



An Introduction to and Defense of Apologetics

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AN APOLOGETIC FOR APOLOGETICS

“Apologetics” need not be a dirty word even among Lutherans. Consider four points. First, we are given a biblical mandate to carry out the apologetic task. Second, there are scriptural examples of apologetics. Third, the church has a long history of defending the faith by the use of reason. Finally, as rational human beings, we simply cannot escape apologetics.

Biblical Mandate

Peter encourages us to “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason (ἀπολογία) for the hope that you have.”¹ The word ἀπολογία paints the picture of a legal defense. Christians are called to make a case for their faith. Peter emboldens persecuted Christians of the early church to live with so much hope that their pagan neighbors have to wonder, “What’s going on with them?”² The passage applies to today as well. “Why do you believe what you believe? Why do you have hope in the midst of all of this chaos?” These questions call for a gospel presentation. These questions also call for a reasoned defense for the claims of Christ.³ The Christian should never answer, “Because I believe!” as if that were good enough. The suicide bomber has more “faith” than most of us. The Christian faith is based on facts and not on the faith itself. St. Paul goes so far as to imply that if you show him the dead body of Jesus, he would not be Christian and neither should anybody else.⁴ Without the fact of the resurrection all is lost. What other religion includes in its own sacred texts the way to debunk the whole religion? This is how important the facticity of the resurrection is to Paul.

Biblical Examples

Biblical examples of apologetics (using the term broadly) include prophecies fulfilled, miracles performed, and even the use of everyday examples in Christ’s and the apostles’ preaching.⁵ Luke provides us examples of Paul’s apologetic work. Paul famously employed

¹ 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV 1984).

² This is sometimes referred to as “existential apologetics”.

³The Christian answer Peter encouraged was certainly a creedal statement on the saving work of Christ. Perhaps Peter is using the term “reason” here specifically as a reference to the gospel and the term “hope” as peace in Christ forever. This would seem to lead us to the conclusion that 1 Peter 3:15 is not talking about apologetics but simply a gospel presentation. However if we consider the legal nature of the word ἀπολογία, that the message of the gospel is based on eyewitness accounts subject to verification, and Peter’s defense of his own testimony as an evidence based eyewitness account (2 Pt. 1:15-18), I think it is legitimate, at the very least, to see 1 Peter 3:15 as an encouragement to carry out the apologetic task as we know it today even if 1 Peter 3:15 strictly refers to a gospel presentation. As noted below it is difficult practically to draw a boundary line between pre-evangelism (including apologetics) and evangelism even if it is necessary to do so theologically.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.

⁵ It should be noted that the New Testament Epistles are documents written for believers. We don’t have any open-letters from Paul to the unbelieving Gentile world. We can assume rightly that Paul and others engaged in

apologetics in Athens by using the altar to an unknown god as a point of contact and quoting Greek prophets. All this as a prerequisite for a presentation of the resurrection, “[God] has given proof of this to all men by raising [Jesus] from the dead.”⁶

Before Agrippa and Festus, Paul made this legal defense,

“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

Paul replied, “Short time or long – I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”⁷

Paul declares that the claims of the church are verifiable. These events were not done in a corner. These claims can be investigated. Either Jesus rose from the dead or he didn't. Christianity is not a religion of mere morality, enlightenment, or a story that provides a lens through which we make sense of the world. It is a claim on reality. It is the metanarrative par excellence. Not only do we have a biblical encouragement for the apologetics task, we have biblical examples to follow.⁸

Apologetics in Church History

Church history also provides examples of apologetics. Justin Martyr's *First Apology* is an example of an early Christian literally making a legal defense for the Christian faith. Christians were falsely accused of atheism and other crimes. Justin refutes the accusations and positively states that Christianity supports civic obedience. In Pauline fashion he uses Greek myth and philosophy to compare and contrast Christ to his accusers' worldview.⁹ By doing so he is able to

such dialogue. We just don't have as many records of this as we do the theological letters to congregations. Wouldn't it be nice to have a transcript of just one of the instances when he “reasoned in the synagogue”? However, one can make the case that Hebrews gives us an insight. Although written to a Christian audience it certainly has the marks of making a case for an orthodox Christology.

⁶ Acts 17:31.

⁷ Acts 26:25-29.

⁸ For more nuance, consider also Acts 17:2, 31; 1 Corinthians 10:4-5; and Philippians 1:7, 16.

⁹ I will use the term “worldview” to describe the way a person makes sense of the world. A person's worldview is how he or she might answer the following questions while living life: “How do I obtain knowledge? Who am I? What is my purpose? How shall I (and others) live? What is the good life? Is there a God? How does the spiritual and physical interact?” A worldview can function as an ideology, philosophy, point of view, mindset, or all of the above.

show the faultiness of the pagan worldview and the superiority of the Christian worldview.¹⁰ Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* and Athanasius' *On the Incarnation* are other examples of early apologetics. Certain arguments from church fathers have come down to us as well. We might think of Anselm's Ontological Argument or even Augustine's take on the Holy Trinity. Whether we agree with the content of the ancients' apologies, they certainly were engaged in the apologetic task. We should also be aware of the context of each generation's apologetics: Who was attacking Christians and who were the Christians trying to evangelize in that particular time and place?¹¹ Today we might categorize a treatise on Christology as doctrine and not apologetics but considering the early Christian engagement with Gnosticism we could rightly categorize it as apologetics.

Martin Luther¹² spoke about apologetics even though he did not use the word. In his 1535 Galatians commentary he contrasts how a Christian might speak to an unbeliever regarding God apart from Christ and the proclamation of the gospel.

But when you leave the doctrine of justification and have to engage in controversy with Jews, Turks, or sectarians, etc., about the power, wisdom, etc., of God, then you must use all your cleverness and effort and be as profound and subtle a controversialist as possible, for then you are in another area. But when it comes to the conscience, to righteousness and life (which I want to be noted carefully here) against the Law, sin, death, and the devil; or when it comes to satisfaction for sin, the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, and the eternal salvation, then you must disabuse your mind completely of all speculation and investigation into the mystery of God, and you must pay attention only to this man, who presents himself to us as the Mediator.¹³

Concerned with that very situation, that is, Christians captured by the Turks, Luther instructed Christians to hold on dearly to their catechetical instruction, use their reason, and to live lives of obedience in 1 Peter 3:15 fashion so that they may remain in the faith and possibly win over their captors.¹⁴

¹⁰ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, ANF Vol. 1, 163-187.

¹¹ See Addendum A.

¹² We should note Luther's context. He was mostly surrounded by other Christians. It would be anachronistic to suggest that he would be unilaterally against apologetics in our context. It is hard to imagine that he would not engage in debates about truth or textual criticism. Consider two instances in which he performed apologetic type tasks. When faced with the Donation of Constantine controversy, he did his due diligence by researching the historicity of the claim. Regarding Ulrich Zwingli he used hermeneutical principles to combat a symbolic presence in the Supper.

¹³ LW 26:29-30.

¹⁴ WA 6,188. For a thorough discussion on Luther and apologetics to Islam see Adam S. Francisco. *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics*. (Leiden, NL: Koninklijke Brill, 2007). Consider also the slave girl who pointed her captor (Naaman) to the prophecy of God (Elisha) in 2 Kings 5.

