist, with the earliest dating within a century of the originals. Metzger explains how this compares to other ancient manuscripts:

> [T]he time between the composition of the books of the New Testament and the earliest extant copies is relatively brief. Instead of the lapse of a millennium or more, as is the case of not a few classical authors, several papyrus manuscripts of portions of the New Testament are extant which were copied within a century or so after the composition of the original documents.[176]

Similarly, F. F. Bruce states:

> The evidence for the New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt. It is a curious fact that historians have often been much readier to trust the New Testament records than have many theologians. Somehow, or other, there are people who regard a 'sacred book' as *ipso facto* under suspicion, and demand much more collaborative evidence for such a work than they would for an ordinary secular or pagan writing. From the viewpoint of the historian, the same standards must be applied to both.[177]

Metzger, Bruce, and others are able to make these claims because the plethora of manuscripts allows textual critics to discern where there has been errors in transmission and whether they are intentional or inadvertent. Furthermore, as Metzger notes, there are so many quotations of the New Testament documents in extra-biblical church writings that nearly the entire New Testament can be constructed without any extant versions of

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[176] Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 35.

[177] Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 10.

the ancient biblical text.[178] Thus, when it is claimed that there are hundreds of thousands of differences in the manuscript, most of these are easily recognized as variant spellings or accidental omissions that do not obstruct the ability to reconstruct the original text with considerable confidence.[179] In other words, the apologist can confidently assert that most modern New Testament translations provide a reasonable reflection of the original manuscripts.

Internal Evidence

Internal evidence for the historicity of the Gospels includes both their genre and the use of eyewitness accounts. Other authenticating criteria include embarrassment and internal coherence. The embarrassment criterion suggests that is hardly likely that those who are seeking to falsify information would in the process embarrass themselves, particularly when they have a vested interest.

In *Fabricating Jesus*, Evans comments on this criterion: "'Embarrassing' sayings and actions are those that are known to reach back to the ministry of Jesus, and therefore, like it or not, they cannot be deleted from the Jesus data bank."[180] In the case of the

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[178] Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 86.

[179] For a specific response to those (such as Bart Ehrman) who suggest the existing differences in extant manuscripts make it impossible to arrive at the meaning of the text, see "The Original New Testament Has Been Corrupted by Copyists So Badly That It Can't Be Recovered," in Darrell L. Bock and Daniel B. Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ*, adv. reader copy (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 35-76.

[180] Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, loc. 562-63.

Gospels, it must be asked why the Gospel writers embellished the story of Jesus in order to establish him as worthy of worship and yet left embarrassing elements in the text that potentially could weaken their own position as leaders in the church. For example, why would Peter's reprimand, the disciples' infighting, the unbelief of Jesus' brother (who later became a church leader), the doubting of Thomas, or women as the first witnesses to the resurrection (when the testimony of women was heavily disregarded) be maintained? Or why, asks Evans, would the Gospels record Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist?

> Perhaps the classic example of "embarrassing" tradition is the baptism of Jesus (Mk 1:9-11 and parallels). What makes Jesus' baptism embarrassing? John's baptism called for repentance of sins and yet, according to Christian teaching, Jesus was sinless. So why would sinless Jesus go to John for baptism? Good question. No Christian would make up this story. Its preservation in the Gospels argues strongly that it is authentic material. The fact that it is preserved in the Gospels and not deleted also shows that the writers of the Gospels made every effort to tell the truth.[181]

Internal coherence also speaks loudly to the historical reliability of a document. In regards to this coherence, Darrell L. Bock, in the final chapter of *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus*,[182] presents what he says is an inductive argument for the historicity of the Gospels based on their "depth coherence." By depth coherence, Bock means that the elements of the Gospel portrait of Jesus' life cohere "in such a variety of ways and through such a plethora of themes that the coherence runs deep into the fabric"

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[181] Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, loc. 563-66.

[182] Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, eds. *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

of the text.[183] This coherence, argues Bock, centers on the kingdom of God and Jesus' place in the center of it:

> Jesus' activity centered in a call to Israel to come back to covenant faithfulness and to recognize the arrival of a new era, the promised era of deliverance. His actions supported these claims. . . .
>
> Jesus saw himself situated in the center of God's program. He anticipated being completely vindicated as the Son of Man at God's side. The activity tied to this understanding produced a coherent narrative for the early church, where he and the promise became the inseparable message. . . . They point to a historical depth within the early church's tradition about Jesus. The linkage between these events does not have the feel of elements added bit by bit over time. Rather, there is a coherent core around which we get a solid glimpse of the aims of the historical Jesus.[184]

With these words Bock argues that the depth at which a wide variety of events recorded in Jesus' life coalesce could not have happened haphazardly, nor could such depth have been invented. This coherence, apart from any support for the historicity of any particular event of the Gospel accounts, speaks loudly to the overall historicity of the Gospel record.

The argument from internal coherence can also be made by looking to the whole of the New Testament and particularly to the writings of Paul. Paul's letters likely pre-date the Gospels, yet what they reveal of the life of Jesus is consistent with the Gospels. F. F. Bruce, in *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, summarizes how well the teaching of Paul coincides with the Gospels:

> [Paul's epistles] were not written to record the facts of the life and ministry of Jesus; they were addressed to Christians, who already knew the gospel story. Yet in them we can find sufficient material to construct an outline of the early

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[183] Bock and Webb, *Key Events*, 825.

[184] Bock and Webb, *Key Events*, 850-52.

> apostolic preaching about Jesus. While Paul insists on the divine pre-existence of Jesus, yet he knows that He was none the less a real human being, a descendent of Abraham and David; who lived under the Jewish law; who was betrayed, and on the night of His betrayal instituted a memorial meal of bread and wine; who endured the Roman penalty of crucifixion, although the responsibility for His death is laid at the door of the representatives of the Jewish nation; who was buried, rose the third day, and was thereafter seen alive by many eyewitnesses on various occasions, including one occasion on which He was so seen by over five hundred at once, of whom the majority were alive nearly twenty-five years later.[185]

Bruce then later concludes: "In short, the outline of the gospel story as we can trace it in the writings of Paul agrees with the outline which we find elsewhere in the New Testament, and in the four Gospels."[186] The coherence of the Gospel accounts with other New Testament writings of an earlier date weakens any claims that the Gospels were made to cohere with one another at some later date by those seeking to establish and justify a religious movement. Instead, the evidence suggests their coalescence is based on actual historical events experienced, known, and propagated from a very early date.

External Evidence

Authenticity is substantiated not only by the internal consistency of the witnesses (in this case, the Gospels), but also by corroboration with evidence outside the accounts in question. External corroboration for the Gospels is significant and includes language artifacts, archaeological findings, and extra-biblical historical accounts. In regards to

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[185] Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 77.

[186] Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 79.

language artifacts, among the most compelling are the personal names of characters found in the Gospels. Extensive research has been done of the frequency of names in first-century Palestine and is presented in an early chapter of Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.[187] Interestingly, similar frequency is found in the Gospels and Acts. For example, the frequency of the top two men's names in first-century Palestine, Simon and Joseph, is indicated at 15.6%, while the frequency of the same two names in the Gospels and Acts is 18.2%.[188] The frequency of the top nine Palestinian men's names is 41.5%, similar to what we find in the Gospels and Acts at 40.3%. What is particularly telling, explains Bauckham, is that the frequency of names differed significantly among the Jewish Diaspora, meaning that it is "very unlikely that the names in the Gospels are late accretions to the traditions."[189]

The historicity of the Gospels can also be supported by archaeology, which is explained in a chapter of Mark D. Roberts' *Can We Trust the Gospels?* entitled, "Does Archaeology Support the Reliability of the Gospels?" In this chapter, Roberts describes the findings of the synagogue in Capernaum, the Pilate Inscription, the cliff at El Kursi (the site where Jesus sent demons into pigs), and the Pool of Siloam. Roberts provides a picture of each in a web article on the topic and adds a description of the bones of a

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[187] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 39-92.

[188] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 71-72.

[189] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 75.

crucified man and of a tribute penny.[190] As Roberts notes, none of these findings "proves anything about Jesus, of course. But they all show that when the Gospels refer to places and people, these places and people really existed."[191]

In establishing the historicity of the Gospels, one must also consider what has been recorded of the life of Jesus outside of the biblical records. Bruce categorizes this evidence into two categories: the early Jewish writings and the early Gentile writings. In regards to the former category, Bruce focuses on evidence in the Talmud and in the writings of the historian, Josephus. He notes the Talmud speaks of Jesus as a historical figure, describes him as one who practiced magic (an admission to the miraculous acts he performed), tells of his death, names five of his disciples who were said to heal in Jesus' name, and discusses Jesus' intention not to destroy the law but to add to it.[192] Josephus' record is no less confirming as it speaks of John the Baptist, the family of the Herods,

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[190] Mark D. Roberts, "Does Archaeology Support the Reliability of the Gospels: Section A," accessed January 8, 2014, http://www.markdroberts.com/htmfiles/resources/gospelsreliable3.htm#oct2705

[191] Roberts, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, 154.

[192] Bruce, 103.

Augustus, Quirinius, Annas, Caiaphas, James the brother of Jesus, and the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, all of which match up nicely with the Gospel accounts.[193]

Relative to early Gentile writings, Bruce notes the works of both Christian and non-Christian writers, including Mara Bar-Serapion, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Justin Martyr and Tertullian. The latter two even refer their readers to other historical writers to confirm what they wrote of Christ.[194] Based on this early extra-biblical evidence, Bruce concludes:

> Whatever else may be thought of the evidence from early Jewish and Gentile writers . . . it does at least establish, for those who refuse the witness of Christian writings, the historical character of Jesus Himself. Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christian-myth', but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories.[195]

Thus, when considering extra-biblical writings alongside archaeology and language artifacts, a reasonable case can be made that the Gospel accounts are historical in nature.

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[193] Bruce, 105-15. Much controversy has surrounded the writings of Josephus, particularly when they speak of Jesus as the Christ and as one who rose from the dead. This controversy is noted by Bruce, but as he states, "It seems unlikely that a writer who was not a Christian should use the expressions [about Jesus' messiahship and resurrection]. . . . Yet there is nothing to say against the passage on the ground of textual criticism; the manuscript evidence is as unanimous and ample as it is for anything in Josephus" (p. 112). For further discussion on the authenticity of Josephus' writings on Jesus, see Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), loc. 3293-3355, Kindle.

[194] Bruce, 118-19. See also J. Warner Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook), 196-201.

[195] Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 123.

Alleged Contradictions

Objections to the historicity of the Gospels often include alleged contradictions. Thus, it is important for the apologist to be prepared to address these concerns. The claim of contradiction has to do with various elements of the Gospels, including theology, chronology, omissions, paraphrases, composites, and variations in names and numbers. Each of these is addressed well in Blomberg's *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*.

First, in regards to suggested conflicting theology, Blomberg notes that considering the New Testament has been the most scrutinized

> piece of literature in the history of the world, it is not surprising to discover that virtually every passage in the Gospels has been seen as conflicting with some other passage by someone or other at some time in history.[196]

However, throughout history the vast majority of the readers of at least the Synoptic Gospels have recognized their great similarity and not their differences, so much so that most have not felt that any theological differences were noteworthy.[197]

Second, relative to chronological differences between the Gospels (i.e., some of the events are placed in different orders in the Gospels), Blomberg notes that such contradictory claims are unwarranted for two reasons: (1) the Gospel writers frequently arrange passages in topical or thematic order,[198] and (2) the wording of the Gospels does

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[196] Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels*, 152.

[197] Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels*, 152-53.

[198] Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels*, 168.

not necessitate that events took place in the same order they are presented.[199] In regards to the latter point, Roberts writes,

> the first readers of the Gospels wouldn't have expected Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to narrate all of the events in the precise order in which they happened. That's just not how it was done in those days. So if we come along and insist that, in order to be reliable, the Gospels must get everything in the precise chronological order, we're demanding something that is both anachronistic and inconsistent with the intentions of the evangelists. We're asking the Gospels to be something that they are not.[200]

Third, in regards to omissions, paraphrases, and composite speeches, Blomberg does not believe that this should be a problem, as editing has always been a part of the recording process and most certainly in the ancient world. To demand that ancient historians record every event without any abridgement is to "judge them by modern standards of precision that no-one in antiquity required."[201] Thus, Blomberg notes the following regarding the paraphrasing of speeches, something which evidently occurred in the Gospels:

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[199] Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels*, 169-71.

[200] Roberts, *Can We Trust the Gospels*, 104. Roberts' conclusion is in keeping with Papias' recollection of the Apostle John's words: "Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely." Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.14-17.

[201] Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels*, 177.

> modern concerns for accurate quotation make many uneasy with certain examples of free paraphrases of others' speeches. The ancient world, however, had few such qualms. Greek and Hebrew had no symbols for quotations marks, and a historian or biographer referring to what others said did not necessarily try to cite their exact wording. So long as what was written remained faithful to the meaning of the original utterance, authors were free to phrase reports however they liked, and no one would accuse them of misquoting their sources or producing unreliable narratives.[202]

Fourth, Blomberg addresses specific concerns related to variations in personal names and places as well as alleged historical errors regarding the death of Judas, the reference to Abiathar in Mark 2:26, the murder of Zechariah mentioned in Matthew 23:35, and the date of Quirinius' governorship. The specific nature of each alleged error and Blomberg's proposed resolutions cannot be addressed here, but suffice it to say that, for the apologist, there are reasonable solutions for each of the legitimate concerns critics have regarding the historicity of specific people, places, or events.

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[202] Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels*, 157.

The Other "Gospels" and the Diversity View

In recent years, it has been increasingly suggested both in popular fiction[203] and more scholarly work[204] that there are other "gospels"[205] which are equally legitimate expressions of early Christianity when compared to the Synoptic Gospels and John. These other gospels, it is said, were crowded out by early power brokers and labeled heretical in an act of hegemony. This argument was first forwarded by Walter Bauer[206] in the early 1970's and later gathered strength with the unfolding discovery of the Nag Hammadi documents, which included early Gnostic writings with supposed stories and sayings of Christ. Elaine Pagels and Bart Ehrman, along with others, take these writings as evidence that there was a diversity within early Christianity and that the New

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[203] For example, Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code: A Novel* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003).

[204] For example, Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York, NY: Random House, 2003); Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005); Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, updated ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[205] The other "gospels" or "early Christian writings include among others: the Gospel of Thomas, the Apocryphon of James, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Judas, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Gospel of Mary.

[206] See Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (1971; repr., Mifflintown, PA: Sigler Press, 1996).

Testament Gospels have no more legitimate claim to true orthodoxy than any of the other gospels.

Strong responses to the diversity arguments can be found in *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* by Andreas Köstenberger and Michael Kruger,[207] Evans's *Fabricating Jesus,* and Bock & Wallace's *Dethroning Jesus*. The response to the diversity view is generally along the following lines: (1) the date of the biblical Gospels, as well as the remainder of the New Testament, precedes that of the other writings;[208] (2) there is evidence that the early church was committed to a defined Christianity very early on and did not manufacture orthodoxy to force unity in the face of many views;[209] (3) the book of Acts, which is the earliest record of the early church, "presents a consistent picture of the church as a group of believers who were primarily concerned not with fashioning a variety of Christian teachings or with conflicting doctrinal perspectives but with propagating a message that did not originate with them;"[210] (4) the church Fathers taught that the theology of the canonical Gospels was rooted in Old Testament theology,

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[207] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

[208] Bock and Wallace, 112-117; See also the discussion on the dating of the alternative gospels throughout chapters three and four of Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*.

[209] Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 54.

[210] Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 75.

whereas the other writings seek to divorce the gospel from its Old Testament roots;[211] (5) most of the other writings have a clear Gnostic flavor consistent with second century Gnosticism, contain ideas and language foreign to first-century Jewish Palestine, and generally lack historical credentials relative to the events they present;[212] (6) confessions and hymns are found in the epistles which predate the Gospels, all of which are in line with orthodoxy;[213] and (7) the canonization process was not the creation of authoritative documents but the recognition of that which had been recognized as authoritative from the beginning, and furthermore, this canonization process began at a very early date.[214]

One of the most important complaints of the diversity argument forwarded by Köstenberger and Kruger is that it is presented as generally non-falsifiable. That is, if the New Testament is held to be unified and other early writings also support early orthodoxy, this is proof that winners suppressed the voices of others. If, however, the New Testament exhibits diversity and other early writings indicate the same, then this is taken as support of the diversity argument.[215] In other words, the diversity argument as it is presented is non-falsifiable and, thus, on that note alone is a questionable hypothesis.

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[211] Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 55-57

[212] Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 163-69; Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, loc. 757-79, 831-900; Bock and Wallace, 128.

[213] Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 77-80.

[214] Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 127-49.

[215] Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 71.

In light of it shortcomings and its non-falsifiability, one might ask why the diversity view commands the popular stature that it presently enjoys. Köstenberger and Kruger provide a reasonable answer and one with which the apologist must contend:

> Indeed, it is contemporary culture's fascination with diversity that has largely driven the way in which our understanding of Jesus and early Christianity had been reshaped. If it can be shown that early Christianity was not as unified as commonly supposed, and if it can be suggested that the eventual rise of Christian orthodoxy was in fact the result of a conspiracy or a power grab by the ruling, political, cultural, or ecclesiastical elite, this contributes to undermining the notion of religious truth itself and paves the way for the celebration of diversity as the only "truth" that is left. And thus the tables are turned—diversity becomes the last remaining orthodoxy, and orthodoxy becomes heresy, because it violates the new orthodoxy: the gospel of diversity.[216]

The Problem of Miracles in the Gospels

For many, the greatest hurdle to accepting the Gospel accounts as historical is the inclusion of countless miracles and exorcisms throughout the text. While it may be possible to discount some of the miracles as simply the result of a psychosomatic event, the multitude and magnitude of miracles in the Gospels presents a particular problem for those who doubt the place of supernatural intervention in reliable historical accounts.

Without a doubt the most complete work addressing the problem of miracles is Craig S. Keener's two-volume *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Account*.[217] The primary thrust of Keener's book "is that eyewitnesses do offer miracle

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[216] Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 234.

[217] Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

reports, whatever the claim's actual explanation,"[218] and secondarily "to invite consideration of potentially supranatural explanations as a legitimate explanatory option."[219] In regards to the first thrust, Keener devotes nearly three hundred pages to referencing eyewitness accounts of miracles throughout history and across cultures. These miracle accounts are well documented and generally involve a multiplicity of attestation that if provided for other non-miraculous events would be readily received as providing strong evidence of historicity. Thus, as Keener explains, it takes special and unwarranted pleading to discount them out of hand:

> Without a special burden of proof against miracle claims, they can be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by normal laws of evidence like any other claims. To reject all eyewitness claims in support of miracles (when we would accept in court eyewitness claims of similar quality for other events) simply presupposes against miracles from the start, rigging the debate so as to exclude in advance any supportive testimony as reflecting misunderstanding or deception.[220]

Of particular concern to Keener is that the presupposition against miracles and the diminishment of eyewitness testimony smacks of Western ethnocentricity:

> Regardless of the explanation given, hundreds of millions of people around the world sincerely believe that suprahuman forces are at work or that miraculous healings occur. Indeed, those who deny such forces (however defined) are clearly a minority of the world's population. Whether one likes it or not, it is neither charitable nor plausible to simply dismiss the existence of sincere claims, however one chooses to explain them. By analogy, it is plausible that many ancient claimants also sincerely believed that they reported such phenomena

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[218] Keener, *Miracles*, 107.

[219] Keener, *Miracles*, 107.

[220] Keener, *Miracles*, 213.

> accurately, rather than that they were inventing them for purposes of propaganda.[221]

Keener's latter point is of particular importance as some claim that the inclusion of miracles in the Gospels is clear evidence that they were not written to record history but rather were fabricated to propagate faith in a miracle-working and divine Messiah. Considering, however, the association of miracles with non-messianic figures such as Paul or with other eschatological prophets such as Elijah, as well as the lack of miracles associated with many venerated figures of antiquity, there was little reason for the Gospel writers to craft stories of Jesus' miracles if he did not actually perform them.[222] Therefore, automatically dismissing the Gospel accounts of Jesus' miracles as something less than historical phenomena is no less reflective of "narrow" and "imperialistic" Western antisupernaturalism[223] than the out-of-hand dismissal of miracle accounts in the modern world.

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[221] Keener, *Miracles*, 222.

[222] Keener, *Miracles*, 24, 27.

[223] Western antisupernaturalism is "narrow" and "imperialistic" because it reflects a small minority position in the world's cultural milieu and yet is considered superior to the perspective held by others. Along these lines Keener comments, "Western scholars may readily dispute the explanations for such phenomena, which may vary from one claim to another, but when some scholars deny that such phenomena ever belong to the eyewitness level of historical sources, they are not reckoning with the social reality of a sizeable proportion of the world's population. Indeed, millions of intelligent but culturally different people will be compelled by what they believe to be their own experience or that of others close to them to dismiss such scholarship as an experientially narrow cultural imperialism." Keener, *Miracles*, 213.

If one is to accept as historical the eyewitness accounts of miracles either in the modern age or in antiquity, one is still left with explaining these phenomena. In other words, it is possible to accept the testimony that one has properly recounted an unusual phenomena, such as an alleged healing, but question the attribution of the phenomena to divine intervention as opposed to psychosomatic influence or coincidence. Keener does not disagree and thinks that miracle claims should be examined on a case-by-case basis, but sees no reason to exclude divine attribution altogether outside of an ungrounded, pre-commitment to traditional Enlightenment prejudice:

> A merely intuitive rejection of supernatural claims thus rests not so much on an argument intelligible in our own cultural setting but on an older academic tradition—even though tradition is usually regarded as a nonemperical and nonrational foundation for epistemology. Contemporary approaches lack necessary grounds for a priori rejecting potential supernatural explanations. . . . An inflexible prejudice against the possibility of supranatural activity is no more neutral than a priori commitment to that possibility is.[224]

A second valuable resource regarding the problem of miracles is *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*.[225] Edited by R. Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas, this book is not specifically aimed at supporting the historicity of the miracles in the New Testament but, more generally, God's action in human history from its inception to today. Here we find Richard Purtill defines miracles as "an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things,

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[224] Keener, *Miracles*, 207.