We Cannot Escape Apologetics

Finally, we cannot escape using reason. It is absurd to think we can. Nor should we disparage reason. Outside of grace and life itself reason is the greatest gift bestowed upon us by our creator.¹⁵ It is how we operate. The Christian has no choice but to make use of reason. We pastors employ reason in every evangelism call we attempt, in every sick call we make, in every class we teach, and in every sermon we preach. The study of apologetics, that is, defending the faith using reason, does not necessarily combat the doctrine of bound choice and sola gratia rather it aids the Christian in thinking clearly so he or she might proclaim clearly.¹⁶ The abuse of reason does not negate its use. Nor does the abuse of apologetics negate its use.

The truth of the matter is that we confessional Lutheran pastors are already practicing apologetics. We always have. When we explain Hebrews 3:4, “For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything,” as proof of a creator we are using a cosmological argument for the existence of God. When we argue for the existence of a universal conscience we are employing the anthropological or moral argument. When we offer pastoral care to the suffering or muse upon the natural wonder of God we are in the realm of ontology (being). When we use passages about God’s purpose and design we employ the teleological argument. When we insist that Luke 2 is real history and not a “Once upon a time...” kind of story we are using historical or evidential apologetics. It is not a matter of whether we should or should not carry out the apologetic task, we already do. It is only a question of carrying it out thoughtfully or not.

We are also forced to respond to attacks on the faith. If one of our parishioners hears that the New Testament texts were made up centuries after the New Testament events by a particular Christian group in order to dominate another Christian group,¹⁷ we rightly point to the historical evidence to dismantle the theory. We simply cannot escape apologetics.

APOLOGETICS AND EVANGELISM

Apologetics can be defined as “The defense of the faith using reason” but there is more to the story. It is about knocking down arguments hostile to the claims of Christianity and presenting positive arguments which vindicate¹⁸ the claims of Christianity. It is engaging people with the reason for our hope. We can quibble about the definition¹⁹ but finally apologetics is about souls.

¹⁵ If reason is the greatest power we have, than its misuse by sinners is the most devastating.

¹⁶ Apologetics should not be defined as “justifying the ways of God to man.” That is a better definition for “theodicy.”

¹⁷ For example: the Walter Bauer/Bart Ehrman theory.

¹⁸ This is different than vindicating the ways of God to men. This is showing proofs of Christian claims.

¹⁹ Here is a possible definition: Apologetics is getting skeptics to use the same reason they do in everyday life as they consider the claims of Christianity in order to show that the claims are at least plausible if not probable then to let the Spirit do his work. For example, when the New Testament texts are judged like all other documents of the same era, they are found to be not only credible but by far the most reliable texts of the era.

These are not arguments to be won but arguments to be used in love. Apologetics is a ministry of caring.

A Subset of Evangelism

Apologetics is therefore a subset of evangelism.²⁰ It is a tool in the evangelist's tool belt. The goal is always Christ. There would be no reason to practice apologetics without this telos. A presentation of Christ should always be waiting in the wings of an apologetic discussion ready to make an appearance. If there is no objection to the claims of Christianity, then apologetics is to exit the stage and allow the gospel its time. It is, of course, rarely this clear-cut in conversations. Theologically we have to distinguish pre-evangelism from evangelism but it is not as if we stop in the middle of a conversation and announce, "Just so you know, now I am leaving the realm pre-evangelism and entering the realm of evangelism." The same is true for apologetics. It is always mixed. The evangelist will always be ready with both the gospel and any necessary defense of the gospel's claim.

With these high stakes the apologist will want to use every tool he has. Reason, natural law, art, philosophy, really any fact or discipline is at play in apologetics.²¹ It has been said that every fact is an apologetic fact. We certainly cannot trace all things back in an apologetic manner because of our limited perspective. However all things belong to and therefore point to God, whether we can articulate it or not.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.²²

The mathematician, the artist, the parent, and the educator all have something to offer.

The apologist will want to be well read not only in theology and philosophy but in art, science, music, politics, etc. Academic apologetics is important but evangelism (and therefore apologetics) occurs most meaningfully and most often in the conversations Christians carry on with friends, relatives, coworkers, and acquaintances. Just as we cannot escape apologetics as rational creatures so we cannot, try as we might, escape relationships. Can the apologist speak winsomely about a variety of subjects and how they relate to each other and especially to theology? Being all things to all men means more than a lame attempt at relevance but rather

²⁰ Apologetics is also an academic discipline. Within the four theological disciplines it falls under "Practical Theology". The various disciplines (even theological ones) can produce friendly (and not so friendly) rivalries. The historical theologian might remind that systematician that doctrine always occurs in a specific context. The systematician might remind the exegete that doctrinal formulation is essential. Apologetics is not the be-all-and-end-all nor does it rise to the level of the four-fold theological division of theology but it is a legitimate discipline. To throw out a whole discipline because of one's weariness towards that discipline is too simplistic of a move.

²¹ See Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *How to Understand the Sacred Scriptures*. Translated by Wade Johnston. (Saginaw, MI: Magdeburg Press, 2011), 100-101.

²² Psalm 19:1-4a.

knowing the era's poets and philosophers. Here is where meaningful conversations occur. Rarely will these relationships end with a come-to-Jesus-moment but opportunities abound as trust in relationships is formed and opinions are shared. The apologist will use reason in these conversations probing the epistemology of the skeptic by asking questions like "Why do you believe that?" in hopes of presenting the Christian claim for what it is, a factual claim that leads to a robust worldview.

Fideism and Rationalism

There is, of course, a healthy suspicion of even a hint of decision theology. Just as the Semi-Pelagianist declares to Christ on the cross, "Thank you, but I'll take it from here" so the Arminian declares to the Holy Spirit, "This is kind of you, but I don't have a use for you." We should notice that Lutherans are not the only ones who raise an incredulous eyebrow when they hear the word "apologetics". Quite frankly it's not how faith works and most Christians know this. Faith is more than a cold intellectual decision. In fact, the pendulum has maybe swung in the other direction to the ditch of fideism, that is, faith determines truth. Faith is seen as a virtue based only loosely on content. The strength of one's faith is more important than the object of the faith. We are to avoid the rationalist's ditch on one side and fideist's ditch on the other side.

It is helpful to consult the systematic division of faith into *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. The apologist can do the first two but only the Spirit can produce *fiducia*. This has everything to do with the doctrine of bound choice and justification in Christ alone. We can't do *fiducia*; it has to be a gift. Many people know the content of the Christian faith (*notitia*). Satan himself certainly assents to the fact that Christ's work is for the salvation of souls otherwise he wouldn't work so hard to thwart the church (*assensus*).²³ But this is a long way away from *fiducia*. The apologist cannot do *fiducia* but he can knock down faulty arguments against Christianity and provide a positive presentation of the facticity of the Christian claim.²⁴

Reason is not the enemy.²⁵ We are. It is not that the Christian faith is unreasonable, it is that we are unreasonable. Would any of us dare to claim that God is irrational? Not only are we limited as finite creatures (Were you there when God set the foundations of the earth?²⁶) but we are also so depraved in our sinfulness that we fight against God. The whole story laid out in Scripture is about God's plan versus man's plan. This is crystalized theologically in Paul's "two kinds of righteousness". There are finally two paths, one of attempting righteousness by following law and one of trusting that Christ was righteous in our place. A human plan or a God

²³ Biblical examples include Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar.