[225] R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

to show God is acting." Such a definition allows for both the predictability of natural laws as well as the unexpected exceptions to those laws by divine action. This may appear to be an *ad hoc* definition developed to allow room for miracles, but it certainly is no more than the non-theists' *ad hoc* requirement "that nature functions in a lawlike fashion."[226] Furthermore, Purtill's allowance for both natural law and intervention would seem to explain more than natural law alone. As C. S. Lewis noted in his book *Miracles*:

> Theology says to you in effect, "Admit God and with Him the risk of a few miracles, and I in return will ratify your faith in uniformity as regards the overwhelming majority of events." The philosophy which forbids you to make uniformity absolute is also the philosophy which offers you solid grounds for believing it to be general, to be *almost* absolute. The Being who threatens Nature's claim to omnipotence confirms her in her lawful occasions. . . . The alternative is really much worse. Try to make Nature absolute and you find that her uniformity is not even probable. By claiming too much, you get nothing. . . . Theology offers you a working arrangement, which leaves the scientist free to continue his experiments and the Christian to continue his prayers.[227]

In other words, while some consider science as having excluded the possibility of miracles (and thus the possibility that any account of miracles in the New Testament or otherwise could be historical), Lewis sees the possibility of miracles as inextricably tied to the possibility of science; both require the existence of an omnipotent God.

Lewis' conclusion may be more than non-theists are willing to accept, but they should at least be willing to recognize the "question-begging, science-of-the-gaps" suggestion that if science cannot explain something it will certainly do so one day. This

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[226] Richard L. Purtill, "Defining Miracles," in *In Defense of Miracles*, 71.

[227] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*: *How God Intervenes in Nature and Human Affairs* (1947; repr., New York, NY: Macmillan, 1978), 106.

kind of thinking is precisely what J. P. Moreland seeks to expose in his contribution to *In Defense of Miracles*, entitled "Science, Miracles, Agency Theory and the God of the Gaps:"

> Some claim that we can never conclude that an event is a miracle because science may find a natural cause for the event in the future and this principle (that science ought only to search for natural causes) is the very foundation of scientific advance. . . . I think that this position is a question-begging, science-of-the gaps argument to the effect that since natural causes have been found for a number of phenomena, then natural cause will be found for all of them. I see no reason, however, to accept this argument and the attitude toward miracles that it exemplifies. If we have good theological, philosophical or scientific grounds for suspecting that some phenomenon is the result of a primary causal act of God (theistic scientists do not appeal to primary causes willy-nilly), then I do not see why we cannot do research in light of this conviction.[228]

While Moreland confronts scientific naturalism, Norman Geisler confronts the more general modern mindset in his contribution to *In Defense of Miracles*. In particular, Geisler counters David Hume's argument against the probability of miracles. In short, Hume argues that because "a wise man . . . proportions his belief to the evidence,"[229] the evidence that indicates nature follows laws should always outweigh the evidence that a law might have been broken in a particular occurrence. Thus, even if a miracle has taken place, it should never be reasonably believed. This, says Geisler, is "silly":

> On these [Hume's] grounds a dice player should not believe the dice show three sixes on the first roll, since the odds against it are 216 to 1. Or, we should never

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[228] J. P. Moreland, "Science, Miracles, Agency Theory, and the God of the Gaps," in *In Defense of Miracles*, 145-46.

[229] Norman L. Geisler, "Miracles and the Modern Mind," in *In Defense of Miracles*, 79. Cited from David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 3d ed., rev. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), Section X, part 1, see chap. 1, pp. 30-33.

> believe we have been dealt a perfect bridge hand (though this has happened) since the odds are against it are 1,635,013,559,600 to 1! What Hume seems to overlook is that wise people base their beliefs on facts, not simply on odds. Sometimes the "odds" against an event are high (based on past observation), but the evidence for the event is otherwise very good (based on current observation or reliable testimony).[230]

Undoubtedly, the miracles that Jesus performed were "against the odds" from a naturalistic perspective, but this is precisely why the Gospel writers chose to include them. They were not written to puff up the identity of Jesus, but rather to provide eyewitness evidence of his unique nature.

Another important perspective when considering the problem of miracles is that of Craig Evans. In *Fabricating Jesus*, Evans dedicates a chapter to Jesus' miracles and explains how they were part and parcel to his message. To strip the Gospels of Jesus' miracles is to strip away the Gospels of Jesus' message about the kingdom of God. This is significant because there is a general consensus among New Testament scholars of many ilk that the main thrust of Jesus' teaching is the kingdom of God. What Evans questions is whether one can maintain such a position and deny the historicity of the miracles:

> Everyone agrees that the essence of Jesus' proclamation was the kingdom (or rule) of God. What is not always clear, however, is that in the thinking of Jesus the onset of the kingdom of God means the collapse of the kingdom of Satan. And the collapse of the kingdom (or rule) of Satan is seen in the exorcisms and healings. The exorcisms and healings cannot be ignored or discounted if we are to understand fully the significance and import of Jesus' bold proclamation that the rule of God has indeed arrived, and that it is the time to repent and embrace it.[231]

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[230] Geisler, "Miracles and Modern Mind," 79.

[231] Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, loc. 1678-82.

To support his claim about miracles and kingdom teaching, Evans points to passages such as Matthew 10:1-8, Mark 3:23-27, 6:7, and Luke 6:12-19, 9:1-6 and 11:20. In each case Jesus indicates that teaching of the kingdom and miracles go hand-in-hand. Thus, those who seek to maintain the message of Jesus and not the historicity of miracles in the Gospels seek to parse the text where it was clearly not intended to be parsed.

As stated earlier, it can be said that a non-Christian is not unreasonable to be concerned about the historicity of the Gospels. Christians claim that Christ is worthy of worship and allegiance precisely because he revealed himself as God in history. If it can be reasonably asserted and evidenced that the Gospel accounts do not reflect accurate or consistent historical accounts, then Christianity can be readily dismissed. The Christian apologist, as evidenced by the review of literature provided here, has a good defense relative to the historicity of the Gospels which includes arguments related to the genre of the Gospels, the input of eyewitnesses, the oral and textual transmission of the narratives, and evidence from within Gospels as well as from extra-biblical sources. In addition, the apologist has reasonable answers for alleged contradictions and the problem of miracles.

The Historicity of the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus continues to be a topic of interest among both Christians and non-Christians and much has been written about its historicity over the last forty years. Gary Habermas has compiled a bibliography of some 3,400 scholarly journal articles and books written in French, German, or English about the resurrection since

1975.[232] While there are plenty of chapter-length treatments,[233] it is the larger works of four leaders in the discussion of the bodily resurrection of Christ—Habermas, Michael Licona, William Lane Craig, and N. T. Wright—that are reviewed here.

Gary Habermas: *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*

Gary Habermas is Distinguished Research Professor at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Graduate School. He completed his doctoral thesis on the resurrection[234] and has subsequently written numerous books and articles on the resurrection, including *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic*; the two-volume series *The Resurrection; Resurrected? An Atheist & Theist Dialogue* (with Anthony Flew); *The*

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[232] Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 19. See Habermas' own article that reports on a large portion of these published materials: Gary R. Habermas, "Experiences of the Risen Jesus: The Foundational Historical Issue in the Early Proclamation of the Resurrection," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 288-97.

[233] For example, see resurrection related chapters in Beckwith, Craig, and Moreland, eds., *To Everyone An Answer;* Copan and Craig, eds., *Come Let Us Reason*; Copan and Craig, eds., *Passionate Conviction*; Geisler and Meister, *Reasons for Faith*; House and Jowers, *Reasons for Our Hope*; and Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, eds., *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*. Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

[234] Gary Robert Habermas. "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry" (PhD Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1976), electronic version available at http://www.garyhabermas.com/books/ dissertation/habermas_dissertation_1976.pdf.

Case for the Resurrection of Jesus (with Licona); and *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*.[235] The latter is Habermas' most recent examination of the resurrection and is discussed below.

Gary Habermas is known for his "minimal facts" approach as presented in *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*. Rather than argue over all possible strands of evidence for the resurrection, Habermas begins his argument with twelve "facts" related to the resurrection which he says are generally agreed upon by scholars of a wide-variety of religious persuasions. He presents them as follows:

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
2. He was buried, most likely in a private tomb.
3. Soon afterward, the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.
4. Jesus' tomb was found empty very soon after his internment.
5. The disciples had experiences they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
6. Due to these experiences, the disciples' lives were thoroughly transformed; they were even willing to die for what they had seen.
7. The proclamation of the resurrection took place very early, at the beginning of church history.

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[235] Gary R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); Gary R. Habermas, *The Resurrection: Heart of the Christian Life* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000); Gary R. Habermas, *The Resurrection: Heart of New Testament Doctrine* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000); Gary R. Habermas and Antony G. N. Flew, *Resurrected? An Atheist and Theist Dialogue*, ed. John Ankerberg (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004); Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

8. The disciples' public testimony and preaching of the resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and buried shortly before.

9. The Gospel message centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

10. Sunday, the day of the resurrection, became the primary day for gathering and worshipping.

11. James, the brother of Jesus and a former skeptic, was converted when he saw the risen Jesus.

12. Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a Christian believer due to an experience he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.[236]

To minimize possible criticism by skeptics, Habermas further whittles down the facts to the six most attested (numbers 1, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12 listed above), and believes that from these six a strong case can be built for the historicity of the resurrection. He claims naturalistic theories that forward some sort of hallucination on the part of the early disciples cannot account for the minimal facts. He provides an excellent catalogue of reasons to debunk the hallucination hypothesis, including the fact that hallucinations are subjective experiences emanating from individuals not groups; if Jesus' followers had hallucinated, his body could have easily been produced as counter-evidence of bodily resurrection; there is no evidence that Paul or James were in a frame of mind conducive to hallucinating the risen Christ; and the New Testament record delineates between visions and Jesus' resurrection.[237]

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[236] Habermas, *The Risen Jesus*, 9-10.

[237] Habermas, *The Risen* Jesus, 10-12.

For Habermas a historical resurrection of Christ is the best explanation of the minimal facts, but he recognizes that the resurrection requires a theistic worldview if it is to be interpreted as a divine act. This being the case, Habermas presents a brief argument for theism using an epistemic argument, the *kalam* cosmological argument, design arguments, and evidence from near death experiences. These arguments ground the reasonableness of theism, which in turn allows theism to provide the framework for understanding the resurrection as a divine act and not an inexplicable anomaly.

Most books defending the resurrection are centered on an evaluation of the evidence with perhaps some discussion of the necessary supporting worldview. But these elements only take up the opening two chapters of *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope.* Instead of stopping at this point, Habermas continues by explaining that the ramifications of the resurrection are so profound that they ought to make the unbeliever consider the resurrection. If the resurrection is true, Habermas claims it should change the way we live and think. It should keep us from fearing death, it should allow us to handle suffering better, and it should cause us to come under the authority of Scripture (since Jesus' teaching was validated by the resurrection and he recognized the Scriptures as authoritative). Why should people even be interested in looking at evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? Habermas' answer would be that it gives us reason, hope, and direction in life.

Michael Licona: *The Resurrection of Jesus*

Michael Licona is currently Associate Professor at Houston Baptist University. He completed his undergraduate and master's work at Liberty University where he

became familiar with the studies of Gary Habermas. Later he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Pretoria and his doctoral dissertation was published under the title *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*.[238] The subtitle is indicative of Licona's effort to examine the evidence as a professional historian as opposed to as a biblical studies expert or theologian.

Prior to examining any historical evidence, Licona familiarizes his readers with issues related to the philosophy of history (such as the nature of knowledge), managing the impact of one's own horizon on historical investigations, and historical methods. He suggests that while the historian is certainly subject to perspectival limitations, these limitations can be mitigated by setting forth one's method and sticking to it, subjecting one's ideas to unsympathetic experts, being forthright about one's own horizon, detaching one's self from bias, and establishing the "historical bedrock" on which hypotheses are made. Licona also believes that when considering evidence, it is important for the historian to take the stance of methodical neutrality as opposed to methodical credulity or skepticism. This means the evidence is not "innocent" or "guilty" before examination and a burden of proof is needed to move the historian away from the agnostic position. Licona is careful to follow these guidelines as he lays forth his case for the resurrection.

For many, consideration of the bodily resurrection of Christ is necessarily inappropriate because of the *a priori* rejection of supernatural intervention. In response,

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[238] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*.

Licona argues that excluding divine miracles is not within the bounds of good history as it arbitrarily eliminates certain possible conclusions. He likens the detection of a miracle as similar to recognizing that something is the product of an intelligent designer.

> We may recognize that an event is a miracle when the event is (1) extremely unlikely to have occurred given the circumstances and/or natural law and (2) occurs in an environment or context charged with religious significance. In other words, the event occurs in a context where we might expect a god to act.[239]

Thus, we would not consider someone's healing after receiving medical attention a miracle, but we may consider the immediate absence of a terminal disease after prayer a miracle.

It is only after his preliminary discussion on historiography and the acceptability of the miraculous that Licona sets forth the historical evidence. This includes New Testament literature, non-Christian sources (such as Josephus, Pliny, and Tacitus), apostolic fathers, and other non-canonical literature. He rates each source as to the likelihood of providing trustworthy independent testimony from unlikely to highly probable, while declaring the evidence of some sources as indeterminate or unhelpful in relationship to the resurrection. Based on the evidence available from these sources, Licona identifies three strongly attested facts that form the "historical bedrock" of a sound resurrection hypothesis: the crucifixion of Jesus, the appearance of the risen Jesus to the disciples, and the conversion of Paul. These are fewer than the minimal facts identified by Habermas in *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* and even the five minimal

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[239] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 163.

facts that Licona promoted with Habermas in *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, largely because Licona seeks to build his case only on the most verifiable of facts.

With these three bedrock facts in hand, Licona then examines the varied hypotheses forwarded by skeptics to explain these facts. This includes the views of Geza Vermes, Michael Goulder, Gerd Lüdemann, John Dominic Crossan, and Peter F. Craffet, many of whom suggest some mix of psycho-social reasons for the resurrection appearances and the conversion of Paul. For each hypothesis, Licona considers explanatory scope, explanatory power, plausibility, ad hoc nature, and ability to illumine other experiences. All are found wanting in at least three of these categories. As the historical resurrection hypothesis does not suffer such failings, Licona concludes,

> Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the best historical explanation of the relevant historical bedrock. Since it fulfills all five of the criteria for best explanation and outdistances competing hypothesis by a significant margin in their ability to fulfill the same criteria, the historian is warranted in regarding Jesus' resurrection as an event that occurred in the past.[240]

This conclusion is significant relative to others that have written in defense of the resurrection because of Licona's very pointed effort to develop and apply examining criteria derived from sound historiography.

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[240] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 610.

Gary Habermas & Michael Licona: *The Case for the Resurrection*

Gary Habermas and Michael Licona marshaled their efforts to write *The Case for the Resurrection.*[241] There is not much that is offered in *The Case for the Resurrection* that is not found in the other two books, but it is worth mentioning if for no other reason than the fact that it is authored by two of the leading defenders of the historicity of the resurrection and was written with the lay person in mind. They take Habermas' minimal facts approach but reduce the number of facts to four, adding the evidence for the empty tomb. The historicity of the empty tomb is not as widely held as the other facts, so they do not make their argument dependent on it, but they do think it should not be overlooked. After providing the evidence that supports the minimal facts, Habermas and Licona consider each of the major counterarguments from legend to fraud to apparent death to psychological phenomenon. While not adding anything particularly novel when compared with their other works, this book may be the best in terms of providing the uninitiated with an orderly and easy-to-understand volume in support of a historical and bodily resurrection of Jesus.

William Lane Craig: *The Son Rises*

As mentioned previously, William Lane Craig completed his first Ph.D. at the University of Birmingham, England and focused his studies on the kalam cosmological

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[241] Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*.

argument. Soon thereafter, Craig pursued a second doctorate under the supervision of Wolfhart Pannenburg at the University of Munich, and he completed his dissertation on the resurrection. *The Son Rises*: *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*[242] was published prior to the completion of his dissertation and is a more accessible version of his doctoral research. In 2002 Craig also completed a more exhaustive work on the resurrection entitled *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus.*[243] These academic and literary pursuits have allowed Craig to be part of a number of public debates on the resurrection with the likes of Bart Ehrman, John Dominic Crossan, Gerd Ludemann, and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, among others.[244]

Craig begins *The Son Rises* similarly to the manner in which he begins his more popular multi-topic books, *Reasonable Faith* and *On Guard*, by discussing the importance of considering the historicity of the resurrection. A life without hope after death is a life without meaning, purports Craig:

> We have a very peculiar circumstance that allows us to determine now the truth of the biblical doctrine of resurrection, namely the biblical conviction that a man has been raised from the dead by God in advance as the basis and pattern for our

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[242] William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (1981; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000).

[243] William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989).

[244] See William Lane Craig, *The Best of William Lane Craig: Debate Collection, Volumes 1-2*, DVD-ROM (La Mirada, CA: Biola University); William Lane Craig and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *God? A Debate between a Christian and an Atheist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); William Lane Craig, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*, ed. Paul Copan (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999).

> future resurrection. . . . Thus, the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus becomes of paramount importance to modern man.[245]

With this perspective as his impetus, Craig quickly dismisses three outdated theories—the conspiracy theory, the apparent death theory, and the wrong tomb theory—none of which garners contemporary support among scholars. He then turns the bulk of his attention to providing a positive case for the resurrection and countering theories that in some form or fashion posit the resurrection accounts as legendary and fictional.

Craig's foundational facts are the empty tomb, the appearances of Jesus after his death, and the early church's belief in the resurrection. Unlike Licona, Craig places significant weight on the fact of the empty tomb, and does so in large part by examining why the New Testament documents can be trusted as to resurrection testimony. If the tomb was indeed empty, the question is why? Craig concludes that the resurrection account is much more plausible than that the body was stolen.

With regards to the appearances after Jesus' death, Craig explores the reliability of Paul's testimony as well as the Gospel accounts and suggests there was inadequate time for legends to arise. Further, with the reported witnesses still alive, the accrual of legend would have been difficult. The suggestion that the appearances were mere visions or hallucinations is not supported as the accounts clearly speak of bodily, physical appearance. While it is possible to say that the disciples were distressed by the loss of their leader, they had no expectation that he would return and all of them would have

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[245] Craig, *The Son Rises*, 21-22.

needed to experience the same psychologically-induced vision at the same time, a phenomenon which is unprecedented.

The church has long believed that the resurrection is a fact of history, and the evidence is that this belief was in place at the time of the writing of the New Testament. But Craig wonders where the belief in present-day bodily resurrection could have arisen if not based on the historical event of Christ. It could not have come from the Jews, for even those who did believe in bodily resurrection believed that it occurred at the end of the world and involved the entire nation of Israel, not just an individual. In support of this stance, Craig quotes German New Testament scholar, Joachim Jeremias:

> Ancient Judaism did not know of an anticipated resurrection as an event of history. Nowhere does one find in the literature anything comparable to the resurrection of Jesus. Certainly resurrections of the dead were known, but these always concerned resuscitations, the return to earthly life. In no place in the late Judaic literature does it concern a resurrection δόξα [glory] as an event of history.[246]

Without the support of Jewish teaching, and certainly without the support of the Roman worldview, Craig concludes that no viable explanation for the origin of belief in the resurrection exists apart from a historical resurrection of Christ.

Compared to Licona's *The Resurrection of Jesus*, Craig's *The Son Rises* does not offer an extensive look at source materials, nor does it individually discuss the strength of each source. It does, however, provide a more readable rationale as to why a historical resurrection is a significantly better fit than any modern hypothesis.

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[246] Cited in Craig, *The Son Rises*, 130. Craig references the quote as from Joachim Jeremias, "Die älteste Schicht der Osterüberlieferung," in *Resurrexit*, ed. Édouard Dhanis (Rome: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1974), 194.

N. T. Wright: *The Resurrection of the Son of God*

N. T. Wright is the retired Bishop of Durham in the Church of England and is currently Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews in Scotland. He is a prolific writer on the New Testament and, in *The Resurrection of Son of God*,[247] provides one of the most exhaustive looks at the resurrection. Unlike the other works reviewed here, it is not Wright's primary aim to build a case for the resurrection by examining biblical or non-biblical accounts. Instead, he sets out to challenge what he considers to be the dominant paradigm concerning the resurrection held by many scholars and mainline churches.

This paradigm generally holds to the following: (1) the Jewish context allows for "resurrection" to mean many things; (2) the earliest Christian writers did not believe in bodily resurrection, (3) the earliest Christians believed in Jesus' glorification or exaltation in some special, non-bodily sense, (4) the resurrection stories were inventions made to support a non-bodily concept of resurrection, (5) the appearances of Jesus were merely descriptions of personal, internal conversion experiences and did not involve any external reality, and (6) Jesus did not physically rise from the dead, even if we do not know what happened to his body.[248]

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[247] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003).

[248] Wright, *Resurrection of the Son,* 7.

In challenging this paradigm, Wright begins by looking at what resurrection meant in the ancient world, and particularly in first-century Judea. This, says Wright, is essential so that we can understand the language of the writings on which any case is made about the resurrection:

> Many studies of the resurrection have begun by examining the accounts of the Easter experiences in Paul and the gospels, subjecting those accounts to detailed tradition-historical analysis. This puts the cart before the horse. Such analysis is always speculative; until we know what resurrection meant in that world, we are unlikely to get it right. This is not just a matter of seeing the big picture ahead of the details, though that is important too; it is about knowing what we are talking about before we begin to talk about it.[249]

With this in mind, Wright then exposes three main influences on the first-century Judeans. First, the pagan Roman world did not believe in bodily resurrection of any kind. The body was generally considered bad and even if some sort of soul-life existed beyond the grave it most certainly did not involve a continuous "person" in a renewed body. Second, the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, held some sway in the Jewish mind, but their perspective was in the minority. Third, and perhaps most important, was the perspective of the Pharisees, who had the strongest influence on first-century Palestinian Jews. They believed that the bodily resurrection would occur and further that it would occur at the end of the age for all of God's people.

What is important to note is that the concept of resurrection for all three groups was the same. That is, when resurrection was spoken of it referred to *bodily* resurrection. Thus, Wright concludes,

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[249] Wright, *Resurrection of the Son*, 30.

> Jew and non-Jew alike heard the early Christians to be saying that it [a bodily resurrection] happened to Jesus. They did not suppose that Christians were merely asserting that Jesus' soul had attained some kind of heavenly bliss or special status.[250]

They uniformly understood that what was being declared was wholly new—Jesus had risen from the dead. Therefore, it is without substantial support that those today construe the language of the New Testament to be speaking of a resurrection that is not bodily in nature and was not first experienced by Jesus Christ.

In support of this thesis, Wright explores the epistles of Paul and the other apostles, the early church fathers, and the Gospels, providing a thorough analysis of each. His point in reviewing the contributions of each source is not to defend their individual historical nature (which was beyond the primary scope of the book), but rather to show that they could not rightfully be taken to be purporting something other than bodily resurrection:

> Let us be quite clear at this point: we shall see that when the early Christians said "resurrection" they meant it in the sense that it bore both in paganism (which denied it) and in Judaism (an influential part of which affirmed it). "Resurrection" did not mean that someone possessed "a heavenly and exalted status"; when predicated of Jesus, it did not mean his "perceived presence" in the ongoing church. Nor, if we are thinking historically, could it have meant "the passage of the human Jesus into the power of God". It meant bodily resurrection; and that is what the early Christian affirmed. There is nothing in the early Christian view of the promised future which corresponds to the pagan view we have studied; nothing at all which corresponds to the denials of the Sadducees; virtually no hint of the "disembodied bliss" view of some Jewish sources; no Sheol, no "isles of blessed", no "shining like stars", but a constant affirmation of newly embodied life.[251]

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[250] Wright, *Resurrection of the Son,* 83.

[251] Wright, *Resurrection of the Son,* 209-10.

Wright, however, does not end here. Most certainly, the bulk of his book is meant to defend the above conclusion, but with that conclusion in hand, Wright goes on to defend the historicity of the resurrection and not simply the meaning in which the stories should be taken. He does this based "on two things that must be regarded as historically secure when we talk about the first Easter . . . the emptiness of the tomb and the meetings with the risen Jesus."[252] In essence, he builds a case from just two minimal facts as opposed to Habermas' or Licona's longer list. He claims that, individually, neither of these facts is sufficient to bring about early Christian belief, but that together they bring about a sufficient condition.[253] Furthermore, Wright argues that because of the nature of their claims outside the mainstream, the combination of the empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Jesus were not only sufficient cause for their beliefs but were necessary as well:

> We are left with the conclusion that the combination of the empty tomb and appearances of the living Jesus forms a set of circumstances which is itself *both necessary and sufficient* for the rise of early Christian belief. Without these phenomena, we cannot explain why this belief came into existence, and took the shape it did. With them, we can explain it exactly and precisely.[254]

Thus, while Wright set as his primary aim in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* to debunk the idea that resurrection language in the New Testament could be taken to

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[252] Wright, *Resurrection of the Son,* 686.

[253] Wright, 686-93. The facts are insufficient by themselves because tombs were regularly robbed, so an empty tomb without appearances would not have generated the disciple's belief. Appearances with a tomb still filled with Jesus' body also would have been insufficient to generate belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus for obvious reasons.

[254] Wright, *Resurrection of the Son,* 696.

mean something other than bodily resurrection, he does in the end provide a defense of its historicity. Nonetheless, the most important contribution of Wright's tome is that it defends against a reading of the Scriptures that allows for a strictly spiritual reading of the resurrection of Christ.

When considering these works together, the Christian who holds to the bodily resurrection of Christ is not left to take the fact by faith alone. The literature provides an excellent assessment of the historicity of source documents, a thorough examination of the context in which those documents would have been understood, a defense of a bodily resurrection as the best explanation of the evidence, and a recognition of the implications both for first-century observers as well as the contemporary person. Thus, it is reasonable to defend more than a fuzzy view of spiritual bliss in the afterlife, but a fully embodied resurrection at the second coming of the one who has already risen from the dead.

Christianity among the Religions

Addressing the topic of Christianity among the religions seems like a nearly impossible task considering all of the variations of beliefs and the manner in which they differ from historical Christianity. But, considering the ever-increasing pluralistic North American culture, it would be negligent not to broach this subject as part of this doctoral project. This review of literature pertaining to the subject will be necessarily brief, but will touch upon literature that provides general information about the religions, some understanding of why other religions exists, and how to engage with those of other faiths.

Works providing description and analysis of the major, and not so major, religions of the world abound. They include everything from the exhaustive sixteen-volume *The*

Encyclopedia of Religion[255] to simple introductions like Gerald McDermott's *World Religions: An Indispensable Introduction*.[256] Two books that provide enough information to provide a solid grounding in a good number of religions and yet are written from a Christian vantage point are *Understanding World Religions* by Irving Hexham[257] and *Neighboring Faiths* by Winfried Corduan. [258]

Irving Hexham: *Understanding World Religions*

Hexham follows an interdisciplinary approach that considers not only the beliefs but also the history, practice, philosophy, and cultural manifestations stemming from three main religious traditions: African (including witchcraft and sorcery), Yogic (Hinduism & Buddhism), and Abramic (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). While Hexham clearly writes from a Christian perspective, he does not seek to compare Christianity to each of the other religions directly, nor does he seek to offer advice to Christians on how to interface with those of other faiths. His aim is to present a solid rubric for the study of religions that presents religions on their own terms.

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[255] Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 16 vols. (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1987).

[256] Gerald R. McDermott, *World Religions: An Indispensable Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011).

[257] Irving Hexham, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

[258] Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

Winfried Corduan: *Neighboring Faiths*

Neighboring Faiths is similar to *Understanding World Religions* in that it too takes an interdisciplinary approach and provides an excellent study of various religions that does not create straw men as foils for Christianity. Indeed, the reader is left with the impression that the information provided for each religion would resonate with the adherents of the religions studied.

Where Corduan's work sets itself apart from Irving's is that each chapter of *Neighboring Faith* ends with a discussion of how Christians might approach those of the particular faith explored. Corduan's advice is not lengthy, but it does help Christian readers maintain the particularity of Christ's claims, locate where other religions leave followers wanting, and avoid approaching those of other faiths with misguided presuppositions. Another important contribution by Corduan is that in his introduction to *Neighboring Faiths* he provides an excellent argument that monotheism preceded other religious and was not the product of some social evolutionary process.

Gerald R. McDermott: *God's Rival*

When considering Christianity's place among other religions, it does not take long for questions to arise from both Christians and non-Christians alike. These questions include, Why has God allowed different religions?, How should Christians treat other religions?, But do all religions not lead to God?, and Given all of the options, how can one know what to believe? Gerald McDermott targets the first of these questions in *God's*

Rival: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions?[259] In doing so, he takes a look at both Old and New Testament teaching as well as the teaching of the church fathers to discern a proper view of other religions. His conclusion is that a Christian is grounded well in believing that the origin of at least some religions is supernatural, that they teach at least some truth, and that despite their errors God uses them in his work of redemption.

With this in mind, he answers the question of why God permitted other religions with at least a three-fold answer. First, God's love for the world meant he gave humanity the freedom to reject his truth, which they did in forming various views of God and reality. Second, God permitted other religions out of "grace and forbearance toward human hardness of heart."[260] He did this because even truth that is distorted can be used by God to prepare for the gospel. This leads to McDermott's third reason, which is that other religions let Christians show others that their non-Christian religious yearnings are properly fulfilled in Christ.

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[259] Gerald R. McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions? Insights from the Bible and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007).

[260] McDermott, *God's Rivals*, 161.

Timothy C. Tennent: *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*

Timothy Tennent, in *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*,[261] appears largely to agree with McDermott's conclusions and argues for an "engaged exclusivist" perspective on other religions. By using this term, he means to steer clear of both pluralism (which purports that all religious paths are equally legitimate and Christianity does not have an exclusive claim to truth) and inclusivism (which claims that all are saved by the work of Christ although they may follow other religious paths), but he also means to avoid a kind of fundamentalist exclusivism that considers virtually everything connected with another religion as dangerous.

Instead, "engaged exclusivism" recognizes that God's general revelation means there is some truth in other religions and, therefore, calls believers to be engaged in open dialogue with others, seek understanding, and forward the truthfulness and particularity of Christianity. Taking this stance, Tennent uses the bulk of his text to outline how the Christian might dialogue with those of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim faiths and provides fictional first-person "Religious Roundtable" dialogues to give a picture of how Christians might engage in conversations with others.

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[261] Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002).

Michael Green: *"But Don't All Religions Lead to God?"*

In regards to the question, But do all religions not lead to God?, Michael Green has published a short response aimed at those who might ask that same question.[262] His highly readable book explores the competing tenants of various religions and acknowledges that while a pluralistic view is attractive, it is hardly the view of many of the world's religious practitioners:

> [I]f you ask the actual worshippers within different faiths whether all religions are the same, you will get an emphatic denial. They know very well that Christians are different from Muslims and Hindus, and often they are so persuaded for the rightness of their own religion that they slaughter members of other religions and burn their mosques or churches. . . . It is the academics sitting in their studies who write books saying that all religions are the same: the practitioners on the ground think differently.[263]

After seeking to convince his readers that the world's religions are irreconcilably different, Green focuses on Jesus and unfolds his unique life, teaching, and actions in history. For Green, the real comparison is not between Christianity and other religions, but between the call to follow Jesus and the roads that lead away from him.

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[262] Michael Green, *"But Don't All Religions Lead to God?" Navigating the Multi-Faith Maze* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002).

[263] Green, *But Don't All* Religions, 14-15.

Mark Mittelberg: *Choosing Your Faith*

While Green addresses those who use pluralism as a defense against the exclusive claims of Christ, Mark Mittelberg, in *Choosing Your Faith*,[264] considers a whole host of other barriers that are just as likely to keep people from following Jesus. These barriers undoubtedly include other religions, but Mittelberg does not address various religions in a one-by-one fashion. Rather he considers the way people decide among various faiths and discusses whether those ways are valid. In the process, he does address religions like Mormonism, Islam, and Buddhism, but he does so to explain the untrustworthy ways people come to other faiths. For example, Mittelberg questions whether tradition, mystical experience, intuition, and "authoritative" voices are thoroughly valid methods of discerning truth. Although they might provide some insight into truth, for Mittelberg something more is needed. This something more is evidence that comes from logic and sensory experience, as these "are God-given tools we must use to gain the vast majority of our information, and ultimately decide what we believe."[265] The reader is then presented with logical, scientific, textual, historical, and experiential criteria in order to test the religions and in the process is shown how Christianity does a better job of meeting these criteria than other religions.

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[264] Mark Mittelberg, *Choosing Your Faith: In a World of Spiritual Options* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008).

[265] Mittelberg, *Choosing Your Faith*, 154.

Craig J. Hazen: *Five Sacred Crossings*

One other book of note when considering Christianity among the religions is Craig J. Hazen's novel, *Five Sacred Crossings*, which features the fictional character, Michael Jernigan.[266] Called upon to substitute for several weeks in a comparative religions class, Jernigan, a Vietnam vet and expert in South Asian Buddhism, takes on the challenge of explaining why Christianity is the best place to start if searching for a religion. His explanation, however, does not come through didactic teaching, but rather through the unfolding of "five sacred crossings" learned from the Cardamom people he encountered during his combat days.

Although presented in their original cryptic form, the five crossings essentially suggest that Christianity is a good road to travel because: (1) it can be tested in the physical world, (2) the salvation it provides is free, (3) it acknowledges what we experience in the world as real and not illusory, (4) it uses the same logic in affirming theological truths as it does truth about everyday reality, and (5) Jesus is front and center

[266] Craig J. Hazen, *Five Sacred Crossings: A Novel* (2008; repr., Los Angeles, CA: Contend Publishing Group, 2012).

and not ancillary.[267] In the end, Hazen's book provides a non-threatening and appealing way to help people through the maze of religious options.

Answering the Problem of Evil & Suffering

The problem of evil has long been a complaint of theism and, for some, a fatal flaw. Thus, in addition to offering positive arguments for the existence of God or the veracity of Scripture, the Christian must also be prepared to answer this age-old critique. Stated simply, the problem of evil claims that the following three propositions are in some manner inconsistent or improbable:

1) God is omnipotent.

2) God is wholly good.

3) Evil exists.

In response to the alleged flaw, theists have addressed logical and evidential concerns, compared competing worldviews in light of the world's suffering, given substantial reasons why a good and all-powerful God could justifiably permit evil and suffering, explained the necessity of moral and natural evil in a dynamic world, and

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[267] Hazen's novel is based on an actual experience he had substituting for a religious studies class during which he shared the essence of the five crossings (although crossings three and four were combined in the actual event, so only "Four Reasons a Thoughtful Person on a Religious Quest Should Start That Quest with Christianity" were given). An account of his own experience is found in Craig J. Hazen, "Christianity in a World of Religions," in *Passionate Conviction: Contemporary Discourses on Christian Apologetics*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 140-53.

recognized that even if the logical and evidential arguments for God are answered the emotional problem still remains.

Plantinga and the Logical Problem

Alvin Plantinga is the John A. O'Brien Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame and is largely responsible for putting the logical problem to rest in *God, Freedom, and Evil*.[268] In addressing the alleged contradiction, Plantinga begins by clarifying that the three premises of the problem of evil are not formally inconsistent. They do not, for example, say that A is greater than B and B is greater than C but A is not greater than C. Thus, in order to claim that they are inconsistent, one must add other propositions to the formulation, such as "Every good thing always eliminates every evil that *it knows about* and can eliminate."[269]

The problem, Plantinga argues, is that this and other attempted propositions do not prove to be necessary, and if they are not necessary then the purported problem of evil is not one that is by necessity illogical. In other words, while it may not be immediately evident how evil and God can co-exist, it is equally evident that the two are not necessarily exclusive. So convincing has been the force of Plantinga's argument that academic atheists have moved away from the logical problem (wherein they attempt to show that belief in the existence of God in light of evil is logically contradictory and thus

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[268] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).

[269] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil,* 18.

irrational) to the evidential problem (wherein they seek to establish that God is highly unlikely in light of the evidence).

The Evidential Problem

While the logical problem is still forwarded by the layperson, it is the evidential problem that is most regularly offered by scholarly atheist thinkers as a defeater of God. In essence, the evidential problem states that given the quantity, quality, and gratuitous existence of evil in the world, it is unlikely that there is an all-powerful, good God since such a God could have created a different world in which the manifestation of evil would have been much less than what it is. Because of the frequency of this claim, the larger proportion of published material by theists is not spent mitigating the logical problem, but rather the evidential problem. Although there are theists who solve the evidential problem by either limiting the power, knowledge, or goodness of God, among those who maintain the traditional view that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good, several responses are offered.

In his Free Will Defense, Plantinga suggests that

> it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contains moral evil. And if so, then it is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil.[270]

The good reason could include the proposition that a world with creatures who have free will is more valuable than a world with creatures without free will. Thus, if humanity

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[270] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil,* 31.

chooses to do what is wrong, even in a measure that is appalling, this, says Plantinga, cannot count against God's omnipotence or goodness.[271] In fact, there is nothing that disconfirms the propositions that

> God is omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect; God has created the world; all the evil in the world is broadly moral evil; and there is no possible world God could have created that contains a better balance of broadly moral good with respect to broadly moral evil.[272]

Because nothing can disconfirm Plantinga's thesis, "The existence of God is neither precluded nor rendered improbable by the existence of evil."[273]

John Feinberg, Chairman of the Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, goes a bit further and considers ways God might eliminate evil. His suggestions include:

1) God could eliminate evil by doing away with mankind.

2) God could remove all objects of desire.

3) God could remove all human desires.

4) God could allow us to have desires but never to the point where they would be aroused to produce moral evil.

5) God could allow us to have any desires and to form intentions based on those desires but intervenes by taking away any intentions that would lead to evil.

6) God could eliminate any willing to do evil.

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[271] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil,* 30.

[272] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil,* 63.

[273] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil,* 63.

7) God could eliminate the expression of evil by stopping any bodily actions that would cause evil.

8) God could eliminate evil by miraculously intervening so that any bodily action that was intended for evil is mitigated.[274]

Feinberg argues, however, that if God were to take any of these actions we would likely not enjoy the results; we would not even be the same kinds of creature:

> I take it that God could have done this, and if he had, it would likely have removed moral evil. The problem is that it would also remove human beings as we know them. It is hard to know what to call the resultant creature since it could neither move nor think—even "robot" seems too "complimentary." I doubt that anyone who thinks there is any worth in being human and in God creating humans, would find it acceptable if God did this.[275]

Thus, while not fully in Plantinga's camp,[276] Feinberg nonetheless gives further credence to the possibility that God could not have created a better, less evil-filled world that includes indeterminate creatures such as humans represent.[277]

As the evidential problem is one of probabilities (that is, it states that it is not *likely* that God exists), some theists directly address the stated improbability of God. For example, Gregory Ganssle and Yena Lee state that the likelihood of God existing is not

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[274] John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 174-78.

[275] Feinberg, *Many Faces of Evil*, 179.

[276] Feinberg takes a compatibilist view of human free will and providence as opposed to Plantinga's incompatibilist stance.

[277] C. S. Lewis also gave a free will defense and concluded similarly: "Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you will find that you have excluded life itself." C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1940; repr., New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 25.

something that we are in a position to assess.[278] Based on what we know, it may not seem as if there are sufficient reasons for evil such that God could be considered omnipotent *and* good. The problem is we are not in a position to know how much we know. If we know all there is to know then perhaps we could claim that God is unlikely, but if the quantity and quality of the information we possess is paltry compared to all that can be known, we could be very far off in our assessment of how likely it is that God could exist. Ganssle and Lee write,

> We are not in a position to judge what God's purpose is in permitting the various cases of evil. We do not know what reasons God might have that would render the observations surprising. Because we lack this key information, we cannot compare the relevant probabilities.[279]

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[278] Gregory E. Ganssle and Yena Lee, "Evidential Problems of Evil," in *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain*, ed. Chad Meister, and James K. Dew (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 15-25

[279] Ganssle and Lee, "Evidential Problems of Evil," 22.

Therefore, "We ought to be skeptical about our ability to make the relevant judgment about whether or not it is unlikely that there is a justifying reason for the evil we observe."[280]

Other theists argue that even if the problem of evil counted against God, such evidence would only be among a larger pool of evidence regarding the existence of God. This is the stated position of William Lane Craig in *On Guard*:

> Now the atheist says God's existence is improbable. You should immediately ask, "Improbable relative to what?" What is the background information? The suffering in the world? If that's all the background information you're considering, then it's no wonder God's existence looks improbable relative to that! (Though, as I've just argued, appearances can be deceiving!) But that's not the really interesting question. The interesting question is whether God's existence is probable relative to the full scope of evidence. I'm convinced that whatever improbability suffering may cast upon God's existence, it's outweighed by the arguments for the existence of God.[281]

Given this stance, it is not surprising that when Craig debated Michael Tooley on the problem of evil, he began by presenting five lines of evidence in favor of the existence of

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[280] Ganssle and Lee, "Evidential Problems of Evil," 22. Ganssle and Lee's words are precisely the point of Plantinga's notable "noseeum" illustration: "I look inside my tent: I don't see a St. Bernard; it is then probable that there is no St. Bernard in my tent. That is because if there were one there, I would very likely have seen it; it's not easy for a St. Bernard to avoid detection in a small tent. Again, I look inside my tent: I don't see any noseeums (very small midges with a bite out of all proportion to their size); this time it is not particularly probable that there are no noseeums in my tent—at least it isn't any more probable than before I looked. The reason, of course, is that even if there were noseeums there, I wouldn't see 'em; they're too small to see. And now the question is whether God's reasons, if any, for permitting . . . evils . . . are more like St. Bernards or more like noseeums." Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 466.

[281] Craig, *On Guard*, 161.

God (the origins of the universe, the fine-tuning of the universe, the existence of objective morals, facts concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the experience of believers)[282] and ended his opening statement with a challenge:

> If Michael wants us to believe that God does not exist, then he must first tear down all five of the reasons I presented and then in their place erect a case of his own to prove that God does not exist. Unless and until he does that, I think belief in God is the more plausible worldview.[283]

While it is dubious that Tooley would need to dismantle all arguments in favor of theism, Craig does have a point in suggesting that the evidential argument relative to the problem of evil and suffering is not sufficient in and of itself to declare the case closed.

C. S. Lewis and the Depravity of Man

The evidential argument against God is not so much that there would be no evil or suffering, but that there would not be as much evil and suffering as there is. How could God, if he were wholly good and all-powerful, permit humanity to endure what we must? The answer C. S. Lewis gives in *The Problem of Pain* is that he allows it because of the depravity of man. While Lewis pointedly states he does not believe in the doctrine of total depravity, "partly because on the logical ground that if our depravity were total we should not know ourselves depraved, and partly because experience shows us much

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[282] William Lane Craig and Michael Tooley, "The Craig-Tooley Debate: Theism, Atheism and the Problem of Evil," in *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain*, ed. Chad Meister and James K. Dew (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 291-98.

[283] Craig and Tooley, "The Craig-Tooley Debate," 298.

goodness in human nature,"[284] he nonetheless paints a picture of humanity being wildly rebellious, albeit in often subtle, socially acceptable ways.

> We imply, and often believe, that habitual vices are exceptional single acts, and make the opposite mistake about our virtues—like the bad tennis player who calls his normal form his 'bad days' and mistakes his rare successes for his normal. I do not think it is our fault that we cannot tell the real truth about ourselves; the persistent, life-long, inner murmur of spite, jealousy, prurience, greed; and self-complacence, simply will not go into words. But the important thing is that we should not mistake our inevitably limited utterances for a full account of the worst that is inside.[285]

This means that, ultimately, the pain we suffer is not unjustified, even pain that would lead to death. D. A. Carson concurs:

> I am a responsible participant in my own death. Death is not simply something that happens to me. It happens to me because I am a sinner. In that sense I have caused death; I am death's subject, not just its object. In my transgression I have attracted the just wrath of God. And that wrath is not mere outworking of impersonal principles, still less the arbitrary demarcation between time and eternity, but God's personal and judicial reaction to the transgression in which I have responsibly indulged as a person.[286]

As Lewis himself fought in World War I and wrote his book in the throes of World War II, he was acquainted well with the suffering common humanity can

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[284] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 61.

[285] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 53-54.

[286] D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 99.

perpetrate and the evil that constitutes the individual's nature.[287] Thus, posits Lewis, if God loves us he cannot keep us in this state, but "must labor to make us lovable."[288] This requires that we be awakened since "error and sin both have this property, that the deeper they are the less their victim suspects their existence." This awakening, he concludes, is accomplished by pain:

> Until the evil man finds evil unmistakably present in his existence, in the form of pain, he is enclosed in illusion. Once pain has aroused him, he knows that he is in some way or other 'up against' the real universe: he either rebels . . . or else makes some attempt at an adjustment, which, if pursued, will lead him to religion. . . . No doubt Pain as God's megaphone is a terrible instrument; it may lead to final and unrepented rebellion. But it gives the only opportunity the bad man can have for amendment. It removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul.[289]

As Lewis expounds elsewhere, suffering and pain often require the forgoing of "second things" (temporal happiness) for "first things" (the return of our allegiance to him)[290] for the greater good of a broken humanity.[291]

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[287] A contemporary voice speaking about the atrocities of mankind since the beginning of the 20th century is Clay Jones. For a startling look at the prevalence and extent of human evil, see Clay Jones, "We Don't Take Human Evil Seriously So We Don't Understand Why We Suffer," 2011, accessed June 20, 2013, http://www.clayjones.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Human-Evil-and-Suffering.pdf.

[288] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 41.

[289] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 93-94.

[290] C. S. Lewis, "First and Second Things," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 278-81.

[291] Some have called what Lewis argues here the "Greater Good Defense." See Keith E. Yandell, "The Greater Good Defense," *Sophia* 13 (October 1974): 1-16.