²⁴ See Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 426-430.

²⁵ There is a whiff of Gnosticism in all of this. When we blame reason, the physical world, science, etc., we tend to let ourselves off the hook, as if our souls were good but only corrupted or imprisoned by the body, the physical world, institutions, science, philosophy, etc. It's our fault!

²⁶ Job 38:4.

plan. God's plan might seem like foolishness to us but that is not because it is foolishness; it is that we are fools. Finally it is a First Commandment issue. Are we God or is God God?

Here is where critics of apologetics stop. Man is incapable of knowing God on his own, period. Not true. Man is only incapable of knowing God fully and of trusting God on his own. Paul does not let the Gentiles off the hook. Even though the Gentiles did not have the Hebrew Scriptures like the Jews, they still had no excuse.²⁷ Interestingly Paul uses a form of the word apologia here (ἀναπολογία). The Gentiles do not have a case. They don't have an apologia (a case) for their worldview. Natural law provides enough information to believe that there is a god-like being. It does not provide us with gospel and it cannot get us to Christ but no one is without excuse. However, there does seem to be a problem here. God demands of us what he knows we cannot accomplish. He demands perfection from sinners and faith from those with bound wills. It is only in Christ that we find the solution. Whatever God demands of us he provides for us in Christ. He grants righteousness to the sinner and faith to the unbeliever. He also, through the eternal Logos, provides a worldview, to put into contemporary terms.

It is only when revelation contradicts the faulty reason of sinners that the Christian goes with the "foolishness" of God over man's "wisdom". The use of Aristotelian logic is a prime example. Aristotle's logic is brilliant. We owe him a lot. We should study him. And we should use him all the way until God says, "Stop". The problem is shoehorning Scripture into Aristotelian categories. Here is where reason trumps revelation. Transubstantiation is a brilliant and attractive doctrine. It is also wrong. The accidents are of bread and wine but the substance is of Christ. Problem solved. Brilliant! But it does not let God be God. It does not let Scripture stand. It puts revelation and, in this case very specifically, Christ into Aristotelian categories.²⁸ Similarly, we are naturally attracted to Aristotle's ethics. A person is not virtuous by being virtuous but by doing virtuous things the person becomes virtuous.²⁹ Brilliant! But this contradicts Christ's declaration of the sinner as righteous. As Christ said (very reasonably) the good fruit does not make a tree good (Mat 7:17-18).³⁰ It's the other way around.

We need the Spirit. Think of 1 Corinthians 2:10b-16.³¹ Paul uses the picture of a man and his thoughts. No one can know the man without knowing his spirit. We need to know his

²⁷ Romans 1:20.

²⁸ LW 36:29-32.

²⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a16-20.

³⁰ Matthew 7:17-18.

³¹ "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

thoughts. We need to know *him*. This does not mean that we do not know anything about the man. We see his body and we observe his actions. Yet these can be misleading if we do not know the man's soul. In a similar way we cannot know God by his outwardness. We might call this the naked God. We know some things but this can be misleading. It is not until we have the Spirit do we know God. This is the paradoxically revealed but hidden-in-Word God. The apologist can talk accurately about God to the skeptic just as we can talk about other people from the evidence of their outwardness. Yet it is only with the Spirit that they can truly know in faith. Apologetics is empty without revelation.

Lutheran Apologetics

Is there then a "Lutheran apologetics?" I bristle at the term. What apologetic argument have Lutherans uniquely used? Lutherans have steadfastly held that they are not sectarian but rather one with the historic church, good, bad, and ugly. Nor is the purpose of apologetics to make someone Lutheran but rather to present Christ.³² Catechesis comes later.

Yet there are Lutheran hallmarks in apologetics beyond the deep suspicion of reason. If there is a Lutheran apologetics then it would be Pauline. Paul quotes the Athenians' own poets to them and then transitions to the resurrection in Acts 17. Although he doesn't use precise logic to connect the resurrection of Christ to the resurrection of the Last Day, Paul offers proof of the bodily resurrection for the Christian hope. He puts forward eyewitness testimony as evidence. This evidentiary tactic is found throughout the New Testament.³³

If there is a Lutheran apologetics then it would also be Christocentric. Christ is how we know God. He is clothed in flesh. We cannot go to him so he came to us. This hiddenness is scandalous but it is how God is revealed. Since the goal is Christ the apologetic task is to get to Christ and specifically his cross and resurrection. The classic arguments for the existence of God are important and useful but if the apologist can get to the resurrection all the better. Efficiency is a virtue in apologetics even if patience might be required.

If there is a Lutheran apologetics then it would also be cross-centric. Christ is how we know God and the crucifixion is how we know Christ. Here we see both law and gospel at their clearest. Here is also where Christ is the ultimate iconoclast shattering all our images of God. It is also where a theology of suffering begins to take shape. If life is to have meaning, then suffering must have meaning otherwise half of life is meaningless and that's on a good day in first-world countries let alone third-world countries. The theology of the cross has ramifications for both the problem of evil and epistemology (the study of knowledge – how we know what we

'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:10b-16).

³² C.S. Lewis' picture of a hall with rooms is apt here. Christianity is the hall. The evangelist/apologist is trying to usher the skeptic into the hall. But there are rooms with furniture down this hall. These are denominations. Eventually you have to enter a room! So apologetics is about "mere Christianity" to borrow another phrase from the Inklings. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952).

³³ Acts 1:3, 12:32, 10:39, 13:31, 22:14, 16:16; John 19:25, 20:31, 21:24; 1 John 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:15-18.

know). Both the problem of evil and epistemology are important apologetic topics. The theologian of the cross understands that what we label “good” might be evil and we only know this because God said so (epistemology). The theologian of the cross understands that what we call “evil” might be good through the lens of the cross (problem of evil).

If there is a Lutheran apologetics then it would also be Logocentric. If it is all about Christ then it is all about the Logos. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, and everything in between. All things were created through him. Up is up and one plus one equals two because of him. The facts that the world was created by word, that Jesus is the Word, and that God chose to reveal himself through words, means that words matter and can be trusted. We sinners mess words up just as we mess up reason, but words themselves are not the enemy but a precious gift by which we have knowledge.