Kreeft and Worldview Fit

Evil and suffering exists, or at least the appearance of evil and suffering exists. Therefore, it becomes a problem that all worldviews must explain, not just theism. The question is which worldview makes the most sense out of humanity's experience of pain and evil. Peter Kreeft, Professor of Philosophy at both Boston College and The King's College, argues convincingly that the Christian worldview best explains suffering in *Making Sense Out of Suffering*.[292] He does this first by declaring that other worldviews, such as atheism, paganism, dualism, Satanism, pantheism, deism, and idealism, provide easy but unsatisfying answers. For example, Kreeft declares atheism "a cheap answer" to the problem of evil because among other things, it (1) belittles the vast majority who have believed in a god despite the fact that they also have known pain; (2) dismisses other evidences in favor of God; (3) leaves open the question of why evolution has not already created an evil-free world if it is has had an infinity to do so; and (4) does not explain where the idea of evil came from in the first place, since evil requires the existence of a standard of goodness and a God who sets that standard.[293]

While Kreeft concludes that worldviews that diminish or eliminate God or deny evil altogether are less than satisfying, he spends most of his time providing eight "clues" from philosophers, artists, and prophets that support the theist's understanding of God in

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[292] Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990).

[293] Kreeft, *Making Sense*, 30-32.

light of the presence of evil. These clues aim in at least five significant directions. First, they indicate that happiness is found in being good, not feeling good.[294] Second, they tell us that suffering might be necessary to make us good and even real,[295] that is,

> If we need to suffer to become wise, if we need to sacrifice some pleasure to be virtuous, if too much pleasure would make us fools, if an easy life would make us less virtuous. . . . God might use suffering to train us, sacrificing the lesser good for the greater.[296]

Third, the clues suggest that we came from paradise and are made for it, for why else would we feel something is wrong or missing in the midst of evil and suffering?[297] Fourth, they remind us that no one is truly good.[298] Fifth, they harken to the Day of the Lord wherein death is swallowed up, suffering ceases, and justice is administered.[299]

Together these clues shape the Christian understanding of the world, an understanding which includes both the presence of a good and all-powerful God as well as grievous evil and suffering. While the position of Christian theism may not answer all

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[294] Kreeft, *Making Sense,* 64. In defense of this point, Kreeft notes, "suffering does not refute the belief in a good God to the ancient mind because a good God might well sacrifice our subjective happiness for our objective happiness."

[295] Kreeft, *Making Sense,* 76-77.

[296] Kreeft, *Making Sense,* 71-72.

[297] Kreeft, *Making Sense,* 92-95.

[298] Kreeft, *Making Sense,* 114-18.

[299] Kreeft, *Making Sense,* 125-26.

questions surrounding the problem of evil, Kreeft argues that the Christian position makes better sense than that offered by competing worldviews.

Kreeft goes on to suggest that the clues about God, humanity, and evil do not converge in an *idea* about the problem of evil but around a *person*. If the problem of evil is ultimately a problem with a person, namely an evil-permitting God, then the answer must also be personal. Kreeft believes a personal answer is found in Jesus Christ who did not just watch our suffering from afar but "did three things to solve the problem of suffering:" 1) he suffered with us; 2) he transformed the meaning of our suffering in becoming man; and 3) he died and rose, transforming "death from a hole into a door."[300] In presenting his case, Kreeft makes special note of the resurrection and its impact on our view of suffering:

> [The resurrection] makes more than all the difference in the world. Many condolences begin by saying something like this: "I know nothing can bring back your dear one again, but . . . " No matter what words follow, no matter what comforting psychology follows that "but," Christianity says something to the bereaved that makes all the rest trivial, something the bereaved longs infinitely more to hear: God can and will bring back your dear one to life again. There is resurrection.
>
> What difference does it make? Simply the difference between eternal joy and infinite and eternal joylessness. . . .
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> Because of resurrection, when our tears are over, we will, incredibly, look back at them and laugh, not in derision but in joy.[301]

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[300] Kreeft, *Making Sense*, 138.

[301] Kreeft, *Making Sense*, 138-39.

Such an understanding of the person of God Incarnate and the implications of his resurrection makes sense of the suffering in the world and does so much more than competing worldviews.

Garry DeWeese and Natural Evil

Much of what has been presented above applies easily to the problem of moral evil and the suffering that it causes, but what about natural evil? One might be able to accept the loss of 2,977 at the World Trade Center in 2001 as the attendant consequences of human free will, but what about the loss of some 230,000 as a result of the Indian Ocean Tsunami? Garry DeWeese, Professor of Religion and Ethics at Talbot School of Theology, offers an answer via his "Free Process" Defense.[302] The defense involves six premises, the first three of which are:

1. The natural world is a dynamic world composed of a vast number of interacting nonlinear dissipative dynamical systems which are sensitively dependent on initial conditions.
2. Nonlinear dissipative dynamical systems may, given a very slight disturbance in initial conditions, lose equilibrium and behave in wildly erratic ways.
3. Wildly erratic systems in the natural world cause natural evil.[303]

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[302] Garry DeWeese, "Natural Evil: A 'Free Process' Defense," in *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain,* eds. Chad Meister and James K. Dew Jr. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 53-64.

[303] DeWeese, "Natural Evil," 55.

DeWeese defends these three premises largely by relying on modern chaos theory, which indicates that even the slightest disturbance (the famously described "flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil") has the possibility of creating great natural evil elsewhere ("a tornado in Texas").[304]

The second part of DeWeese's argument includes two premises:

4. A dynamic world in which free creatures can exercise genuine creativity, thereby bringing about truly novel effects, is better than a static world.
5. God would want to create a dynamic world.[305]

In defense of these two premises, he first sets out the neuro-physiological defense in which he notes that both the brain and the heart are recognized as non-linear, dynamic systems in which impulses originate from various locations. This allows for both the brain and the heart to "repair" itself or recover from injury, something that simply would not be possible in a "linear" world. This, suggests DeWeese, provides an illustration of the superiority of a dynamic, even wildly chaotic, world over a static world.

Second, he defends his argument by recognizing that dynamic systems have a much greater potential for novelty and variety (think snowflakes), and this potential is of great value, even to God:

> A mechanistic world, where natural processes would "snap back" to their original orientation, would not allow for genuine creativity. Certainly not all of

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[304] See E. N. Lorenz, "Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?", American Association for the Advancement of Science 139th meeting, accessed January 27, 2014, http://eaps4.mit.edu/research/Lorenz/Butterfly_1972.pdf.

[305] DeWeese, "Natural Evil," 58.

> humanity's creativity is for the good, but it's difficult to imagine how impoverished the world would be—and our individual lives would be—without the possibility of bringing about truly novel effects in the world. Indeed, as creatures made in God's image, the exercise of reasoned creativity seems essential to a meaningful life.[306]

This, of course, would give reason for God to want to create a dynamic world, even if such a world would bring about the possibility of natural evils.

The final premise in DeWeese's argument is:

6. Even God cannot make a dynamic world in which natural evil could not occur.[307]

This premise is not meant to suggest that God actualizes all natural evil (although Scripture would certainly suggest he does so on occasion), but rather that he knowingly creates the potential for natural evil for the sake of a dynamic world. Once the potentiality is created within a dynamic system, it is not hard to imagine how creatures, particularly those with free will, could create a disturbance (via the butterfly effect) in the larger system and thus bring about natural evil. The resulting implication is that natural evil is a natural consequence of free will. In other words, if God wants to create a dynamic world in which creatures would have free will, natural evil becomes inevitable.

DeWeese's formulation also provides for a connection between natural evil and moral evil when one adds in the fall of humanity and the presence of demons. If all free actions have the possibility of creating natural evil, then certainly a proportion of natural

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[306] DeWeese, "Natural Evil," 59.

[307] DeWeese, "Natural Evil," 61.

evil must be attributed to moral evil. As DeWeese states, "both human and demonic agents can cause natural processes to become chaotic in nature. To the degree that this is so, the resultant 'natural evil' would be moral evil after all."[308] While DeWeese is not the only one to tie natural evil to the fact that we live in a fallen world,[309] he does provide perhaps the best explanation of how they are connected.

D. A. Carson and the Mystery of Compatibilism

Many of the contributors mentioned above are incompatibilists. This means they believe that 1) people have free will, and 2) free will is only free will if there is nothing outside the person acting (including God) that determines the will. Those taking this position include C. S. Lewis, Alvin Plantinga, and William Lane Craig. Others, however, are compatibilists who argue that 1) people have free will, but 2) persons can maintain free will even if God is absolutely sovereign over their activity. This camp includes Douglas Groothuis, John Feinberg, and D. A. Carson. While attempts have been made to support this position philosophically,[310] it is not unusual for compatibilists simply to

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[308] DeWeese, "Natural Evil," 62.

[309] For example, see John Feinberg, who ties post-fall natural evil to the fall, or William Dembski who proposes that the fall is responsible for even pre-fall natural evil in an old earth scenario. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 191-203; William A. Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009).

[310] See R. E. Hobart, "Free Will as Involving Determination and Inconceivable Without It" *Mind* 43, no. 169 (Jan 1934): 1-27; and John Frame, "Human Responsibility and Freedom," in *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishers, 2002).

present the biblical data and draw their conclusion apart from any philosophical arguments. This is, in essence, what D. A. Carson accomplished in his book *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*.[311]

Carson admits that how the two propositions of compatibilism are simultaneously true is a mystery since "the mystery of providence defies our attempt to tame it by reason."[312] But since "God is less interested in answering our questions than in other things," such as "securing our allegiance, establishing our faith, nurturing a desire for holiness,"[313] the mystery is not only acceptable but preferred:

> One of the common ingredients in most of the attempts to overthrow compatibilism is the sacrifice of mystery. The problem looks neater when, say, God is not behind evil in any sense. But quite apart from the fact that the biblical texts will not allow so easy an escape, the result is a totally nonmysterious God. And somehow the god of this picture is domesticated, completely unpuzzling.[314]

While many apologists shrink from offering mystery as a solution for questions related to God, the compatibilist stance is nonetheless valuable in that, at the very least, it does not package evil and suffering in a little box as if it all can be understood. Defenses against the claim that evil and suffering precludes the existence of God might offer scenarios that make it plausible that God could exist with evil, but these scenarios do not constitute absolute explanations of the problem of evil. Thus, it is valuable to remind those trained

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[311] Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*.

[312] Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 201.

[313] Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 219.

[314] Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 200.

to answer this issue, whether compatibilists or incompatibilists, that an element of mystery will always remain.

The Emotional Problem

Nearly all who defend the existence of God in a suffering world recognize that such a defense means little to the one who is actually experiencing evil. When people suffer they most often do not care whether their suffering is supported by some logical construct, nor do they necessarily find immediate comfort in Scripture's claim that "all things work together for good for those who love God."[315] Rather, they need someone who will stand by them in their pain and wrestle with them in their questions. Therefore, the apologist must not be quick to give an apologetic answer when the questions asked are but the heart crying out. To that end, several works that provide personal and helpful "companionship" for those experiencing suffering are: *A Grace Disguised*, Jerry

[315] Rom. 8:28

Sittser;[316] *A Grief Observed*, C. S. Lewis;[317] *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller;[318] *When God Weeps*, Joni Eareckson Tada;[319] *A Grief Sanctified*, J. I. Packer;[320] and *Experiencing Grief*, H. Norman Wright.[321]

Confronting Myths about Christianity

It is not unusual for myths about Christianity to act as "evidence" against Christianity and barriers to faith. Although they are likely more red herrings than actual defeaters, these myths have nonetheless proven effective in justifying a life absent of Christian faith. Thus, it is important for the apologist at least to become familiar with the more prevalent myths and how to dispel them adequately. As with myths in general, some have basis in fact and others have absolutely no basis, and so in familiarizing

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[316] Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss*, expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

[317] C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (1961; repr., New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009).

[318] Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York, NY: Dutton Adult, 2013).

[319] Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes, *When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997).

[320] J. I. Packer, *A Grief Sanctified: Through Sorrow to Eternal Hope* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002).

[321] H. Norman Wright, *Experiencing Grief* (Grand Rapids, MI: B&H Books, 2004).

oneself with myths, it is important to concede what is true even if the truth does not paint Christians in a particularly noble light.

Jeffrey Burton Russell: *Exposing Myths about Christianity*

The most exhaustive response to myths about Christianity is Jeffrey Burton Russell's *Exposing Myths about Christianity: A Guide to Answering 145 Viral Lies and Legends*.[322] Russell is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of California-Santa Barbara, and he draws from his much more intensive monographs, including *A History of Witchcraft*, *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and the Historians*, and *Medieval Civilization*,[323] in the formulation of his response to the 145 myths. His approach is remarkably even-handed as he willingly concedes where Christians have not lived out a God-honoring faith, while at the same time not budging from the historical record or Christian orthodoxy.

In *Exposing Myths about Christianity*, myths are grouped under six subheadings: (1) Christianity Is Dying Out, (2) Christianity Is Destructive, (3) Christianity Is Stupid, (4) Jesus and the Bible Have Been Shown to Be False, (5) Christian Beliefs Have Been Shown to Be Wrong, (6) Miracles Are Impossible, (7) Worldviews Can't Be Evaluated,

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[322] Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Exposing Myths about Christianity: A Guide to Answering 145 Viral Lies and Legends* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012).

[323] Jeffrey B. Russell and Brooks Alexander, *A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007); Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and Modern Historians* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1991); and Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Medieval Civilization* (New York, NY: Wiley, 1968).

and (8) What's New is True. As would be expected, the myths addressed are diverse and range from "Christianity is anti-sex" to "Christians burned down the Great Library at Alexandria," and from "Belief in Christianity is incompatible with science" to "The church changed the Bible to fit its doctrines." Russell's responses are not lengthy (generally one to four pages), but regularly undermine errant historical information, correct misunderstandings about Christianity, or expose ungrounded assumptions made by those who perpetuate the myths.

Ronald L. Numbers: *Galileo Goes to Jail*

Other myth-busting works are less exhaustive and tend to focus in on fewer myths. Ronald L. Numbers, Hillsdale Professor of the History of Science and Medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, offers a look at twenty-five myths about science and religion in *Galileo Goes to Jail*.[324] This edited compilation does not only address myths that Christians feel are used to denigrate their faith, but also includes articles from non-believers who believe that Christians have their own myths that keep them from "facing the facts" and confronting what they believe to be a world without God.

Thus, in addition to seeing the likes of David C. Linberg discussing the myth "that the rise of Christianity was responsible for the demise of ancient science," or Edward B. Davis' response to the myth "that Isaac Newton's mechanistic cosmology eliminated the need for God," one also reads Michael Ruse's disagreement with the idea "that

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[324] Ronald L. Numbers, ed. *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

‘intelligent design’ represents a scientific challenge to evolution,” and James Moore’s defense against the claim “that evolution destroyed Darwin’s faith in Christianity—until he reconverted on his deathbed.” Overall, *Galileo Goes to Jail* gives the reader a bit less of a Christian apologetic and a bit more of an exposition of how various sides of the theist-atheist debate name the myths and answer them.

Philip J. Sampson: *Six Modern Myths*

Philip J. Sampson (Ph.D. in social sciences from the University of Southampton in England) narrows the discussion further by honing in on just *Six Modern Myths about Christianity and Western Civilization*.[325] Before introducing the six myths, however, Sampson presents a sizeable introduction that discusses the role of story and myth in reinforcing and perpetuating the prevailing worldview. This introduction includes the following:

> Indeed, we have become so accustomed to the idea of historical narrative that myth seems a thing of the past. Myths are seen as untrue, relics of premodern anxieties that science and progress have assuaged. The ancients have relied on them, but now we know better. However, some myths are still with us.
>
> Just as the Bible cannot be regarded as mythical simply because it is an ancient text, so some modern stories of our place in the universe cannot be regarded as history simply because they are recent texts. Indeed, such stories might have more in common with ancient myths than with history. Of course, modern-day stories of who we are and how we fit into the universe are no longer told in the same way the Greeks told theirs, but that does not mean that we have no such stories. The modern mind, no less the ancient one, uses story to reinforce its belief that we are more advanced and more “scientific” than other civilizations.

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[325] Philip J. Sampson, *Six Modern Myths about Christianity and Civilization* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

> But unlike the ancient Greeks we clothe our modern myths in the garb of history and science.[326]

With this as his premise, Sampson continues on to reveal six modern myths and to propose the anti-theistic tenants they seek to support.

First, Sampson examines the myth of science and the church being at war with one another. The misrepresented story of Galileo's "persecution" establishes the myth and suggests that a person must stand on either the side of rational investigation or irrational dogma. Accurate details regarding Galileo's dealings with the pope and other religious leaders are not important in maintaining the myth; what is important is that a man who had the science right was ultimately rebuffed by the church. Secondly, Sampson explains that the myth of Darwinism tells a story that does away with the need for God; the world is but a product of blind, natural selection. If that means that stories about peppered moths or caricatured reports of the Scopes trial continue to be told without caveats or footnotes, so be it in order to support the larger aim of dismissing God.[327] Third, Sampson suggests there is a myth about Christianity holding a leading role in environmental degradation. The unfounded connection is forwarded as truth in order to paint the church as the enemy of what we can touch and taste and breath.

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[326] Sampson, *Six Modern Myths*, 8.

[327] Of course, as Sampson explains, it was not just the atheists who advanced Darwin's story. Aspects of it were useful for advancing a wide range of causes such as eugenics, the superiority of men over women (and thus the opposition to the suffrage movement), and the supremacy of the Arian race.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth myths are all aimed at painting the church as oppressive. Whether through the obliteration of culture in the case of missionary activity, the repression of human nature through restrictions on human sexuality, or the persecution of non-orthodox believers (such as witches). In regards to the latter, Sampson comments,

> The fact is that somewhere between 90 percent and 99 percent of the cruel deaths reported by the story of witch-hunting are fictional. Exaggeration on this scale requires explanation. What can have possessed so wide a range of authors to imagine the torture and execution of millions of women? No doubt there are many social and psychological factors involved here, but by inventing so many deaths and attributing them to the church, the modern mind evades its own responsibilities and gains an alibi for the unprecedented slaughter of the twentieth century.[328]

Sampson's conclusion in regards to the "witch" myth is essentially the same he makes for the other myths as well: exaggeration or even complete fabrication of "historical" narrative does not support anti-theistic aims by accident.

David Bentley Hart: *Atheist Delusions*

Another valuable contribution to the discussion of myths about Christianity is *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*,[329] authored by David Bentley Hart. Hart is an Eastern Orthodox theologian and philosopher whose book is more a set of interwoven essays than distinct responses to various myths. Nonetheless,

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[328] Sampson, *Six Modern Myths,* 137-38.

[329] David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

along the way he addresses such myths as: monotheism has been the cause of most of the wars in history;[330] early church writings were influenced by Gnosticism and preached liberation from the flesh; Christianity supports the oppression of women; atheism, rather than theism, can better substantiate morality; medieval history was an "age of faith" that was appropriately overthrown by an "age of reason;" Christians have historically sought to repress reason and scholarship; the church represses science; and Christianity has been particularly intolerant of other religions.

Rodney Stark: *For the Glory of God*

The work of Rodney Stark should also be considered in addressing myths about Christianity. Stark, who is the Distinguished Professor of Social Sciences at Baylor University, contributes to the discussion most poignantly in *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery.*[331] Here Stark provides evidence of monotheism's substantial contribution to the formation of modern science as well as the end of slavery. In addition, he explores the era of witch-

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[330] On this issue, the reader is also directed to an insightful article by Robin Schumacher on the prevalence of wars instigated for religious purposes. Robin Schumacher, "Does Religion Cause War? The Myth that Religion is War's #1 Cause," accessed September, 4, 2013, http://www.blogos.org/compellingtruth/does-religion-cause-war.html

[331] Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

hunts which he suggests were part of "Western society's darkest days."[332] Another valuable contribution by Stark is his chapter on the appeal of Christianity to women in *The Triumph of Christianity*.[333] This ancient and long-standing appeal speaks loudly against the myth that Christianity has been oppressive towards women.

Robert D. Woodberry: "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy"

The research of Robert D. Woodberry dovetails well with Stark's findings. Protestant missions has often been shown in a negative light, but Woodberry's research[334] on the impact of "conversionary" Protestant missionary activity makes such a negative characterization unwarranted. While Woodberry does not deny the sometimes culturally insensitive tactics of missionaries, their presence is strongly associated with higher literacy rates, the mass education of women and the poor, protection of the disenfranchised through non-violent social action, and religious freedom. In fact, as the article's title suggests, the historical presence of "conversionary" Protestant missionaries is more strongly associated with the formation of democratic governments across the globe than any other known factor. Thus, says Woodberry, "social scientists should take culture and religion more seriously. Religious groups are not merely interchangeable with

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[332] Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God*, 287.

[333] Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2011), 121-136.

[334] Robert. D. Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (May 2012): 244-74.

any other organization: Distinct theologies and organizational forms lead to distinct outcomes."[335] In the case of Protestant missionaries, those outcomes, contrary to modern myths, are laudable and provide another point of defense for the Christian apologist.

Other Contributions

Three other works aimed at dispelling myths about Christianity focus on myths that are most tied to Scripture. Paul Copan, in *Is God a Moral Monster?*,[336] defends against those who would call God a self-promoting, jealous, vindictive, genocidal beast. He does this by carefully examining both the scriptural and cultural context of God's acts in Old Testament history. Copan does the same with biblical instances of human trafficking, polygamy, dietary laws, and an assortment of seemingly "kooky" laws. While Copan does not always present slam-dunk arguments, he does at least present the case that it is not unreasonable, in light of all the evidence, to view God as a righteous and good God who, while willing to judge sin, is not capricious or inhumane. David T. Lamb's *God Behaving Badly*[337] covers much of the same Old Testament territory, but does so in a slightly less academic and more popular format, while Fred von Kamecke's

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[335] Woodberry, "Missionary Roots," 269.

[336] Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

[337] David T. Lamb, *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist and Racist?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

Busted[338] engages more with New Testament myths. These myths have to do with the trustworthiness of the biblical text, the claims of Christ, and Christian particularity, while von Kamecke also discusses myths like "Christianity is anti-Semitic" and "With all the evil in the world there can't be a God."

In some cases the works reviewed above expose the all-out falsehood of certain myths, while in other cases they give sufficient reason to interpret data in ways that are at least not indicting of theism. In still other cases, they admit to some of the failings of the church to respond in a manner reflective of the overall Christian ethos. As such, they are excellent resources when responding to the use of myths as defeaters of Christianity and/or as "evidence" in favor of competing worldviews.

Putting Apologetics into Practice

Participants of the apologetics conference that is central to this doctoral project were exposed to the apologetic arguments for which the above review of literature has been provided. The intent of the conference was to improve the apologetic understanding of the participants but the hope is that any increased understanding will not just be helpful in solidifying the confidence of the participants themselves, but will also be helpful as they interface with those outside the Christian community. Therefore, the final

[338] Fred von Kamecke, *Busted: Exposing Popular Myths about* Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

session of the apologetics conference was focused on giving advice on how to put apologetics into practice.

Greg Koukl: *Tactics*

Most published material on the topic of putting apologetics into practice is in the shape of an added chapter to a book that covers apologetic arguments. One book, however, that is focused wholly on helping people in the practical use of apologetics is Greg Koukl's *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*.[339] Koukl is President and Founder of Stand to Reason, a ministry focused on the use of apologetics in the public sphere, meaning he has had plenty of opportunity to put apologetics into practice himself. In *Tactics*, Koukl says his aim is to make apologetics "more like diplomacy than D-Day"[340] and offers an approach that "trades more on friendly curiosity—a kind of relaxed diplomacy—than on confrontation."[341] While forwarding an "Ambassador Model" that includes knowledge, wisdom, and character on the part of the apologist, *Tactics* is focused on the wisdom element. Koukl says the wisdom element is all about artful and cordial conversation that does not seek to make a convert at every

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[339] Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

[340] Koukl, *Tactics*, 20.

[341] Koukl, *Tactics*, 20.

encounter, but rather hopes to "put a stone in someone's shoe" and give them something about which to think.[342]

Artful and cordial conversation, suggests Koukl, is best obtained through asking questions. He calls his question asking method the "Columbo" tactic after the television Lieutenant Columbo who was known for sheepishly and unassumingly asking questions in order to uncover evidence. Columbo questions are centered on three aims: gathering information, reversing the burden of proof, and leading the conversation in a particular direction. The first aim of gathering information is important so that the apologist can properly understand the other person's position.[343] Often people are not particularly strong at stating their own view and their initial statements may not accurately represent their true stance or concerns. The second aim—reversing the burden of proof—is valuable because people frequently make unsubstantiated statements that are meant to disarm Christian theism. While Christians at times must provide sound reasons for what they believe to be true, it is not unreasonable for others to bear the burden of proof for their own claims. In calling others to legitimize their own claims, it is possible to help a person uncover the lack of evidence or coherence in their own viewpoint. The third aim

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[342] Koukl, *Tactics*, 41.

[343] Similarly, Gregory Ganssle writes that questions aimed at gathering information allow the questioner to be a diagnostician: "As people who aim to be faithful followers of Jesus, we need to cultivate our diagnostic skills so we can identify and articulate exactly how the remedy Jesus brings will meet the crucial need." See Gregory G. Ganssle, "Making the Gospel Connection," in *Come Let Us Reason: New Essays in Christian Apologetics*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), 7.

of Columbo questions is to move the conversation in a direction that purposely builds off a person's presuppositions or that avoids topics of unnecessary tension. In doing so, the apologist avoids "landmines" that may impede further conversation and addresses the issues most poignant for the listener.[344]

Norman and David Geisler: *Conversational Evangelism*

A second book focused primarily on the use of apologetics with unbelievers is *Conversational Evangelism: How to Listen and Speak So You Can Be Heard* by Norman and David Geisler.[345] Norman Geisler has long been recognized in the academic field of apologetics, but his son David has recognized that approaching people head on with apologetic arguments is rarely successful in opening their hearts and minds to the person of Christ. Similar to Koukl, the Geislers advocate the "art of asking question in a non-threatening way." Non-threatening is the operative term, for "if our questions come across as though we are attempting to load both barrels of our shotgun, we should not be surprised when people decide not to (figuratively speaking) come to our hunting party."[346]

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[344] Koukl, *Tactics*, 47-49.

[345] Norman Geisler and David Geisler, *Conversational Evangelism: How to Speak So You Can Be Heard* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009).

[346] Geisler and Geisler, *Conversational Evangelism*, 114.

For the Geislers, questions are successful if they surface uncertainty in another's own perspective, minimize defensiveness, and create a curiosity to want to hear more.[347] They are also successful if they uncover whether barriers to faith are intellectual, emotional, or volitional. The apologist is often prepared with tools to address intellectual concerns, but if the barriers are emotional or volitional, the apologist's tools may do little good or perhaps even create stronger resistance. The end game of apologetics, at least relative to unbelievers, is to see them come to Christ, and if "people don't want to believe for emotional or volitional reasons, then all the apologetics in the world is not going to convince them."[348]

The Geislers offer a number of potential questions for unbelievers, but suggest four fundamental questions for the apologist to ask of him or herself when in conversation with others. These questions are:

1. What are the possible questions (or issues) behind each question (or issue) that needs to be addressed?
2. What terms need to be clarified?
3. What truth do we want them to grasp about the question or issue raised?
4. What questions and illustrations can we use to help them grasp this truth?[349]

The first two questions help the apologist understand the person being engaged and thus help determine a starting point for further discussion. The third addresses the

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[347] Geisler and Geisler, *Conversational Evangelism*, 35.

[348] Geisler and Geisler, *Conversational Evangelism*, 89.

[349] Geisler and Geisler, *Conversational Evangelism*, 139.

conversational pathway to be taken, and the fourth shapes the specific means by which the apologist proceeds down the pathway. Overall, what the Geislers suggest is not a canned or reactionary apologetic method, but one that is pointedly thoughtful.

Moreland and Muehlhoff: *The God Conversation*

The use of illustration and story is important if the apologist is to reach today's postmodern culture.[350] J. P. Moreland and Tim Muehlhoff recognize this to be so and have put together a collection of stories and illustrations in *The God Conversation: Using Stories and Illustrations to Explain Your Faith*.[351] For Moreland and Muehlhoff, stories are valuable not just because they are culturally vogue, but because they can (1) present ideas in clear, easy to follow ways, (2) help people better remember the point being made, (3) allow for repetition without weariness, and (4) sustain the interest of the listener.[352] In particular *The God Conversation* provides illustrations to answer questions regarding scientific/naturalistic claims, the presence of evil and suffering in the world, the resurrection of Jesus, the uniqueness of Christianity relative to other religions, and objective morality.

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[350] Geisler and Geisler, *Conversational Evangelism*, 139-140. Also see Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seeker and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 138-48.

[351] J. P. Moreland and Tim Muehlhoff, *The God Conversation: Using Stories and Illustrations to Explain Your Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

[352] Moreland and Muehlhoff, *The God Conversation*, 15-18.

In addition to the above works, John G. Stackhouse, Jr. provides some excellent perspectives regarding the practice of apologetics in the latter section of *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today*.[353] When it comes to developing principles of Christian communication, whether directly related to apologetics or not, Stackhouse sees the believer's model as the Lord Jesus himself.[354] Ultimately, this means that Christians should profess the gospel, or related apologetics, not just by word or deed but by a complementary combination of both. Thus, in chapter eight, Stackhouse, Jr. offers these words:

> Moral excellence is, of course, a good thing in itself and does not need to be justified instrumentally as a means to some other end. But in terms of apologetics, we must recognize that behavior is not self-interpreting. A "good person" in our culture might be a Christian, but might also be a faithful Buddhist, or Baha'i, or secular humanist. Our friends might see the conspicuous "dots" of our distinctive behavior, but it is not to be assumed that they will "connect" them in a line that leads to Christianity. . . .
>
> To put it starkly, if "message without life" was sufficient, Christ didn't need to perform signs, nor did he need to form personal relationships in which to teach the gospel to those who would believe him and spread the word. He could simply have hired scribes to write down his message and distribute it. Furthermore, to an important extent Christ's life was a crucial part of the message. Thus the gospels are accounts of Jesus' deeds as well as words. . . .
>
> Therefore we are to offer, as God Incarnate did, both word and flesh, both message and life, to our neighbors in apologetics.[355]

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[353] John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[354] Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics*, 131-32.

[355] Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics*, 133-35.

For Stackhouse, Jr. then, a Christ-like apologetic of word and deed is one that is full of both grace and truth. He notes that apologists are well known for their emphasis on sharing the truth, but not their grace; thus, the apologist is right to remember to love people well in the process of sharing apologetic arguments. Stackhouse, Jr. asserts, "God cares about people more than he cares about 'truth' in the abstract. Jesus didn't die on the cross to make a point. He died on the cross to save people whom he loves."[356] Stackhouse, Jr.'s comments along these lines are not unique; a review of literature finds many seasoned apologists reminding their readers of the importance of focusing on the *person*

[356] Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics*, 142.

who is the recipient of any apologetic arguments.[357]

Communicators can always be susceptible to compromise in order to convince listeners of a particular point or perspective. Doing apologetics as Jesus does calls apologists to avoid such compromise. Stackhouse, Jr. offers four particular places of compromise to avoid:

> First, we must not compromise God's mission. We must not restrict it so that it becomes narrower than God wants it to be: not merely "souls" being "saved," or "minds" being "changed," but whole people being adopted into God's family and cooperating with him in the global work of redemption.

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[357] Josh McDowell writes, "truth bears the sweetest fruit when it is planted in the soil of a loving relationship." Josh McDowell, "A Fresh Apologetic: Relationships that Transform," in *Apologetics for a New Generation: A Biblical and Culturally Relevant Approach to Talking about God*, ed. Sean McDowell (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 68. William Lane Craig adds: "More often than not, it is who you are rather than what you say that will bring an unbeliever to Christ. . . . For the ultimate apologetic is—your life." Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 407. Norman and David Geisler note, "Our goal should be to talk to people in such a way today that the next time they see us, they are eager to continue the spiritual conversation, not run the other direction. We will be more likely to reach our ultimate goal if we plant a seed today, water it tomorrow, and look for the fruit after a season (1 Corinthians 3:6)." Geisler and Geisler, 117. Dan Kimball poses this question, "When you are studying apologetics, does your heart break in compassion for the people you are preparing to talk to? Or are you stockpiling ammunition to show people they are wrong." Dan Kimball, "A Different Kind of Apologist," in *Apologetics for a New Generation: A Biblical and Culturally Relevant Approach to Talking about God*, ed. Sean McDowell (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 38. Finally, Tim Keller offers this valuable reminder: "Many people who take an intellectual stand against Christianity do so against a backdrop of personal disappointment with Christians and churches. We all bring to issues intellectual predispositions based on our experiences. If you have known many wise, loving, kind, and insightful Christians over the years, and if you have been to churches that are devout in mind yet civic-minded and generous, you will find the intellectual case for Christianity much more plausible. If, on the other hand, the preponderance of your experience is with nominal Christians who bear the name but don't practice it or with self-righteous fanatics, then the arguments for Christianity will have to be extremely strong for you to concede that they have any cogency at all." Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Dutton Adult, 2008), 52.

> Second, we must not compromise God's law. We must not manipulate or deceive, and particularly not use the "bait-and-switch" tactics that show up occasionally among evangelicals, and particularly in work with students: "Come and find out how to have great sex!" . . .
>
> Third, we must not compromise God's message. Throughout the history of the church, well-meaning apologists have trimmed the gospel to make it fit a little easier with the presuppositions and preferences of the audience. . . . Too much editing of the message to suit the categories and interests of our neighbors can result in our merely echoing them, rather than giving them the gift of something wonderful they don't already have.
>
> Fourth, we must not compromise God's love. Apologetics must always look like God's love at work. People should be able to tell we love God and that we speak and act in the name of God's love. Any apologetics that falls short of this standard falls badly short of the glory of God.[358]

Each of these four reminders are helpful in keeping the apologist from "cutting corners" in order to produce results.

Stackhouse, Jr. also focuses on what he calls "Audience-Specific Apologetics." This means, first and foremost, that the apologist must recognize that among listeners there is a spectrum of openness. Similar to Koukl and Geisler, Stackhouse, Jr. notes that good question asking and listening is imperative in determining how open someone is to receiving the gospel, and in learning whether any "resistance is primarily intellectual, moral, spiritual, or along some other dimension or combination of dimensions."[359] Once a diagnosis is made, the apologist must then consider the apologetic approach to take. Stackhouse, Jr. offers three main approaches: appeal to subjective experience, appeal to evidences and reasons, and appeal to Christian worldview. The first two approaches are relatively self-explanatory, while the third refers to an effort by the apologist to provide

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[358] Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics*, 140-41.

[359] Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics*, 146.

not just piece-meal arguments, but an explanation of how Christianity is the best worldview fit for what we intuitively and experientially know of the world. Of course, Stackhouse Jr. does not think the apologist can only use one of these approaches in a given situation, but remembering that there is more than one approach keeps the apologists from defaulting to an approach that may not be most effective.

Other Contributions

Other apologists offer some helpful advice as well. Alister E. McGrath, in *Mere Apologetics*, encourages aspiring apologists to "practice, practice, practice."[360] James W. Sire, in *A Little Primer of Apologetics*, reminds apologists to call on the Holy Spirit in prayer:

> [A]s apologists we should be praying every step of the way—for our study of Scripture and the world around us, for knowledge and sensitivity to the people we encounter, for those we meet and with whom we have significant conversations, for our community of faith to be an apologetic community, one living the faith we proclaim.[361]

C. S. Lewis cautions against relying too heavily on the latest scientific research as the foundation of one's argument, for "we shall usually find that just as we have put our finishing touches to our argument science has changed its mind and quietly withdrawn

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[360] McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 38.

[361] James W. Sire, *A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 49.

the theory we have been using as our foundation stone."[362] Finally, Wayne House and Dennis Jowers offer excellent individualized advice on how to address the cultist, secularist, postmodernist, Muslim and New Age mystic in the final five chapters of *Reasons for Our Hope.*[363] These sources, together with the previously reviewed work, provide an excellent array of instruction regarding the use of apologetics.

Teaching Others to Teach

As this doctoral project concerns not only the presentation of apologetic information to a general audience, but also calls for the training of laity in the presentation of that information, a review of literature applicable to the art of teaching is pertinent. The literature reviewed provides an academic basis for the training of lay leaders in preparation for the apologetics conference.

Bruce Wilkinson: *The Seven Laws of the Learner*

Undoubtedly the most referred to book on teaching in the Christian context is *The Seven Laws of the Learner* by Bruce Wilkinson.[364] Wilkinson is a professional writer and conference speaker who is reported to have trained over 100,000 teaching professionals.

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[362] C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 92.

[363] House and Jowers, *Reasons for Our Hope*, 372-429.

[364] Bruce Wilkinson, *The Seven Laws of the Learner: How to Teach Almost Anything to Practically Anyone* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 2005).

As indicated by the title, he presents seven "laws" which he believes enable someone to "teach almost anything to practically anyone."

Law number one is the Law of the Learner, which essentially states that teaching is not about the teacher presenting information but about causing the learner to learn. According to Wilkinson, "True biblical teaching doesn't take place unless the students have learned. If they haven't learned, I haven't taught."[365] Implementation of this law "requires the teacher to refocus attention from the subject to the student"[366] and take on the responsibility of doing everything in his or her power to cause the student to learn. Inevitably this calls for a review of the content to be taught, the style and climate used to teach, and the character and background of the students. Because *The Seven Laws of the Learner* moves the center of teaching to the student, it calls for success to be measured not by how much information is presented but by how much the student learned.

The second law is the Law of Expectation and states that "what you think has a powerful and undeniable impact on everyone you meet."[367] If teachers' expectations are too low for those they instruct, it is likely they will not encourage learners to new understanding and might even contribute to their underperformance. If expectations are too high for too long, then discouragement on the part of the learner might take place.

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[365] Wilkinson, *Seven Laws*, 17.

[366] Wilkinson, *Seven Laws*, 19.

[367] Wilkinson, *Seven Laws*, 83.

The teacher, therefore, must not undersell student potential but encourage learners to fulfill it by giving them the proper skills and painting a vision of their future.

The Law of Application is Wilkinson's third law and states that the teacher's aim is not acquisition of information by the students, but rather the application of the information towards the end of changed lives. In other words, the Law of Application calls the Christian teacher to move the student from studying the Bible or theology or church history to obeying the Lord. This demands that the teacher apply the teaching to her own life so that students have a living model. It also calls for persuasion on the part of the teacher. Some teachers do not believe they should try to persuade their students, but if they understand that the end goal of teaching is application rather than content acquisition, they will do all they can through both content and delivery to encourage people to apply what they are learning.[368]

Fourth is the Law of Retention. This law calls for the teacher to use all means to help the learner retain the necessary information. This includes efforts by the teacher to focus on the facts that are most important, arrange the facts so they are easy to remember, review the facts frequently, and attach memorable stories and illustrations to what is taught.

Wilkinson's fifth law is the Law of Need. The Law of Need says that students learn best when they sense the need for the information; therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to help learners understand the need before every new unit of content.

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[368] Wilkinson, *Seven Laws*, 178-85.

Along these lines, Wilkinson quotes an unnamed teacher: "A great teacher is not simply one who imparts knowledge to his students . . . but one who awakens their interest and makes them eager to pursue knowledge for themselves."[369] To awaken student interest, however, it takes effort on the part of the teacher to understand the audience. Uncovering what is already important to them, where they have experienced their own shortcomings, and what questions they have help the teacher to discover the needs the content can pointedly address.

Sixth is the Law of Equipping, which says that the primary purpose of the teacher is to equip Christians to do the work of the ministry. Therefore, the success of the teacher is not based on how many people participate in the learning experience, but on how many of the learners go on to minister in qualitative and quantitative ways. This, declares Wilkinson, requires that students are trained to be independent users of the skills they have acquired.

The seventh and final law is the Law of Revival. This law calls the teacher to be responsible for leading the learner to spiritual restoration. Students may learn information and perhaps even apply what they have learned in real world ministry settings, but at the same time may not have confronted issues in their own lives. The teacher, therefore, must encourage students to examine their own lives, confront them about the presence and consequences of sin, and engage in intense prayer for the Lord to be at work in the lives of the learners.

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[369] Wilkinson, *Seven Laws*, 284.

Together, these Seven Laws help the teacher move away from a purely content focus. In each case, they emphasize that what the student learns is ultimately the responsibility of the teacher. A good teacher, Wilkinson concludes, is not one who downloads the required information and then expects students to "get it" apart from any life implementation. Rather, he considers whether or not students are learning to be his problem. This is probably the most important reminder of the Seven Laws in regards to this doctoral project. Presenters must remember that the end game is not the transfer of information, but genuine understanding on the part of the conference participants.

Howard Hendricks: *Teaching to Change Lives*

Bruce Wilkinson was a student of Howard Hendricks' at Dallas Theological Seminary. Prior to Wilkinson's *Seven Laws of the Learner*, Hendricks proposed his own seven laws in *Teaching to Change Lives*.[370] These overlap with Wilkinson at many points with a similar emphasis on the learner-centered teaching. Hendricks, however, does discuss the focus teachers must also place on themselves. For Hendricks, the teacher who stops growing today stops teaching tomorrow,[371] which means there is a need for a teacher to continue growing intellectually, physically, socially[372] and not rest on past

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[370] Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1987).

[371] Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives*, 17.

[372] Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives*, 24-34.

laurels. While the lay leaders for this project were recruited for the sake of an apologetics conference, they were also recruited with the hope of creating a team of community "experts" that would be a resource to the church in the foreseeable future. To be those experts, continued growth, as Hendricks encourages, will be necessary.

Another valuable contribution of Hendricks is his declaration: "*Teaching that impacts is not head to head but heart to heart*."[373] That is, if a teacher hopes to impact her students significantly, she must be willing not only to share what she knows, but also share what she does with that information and how she feels about it. In this way, learners see the value of what is taught and are more likely to put what they know to use. Hendricks' instruction along this line is valuable even for a one-time conference presentation. The lay leaders and I must give students a sense of the value and applicability of the information to the presenters themselves.

Stanley and Jones: *Communicating for a Change*

Andy Stanley is pastor and founder of one of the nation's largest churches, North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia, and is well known for his teaching skills. In his book *Communicating for a Change*,[374] which he co-authored with Lane Jones, a model for teaching is explained. The model is not meant to address all teaching environments as perhaps Wilkinson and Hendricks' books are. Instead, Stanley and Jones

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[373] Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives*, 85.

[374] Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change: Seven Keys to Irresistible Communication* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2006).

lay out the fundamentals of developing a strong individual teaching session. These fundamentals include:

- *Determine your goal*. Before starting to teach, determine the goal of communication. Ultimately the goal of communication must not be to teach a subject but to teach people to learn a subject.[375]
- *Pick a point*. If every time we teach, we give people three to four things to apply to their lives each week, they will quit before they even change. Therefore, it is important to know the *one* thing that the audience needs to know and what to do about it. We must have a burden for this point and we need to help the audience build a burden for grasping the point as well.[376]
- *Create a map*. Create a pathway for how you will teach people. For Stanley, this map is represented by the following words: ME-WE-GOD-YOU-WE. *Me* means beginning by telling people about something you struggle with or a tension you often find in yourself. *We* means helping people see that they probably struggle with and wonder about the same things as the teacher and not transitioning until there is a sense the audience really wants you to help them resolve the issue. In other words, "Focus on the question you are intending to answer until you are confident your audience wants it answered. Otherwise you are about to spend twenty to thirty minutes answering a

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[375] Stanley and Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, 91-99.

[376] Stanley and Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, 101-16.

question nobody is asking."[377] *God* means showing the audience that God addresses this struggle and question and walking them through one text that shows them just that. *You* means telling people what they ought to do in light of what God says. This includes what they should do in relationships, in their stage of life, with believers and unbelievers, and with people they do not know yet. The final *we* means giving people a vision of what it would look like if everyone in the church community walked in the way of God's teaching.[378]

- *Internalize the message*. It is imperative that the teacher can talk and not read what they are trying to communicate. If the teacher has not internalized the message, the audience should not be expected to internalize it.[379]
- *Engage the audience*. The point that is communicated needs to connect with real needs in people's lives, and it needs to help them look at things in a way they have never before looked at them. Engaging people also means working hard on transitions. People need to know that you are moving on to the next part of your map and how it connects to where you have been. Other "rules of engagement" include: not moving through information too fast or too slow; explaining not just reading through the biblical text; using illustrations or

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[377] Stanley and Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, 125.

[378] Stanley and Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, 119-30.

[379] Stanley and Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, 133-43.

visuals that surprise people; and not getting so complicated that people are lost along the way.[380]

- *Find your voice*. It is important that the speaker is authentic and does not try to be anyone other than himself or herself.[381]
- *Find some traction*. If struggling with how to shape a teaching session, seek God and ask yourself questions like: What do they need to know? Why do they need to know it? What do they need to do? Why do they need to do it?[382]

The fundamentals presented by Stanley and Jones are generally directed toward the weekly preacher; however, many of their points are applicable to a presentation that involves a larger venue or that generally allows for one-way communication. Since the apologetics conference that is planned involves speakers presenting to a larger audience, many of the fundamentals are applicable. Particularly important are the ideas of picking a point and creating a map. As the lay presenters do not have a great deal of public speaking experience and have been exposed to a large amount of information relative to their topic, it will be important for them to understand clearly what information they want to communicate and how they will go about communicating it in a clear and compelling fashion.