There is a debate of how much John had in mind the Greek concept of Logos when he wrote the first chapter of his Gospel. Certainly we can see with historical perspective the connection between Heraclitus who worked in Ephesus and John who had connections to the same city. The Greek philosopher famously said that a person cannot step into the same river twice. At first glance he seems to imply that change is so constant that meaning is illusive. But Heraclitus also said “Listening not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to agree that all things are one.”³⁴ Heraclitus understood that there was something outside which regulates all things. In my dreams I imagine Heraclitus saying “Listen to the Logos, whatever this distant but regulating force might be” and John replying “Listen to the Logos? I met Him!” Jesus, as the ultimate image-breaking Logos, is the metanarrative that explodes all other metanarratives. Something to think about in an era when people are incredulous to metanarratives but still seek a metanarrative, namely their own. It is only when we painfully realize that we don’t have as much creative control over our own narrative that we seek another. “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”³⁵

Seelsorge Apologetics

The intersection of suffering and truth is where most personal apologetics takes place. The Lutheran apologist is to be seelsorger. J.P. Moreland has said that apologetics is a ministry of caring. The apologist is to be ready to give an answer but should never forget to “do this with gentleness and respect.”³⁶ The apologetic-minded pastor is concerned not only with the skeptic but also with the parishioner. Every Sunday he stands before sinner-saints. There are unbelievers in the pews even if everybody in the pews is a believer.³⁷ The Old Adam is drowned daily in

³⁴ W.K.C. Guthrie, *The History of Philosophy* Vol. 1, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 424-425.

³⁵ 2 Corinthians 10:5.

³⁶ 1 Peter 3:15b.

³⁷ Mark 9:24.

baptism but the old guy can swim. The Old Adam is an unbeliever. Everybody has doubts. Everybody is suffering.

Apologetics at its best shows that Christians care. We care about the skeptic's questions. We care about the doubts of believers. We care about the future doubts of young believers. Lutheran pastors should never say or even imply "Just believe! It's in the Bible!" but rather take the time to listen to questions and patiently find the best answers. This gentle attitude will pay dividends when it comes time to say, "I don't have the answer to that but I do know this, Christ died and rose for you." It also will pay dividends when the members of our churches encounter skeptics that rock their faith. "I know someone who has thought about this (my pastor) and his faith didn't fall apart when challenged." It pays dividends when those same members have friends in crisis. "I know a man who will not judge but listen patiently and gently shepherd my friend to Christ instead of demanding submission to God from a person who does not yet know God." Finally, we should be concerned with equipping our youth with some tools. Not a hammer searching for a nail but ways to think clearly with biblical, and yes, philosophical arguments for the faith. So that when they are asked to give a reason for their hope, they will have something. And those questions may not come from their college professors or friends, they may come from within, "What is the reason for *my* faith."³⁸

TACTICS: WINNING SOULS NOT ARGUMENTS

Seelsorge apologetics is not about winning an argument; it is about winning souls. Pastoral care informs our apologetic tactics.

The First Person to Lose Their Cool Loses

The first person to lose their cool loses the argument even if they won the argument. This can be frustrating but that's how life goes. Nor is the apologist trying to win a cultural war. If we succeed in turning our whole society from evolutionism to creationism but have not presented Christ, we have lost the war even if we won the battle. An "us versus them" attitude should be replaced with the care of souls. Attacks on *the* faith feel personal to us but we should see them as personal attacks by the devil on the skeptic and not first a personal attack on us. Our egos mean nothing here. If we have an apologetic that can move mountains but have not love, we are nothing but a resounding gong. We are only making noise. Job number one is to shut up and listen. It's about respect. The skeptics care enough to have been thoughtful about the great questions of life. We should respect them for that. The respect will pay dividends.

The last thing the church needs is another amateur psychologist but pastors often find themselves playing this role. The same is true for the seelsorge apologist. From where does this skepticism come? Is it anger at God about a specific tragedy or over the general tragic nature of

³⁸ Our young people are dealing with this question: Is my faith true or is it in another realm separate from hard truth. An apologetic minded pastor gives them permission to be both a Christian and a thinking person.

the world? Does it stem from an absent father figure?³⁹ Is it anger that God does not exist?⁴⁰ A desire that God does not exist? Does the skeptic find great delight in being superior to the masses and their “opiate”? More often than not it is a form of self-justification. It’s a First Commandment issue. The real question is rarely “Is there a god” but “Who is God?” We are all religious. We all have a God. Is it me or someone else? We pastors need to tread lightly here but the above questions help the apologist. The apologist will want to ask as many questions as he offers answers.

A Level Playing Field

Besides the primary tactics of asking questions and listening, three other tactics emerge. We might call the first “Leveling the playing field,” the second “You don’t live your life like that,” and the third “Put a rock in their shoe.” The apologist cannot reason a skeptic into faith but he can hold the skeptic’s use of reason to the same standard the skeptic himself uses to criticize the Christian claim. An example would be the circular logic used by both Christians and skeptics alike. Skeptics scoff at this circular logic: The Bible is God’s Word because it says it is God’s Word. While the statement “We know that God’s Word is God’s Word because God’s Word says so” is true enough, it is an incredulous statement to the skeptic. Yet the skeptic can fall into the same trap. Consider the circular logic concerning miracles: Jesus could not have risen from the dead because there is no evidence of any bodily resurrection. Therefore the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection is not valid. The skeptic cannot point out the circular logic of Christians while employing circular logic elsewhere. The apologist is not afraid of reason, he only wants the skeptic to use the very same reason he uses in everyday life to look at the claims of Christianity. This is helpful in a variety of apologetic issues especially the historicity of the resurrection.

You Don’t Live Your Life Like That

The first tactic, “Leveling the playing field,” is made personal in the second, “You don’t live your life like that.” One example is probability. What is the probability that one person in 1st Century Palestine could fulfill the Old Testament prophecies as did Christ? Even if one eliminates all the prophecies that are miraculous (e.g. the virgin birth), that could have been manipulated (e.g. riding a donkey to Jerusalem), or that are vague (e.g. the stone that causes people to stumble), we are left with enough prophecies that may make the skeptic wonder “What if?” (e.g. born in Bethlehem, sold for thirty pieces of silver). So what are the odds that one person, in one location, and in one era fulfilled these prophecies? The odds are astronomical.⁴¹ Could it all be a conspiracy? Could it be true even though the odds are long? I suppose, “But you don’t live your life like that!” Every day we take chances. Will a sinkhole appear if I step on that

³⁹ See Paul, Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism*, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1999).

⁴⁰ Radio interview: C.S. Lewis, *A Leap in the Dark*, assessed July 1, 2019 from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/transcript/leap.html>.

⁴¹ John Warwick Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus* (Bonn: Culture and Science Publications, 2005), 131.

piece of sidewalk? Probably not but it's possible. We live by probability and not by certainty and that's OK. If we insisted on certainty then we would never get out of bed in the morning, too afraid to go out into the world. Notice that the argument is not about hitting a homerun but rather about showing skeptics, by the way they employ reason in everyday life, that the Christian claim is, at the very least, possible, if not probable.⁴² This tactic challenges dismissals of the Christian claim that are all too common but not all that thoughtful. Nor is the standard in apologetics certainty (an impossibility anyway). The apologist only needs to prove plausibility and then, hopefully, probability. The Spirit will take care of certainty.⁴³

A Rock in Their Shoe

The final tactic is called "Putting a rock in their shoe."⁴⁴ Gregory Koukl's picture is of someone walking with a pebble in their shoe. There is a nagging annoyance with every step. Can the apologist give the skeptic something, anything, that creates doubt in their worldview?⁴⁵ Could it be the argument from contingency? There has to be something outside of the world, right? Could it be the moral argument? If there is no absolute morality, what about social reformers? Could it be the massive manuscript evidence for the Gospels? Every step the skeptic takes there is the nagging question that creates the doubt, "Maybe I am not as secure in my atheism as I thought."