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[380] Stanley and Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, 145-66.

[381] Stanley and Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, 169-80.

[382] Stanley and Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, 183-91.

William R. Yount: *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*

A final work that offers helpful perspectives on teaching in the Christian environment is William R. Yount's *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*.[383] This edited work with contributions from a variety of authors explores the whole realm of Christian education and includes topics ranging from theological foundations for the teaching ministry of the church to selecting curriculum. Obviously, not everything in this book is applicable to the doctoral project at hand. Some of the repetitive themes in the book, however, overlap well with what is offered in the three books already reviewed. This includes the idea that teaching is ultimately not about the transfer of information but about the formation of people. Yount says, "Teach people, not lessons,"[384] and "Christian teachers are far more than transmitters of lessons. . . . Our calling is to help learners grow towards Christlikeness."[385] Other themes include the importance of the teacher having a clear teaching objective for each teaching session and the value of "priming the pump" for learning. In regards to the latter, Yount writes,

> We make a dangerous assumption when we walk into a classroom thinking our students are ready to learn. Our learners have their hearts and minds on a hundred different things, and they may not be at all ready to focus on the subject at hand.[386]

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[383] William R. Yount, ed., *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008).

[384] Yount, *The Teaching Ministry*, 65.

[385] Yount, *The Teaching Ministry*, 185.

[386] Yount, *The Teaching Ministry*, 238.

Similarly, Margaret Lawson, a contributing author, adds, "Adults need to know why they need to learn something. They are motivated to learn that which they perceive will help them."[387]

Each of the four books reviewed echo important sentiments about the teaching process. They call the teacher to be audience-centric, identify clear objectives, help listeners personally understand the value of what they are being taught, provide points of application, and keep the learner engaged by communicating clearly and honestly, among other things. These elements are important when teaching lay leaders to teach others.

Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to review literature relative to the arguments presented during the conference that is central to this doctoral project. Each of the apologetic topics could have easily been the topic of a project by itself. Thus, the review of literature presented here is not considered exhaustive in anyway, but is designed to expose valuable contributors to the arguments and the most substantial elements of their arguments. Nonetheless, sufficient discussion of literature for each topic was provided to indicate that the lay or clergy apologist has at his or her disposal ample resources to establish well-grounded arguments. Furthermore, there is sufficient direction among the literature to allow clergy to prepare lay leaders adequately to present their apologetic findings in a manner which will benefit potential learners.

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[387] Yount, *The Teaching Ministry*, 357.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH QUESTION AND DESIGN

This chapter provides a description of the research design as applied to the research question addressed in chapter one. A summary of the research question and hypothesis will be followed by a description of the project design including the methodology used to prepare lay leaders and the instrumentation used to test the hypothesis. In addition a thorough description will be provided of the research environment as well as a chronology of the research process.

Research Question & Hypothesis

The research question addressed in this doctoral project is as follows: "Is it possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetic understanding among those who attend?" The hypothesis is that this question can be answered in the affirmative. Thus, this project involved the training of lay leaders to team with me in presenting apologetic material at a weekend conference. To determine if a positive relationship exists between the efforts of the team and increased apologetic understanding in the participants of the conference, a noticeable increase in understanding must be evidenced by the attendees. If such an increase is recognized, the research question can be answered in the affirmative.

Setting of the Project

I serve as the Executive Pastor of BridgePoint Bible Church in Houston, Texas. BridgePoint Bible Church was established in 1933 and has a Sunday worship attendance of approximately 600. The church is located in what is known as the Energy Corridor of Houston, which is home to corporate headquarters for the likes of BP, Shell, Conoco/Phillips, and Exxon, and is surrounded by strong public educational facilities. In keeping with the surroundings, many who attend BridgePoint are employed as professionals and most have completed at least undergraduate studies. Although there are people who attend BridgePoint who are new to the Christian faith, many have been exposed to Scripture for a number of years. While some individuals have made personal efforts to become more versed in apologetics, the church has not made any church-wide effort to improve apologetic understanding since at least 2000.

The research design involved an apologetics conference which was held at BridgePoint on April 11 and 12, 2014, a detailed schedule of which will be presented in this project. The conference was advertised to those in the church community with most promotion outside of the church taking place by word-of-mouth. Prior to the conference I met with selected lay leaders who in turn taught the breakout sessions at the conference. The initial group preparation session occurred on January 20, 2013, and the final preparation session occurred on April 6, 2014. Most preparation sessions occurred on Sunday afternoons, with the exception of the March 8, 2014, and March 22, 2014, sessions, which occurred on Saturday mornings. In addition, I met with lay leaders on an individual basis as needed throughout the aforementioned time period.

Implementation of the Project

The implementation of the project involved five major steps. First, the project was outlined and initial biographical research was completed. This included the selection of ten apologetic issues to be addressed at the conference and the identification of literature relevant to each topic. Secondly, I identified six individuals within the congregation who would act as presenters alongside him at the conference. These individuals included four men and two women and each was assigned one of the ten apologetic issues. Only one had completed any significant reading or training in the issue assigned, but because of my familiarity with the lay leaders I was able to assign topics for which they would likely already have some interest. Third, I met with the lay leaders and provided each with a reading list with which to begin preparation for the conference. Later I met with them in order to aid in the development of initial outlines for each presentation and to provide pedagogical instruction to aid in a successful presentation. I also provided a forum in which presenters practiced their presentations before the other lay leaders and received feedback. Fourth, the lay leaders and I completed the conference and implemented the measurement tool at the onset and conclusion of the conference. An additional follow-up measurement tool was sent to conference participants six weeks after the conference. Finally, the data was evaluated and analyzed.

Preparation for the Project

The success of this project depended upon careful preparation in six areas. First, it was important to have a solid outline of the apologetics conference so that the lay leaders

asked to participate would know in advance clear parameters for their involvement. Second, it was necessary to identify participants who would be willing to stay engaged in the project over a sustained period of time and complete a substantial amount of preparation. Third, the completion of an early reading list for each apologetic topic was required so that lay leaders would have a starting point in their individual study and preparation well before the conference date. Fourth, the measurement tool had to be developed in conjunction with the lay leaders so that questions asked of participants overlapped with the material to be presented at the conference. Fifth, I had to conduct my own research for each of the ten apologetic issues both to aid in my own presentations, but also to coach the lay leaders properly as they prepared their presentations. Sixth, preparations for the actual conference required pre-conference promotion, the creation of audio-visual aids, and the development of participant materials.

Recruitment of Lay Leaders

It was my intent not to provide pre-packaged curriculum to lay leaders for presentation at the apologetics conference. Rather, I sought to create community "experts" for the various topics. Such an aim required that any lay leaders involved in the project would be willing and able to engage in a significant amount of research and study relative to the topic assigned. Thus, I sought individuals who had both time for and interest in such a sustained effort. Further, I selected lay leaders who roughly represented the overall make up of regular attenders to BridgePoint. In the end, seven invitations were extended to participate and six individuals agreed to be part of the project, all between the ages of thirty and sixty. Of the lay leaders, only the one assigned to the historicity of the

Gospels had conducted any significant prior study of the topic assigned. He, however, had completed his Ph.D. in New Testament studies and is a current professor at the Houston extension of Dallas Theological Seminary.

Training of Lay Leaders and Creation of Presentations

In preparation for the apologetics conference, the lay leaders were subject to a number of training sessions. Each of these sessions is described below.

Session 1 occurred on January 20, 2013. At this meeting the lay leaders were acquainted with one another and received an introduction to the preparation process. They were told that the intent of the project is to develop them as community "experts" on the assigned topic by means of strong engagement with major literature on their topic. Each was given a list of potential readings for his or her topic. Collectively, the reading lists make up much of the bibliography presented in this doctoral project and were generally listed from easiest to most difficult to read. The leaders were instructed to begin with the easiest readings first and then progress to the harder readings. In each case, they were asked to identify the arguments they found most compelling and which they felt could be later explained to others. They were also asked to take note of the tone of the writings as well as the content, and to highlight illustrations that would prove beneficial later. The lay leaders were told that it would not be the aim of the presentations to provide "air-tight" arguments, but rather to present a reasoned case. Finally, the lay leaders were asked to create a basic outline for their presentation to be completed by the fall of 2013. Such an outline would allow me to ensure that the lay leaders were

processing material in a positive manner; it would also allow me to ensure that the eventual presentations and the measurement tools were complementary.

Session 2 took place on July 14, 2013. At this session, I presented little new information. The intention was to check with each of the lay leaders to see how their reading was progressing and to answer any outstanding questions. Once again, the presenters were told that in the process of doing their reading they were to make note of what they considered to be the most effective arguments and to highlight any illustrations that might help support those arguments. Some of the presenters indicated reservations about presenting a convincing argument. They were then reminded that the intent of the conference was not to "prove" various apologetic points, but to provide well-reasoned cases for each topic area. Overall, the lay leaders came to Session 2 having completed a number of the suggested readings allowing them to be sufficiently aware of the contour of arguments relative to their topic area.

Session 3 took place on September 8, 2013. During this session lay leaders were provided with instruction on how to develop a successful presentation. This session was not aimed at the content of their presentations, but rather at the manner in which the content would be presented. This training session was developed after I had completed a review of literature on teaching (as presented in chapter three). This review resulted in the development of the "Preparing for a Successful Presentation" outline found in Appendix A. I walked the lay leaders through the outline adding personal anecdotes and answering questions along the way. The lay leaders' interaction with the suggestions was positive, and there was a collective sense of confidence that developing a strong presentation was possible.

Session 4 was not a collective session of lay leaders. Instead lay leaders were asked to provide me with a general outline for their presentation by November 3, 2013. Once the outlines were received, individual meetings with the leaders were scheduled in November and December. At these meetings, which generally took about one hour, I gave individual suggestions regarding the outlines. These suggestions included the selection of salient points, the order of the presentation, and the extent of depth regarding any particular point. In addition, I answered any questions or concerns from the lay leaders and generally encouraged them in their efforts.

Session 5 took place on February 10, 2014. This session allowed the lay leaders to reconnect with one another and for me to present the final preparation steps for the conference. In particular, I gave instructions about the flow of the conference and the development of PowerPoint slides and handouts for their presentations. In addition, they were reminded of the "Preparing for a Successful Presentation" notes and were asked to review them as they developed the particulars of their presentation.

Session 6 was designed as practice sessions for the lay leaders. On March 8, 2014, three of the lay leaders made their presentations to other lay leaders. Each presentation included the PowerPoint slides to be used during the apologetics conference. Following each presentation, feedback was provided both by me and the other lay leaders. The remaining three lay leaders practiced their presentations on March 22, 2014, and received similar feedback. After Session 6, I met in the following weeks with any lay leaders who desired specific help in crafting their final presentation.

Session 7 occurred on April 6, 2014. During this final meeting, I reviewed conference details, offered an opportunity for final concerns to be stated, and expressed confidence in the lay leaders.

Recruitment of Conference Participants

The apologetics conference was promoted on the church website, church signage, and in the worship services for five weeks prior to the conference. In addition, on the Sunday prior to the conference (April 6, 2014), I presented a sermon entitled "A God Who Gives Reasons." The purpose of the sermon was to encourage attenders to see faith and reason as vitally connected, giving impetus for them to participate in the conference.

The Apologetics Conference

The centerpiece of this doctoral project is an apologetic conference during which I, along with the trained lay leaders, made presentations centered on ten apologetics-oriented topics. The apologetics conference was titled, "Why God: Exploring Reasons to Believe in the God of the Bible," and took place on April 11 and 12, 2014, with the specific schedule for the conference as follows:

<u>Friday, April 11, 2014</u>

7:00-7:30	Introduction & Pre-Conference Assessment
7:30-8:15	Plenary Session 1
	The Ramifications of a Godless World
8:30-9:30	Breakout Session 1:

A. *A Look at the Fine-Tuning of the Universe*

B. *The Moral Argument for the Existence of God*

<u>Saturday, April 12, 2014</u>

9:30-10:15 Plenary Session 2

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

10:30-11:30 Breakout Session 2:

A. *The Reliability of the Gospels*

B. *Evidence for the Resurrection*

11:45-12:30 Plenary Session 3

Christianity as a Reasonable Quest

12:30-1:30 Lunch

1:30-2:30 Breakout Session 3

A. *Answering the Problem of Evil & Suffering*

B. *Confronting Myths about Christianity*

2:45-3:30 Plenary Session 4

Putting Apologetics into Practice

3:30-3:45 Post Conference Assessment and Closing Remarks

The conference began with an introduction by an appointed emcee who explained the conference's tie to a doctoral research project. Participants were told of the conference schedule, and it was indicated that they could participate in all or part of the conference. However, all adults (age 18 and over) were encouraged to participate in the entire conference and to complete the measurement instruments so as to contribute to the

research project. Participants were read the Verbatim Consent Form Instructions as approved by Biola University's Protection of Human Rights in Research Committee (see Appendix B) and adults interested in participating in the research project completed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) and deposited them in prepared bins. Those who consented were then asked to complete the Pre-Conference Survey (see Appendix D) and to deposit the surveys in the respective collection bins. It should also be noted that when participants arrived at the conference, they were given a conference packet. In the folder, they found: (1) the Consent Form, (2) a conference program that included the schedule, note pages, and recommended resources, and (3) the Pre-Conference Survey.

Following the introductory remarks, I presented the first lecture, "The Ramifications of a Godless World," for approximately forty-five minutes. After the lecture, participants were given the option to attend one of two breakout sessions prepared by the lay leaders. These sessions involved a lecture of approximately forty-five minutes with about fifteen minutes reserved for questions and answers relative to the lecture. After the breakout session, participants were dismissed until the next morning.

On Saturday, April 12, participants returned to BridgePoint Bible Church in the morning. Prior to the lunch break, participants attended the second plenary session, a second breakout session, and the third plenary session. The lunch break allowed participants not only to eat, but to browse a book table developed for the event that featured many of the recommended resources indicated in the conference program for each topic addressed. After the lunch break, the final breakout session and the final plenary session were completed. At the completion of all presentations, the emcee asked those participants who had completed the Consent Form and the Pre-Conference Survey

to complete the Post-Conference Survey (see Appendix E). Participants were thanked for their involvement in the research project and were dismissed.

Finally, six weeks after the conference, on May 23, 2014, those participants who completed the Consent Form were sent an email asking them to participate in an anonymous online Follow-Up Survey (see Appendix F).

The Conference Presentations

The conference presentations were the original work of each of the presenters. Each presentation was approximately forty-five minutes in length. The verbal presentation was accompanied by PowerPoint slides which adequately represented the content of each presentation.

Development and Application of Research Instruments

The primary purpose of this doctoral project is to answer the question: "Is it possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetic understanding among those who attend?" To measure whether the trained leaders increased the apologetic understanding of conference attendees, a Pre- and Post-Conference Survey were developed (see Appendix D and E, respectively). The surveys were crafted to coincide with the ten different apologetics presentations. That is, questions were developed to measure the apologetics understanding of attendees prior to the conference and then to test them over the same questions at the end of the conference. In particular, three questions were developed for each of the ten sessions for a total of thirty questions. In addition, it was my contention

that if understanding truly increased there would also be an increase in apologetic confidence as well as an increased knowledge in where to turn for answers to apologetic questions. Thus, five additional questions were asked to measure apologetic confidence and four questions were asked to measure if participants had a sense of where to turn for answers to apologetic questions. In total then, participants were asked thirty-nine identical questions both before and after the conference.

Prior to answering the thirty-nine questions on the Pre-Conference Survey, participants were asked three demographic questions: (1) Are you a regular attender of BridgePoint?, (2) Do you consider yourself a practicing Christian?, and (3) Are you at least 18 years of age? It was anticipated prior to the conference that most of the participants would be Christians from the BridgePoint community. The first two questions were aimed at confirming that preconception. Answers to the first two questions also allowed for the analysis of any differences between those inside and outside the BridgePoint community and the Christian faith. The third question was asked to confirm that the survey taker was old enough to participate in the study.

As indicated earlier, the Pre-Conference Survey was administered and collected prior to any of the presentations and the Post-Conference Survey was administered and collected after all sessions were completed. Attendees created an identifying code that was placed at the top of both surveys. This allowed for an individual's Pre-and Post-Conference Surveys to be directly compared while maintaining anonymity.

In addition to the identical thirty-nine apologetics questions on the Pre- and Post-Conference Surveys, three additional questions (40-42) are found on the Pre-Conference Survey. These questions have to do with personal use and interest in apologetics. Six

weeks after the conference, participants who completed the Informed Consent Form (on which they were asked for an email address) were sent an email in which they were asked to complete an online survey. On the online survey, questions 40-42 found on the Pre-Conference Survey were asked again for comparison purposes. In addition, one other question was asked relative to the statement: "I have used something I learned in the apologetics conference in a conversation with someone." The purpose of the question was to see if use of and interest in apologetics increased in the period following the conference, also indicators of a true increase in apologetic understanding as a result of the conference. Those who completed the online survey gave no personal information, but provided the same code used for the Pre- and Post-Conference Surveys which allowed for data to be appropriately matched while maintaining anonymity.

Each of the questions on the three different surveys consists of a single statement to which the participant is asked to respond. The response options given are in the form of a Likert-type scale. This scale allows for five potential answers, each of which is given a numerical value: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neutral, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree. Participants were asked to select a whole number response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) and not to respond with an answer between any of the options (e.g., 1½). For each question there is a desired response, that is, a response that indicates apologetic understanding relative to a particular issue. In some cases, apologetic understanding is indicated by agreeing with the statement given and in other cases by disagreeing with the statement given. The surveys were constructed in this manner to encourage participants to be thoughtful about their responses and to avoid rote responses on one side of the scale or the other.

Instrumentation and Project Hypothesis

I hypothesized that, as a result of teaming with lay leaders in the presentation of an apologetics conference, the participants of the conference would increase their apologetics understanding. The results of the research are measured by comparing the Pre-, Post-, and Follow-Up Conference Surveys. This is accomplished by comparing the before and after responses and measuring the movement on the Likert scale. If the responses show noticeable movement towards the desired response, then I can conclude that the hypothesis was supported. If the responses show movement away from the desired response or remain stable, then I can conclude that the hypothesis was not supported.

Summary

The intent of this chapter has been to explain the treatment I applied relative to the research question. The treatment called for the recruitment and training of lay leaders, the development and completion of an apologetics conference, and the design and implementation of a research instrument to measure the effectiveness of the apologetics conference in increasing the apologetic understanding of participants.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT RESULTS

This chapter reports on the apologetics conference which lies at the center of this doctoral project. It discusses the degree to which the project was conducted as planned as well as the results of the Pre-Conference, Post-Conference, and Follow-Up Surveys and their significance.

General Description of Project Implementation

To answer the research question of this doctoral project, I trained lay leaders to team with me in presenting apologetics material at a weekend conference. This apologetics conference was completed on April 11 and 12, 2014, at BridgePoint Bible Church in Houston, Texas. The conference was completed without deviation from the planned schedule as set forth in chapter four with the Pre-Conference Survey completed prior to the presentation of the ten apologetics topics. Each of the lay leaders duly completed their presentations consistent with the materials they prepared with me over the previous fifteen months. The Post-Conference Survey was implemented immediately following the conference, while the online Follow-Up Survey was distributed on May 24, exactly six weeks after the conference completion date. Participants were given one week to respond to the online survey.

A total of 185 individuals attended the conference, although not all attended the entire conference. Of the attendees, 118 completed the Pre-Conference Survey, 107 completed the Post-Conference Survey, and 78 completed the Follow-Up Survey. Only those who attended the entire conference were asked to complete the Post-Conference and Follow-Up Surveys. Some of the surveys were not completed properly and some did not have the necessary identifying code. In the end, there were eighty-four useable matches for Pre- and Post-Conference Surveys (n=84), and 39 useable matches between the Pre-Conference Survey and the Follow-Up Survey (n=39).

Prior to answering the apologetics-related questions on the Pre-Conference Survey, participants were asked three demographic questions: (1) Are you a regular attender of BridgePoint?, (2) Do you consider yourself a practicing Christian?, and (3) Are you at least 18 years of age? It was anticipated prior to the conference that most of the participants would be Christians from the BridgePoint community. The first two questions were aimed at confirming that preconception, and indeed the preconception was confirmed. Only two survey completers were not regular attenders of BridgePoint and all participants indicated that they were practicing Christians. Had there been a significant number of participants who had answered no to the first two questions, there may have been reason to consider a comparative analysis between participants inside and outside the BridgePoint community and the Christian faith. In the absence of participants outside of BridgePoint and the Christian faith, no such comparative analysis is called for and all participants were considered in the same statistical pool. The third question was asked to confirm that the survey taker was old enough to participate in the study. All surveys indicated an answer in the affirmative to the third question.

Survey Results

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the conference was well received by the participants; however, such evidence is not sufficient to indicate that the apologetics conference answered the research question at hand. I hypothesized that as a result of teaming with lay leaders in the presentation of an apologetics conference that the participants of the conference would increase their apologetics understanding. The results would be measured by comparing the Pre-, Post-, and Follow-Up Conference Surveys. If the responses indicate movement towards the desired response, then I will conclude that the hypothesis has been supported. If the responses indicate movement away from the desired outcomes or remain stable, then I will conclude that the hypothesis has not been supported.

The surveys were crafted to coincide with the ten different apologetic presentations. In particular, three questions were developed for each of the ten sessions for a total of thirty questions (Questions 1-30). It is my contention that if understanding truly increased there would also be an increase in personal confidence relative to apologetic questions as well as an increased knowledge of where to turn for answers to apologetic questions. Thus, five additional questions (Questions 31-35) were asked to measure apologetic confidence and four questions (Questions 36-39) were asked to measure if participants had a sense of where to turn for answers to apologetic questions. In addition to the identical thirty-nine apologetics questions on the Pre- and Post-Conference Surveys, three additional questions (Questions 40-42) are found on the Pre-Conference Survey which were asked again on the Follow-Up Survey. These questions

have to do with personal use and interest in apologetics. In addition, one other question was asked on the Follow-Up Survey (Question 43) to see if use of and interest in apologetics increased in the period following the conference. As with Questions 1-30, if the responses for the latter questions indicate movement away from the desired outcomes or remain stable, then I will conclude that the hypothesis has not been supported.

Results Indicated by Responses to Questions 1-30: Content Comprehension

Questions 1-30 were asked on both the Pre- and Post-Conference Surveys, and these surveys are presented in Appendix D and E. Each of the questions on the surveys consisted of a single statement to which the participants were asked to respond. These statements are shown below:

<u>Life without God</u>

1. Love and beauty as we know it would not exist apart from the existence of God.

2. If God does not exist, any meaning one attributes to life is subjective.

3. If there is no God, human reason is unreliable.

<u>The Kalam Cosmological Argument</u>

4. Everything that comes into existence has a cause.

5. The Second Law of Thermodynamics undermines the idea that the universe had a beginning.

6. If the universe had a beginning, it had to have a cause.

<u>Resurrection</u>

7. It is essential to biblical Christianity that the resurrection was a historical event.

8. The Gospels report that the disciples experienced encounters with the risen Christ. These reports are historically credible.

9. The biblical report that women were the first witnesses of the resurrection weakens the historical case for the event.

The Historical Reliability of the Gospels

10. The theological character of the Gospels means we cannot rely on them as being theologically accurate.

11. The testimony of the Gospels can't be trusted as historically accurate because they were written too long after the events occurred.

12. Even if the Gospels included real eyewitness testimony, we cannot trust that they provide an accurate historical account of first century events for the simple reason that eyewitness testimony is not always credible.

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

13. Non-believers don't have a problem with evil and suffering like Christians do.

14. God is good and loving. He also allows for evil and suffering. These two thoughts are not compatible.

15. The Christian worldview provides the best explanation for why there is evil and suffering in the world.

Fine-Tuning of the Universe

16. Christian and non-Christian scientists agree that life in the universe would be highly improbable if gravitational and electromagnetic forces were slightly different than they are.

17. When Christians infer that there is a God based on the intricate design of the universe, they have moved beyond the boundaries of good science.

18. When it is said that the universe is "fine-tuned," it is meant that the initial conditions of our universe had to fall within an extremely narrow range in order to allow for life.

The Moral Argument

19. All moral values and duties are subjective in nature, varying from society to society and at times even from individual to individual.

20. Even if moral duties exist in an objective sense, it is still difficult to explain why one should follow these morals apart from a belief in God.

21. If moral values and duties exist in an objective sense, their existence must stem from something beyond individuals and societies.

Myths about Christianity

22. Christianity has a long history of impeding scientific pursuits.

23. Religious wars, including those done in the name of Christianity, are the cause for a significant percentage of large-scale, armed conflicts since the time of Christ.

24. The Bible does a good job of supporting the cause of disenfranchised groups including women.

Christianity among the Religions

25. Christianity is unique among the world's major religions because it is open to being tested through historical evidence.

26. If on a religious quest, one reason to start with Christianity is that while Jesus is revered by other religions, he is at the center of Christianity.

27. An attractive feature of Christianity versus other religions is that salvation is free.

Putting Apologetics into Practice

28. Apologetics is helpful in removing barriers to belief that people might have.

29. When using apologetics, the tone of the discussion is not important.

30. Asking people questions about their own beliefs is generally not a good way to help them see the weaknesses in their own thinking.

The response options given were in the form of a Likert-type scale: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neutral, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree. For each question

there was a desired outcome (DO) that indicated proper apologetic understanding. This outcome is indicated on Table 1 for each question. In some cases, apologetic understanding was indicated by agreeing with the statement given and in other cases by disagreeing with the statement given. Pre- and Post-Conference Survey responses were matched for individual participants using the identifying code.

Table 1 shows the average pre-conference response and the average post-conference response for each question. Movement towards the desired outcome, as indicated by comparing the results of two surveys, was on average positive for each of the questions with the exception of question nine, which had a very slight (-.04) movement away from the desired outcome. There is no particular reason of which I am aware as to why this question elicited negative movement when all the others elicited positive movement. As mentioned, three questions were asked relative to each of the ten apologetic presentations. When the average movement for each grouping of three questions was considered, the movement was positive for each set of questions, including the set of which question nine was a part (see Table 2).

Table 5.1. Content Comprehension, Questions 1-30

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Desired Outcome (DO)	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	1
Average Pre-Conference Response	1.31	1.54	1.68	1.73	3.36	1.67	1.21	1.31	4.61	4.40	4.50	4.25	4.35	4.07	2.29
Average Post-Conference Response	1.27	1.31	1.27	1.33	3.56	1.21	1.12	1.26	4.57	4.56	4.73	4.55	4.45	4.43	1.40
Pre-/Post-Conference Improvement	0.04	0.23	0.40	0.39	-0.20	0.45	0.10	0.05	0.04	-0.15	-0.23	-0.30	-0.11	-0.36	0.88

Question	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Desired Outcome (DO)	1	5	1	5	1	1	5	5	1	1	1	1	1	5	5
Average Pre-Conference Response	2.05	4.14	1.92	3.73	2.35	1.70	3.55	3.08	2.33	1.86	1.71	1.56	1.85	4.36	4.00
Average Post-Conference Response	1.51	4.48	1.42	3.77	1.88	1.44	3.82	3.73	1.93	1.32	1.18	1.15	1.42	4.55	4.65
Pre-/Post-Conference Improvement	0.54	-0.33	0.50	-0.05	0.46	0.26	-0.27	-0.64	0.40	0.54	0.54	0.40	0.43	-0.19	-0.65

Total Useable Pre-Post Survey Matches: 84

Note: All calculations have been made using non-rounded numbers which accounts for slight deviations when pre-conference and post-conference reponses are used to indicate improvement.

Table 5.2. Average Responses Compared to Desired Outcome, Questions 1-30

Question	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18	19-21	22-24	25-27	28-30	1-30
Difference in Desired Outcome and Pre-Conference Survey	0.51	1.01	0.31	0.62	0.96	0.94	1.11	1.57	0.71	0.83	0.85
Difference in Desired Outcome and Post-Conference Survey	0.29	0.66	0.27	0.39	0.51	0.48	0.85	1.13	0.22	0.40	0.52
Indicated Improvement	0.22	0.35	0.04	0.23	0.45	0.46	0.26	0.44	0.49	0.42	0.33

Total Useable Responses: 84

Note: All calculations have been made using non-rounded numbers which accounts for calculation deviances across rows or columns.

Table 5.3. Responses Equal to Desired Outcome, Questions 1-30

Question	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18	19-21	22-24	25-27	28-30	Total
Pre-Conference Responses = DO	0.67	0.44	0.78	0.53	0.42	0.37	0.35	0.24	0.48	0.38	13.96
Post-Conference Responses = DO	0.79	0.71	0.81	0.72	0.71	0.67	0.53	0.45	0.83	0.73	20.83
Increase in Responses = DO	0.11	0.27	0.03	0.19	0.29	0.29	0.19	0.21	0.36	0.35	6.87

Total Useable Responses: 84

Note: All calculations have been made using non-rounded numbers which accounts for calculation deviances across rows or columns.

When considering the data collectively, participants provided an answer equal to the desired outcome an average of 13.96 times on the Pre-Conference Survey and an average of 20.83 times on the Post-Conference Survey (see Table 3). This is an improvement of 49%, indicating the participants increased their understanding of apologetic issues as a result of the conference as measured by the Pre- and Post-Conference Surveys.

The set-up of the conference with the breakout sessions only allowed participants to attend seven of the ten presentations. Participants were asked on the Post-Conference Survey to indicate which sessions they attended, but to answer questions for all presentations. This allowed me to compare the results for the breakout sessions attended with those of the breakout sessions not attended. Since some of the presentations had slight overlap, it was expected that even without attendance at a particular session results would improve slightly on the Post-Conference Survey, while a more marked improvement would be indicated for sessions actually attended. This expectation was met as participants moved towards the desired outcome by an average increment of 0.20 for the sessions not attended and 0.44 for sessions attended (see Table 4). In other words, when participants attended a breakout session, their responses moved more towards the desired outcome for the questions associated with the breakout session than if they did not attend the session.

Table 5.4. Average Improvement Considering Session Attendance, Questions 7-24

Question	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18	19-21	22-24	7-24
Indicated Improvement with Session Attendance	0.15	0.26	0.53	0.54	0.40	0.76	0.44
Indicated Improvement without Session Attendance	-0.02	0.16	0.31	0.34	0.15	0.25	0.20
Impact of Session Attendance	0.16	0.11	0.22	0.21	0.25	0.51	0.24

Total Useable Responses: 84

Note: All calculations have been made using non-rounded numbers, which accounts for calculation deviances across rows or columns.

Results Indicated by Responses to Questions 31-35: Apologetic Confidence

It is my contention that if the apologetic understanding of the participants actually increased, they would exhibit a corresponding increase in confidence relative to their own ability to answer questions that others might have regarding Christianity. Questions 31-35 were designed to measure this confidence, and are listed below:

31. One reason I don't often share my faith with others is that I fear I won't be able to answer their questions.

32. I am confident I can explain to others why I believe God exists.

33. If someone questions the historical reliability of the New Testament, I don't really know how to respond.

34. If someone asks me why a good and powerful God would allow suffering and evil, I know some good ways to answer their question.

35. When non-Christians ask me questions about the Bible or Christianity, I am uncomfortable.

As with Questions 1-30, there was a desired outcome (DO) of 1 or 5 for each question on the given Likert scale, as indicated in Table 5. When considering the data for Questions 31-35 collectively, participants provided an answer equal to the desired

outcome an average of 0.38 times on the Pre-Conference Survey and an average of 0.92 number of times on the Post-Conference Survey. This is an improvement of 58%. Furthermore, the average deviation from the desired outcome was 1.82 on the Pre-Conference Survey for Questions 31-35 and only 1.30 on the Post-Conference Survey. This is an improvement of 0.52, or 29%, indicating that the participants increased their confidence in answering apologetics-oriented questions as a result of the conference.

Table 5.5. Apologetic Confidence, Questions 31-35

Question	31	32	33	34	35	31-35
Desired Outcome (DO)	5	1	5	1	5	n/a
Average Pre-Conference Response	2.73	2.99	3.10	2.46	3.50	n/a
Average Pre-Conference DO Differential	2.27	1.99	1.90	1.46	1.50	1.82
Average Post-Conference Response	2.79	1.96	3.85	1.86	3.64	n/a
Post-Conference DO Differential	2.21	0.96	1.15	0.86	1.36	1.30
Pre-/Post-Conference Improvement	0.06	1.02	0.75	0.61	0.14	0.52
Pre-Conference Responses = DO	0.00	0.10	0.07	0.10	0.12	0.38
Post-Conference Responses = DO	0.00	0.25	0.20	0.29	0.18	0.92
Increase in Responses = DO	0.00	0.15	0.13	0.19	0.06	0.54

Total Useable Responses: 84

Note: All calculations have been made using non-rounded numbers, which accounts for calculation deviances across rows or columns.

Results Indicated by Responses to Questions 36-39: Participants' Understanding of Where to Turn for Answers

One indication of increased apologetic understanding is an increased awareness of where to turn for answers to questions on various apologetic topics. One of the purposes behind using lay leaders was to make participants aware of a number of individuals within BridgePoint Bible Church to whom they could turn with questions. Furthermore,

the inclusion of recommended resources in the conference program and a corresponding book table gave participants exposure to where to find additional answers. Thus, it was expected that the responses would move towards the desired outcome for Questions 36-39 in the Post-Conference Survey (see Appendix E) relative to the Pre-Conference Survey (see Appendix D). These four questions are listed below:

36. There are people at BridgePoint I can turn to if I need answers to tough questions about Christianity.

37. BridgePoint is a good church for someone who wants more than surface answers to tough questions about God and the Bible.

38. The people making the presentations at this conference would be good resources if I have questions about their subject areas.

39. I am aware of good resources if I need help in answering tough questions about Christianity.

As with the previous question, participants were to respond to the above statements with an answer of 1 (strongly agree) to a 5 (strongly disagree) using a Likert-type scale. The desired outcome (DO) for Questions 36-39 was 1, or strongly agree. When considering the data for Questions 36-39 collectively (see Table 6), participants provided an answer equal to the desired outcome an average of 1.44 occurrences on the Pre-Conference Survey and an average of 2.68 occurrences on the Post-Conference Survey. This is an improvement of 1.24, or 86%. Furthermore, the average pre-conference response for Questions 36-39 was 0.83 greater than the desired outcome and the average post-conference response was only 0.36 greater than the desired outcome. This is an improvement of 0.47, or 57%, indicating that the participants increased their understanding of where to find answers to apologetic questions, and in particular

recognized to a greater degree that BridgePoint is a church in which such answers can be found.

Table 5.6. Participants' Understanding of Where to Turn for Answers, Questions 36-39

Question	36	37	38	39	36-39
Desired Outcome (DO)	1	1	1	1	1
Difference in DO and Pre-Conference Response	0.73	0.74	0.95	0.90	0.83
Difference in DO and Post-Conference Response	0.44	0.38	0.30	0.31	0.36
Pre-/Post-Conference Improvement	0.29	0.36	0.65	0.60	0.47
Pre-Conference Responses = DO	0.43	0.44	0.25	0.32	1.44
Post-Conference Responses = DO	0.63	0.65	0.70	0.69	2.68
Increase in Responses = DO	0.20	0.21	0.45	0.37	1.24

Total Useable Responses: 84

Note: All calculations have been made using non-rounded numbers, which accounts for calculation deviances across rows or columns.

Results Indicated by Responses to Questions 40-43: Sustained Apologetic Interest and Use

If increased apologetic understanding has occurred among participants, it is believed that they will be more likely to engage others in conversations about Christ, use salient points from the Why God Conference in discussions with others, and have an increased interest in apologetics as indicated by pursuing resources related to apologetics. With this in mind, I asked the participants Questions 40-42 in the Pre-Conference Survey (see Appendix E) as well as in the Follow-Up Survey (see Appendix F) six weeks after participation in the conference. These questions are as follows:

40. I have had a discussion with a non-Christian about spiritual issues in the last six weeks.

41. I have read something related to apologetics in the last six weeks.

42. I have an interest in learning better how to answer questions and objections regarding Christianity.

Although the number of completed Follow-Up Surveys was seventy-eight, only thirty-nine could be successfully matched with completed Pre-Conference Surveys using the participant-provided identifying code. In addition I asked Question 43 in the Follow-Up Survey as an indication of the extent to which people put the information gained at the conference to use.

43. I have used something I learned in the apologetics conference in a conversation with someone.

There was no pre-conference equivalent to Question 43.

Table 5.7. Sustained Apologetic Interest and Use, Questions 40-42

Question	40	41	42	40-42
Desired Outcome (DO)	1	1	1	1
Difference in DO and Pre-Conference Response	1.92	1.86	0.37	1.38
Difference in DO and Post-Conference Response	1.63	1.31	0.48	1.14
Follow-Up Improvement	0.29	0.55	-0.11	0.24
Pre-Conference Responses = DO	0.13	0.15	0.67	0.95
Follow-Up Responses = DO	0.15	0.21	0.54	0.90
Increase in Responses = DO	0.03	0.05	-0.13	-0.05

Total Useable Responses: 39

Note: All calculations have been made using non-rounded numbers which accounts for calculation deviances across rows or columns.

As with the previous questions, participants were asked to respond to the above statements with an answer of 1 (strongly agree) to a 5 (strongly disagree). The desired outcome (DO) for Questions 40-43 was 1, or strongly agree. When considering the data for Questions 40-42 collectively (see Table 7), participants provided an average pre-conference response of 1.38 above the DO and an average follow-up response of 1.14

above the DO. This is an overall improvement of 0.24, or 17%, despite the fact that responses to Question 42 did not show an improvement. The latter question may not have shown an improvement because of oversaturation or perhaps because of the small sample size combined with the fact that both pre-conference and follow-up results were very near the DO.

The overall positive movement for Questions 40-42, however, is not matched by an increased number of responses equal to the DO for the questions. Although the follow-up responses for Questions 40 and 41 show more DO responses, Question 42 did not and thus mitigated the DO results of Questions 40 and 41.

Question 43 was asked in order to discern whether participants used the information they gained at the conference in conversation with others. There was no equivalent pre-conference question, which meant that the answers did not need to be compared with a previous survey. This allowed me to use all seventy-eight responses to the Follow-Up Conference Survey for this particular question. It was anticipated, based on the overall hypothesis of this doctoral project, that participants would on average provide an answer of less than three, or the neutral pre-conference position. The actual responses confirm such an expectation as the average score for Question 43 was 2.22.

Significance of Findings

Once again, I pursued this doctoral project in order to answer the question: “Is it possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetic understanding among those who attend?” I hypothesized that as a result of teaming with lay leaders in the presentation of an

apologetics conference that the participants of the conference would increase their apologetics understanding. This increase in understanding was measured by comparing responses on the Pre-Conference, Post-Conference, and Follow-Up Surveys. I selected a desired outcome for each question and movement towards the desired outcome was measured by comparing the Pre-Conference Survey with the Post-Conference Survey for Questions 1-39 and the Pre-Conference Survey with the Follow-Up Survey for Questions 40-42. The survey results indicated that there was movement towards the desired outcome for each of the question sets. That is, participants indicated that they increased their knowledge of apologetic arguments in Questions 1-30, their apologetic confidence in Questions 31-35, and their awareness as to where to seek further apologetic information in Questions 36-39. In addition, six weeks after the conference, they indicated a greater use and pursuit of apologetics, as indicated by responses to Questions 40-42. Remarkably, of the forty-two questions in which before and after comparisons were made, forty showed movement towards the desired outcome.

I was confident throughout the development of the doctoral project that the research question would be answered in the affirmative, but was pleasantly surprised by the strength of the affirmation. This affirmation comes not only through the analysis already presented, but also through anecdotal evidence. Both during the conference and in the days that followed, participants regularly commented on how helpful the material was in encouraging their own faith and equipping them with answers to share with others. In addition, a number of participants spoke of wanting to bring friends to BridgePoint, because they now knew that it was a church that would be able to answer their friends' questions. Eagerness was also noted by the participants' desire to access recorded

presentations online in order to review various arguments and/or listen to the breakout sessions they were not able to attend.

Although the process of preparing the presenters was lengthy, requiring some fifteen months, it is believed that the period of time granted to the lay leaders, the strong engagement of the lay leaders in the preparation process, and the mentoring I was able to provide were the main contributors to the success of the doctoral project. The lay leaders were not just handed a set of notes to rely upon for their presentations, but instead read a great deal of material from top contributors to their topic area and were able to come to a place of conviction and confidence about the arguments they made. The process allowed the leaders to exhibit a significant degree of mastery and expertise that not only made for strong presentations, but also gave a sense of confidence to participants. Participants were clearly not given canned or superficial answers and were significantly engaged by the material. This was the case despite the differing presentation styles of the lay leaders.

Summary

The intent of this chapter has been to explain the results of the doctoral project relative to the research question. My hypothesis was that this question could be answered in the affirmative and was tested by working with lay leaders to present an apologetics conference. Attendees of the conference completed surveys at the onset of the conference, at its completion, and six weeks after the conference. The results of the surveys were compared and found to confirm the hypothesis by indicating recognizable improvement from survey to survey relative to apologetic understanding.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the doctoral project will be summarized. The problem addressed by this project will be reviewed, the treatment applied will be addressed, and the results and attending conclusions will be discussed. In addition, a synopsis of each of the preceding chapters within this project will be presented and recommendations for further study will be made.

Review of the Problem

In chapter one it was argued that discipleship in the American evangelical church has largely forgotten the mind. While there have been calls to evangelism, doctrinal orthodoxy, community engagement, moral living, and a personalized relationship with God, there has long been lacking a call to rigorous thought regarding the full-orbed nature of the Christian worldview and how it speaks to questions others might have of its veracity. In large part this has meant that while the church has continued its ability to share what it believes at least on the most foundational theological issues, it has too often lost its ability to articulate why it believes what it believes. It is not surprising, then, that the American church has increasingly found itself losing the battle for hearts and minds.

In order to address this issue, the church must begin the process of equipping believers with the information and skills necessary to present an adequate case in favor of the Christian worldview and to expose the failings of other worldviews with which it vies. In other words, the church needs to learn how to win in the marketplace of ideas through sound apologetic efforts. As set forth, it has been the intent of this doctoral project to address this need by exposing a local church to apologetic arguments. This could have been accomplished through the sole efforts of a paid vocational minister or by contracting the services of a professional apologist. It was my contention, however, that apologetic understanding could increase without resorting to the professional expert model. Furthermore I believed that by choosing to establish a team of trained lay leaders in an apologetic effort the church could do more than just learn about apologetics for a weekend; it could be invested with well-versed individuals who could help create a culture of developing the forgotten mind.

Review of the Treatment

Of course, my desire to increase apologetic understanding in the local church and to do so by teaming with lay leaders is only worthwhile if indeed it could be shown that increased apologetic understanding through such a medium is possible. To that end, I sought to build a doctoral project in which church attenders were encouraged to attend a weekend apologetics conference at which the lay leaders and I presented various apologetics related topics. Adult conference attendees were asked to complete pre-conference, post-conference, and follow-up surveys in order to ascertain whether an increase in apologetic understanding was attained. The kind of understanding that I was

looking for was not one-dimensional. That is, it was my belief that if apologetic understanding had indeed increased it would not just result in the addition of apologetic information, but it also would increase the confidence of participants in addressing questions people might have about the Christian faith, improve their understanding of where to find further answers to difficult questions, and increase their use of apologetics. Thus, questions on the survey instruments were aimed at measuring this kind of multi-dimensional increase in apologetics understanding by comparing before and after responses. The survey instruments are presented in Appendices D, E, and F.

Review of Results

The data acquired from the surveys uniformly supported the hypothesis that apologetic understanding would increase among conference participants. Comparison was made between pre-conference, post-conference, and follow-up surveys for all participants who completed usable surveys. An analysis indicated that there was a significant increase in apologetic understanding, as indicated by a better grasp of apologetic arguments, increased apologetic confidence, and improved use of and interest in apologetics.

Summary of Preceding Chapters

The purpose of this doctoral project is to answer the research question: “Is it possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetic understanding among those who attend?” Chapter one articulated this question and the corresponding hypothesis. It also provided

the reader with definitions of pertinent terms as well as the limitations and delimitations of the project.

The purpose of chapter two was to provide a biblical and theological rationale for this doctoral project and particularly for the research question. This was accomplished first by examining Scripture's call to use reason in the comprehension of God's self-revelation. Second, the specific use of apologetics in both the Old and New Testaments was explored with particular attention given to the examples of Jesus and the apostles. Third, a brief overview of the use of apologetics in church history was sketched and indicated that the contemporary use of apologetics is consistent with the church's efforts throughout the ages. Finally, in the second chapter, common objections to apologetics were addressed and found to be wanting.

Chapter three was a review of literature relative to the arguments presented during the conference as well as to the training of lay leaders. Each of the apologetic topics could have easily been the topic of a project by itself. Thus, the review of literature was not considered exhaustive, but was nonetheless sufficient to indicate that the lay or clergy apologist has well-grounded arguments at his or her disposal. Furthermore, there was sufficient direction among the literature to guide clergy in adequately preparing lay leaders to present apologetic findings in a manner that would benefit potential learners.