Fiducia is not the apologist/evangelist's job; proclamation of Christ is. It is about thinking and speaking clearly with grace and concern. The Spirit will not return empty.⁴⁶ This means that the apologist/evangelist does not need to cover every doctrine or use every apologetic argument all at once. This is important because we can get caught up in topics that are important

⁴² "The Christian apologist is in a position to show any rational man, particularly if he [has] a well-trained mind, that after all it would appear more reasonable to accept the claims of Christianity as true than to reject them as false. But he must ever keep in mind that his real business is not to demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion to the unbeliever, but to uncover the insincerity of unbelief, for all who reject Christianity do so, consciously or unconsciously, because of their evil will and not because of their pretended 'intellectual honesty.'" Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951) Vol. 1, 110.

⁴³ Hebrews 11:1. Also Francis Pieper: "All other sciences are based on human observations and human deductions, and in the nature of the cases – *errare humanum est* – the information offered by philosophy, astronomy, medical science, etc., is more or less unreliable. . . The faith by which the Christian theologian, just as every Christian, apprehends and knows God's own doctrine in Scripture, is not a knowledge or conviction gained by use of his own natural powers (*fides humana*), but is a knowledge and conviction wrought by the Holy Ghost through the divine Word itself (*fides divina*); it is therefore a sure knowledge; it is absolute certainty. Faith is the product not of the 'wisdom of men', but 'of the power of God' (1 Cor. 2:5); it is therefore, in contrast to worldly knowledge, the one certain knowledge, as Scripture itself declares (1 Cor. 2:12)." Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. 1, 107-108. And: "The arguments which call forth a human faith (*fidem humanam*) would be underestimated if we declared them to be utterly worthless. Also Christ and His Apostles used them on occasion." Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. 1, 311.

⁴⁴ Gregory Koukl, *Tactics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

⁴⁵ We are careful here not to slip into sophistry, that is, using rhetoric to change a person's mind. Rather we present evidence that may or may not make the skeptic wonder.

⁴⁶ Isaiah 55:11.

but not central. Creation is one of them. I personally believe that a six-day creation is a doctrine only obtained by faith and not by reason (at least not yet). I can get to a creation of some sorts via reason but not to Genesis 1 and 2. I wonder if we sometimes conflate a cultural war with doctrine. Am I fighting against evolution because of my concern for lost souls or because I want to defeat a liberal agenda? It is a worthy question. If a skeptic will not even talk about Christ because he believes Christians are fools for not accepting evolution, what do we do? Do we draw our line in the sand and say "Bring it on!" or do we say, "We can agree to disagree on this one but that is not the central issue." Some apologists suggest saying, "There are plenty of Christians who do not accept a six day creation but still trust Christ." We can argue about the validity of that tactic but the point is to get to the Gospel. This is where the Spirit does his work and then we will work backwards from Christ. What would we do if the issue wasn't creation but the real presence or predestination? Would we stand our ground there or try to move on to the cross? Some things have to be left for Adult Information Class.

If the apologist slips into a win-the-argument position, he risks losing his opportunity to present the gospel. There is an inherent danger to every apologetic argument. A skeptic can defeat any one argument (in his own mind or by finding an atheist who has seemingly defeated an argument for theism) and say to himself "That's all they got?" With victory in hand, he closes his mind off to any more challenges from the theist. The apologist will want to carry on multiple conversations with honest humility and ask probing questions about the atheist's own worldview. The goal is to present a preponderance of evidence in favor of the Christian worldview over against another worldview.

EVIDENTIAL APOLOGETICS

There are many ways to divide the academic discipline of apologetics. What follows will have a vocational feel to it. How might an historian, lawyer, scientist, philosopher, or artist deal with the New Testament claim that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and Savior of the world? This is helpful because these apologetic arguments are not meant for abstract thought but for real people.

The Advantages of Evidential Apologetics

Evidential or historical apologetics asks the question how might an historian, lawyer, or an investigator look at the Christian claim? There are two advantages to evidential apologetics. First, the arguments are already focusing on the Word and specifically Christ. Half the battle is already won. Second, these arguments are understandable to most people. Philosophically or scientifically heavy apologetics might be lost on the average person. And when attempts are made to simplify those arguments for the laity, the experts tend to scoff. Sometimes this is right. It is good advice for the pastor to try to avoid getting into an argument about evolution with a middle school biology teacher. Both parties are probably wrong most of the time. However sometimes this is arrogance on the part of the experts. Evidential apologetics has the same problem of course, but there is a healthy dose of common sense that makes these types of arguments relatable. It is, after all, how we practically deal with the world day in and day out. We judge the evidence.

The Resurrection Claim

We start with the resurrection of Christ. This is a claim on reality. He either rose from the dead or didn't and the Christian faith either is true because of it or isn't. In a positive way the apologist puts forth the Christian claim for evaluation by the standard tools used by an historian, investigator, or lawyer (leveling the playing field). In a negative way the apologist defends accusations from the outside that the Christian claim is inaccurate (e.g. the eyewitness accounts are suspect), that the texts been tampered with (e.g. edited by later Christians), or that the texts are unreliable (e.g. the New Testament texts are not history). The apologist will also have to deal with conspiracy theories about the resurrection of Christ (e.g. The Passover Plot). The apologist points to the standard way we judge historical questions like these to show there unlikelihood (you don't live your life like that). This might be the rock in their shoe they need.

The Christian claim is that Jesus died on a cross and rose from the dead. There are eyewitnesses to these events. One question an investigator would ask is "Who had access to the body of Christ?"⁴⁷ There are only three groups: The Romans, the Jewish authorities, and the disciples. The investigator then asks, "Do any of these groups have the means, motive, and opportunity to fake the resurrection?" All three groups had the means and opportunity but none had a motive. The Romans wanted this problem off their agenda. The Jewish authorities are the ones who wanted him dead in the first place and seem paranoid about a ruse insisting that the tomb be secured. Nor did the disciples have a motive. They were hardly brave at this moment. And what would they have gained for such a ruse? They gained no advantage only persecution and, for many, martyrdom. There are other nuances to this argument such as the disciples, who had nothing to gain by lying, are good eyewitnesses (as opposed to a witness in a criminal case who gets a plea deal for his testimony) and the fact that women were the ones who discovered the resurrected Jesus (if a conspiracy in this era were to be hatched one would probably use male eyewitnesses in the story). We simply do not have space to flesh out all the details of resurrection arguments.⁴⁸ This is only an example of how we can dismiss faulty arguments against the resurrection by applying standard investigative logic to the Christian claim.

Breaking Circular Logic

We mentioned earlier the circular logic employed to prove that God's Word is God's Word. Although this is true it is not helpful when engaging the skeptic. Nor is it helpful for the Sunday School teacher to shut down the inquisitive child with "The Bible said so, that's why!" There is a way out of the circular logic. God's Word is God's Word because Jesus said so and he rose from the dead and claimed to be true God. If he is true God and proved this claim with a resurrection, we ought to listen to what he says about the nature of Scripture. Thus the reason given to the skeptic for our belief in inerrancy is not because the Bible said so but because of the verifiable fact that Jesus rose from the dead. At the very least it undermines the atheistic

⁴⁷ We will forgo the debate over whether or not Jesus actually died on the cross. We only have space for a brief summary of resurrection apologetics here. All credible historians believe that Jesus was in fact crucified and died. However, this is a topic that deserves some attention because of the Koranic claim that Jesus did not die.

⁴⁸ See addendum B.

accusation of circular logic. Remember that the unbeliever does not have the Spirit. At this point reason is all we have. We then move to a gospel presentation.

Textual Tests

The obvious next step is to discuss the reliability of the New Testament texts, in particular, the four Gospels. There are three categories of tests we can employ on ancient texts: the bibliographical, internal, and external tests. Bibliographical tests deal with the transmission of the texts. What is the gap between the autographs and the earliest manuscripts and how much manuscript evidence do we have? Internal tests deal with the authors and the text's claims. Does the text claim to be what it is believed to be? Is the text coherent? Did the authors have the means and opportunity to record reliable testimony? What was their motive for writing? External tests deal with evidence outside the texts themselves. Are there sources that back up or contradict the claims of the text? Are there sources that help us determine authorship? A thorough recounting is impossible here but a brief line of thought is offered in addenda C-E.

SCIENTIFIC APOLOGETICS

The relationship between the hard sciences and religion has not always been confrontational. Pre-Enlightenment scientists were often committed Christians. The biblical message of a creator did not inhibit scientific discovery but rather encouraged it. Scientists expected to find order because there was an Orderer. The story of science and religion does have its conflicts but many of those stories are currently seen through a post-Enlightenment lens.⁴⁹ The rise of Metaphysical Naturalism skews the way we look at the relationship between science and theology. Metaphysical Naturalism is the notion that there is only the natural (not the supernatural). This includes mental properties which are ontologically dependent on and/or caused by natural phenomena. This is different than Methodological Naturalism which is the notion that only natural causes or explanations are to be used while practicing science.⁵⁰

Hard versus Soft

A funny thing happened on the way to postmodernism. Not really funny, actually tragic. An ancient epistemological question was being asked once again, "How do we know?" On

⁴⁹ See *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion*, edited by Ronald Numbers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 2009); *When Science and Christianity Meet*, edited by David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003); John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991); David Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1998)

⁵⁰ Methodological Naturalism is a natural way to conduct science. We should not conclude that the angels are the first cause of the motion of the planets. However, to eliminate all supernatural causes is unscientific and can turn into Metaphysical Naturalism. There are situations when the hard sciences stop and allow religion or philosophy have their say (e.g. ethics). This is akin to Stephen Jay Gould's Non-Overlapping Magisteria (NOMA). Yet, scientists are right to use theories which propose things that are not (yet) perceived empirically (e.g. nobody has observed an electron). The question is can one use a theory that employs design (and therefore a designer). Should this be off limits? It hasn't always been anathema to do so. NOMA simply isn't workable.

university campuses it was framed “Who decides the rules of truth?” Should theology be the Queen of the Sciences? Is philosophy the handmaiden to theology and all other disciplines as well? Can these, or better yet, should these different disciplines interact with each other? If so, who sets the rules? A definitive split between what we might call “hard” and “soft” sciences emerged. The hard sciences (mathematics, chemistry, biology) made claims on truth while the soft sciences (the humanities) offered opinion which could not be verified. Hard equals truth; soft equals opinion.⁵¹

Certainly these are necessary and helpful divisions. The Bible is not an appropriate textbook for Chemistry 101 and *On the Origin of Species* should not be a textbook for Ethics. They are two different subjects with different tools. They also have different rules. The hard sciences seek to use testable hypotheses which can, in principle, be falsified so that, through verification, generalizations can be made and laws (highest levels of generalization) can be used to conduct more experiments. The problem comes when these rules are applied for all truth. A hard scientist is right to insist that a miracle cannot be scientifically proven. It is outside the boundaries of scientific inquiry. Science cannot speak to this. Thus a Wittgensteinian attitude is appropriate “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”⁵² This goes too far when the attitude becomes “Whereof one cannot speak, there is no truth.” This metaphysical naturalistic attitude has been labeled “scientism.”⁵³

Here is the irony of scientism: the statement that truth must be empirically verified (thus eliminating any intrusion of philosophy) is a *philosophical* statement that *cannot* be empirically verified and *does not* follow the falsification principle. This is called logical positivism, that is, justifiable assertions are assertions that are either scientifically verified or are capable of logical or mathematical proof. Notice the self-refuting nature of logical positivism. It cannot be verified nor can it claim logical or mathematical proof status. Denis Alexander points out that logical positivism has all been abandoned in philosophy departments but still holds sway in the hard sciences (more so in the USA than in Europe).⁵⁴

You cannot escape philosophy.⁵⁵ So the question becomes, can the philosopher and chemist talk to each other? For the apologist the question is, can theology talk to any discipline? Or better

⁵¹ This is the default position of many, both Christian and non-Christian alike. It is quite liberating for a Christian to realize that he can be both a Christian and a thinking person.

⁵² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 151.

⁵³ J.P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 26.

⁵⁴ “Why Science Will Never Have the Answers to Life’s Biggest Questions”, presentation at Acton University, Grand Rapids, MI, June 20th 2019. Alexander is the Founding Director of the Faraday Institute of Science and Religion, Cambridge and an Emeritus Fellow of St. Edmund’s College. Alexander also pointed out that AJ Ayer, an English logical positivist, abandoned positivism later in life.

⁵⁵ It should be noted that theologians are not the only ones who have wrestled with the use of philosophy in their discipline, especially Aristotle. At about the same time Luther warned of Aristotelian influence on theology, many scientists wanted to throw out Aristotle from their disciplines. As was the case in theology, many wanted to throw out the baby with the bath water. A simplistic example: Aristotle’s fourth cause (telos) could hinder scientific

yet, can the apologist talk to *anybody*? I answer “yes” to all three because they did for centuries⁵⁶ on university campuses and because all things belong to God including physics. If God gave us language to reveal the things of his mind,⁵⁷ then there is no reason to believe that language cannot help in the interdisciplinary quest of apologetics.

Teleology

There are a variety of scientific apologetic arguments which are used to greater or lesser success. Most of them will have experts on both sides. Some are tainted with confirmation bias (on both sides) others have legitimate open-minded experts on both sides.⁵⁸ This can be frustrating to the layperson but it does not mean that the field of scientific apologetics is not worthwhile. They are thoughtful discussions which will most likely not lead to a “homerun” (no argument does) but can once again level the playing field, challenge the faithful atheist’s worldview (you don’t live like that), and maybe, just maybe, put a rock in the skeptic’s shoe.