The intent of chapter four was to explain the treatment I applied relative to the research question. The treatment, as indicated above, called for the recruitment and training of lay leaders, the development and completion of an apologetics conference, and the design and implementation of a research instrument to measure the effectiveness of the apologetics conference in increasing the apologetic understanding of participants.

Chapter five was written to explain the results of the doctoral project relative to the research hypothesis. The results of the surveys completed by the conference participants were compared, analyzed, and presented for the reader. These results confirmed the hypothesis by indicating significant improvement from survey to survey relative to apologetic understanding.

Implications of the Doctoral Project

The findings of this doctoral project indicate that it is indeed possible for a pastor to team with trained lay leaders in providing an apologetics conference that effectively increases apologetics understanding among those who attend. Such a finding is important because more often than not apologetics training is left up to professional clergy or apologists. While such training is not wrong, it may give the impression that while apologetic arguments are interesting, they are not something that can be grasped at a significant level by the common churchgoer.

By employing lay leaders in the process of teaching apologetics, the participants of the conference viewed BridgePoint in a different way. They recognized that there were those in the church who could help answer their questions and that the church as a whole is a place where people can freely inquire about the Christian faith. It is unlikely that such would have been the result if I had sought to present all of the apologetic topics alone. Participants may have gained an elevated view of my personal ability to address apologetic issues, but it is doubtful that their impression of the church as a whole would have changed. The inclusion of lay leaders was crucial to such a change in perspective.

In addition to the use of lay leaders proving to be effective in improving the apologetic understanding of a local church, the lay leaders themselves found the process to be personally valuable. Although the commitment was significant and called for a considerable measure of research and presentation preparations, all participants considered their inclusion in the project beneficial. Some found the research invigorating as it caused them to think more deeply about an issue than they are often required to in church. Others found the training relative to developing a strong presentation helpful not only for the present project, but also for other teaching environments. For many, the prospect of a public presentation about a difficult issue was daunting, but nevertheless they discovered themselves able to complete such an assignment. Success in this project would seem to set them up well for further success in other teaching settings.

One of the great advantages to using a lay team in training others in apologetics is the fact that apologetic knowledge becomes dispersed among the local congregation. The value of this dispersion is at least two-fold. First, each of the apologetic topics could consume a lifetime of study. By encouraging lay leaders to become experts in certain topics, it is likely that the depth of understanding regarding a variety of topics would be much greater than if one individual was called to be an expert in all arenas. Although I made a significant effort to become well-versed in the literature and arguments for each of the apologetic topics, in some cases the presenters surpassed my knowledge regarding a particular project. This is as it should be in a healthy congregation. Secondly, by dispersing apologetic knowledge among a group of lay leaders, the longevity of expertise is anticipated to be greater. It is always possible that I could be called away from the church, but even if this occurred, a considerable amount of apologetic knowledge would

remain with the church. Likewise, one of the lay leaders could also leave the church (although each was selected in part because of their recognized commitment to the body), but again only a portion of the apologetic expertise would be lost.

In summary, the affirmation of the hypothesis of this doctoral project has several implications. First, it indicated that teaming with lay leaders is effective in increasing the apologetic understanding of people in the church. Second, it indicated that using lay leaders can significantly improve the perspective that the local church as a whole is a place where questions about Christianity can be asked. Third, it provides valuable skills and experience to the lay leaders. Fourth, the longevity of apologetic knowledge in the church appears to be better secured when using a clergy/lay leader team.

Recommendations

When considering recommendations, I contemplated any changes I would make to this particular doctoral project, recommendations for researchers of similar projects, and recommendations for further research.

Recommendations for Changes to this Project

Three main tasks were involved in this project: 1) designing and implementing an apologetics conference, 2) training lay leaders to develop apologetic presentations, and 3) creating and implementing survey instruments to measure the effectiveness of the project in increasing apologetic understanding. In regards to the first task, no changes are recommended. The topics chosen seemed to be of considerable interest to the participants, and the schedule used, while intensive, appears to have been appropriate to

maintain engagement throughout the conference. Neither are changes recommended for the preparation of the lay leaders. It is believed that the leaders received adequate information and helpful training that allowed them to succeed, as measured by the increase in apologetic understanding of those who attended the conference. This training included group settings, one-on-one interaction, and topic-specific instruction relative to both content and presentation. I did not, however, complete a formal debrief with the lay leaders to discern from their perspective if any changes in the training process would be suggested from their standpoint.

In regards to the third task—the development and implementation of the survey—I would likely change some of the wording for the questions to provide for greater clarity. Anecdotal evidence suggests that double negatives contained in some questions were confusing (e.g., Questions 12 and 31), some terms were not properly understood (e.g., "undermines" in Question 5), and other questions were too easily answered correctly prior to the conference even if participants were not familiar with the topic of discussion (e.g., Questions 1, 7, and 8). In addition, the method of establishing an identifying code created too many identical codes among participants, meaning that some of the surveys became unusable for the simple reason that they could not be uniquely matched. In addition, it was apparent that many individuals could not remember their identifying code six weeks later when the Follow-Up Survey was completed. This resulted in many of the Follow-Up Surveys being unusable for comparison purposes.

Recommendations for Researchers of Similar Projects

When considering the three main tasks of this project, it is recommended that researchers of similar projects select an apologetics conference schedule that would be most advantageous to their local congregation. I have been at BridgePoint Bible Church for fourteen years and had a sense of the topic areas that would interest people and a schedule that would attract and maintain participants. The topics and schedule best for other churches may vary.

Participation was good at the conference for several reasons: 1) the church advertised the conference for several weeks before the event, 2) I preached a message prior to the conference entitled "A God Who Gives Reasons" that was specifically designed to encourage participation, and 3) I extended many personal invitations. When it comes to apologetics, many who are uninitiated do not see the value until after they have heard the arguments; thus, it is incumbent upon any researcher to provide strong pre-conference incentive for attendance.

When providing lay leader training, it is recommended that researchers emphasize both content and presentation in the training venues. The former is necessary if the participants of a conference are going to have cogent and usable information to present. The latter emphasis on presentation, however, is just as important. Often apologetics is about the development of formal arguments and little is said about the actual presentation of the arguments. I believed that it was important to provide significant training relative to presentation not only so that materials were presented in an understandable and engaging way, but also because I believed that the manner and tone that was used by the

lay leaders in presenting their material would in and of itself be instructive to participants.

Finally, in regards to survey development and implementation, it is recommended that future researchers create a means of securing better identifying codes for the reasons indicated in the previous section.

Recommendations for Additional Research

Teaching apologetics in the local church can take many forms. As indicated in chapter three, others have sought to assess the effectiveness of teaching apologetics in the local church, but none have studied the effectiveness of teaming with lay leaders in the process. Some recommendations for additional research that involves the use of lay leaders might include:

1. *Use of a fully lay-led approach*. Rather than a vocational minister teaming with lay leaders, research could be conducted as to the effect of a completely lay-led presentation team. I believe my inclusion on the team provided a helpful validation of the team as a whole. In other words, since I am respected as a pastor in the church my inclusion likely helped with garnering participation and lending general credibility to the conference. This belief, however, may not be warranted, and there may be value to a strictly lay-leader team.
2. *Implementation of a more directed, stream-lined preparation method.* I purposely allowed all lay leaders to craft their own presentation. This approach took a considerable amount of time as each was called upon to do

his or her own research on each topic area. Such an approach is believed to have helped the lay leaders become "community experts" relative to their assigned topic; however, it may well be that in terms of presenting an understandable apologetic argument, effectiveness could still be attained by giving presenters a pre-developed outline. This would probably lessen the fifteen-month presentation period used for this project.

3. *A non-weekend conference presentation medium.* This project used a weekend apologetics conference as the medium. This approach may have certain advantages because participants make a shorter-term commitment and are perhaps able to see overlaps between various apologetic arguments. At the same time, it is just as likely that the amount of apologetic information was more than many participants could adequately process in such a short period. Thus, additional research might include a weekly class that highlights just one topic per week.
4. *Use of an application component.* If a further research project was done using a once-per-week class, it would be possible for participants to be given assignments in order to use what they learn in conversations with others. Although this doctoral project did include instruction on how participants might put apologetics to use, they were not given the opportunity to apply what they had learned or debrief their attempts with other participants and leaders.
5. *Formal review of lay leaders.* This project did not involve a formal interview or survey of the lay leaders. In future projects, such a review might expose

ways in which the preparation process and effectiveness of the presentations might be improved.

APPENDIX A

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL PRESENTATION

In preparing lay leaders for the presentations, the following instructions were provided during training sessions. The instructions were given as a hard copy and were explained verbally by the researcher.

Preparing for a Successful Presentation

A. Remember the goal of all teaching: to cause learning. In the end our aim is not to teach information but to teach people.

B. Identify the aim for the specific session: what is it that we want to cause people to learn?

   It will be our goal to cause people to learn answers to questions regarding the Christian faith such that they can readily use them in conversations with others.

C. Prepare your own heart and the heart of your listeners through prayer. Ask God to build in you a humble, yet assured, heart. Also ask him to help you to answer any skeptics in a gentle way. Pray your listeners will be learners more than critics.

D. Create a map that helps cause people to learn

   1. *Stir in people a desire to know the answer/response to the question/issue at hand.* We must highlight and personalize the question we are trying to answer, so that people are ready to learn. "Priming the pump" is often a forgotten step in the teaching process, and the result is that people get an answer for a question they don't think they need. The ME-WE model is an excellent way to prime the pump.

      ME

      WE

   2. *Present the answer to the question at hand as clearly as possible and provide a response to any common objections or questions*. The intention is not to show people how much you know about a subject; the intention is to make sure that people understand what you are teaching. This means that you should only share what you can explain well. It also means that it is likely that you will need to say key things in several different ways or perhaps repeat important points.

   3. *After presenting your answer, show people how this information can be used in a conversation* This acts not only to remind people that you are teaching them not just to give them information but as a ministry tool. It also provides you an opportunity to repeat the main stream of the argument.

   4. *Close by giving people a vision of how the Christian community will be well served if it is equipped with the answer you have provided.* This vision should be inspiring and encourage people to what to learn even more.

5. *Between each of the above provide a clear transition.* For example, after stirring interest in people, simply tell them that now you are going to provide them with some helpful thoughts to address the issue.

E. Be conscious of important live presentation elements:

1. *Engagement*. Plan to be engaging by using illustrations and visual aids, not as filler but to help people understand and keep focused. For the sake of continuity, we will all provide an outline of our points, as well as a list of Recommended Resources.

2. *Internalization*. It is imperative that people see us having internalized the argument we are presenting. We cannot hope that others will internalize it if we have not done so ourselves.

3. *Tone*. Humility is key. Be non-condescending and non-self-promoting, but properly confident

4. *Volume*. Obviously we want to be loud enough, but we also want our volume to aid in attention through variation

5. *Speed*. Too slow bores people, too fast loses them. Varying speed for emphasis can be important as well.

6. If nervous, say a quick pray before you start and then act in faith in God's provision by starting strong.

"People learn what they care about and remember what they understand"
Standford Eriksen

Recommended Resources:

- *The Essence of Good Teaching*, Standford C. Eriksen, 1997
- *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive*, Howard Hendricks, 2003
- *Communicating for a Change: Seven Keys to Irresistible Communication,* Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, 2006
- *The Seven Laws of the Learner: How to Teach Almost Anything to Practically Anyone*, Bruce Wilkinson, 2005
- *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, William Yount, 2008

APPENDIX B

VERBATIM CONSENT FORM INSTRUCTIONS

Prior to completing the conference surveys, participants of the conference were read the following consent form instructions verbatim in keeping with Biola University's Protection of Human Rights in Research Committee requirements.

Verbatim Consent Form Instructions

Thank you for attending this apologetics conference. It is part of a thesis-project developed by John Hopper who is a student of Talbot School of Theology at Biola University, La Mirada, California. The conference schedule is as listed in your folder and provides for you to attend four plenary sessions and three out of six different breakout sessions. If you attend the seven sessions possible for you to attend and complete the surveys to be explained, your total time involvement will be approximately nine hours.

To assess the effectiveness of this conference in improving your apologetic understanding and interest, you are asked to participate in a pre- and post-conference survey, as well as a short online survey six weeks after the conference. The total time estimated for completing all three surveys is 25 minutes. These surveys will ask you to create an identifying code known only to you, so as to maintain the anonymity of each survey. All completed surveys will be maintained by John Hopper and will not be made public even in their anonymous state. Information from all surveys will be analyzed and certain statistics from the survey set will be made public. Again, however, the results of any one survey will not be made public. If some unforeseen event causes an individual survey to be made public, your unique identifying code means it is unlikely anyone will be able to associate a survey with you.

Your participation in this research project is anticipated to benefit the BridgePoint Bible Church community by providing church leaders with information about the apologetic understanding of the church attenders and the effectiveness of using a pastor and lay leaders to train them. Upon completion of the thesis-project, a brief summary of survey results will be emailed to all participants. Furthermore, when the written thesis-project is completed it will be made available for public review.

If you would like to be a part of this research project and are at least 18 years of age, you are asked to read and sign the Informed Consent Form found in your conference folders, knowing that at any time you are free to leave the conference or opt out of completing any remaining surveys. Please place the completed Informed Consent Form in one of the collection bins found at the back of the room when completed. Once you have completed the Informed Consent Form, you may also complete the pre-conference survey.

If you are under 18, or would not like to be part of the research project, you are free to attend the entire conference. You are asked, however, not to complete any surveys.

Thank you again for your attendance and participation.

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Prior to participation in the survey, attendees of the conference were asked to complete the following informed consent form in keeping with Biola University's Protection of Human Rights in Research Committee requirements.

Informed Consent Form

Participant's name: _____

I authorize John Hopper (doctoral candidate at Biola University, La Mirada, California, and Executive Pastor at BridgePoint Bible Church, Houston, Texas) and/or any designated research assistants to gather information from me on the topic of Christian apologetics.

I understand that the general purposes of the research are to assess the effectiveness of a researcher-designed apologetics conference and that I will be asked to complete a pre- and post-conference survey as well as a follow-up survey six weeks after the conference. I understand that the approximate total time of my involvement in completing the three surveys will be about 25 minutes and the total time of my involvement at the conference will be about 9 hours.

The potential benefit of the research study is that John Hopper will have more accurate information regarding the apologetic understanding of church attenders as well insight in how to further train people in apologetics. This information can then be shared with other church leaders in the formation of future training opportunities.

I am aware that I may choose not to answer any questions that I find embarrassing or offensive.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue anxiety or stress or have questions about the research or my rights as a participant, that may have been provoked by the experience, John Hopper will be available for consultation, and will also be available to provide direction regarding medical assistance in the unlikely event of physical injury incurred during participation in the research.

Confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher. My individual results will not be released without my written consent.

_____ _____

Signature Date

I am over 18 years of age: Yes ☐ No ☐

_____

Email (used to send me follow-up survey and brief summary of research results)

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the researcher with your pre-conference survey responses. The other copy you may keep for your records.

Questions and comments may be addressed to John Hopper, BridgePoint Bible Church, 13277 Katy Freeway Houston, Texas, 77079. Phone: 832-448-1330.

APPENDIX D

PRE-CONFERENCE SURVEY

Prior to all teaching sessions of the conference, participants who had completed the informed consent form also completed the Pre-Conference Survey included here.

Last letter of the city you were born in _____

Second digit of your age on April 11, 2014 _____

Favorite holiday _____

WHY GOD? PRE-CONFERENCE SURVEY

Preliminary Questions

A. Are you a regular attender of BridgePoint? Yes No

B. Do you consider yourself a practicing Christian? Yes No

C. Are you at least 18 years of age? Yes No

Respond to each of the questions below by indicating your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. Please circle one of the five numbers for each question. Do not mark a space between the numbers.

Life without God

1. Love and beauty as we know it would not exist apart from the existence of God.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

2. If God does not exist, any meaning one attributes to life is subjective.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

3. If there is no God, human reason is unreliable.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

4. Everything that comes into existence has a cause.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

5. The Second Law of Thermodynamics undermines the idea that the universe had a beginning.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

6. If the universe had a beginning, it had to have a cause.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Resurrection

7. It is essential to biblical Christianity that the resurrection was a historical event.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

8. The Gospels report that the disciples experienced encounters with the risen Christ. These reports are historically credible.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

9. The biblical report that women were the first witnesses of the resurrection weakens the historical case for the event.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

The Historical Reliability of the Gospels

10. The theological character of the Gospels means we cannot rely on them as being theologically accurate.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

11. The testimony of the Gospels can't be trusted as historically accurate because they were written too long after the events occurred.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

12. Even if the Gospels included real eyewitness testimony, we cannot trust that they provide an accurate historical account of first century events for the simple reason that eyewitness testimony is not always credible.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

13. Non-believers don't have a problem with evil and suffering like Christians do.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

14. God is good and loving. He also allows for evil and suffering. These two thoughts are not compatible.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

15. The Christian worldview provides the best explanation for why there is evil and suffering in the world.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Fine-Tuning of the Universe

16. Christian and non-Christian scientists agree that life in the universe would be highly improbable if gravitational and electromagnetic forces were slightly different than they are.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

17. When Christians infer that there is a God based on the intricate design of the universe, they have moved beyond the boundaries of good science.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

18. When it is said that the universe is "fine-tuned," it is meant that the initial conditions of our universe had to fall within an extremely narrow range in order to allow for life.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

The Moral Argument

19. All moral values and duties are subjective in nature, varying from society to society and at times even from individual to individual.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

20. Even if moral duties exist in an objective sense, it is still difficult to explain why one should follow these morals apart from a belief in God.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

21. If moral values and duties exist in an objective sense, their existence must stem from something beyond individuals and societies.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Myths about Christianity

22. Christianity has a long history of impeding scientific pursuits.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

23. Religious wars, including those done in the name of Christianity, are the cause for a significant percentage of large-scale, armed conflicts since the time of Christ.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

24. The Bible does a good job of supporting the cause of disenfranchised groups including women.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Christianity among the Religions

25. Christianity is unique among the world's major religions because it is open to being tested through historical evidence.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

26. If on a religious quest, one reason to start with Christianity is that while Jesus is revered by other religions, he is at the center of Christianity.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

27. An attractive feature of Christianity versus other religions is that salvation is free.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Putting Apologetics into Practice

28. Apologetics is helpful in removing barriers to belief that people might have.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

29. When using apologetics, the tone of the discussion is not important.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

30. Asking people questions about their own beliefs is generally not a good way to help them see the weaknesses in their own thinking.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Apologetic Confidence

31. One reason I don't often share my faith with others is that I fear I won't be able to answer their questions.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

32. I am confident I can explain to others why I believe God exists.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

33. If someone questions the historical reliability of the New Testament, I don't really know how to respond.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

34. If someone asks me why a good and powerful God would allow suffering and evil, I know some good ways to answer their question.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

35. When non-Christians ask me questions about the Bible or Christianity, I am uncomfortable.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Where to Turn for Answers

36. There are people at BridgePoint I can turn to if I need answers to tough questions about Christianity.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

37. BridgePoint is a good church for someone who wants more than surface answers to tough questions about God and the Bible.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

38. The people making the presentations at this conference would be good resources if I have questions about their subject areas.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

39. I am aware of good resources if I need help in answering tough questions about Christianity.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Personal Use of and Interest in Apologetics

40. I have had a discussion with a non-Christian about spiritual issues in the last six weeks.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

41. I have read something related to apologetics in the last six weeks.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

42. I have an interest in learning better how to answer questions and objections regarding Christianity.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

APPENDIX E

POST-CONFERENCE SURVEY

Following all of the teaching sessions of the conference, participants who had completed the informed consent form and attended the entire conference were asked to complete the Post-Conference Survey included here.

Last letter of the city you were born in _____

Second digit of your age on April 11, 2014 _____

Favorite holiday _____

WHY GOD? POST-CONFERENCE SURVEY

Respond to each of the questions below by indicating your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. Please circle one of the five numbers for each question. Do not mark a space between the numbers.

Conference Attendance

I attended the following sessions at which John Hopper was the presenter:

- ❑ The Ramifications of a Godless World
- ❑ The Kalam Cosmological Argument
- ❑ Which God? Christianity as a Reasonable Quest
- ❑ Putting Apologetics into Practice

I attended the following breakout sessions:

- ❑ A Look at Fine-Tuning of the Universe (Mike Hugele)
- ❑ The Moral Argument for the Existence of God (Jim Muckle)
- ❑ The Reliability of the Gospels (Ben Simpson)
- ❑ Evidence for the Resurrection (Theresa Clede)
- ❑ Answering the Problem of Evil & Suffering (Joe Sanders)
- ❑ Confronting Myths about Christianity (Vivian Bush)

Life without God

1. Love and beauty as we know it would not exist apart from the existence of God.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

2. If God does not exist, any meaning one attributes to life is subjective.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

3. If there is no God, human reason is unreliable.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

4. Everything that comes into existence has a cause.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

5. The Second Law of Thermodynamics undermines the idea that the universe had a beginning.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

6. If the universe had a beginning, it had to have a cause.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

Resurrection

7. It is essential to biblical Christianity that the resurrection was a historical event.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

8. The Gospels report that the disciples experienced encounters with the risen Christ. These reports are historically credible.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

9. The biblical report that women were the first witnesses of the resurrection weakens the historical case for the event.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

The Historical Reliability of the Gospels

10. The theological character of the Gospels means we cannot rely on them as being theologically accurate.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

11. The testimony of the Gospels can’t be trusted as historically accurate because they were written too long after the events occurred.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

12. Even if the Gospels included real eyewitness testimony, we cannot trust that they provide an accurate historical account of first century events for the simple reason that eyewitness testimony is not always credible.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

13. Non-believers don't have a problem with evil and suffering like Christians do.

1	2	3	4	5
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14. God is good and loving. He also allows for evil and suffering. These two thoughts are not compatible.

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APPENDIX F

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

Six weeks after the conference, participants who had completed the informed consent form were asked to complete an online follow-up survey that contained the questions shown below. Questions 4 through 7 correspond with Questions 40-42 on the Pre-Conference Survey.

Follow-Up Survey

In order to compare the results of this survey to the Pre-Conference Survey, please provide the same answer to these three "identifier" questions as you did at the Why God Conference.

1. What is the last letter of the city you were born in?

2. What was the second digit of your age on April 11, 2014?

3. What is your favorite holiday?

<u>Personal use of and interest in apologetics</u>

4. I have had a discussion with a non-Christian about spiritual issues in the last six weeks.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

5. I have read something related to apologetics in the last six weeks.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

6. I have an interest in learning better how to answer questions and objections regarding Christianity.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

7. I have used something I learned in the apologetics conference in a conversation with someone.

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree

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