Perhaps the most promising scientific apologetic arguments deal with design and purpose (teleology). One is the fine-tuning of the universe. Certain quantities and constants are “fine-tuned”. If they are “off” by even the smallest of amounts, life cannot exist. It “seems,” almost all people would agree, that the universe is designed. But could this fine-tuning be by chance? Or, could these precise constants and quantities be “necessary,” that is, they had to be this way. Here is where we enter philosophy. Can we move from “is” to “ought” so simply? Just because we observe something, it does not follow that it has to be this way (necessary). The proof that these constants and quantities *are* does necessarily mean they *have* to be. Design (which implies a designer) is the more probable conclusion. Again, not a “homerun” but we judge matters in everyday life based on this kind of probability. It’s how we live our lives. It should also be noted that the argument of “the way things are is proof that these improbable things actually occurred without design, no future discussion is necessary” is based on an a priori (logical positivism) against theism.

Body and Soul

Two other scientific issues to keep an eye on in the coming years and decades are Near Death Experiences (NDE) and the interaction between cognitive behavioral therapy and neuroscience. NDEs have been cataloged for some time now.⁵⁹ There seems to be a growing

inquiry (the telos of matter is not to be at the center of the earth). However, it is dangerous to throw out all teleological questions (design, purpose). Many scientists ignore (or don’t even know about) Aristotle but continue to use teleological language (design) while denying that there is such a thing as design.

⁵⁶ See Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:16b.

⁵⁸ For example: the 1st and 2nd Laws of Thermodynamics, irreducible complexity.

⁵⁹ See University of Virginia’s School of Medicine’s Division of Perpetual Studies at <https://med.virginia.edu/perceptual-studies/our-research/near-death-experiences-ndes/fifty-years-of-research-nde/> and Gary Habermas and J.P. Moreland *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence of Immortality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998).

consensus that something is going on here. There is too much data to dismiss these phenomena. There are three categories of NDEs: 1. People who have been in a coma or have been brain dead observe something (e.g. grandma talked to me last night). 2. People in this state have observed something in the room (e.g. I heard the doctor say, “Oops, I clipped the wrong artery”). 3. People in this state observe something in a different location (e.g. what the grieving family had for dinner a mile away). The first two can be easily dismissed. The first: seeing grandma was an illusion. The second: we don’t know enough about the brain to eliminate the possibility that it can gather information even if we have defined the person as “dead”.⁶⁰ But the third? Could it be a disembodied soul? The payoff for the apologist is, once again, not proof of the existence of the Christian God (the person could be wrong about they saw or make a wrong theological conclusion). The payoff is evidence for the existence of a non-physical entity. We, of course, would call it a soul. The ramifications for ethics, human rights, and evangelism are enormous.

The interaction between cognitive behavioral therapy and neuroscience may have apologetic value as well. Let’s say there is someone who deals with the debilitating anxiety that people are always judging them, so much so, that they cannot enter a crowded room. Let’s say a therapist trains them to repeat this phrase before entering a room “Nobody in the room is looking at me and judging me. I have no proof that people are judging me”. Let’s say that person is then able to overcome, in some small way, the debilitating anxiety of entering a crowded room. Now let’s say that scientists are able to match up this state of consciousness with a physical brain state.⁶¹ If the person’s brain state is changed, the question becomes, what changed the brain? This is obviously more complicated than what we can develop here, but there are some who believe this points to a non-physical entity. We might call it a mind. Again, we are nowhere near the Christian God but we have demonstrated, perhaps, that Metaphysical Natrualism does not match up with reality. How does Metaphysical Naturalism explain consciousness? This pebble in a shoe could be a game changer for many, an eternal game changer, if they are more likely to consider the Christian claim.

The New Atheists and Friendly Atheists

A brief note on the “New Atheists.” Here I separate the New Atheists from the more contemporary “friendly atheists”. The New Atheists tend to be polemical. The kind atheists, are just that, kind and calm. I find the New Atheists refreshing. They call a spade a spade even if they are wrong. They will not accept religion as a benign phenomenon. Neither did Paul.⁶² Either Christianity is right or it is wrong. They marshal all sorts of vitriol in their attacks on religion. This is proving to be a bad game plan (as evidenced by the rise of more gentler atheists). I bring them up in this section because in order to understand them you must understand that they only

⁶⁰ The definition of death is disputed.

⁶¹ See Jeffery Schwartz and Sharon Begley, *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force* (New York: Regan Books, 2003) and Mario Beauregard and Denyse O’Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Case for the Existence of the Soul* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

⁶² 1 Corinthians 15.

accept the rules of scientism (not science) and will not accept as data anything from the humanities. Their major flaw is that they claim the right to speak on soft science matters like ethics (e.g. how could you believe in a god that commanded the slaughter of Canaanites). They are not playing by their own rules.

“Friendly Atheists” are less polemical than the “New Atheists”. They are also more sophisticated and charitable in their arguments. One issue that the apologist might encounter is a debate between the terms Atheism and A-theism.⁶³ Normally we think of atheism as the belief that there is no god. However contemporary atheists often use the label as a-theism, as in, they are not theists. Same thing, right? Perhaps. Most would actually describe themselves as agnostic but with the term a-theism. What they are trying to imply is that everybody is born an atheist (non-theist) and they (the a-theists) continue to be unconvinced with the arguments for theism and all the baggage that comes with theism (religious wars, intolerance, and indoctrination). It does not seem necessary to many contemporary a-theists to make arguments for their lack of theism. It’s the default position. Why would they consider Christianity any more than they would consider Buddhism or a Unicorn God preached by the man under the freeway? This is where positive arguments for the Christian claim are necessary. The a-theist feels no desire to defend their natural position especially if their worldview “works” and has meaning to them. It is necessary for the apologist to help the a-theistic skeptic to see the conclusions to their worldview. Christianity is not a benign worldview but neither is a-theism.

PHILOSOPHICAL APOLOGETICS

It is argued that philosophy, specifically “first philosophy,”⁶⁴ should have autonomy and authority in matters in all disciplines. This seems arrogant (especially to the hard sciences⁶⁵) but it is not a territorial claim as much as it is a claim on reality, this is, the way things are. We saw examples of that in the above section. Epistemology (how we know things) is essential to all disciplines and cannot be avoided. Epistemology is a philosophical matter. You cannot empirically verify the principle of falsification. It’s philosophical. It’s just the way it is. So even theologians need to know some philosophy. Our Lutheran ears should not be ringing right now. I am afraid sometimes we take our modern sensibilities (we only truly know what we can prove and all other things are just blind faith) and try to baptize them with Lutheran theology. A more nuanced approach is often needed. The rules of hermeneutics are not found in a lost prologue of Genesis. There is no verse that states “Treat a passage of poetry different than a passage of history.” We figured that out via reason.

Cosmology

⁶³ I am using a dash in order to differentiate the two but they would not.

⁶⁴ The study of being as being, first causes, the things that do not change, and/or metaphysics.

⁶⁵ It should be noted that the Queen of the Sciences was not always kind to the hard sciences. See Matthew Stanley, *Huxley’s Church and Maxwell’s Demon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2105).

The classic arguments for the existence of God⁶⁶ are Aristotelian and Thomistic but that doesn't mean they are incorrect. As stated before their greatest flaw is that they don't get the skeptic to Christ. Yet they have value to show that Metaphysical Naturalism is not as strong as Theism. Cosmological arguments (causality) are the easiest. They all employ the law of contingency. All matter is contingent. I am contingent on my parents and they on theirs and so on and so on. Yet we cannot have an infinite line of causes. There must then be a non-contingent being or force, a first cause. To put it another way: all matter is contingent, the universe (by definition) is all matter, thus the universe is contingent.⁶⁷ Part and parcel of this argument is to prove that the universe is not infinite (thus there cannot be an infinite string of causes). There are a handful of scientific⁶⁸ and philosophical⁶⁹ arguments towards this end. The most famous today is an ancient one called the Kalam Cosmological Argument. Simply put, if the universe is infinite then we could not have reached the present moment because there would be an infinite amount of moments between when I started reading this sentence and when I ended it and how could you ever traverse an infinite amount of time? Since we are here at the end of the sentence, the universe is not infinite. This means that the universe had a beginning and thus a cause. We can also make some very vague but important conclusions of this cause. It is personal, creative, intelligent, powerful, and free.

Anthropology

The anthropological argument, also known as the moral argument, is perhaps the strongest of the classical arguments. If there are objective morals and duties then there is an absolute being that exists. There would be no way to determine what is right and wrong unless there is an objective reference point to judge any act "good" or "evil". If we did not have a reference point, we would be left with individual viewpoints each having the same value. Subjective preference applies to the subject and not anybody else. Relativists are correct that we have no right to apply personal, subjective, moral preference on another subject. The problem is that even the postmoderns have one rule: Don't be cruel! Every time we say, "That's not right!" or even "That's not fair!" we appeal to an absolute right and wrong.⁷⁰ Consider Richard Dawkins' infamous line, "The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should

⁶⁶ Addendum F provides a brief sketch of cosmological, teleological, anthropological, and ontological arguments.

⁶⁷ Some propose multi-verses but this does not solve this particular problem because multi-verses would still have a finite amount of space, energy, etc.

⁶⁸ For example: The 1st and 2nd Laws of Thermodynamics, Olber's paradox, and Big Bang Cosmology. These, as all arguments, are not without their critics.

⁶⁹ The Arguments from Change, Efficient Causality, Time and Contingency, and the World as an Interacting Whole.

⁷⁰ Notice that the question is not "Can you be good without believing in God?" Of course you can (in a civic righteous way). The question is "Can there be good without God?"

expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”⁷¹ We do not live this way and do not want to live this way.

This is most helpful in an age when we are tripping over ourselves to be more righteous than the next person. We simply have to point out as apologists that for all this moral indignation there needs to be a moral standard. One way to make this palatable to the skeptic who bristles at being told by someone else that they are wrong (who does?) is to talk about moral reformers. Did the civil rights movement have good cause to fight against racist polices?⁷² If there is no moral right or wrong, only laws that are posited by a group, do we have any recourse to tell another group that their policies are wrong? If the majority says, “This is right,” how can a minority say “This is wrong”? This has much to do with human rights. Why do we throw a cannibal into prison for killing another human being for food (without first torturing the other human) but do not throw a cat into prison for eating a mouse (and playing with it before it kills it)? What is the difference if we are only material beings?

Ontology

Ontology has to do with being. The classic ontological argument for the existence of God is brilliant, wonderful, fun, but almost worthless in practicality and probably faulty and wrong. You can check it out in Addendum F. We will expand the ontological category, however, to add the problem of evil. How could there *be* a good, omnipotent God, and an evil world? There seems to be only a few options: 1. God cannot stop evil. 2. God doesn’t care enough to stop evil. 3. God doesn’t exist. Two points: first, evil is not a created thing which helps in defeating the question, “Did God create evil?” That is a category mistake. Second, the acceptance that there is such a thing as evil itself proves that there is an absolute morality and thus a god. There is a fourth option and we will get to that when we encounter the Theology of the Cross.

Here is where we should deal with the accusation that God himself is immoral. Any number of accusations from misogyny to genocide have been levied against God. He has even been accused of child abuse. A few preliminary notes are helpful. 1. Again the claim that something or someone is evil presupposes an objective morality. 2. To infer that God is evil and therefore does not exist is illogical since just wishing something wasn’t so does not make it not so. To be fair, usually this argument is made to say, “How stupid are you to believe in a God that would...” However, the same logic applies. Believing that a being exists is not dependent on

⁷¹ Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

⁷² Notice the difference between MLK Jr who appealed to an objective morality and others who appealed to power. The former was righteous, the latter was practical: if you are going to wait for the white power structure to change you will be waiting forever. Might makes right. Consider King’s quote: “Black Power is a nihilistic philosophy born out of the conviction that the Negro can’t win. It is, at bottom, the view that American society is so hopelessly corrupt and enmeshed in evil that there is no possibility of salvation from within.” *I am Because We Are: Introduction to Black Philosophy*, edited by Fred Lee Hord and Jonathan Scott Lee (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 291.

I suppose one could argue that the civil rights movement was not about the wrongness of one group’s racism but about one group using power over another group. Despite being anachronistic, the problem still remains: How can I say to one group “Your violence to others is wrong” when they can just answer “It is moral for us to enact this violence.”

agreeing with that being's morality. 3. We simply do not have the perspective to make moral judgments upon a divine being. 4. The specific accusation of child-abuse misunderstands the Triune nature of God.

The most helpful line of thought, however, points out that the world is a tragic place. On this the apologist and skeptic can agree. From that starting point the apologist can recount the heinous nature of the Ancient Near East. You think we have it bad today, let me tell you! The apologist can then make it personal by showing the skeptic that we all have righteous anger. When we hear about some particular injustice that drives our blood pressure up we call for swift and often merciless justice. And if those injustices were brought upon us or our family? Watch out. Well these injustices (and worse) were committed against God's children (think child sacrifice). Maybe he is more patient than we give him credit for. It is easy for a middle class person in America to wonder why God is so angry. "What's his deal?" It is equally easy for a person living in abject poverty to wonder why God does not smite the greedy West. "What's he waiting for?" God can never win with us, can he? And that's the final point. We have to let God be God.

We got dangerously close to a theodicy in the above paragraph. We may at times cross the line and say something like, "Maybe God sent those Canaanite babies right to heaven because he knew how awful their lives would be." I have no evidence of that. Better to point out our own righteous anger at sin and allow God to have his. To the skeptic we might only be able to say, "We have ours and God has his but God offers grace and we do not and cannot."

Worldview Criteria

All apologetics deal with worldview matters. For lack of a better word we all have a worldview. It is how we make sense of our lives in this world. We might think of a foundation upon which scaffolding is built. The foundation needs to be solid but even with a solid foundation there can be weak points in the scaffolding affecting the levels above. A good worldview⁷³ will have both a good foundation and solid scaffolding. This is impossible for fallen humans but we can point out the flaws of our own and other worldviews and trace both the problem to the foundation and show the instability of the scaffolding higher up. An example: a Christian might have a solid foundation but up in the scaffolding might have a flaw such as the Protestant Work Ethic mentality. This will affect how they see the value of their work (it is for my own integrity and not for others). This will affect their value judgment on others (certain vocations are better than others). This in turn may even affect their view of human rights, immigration, and economics.

A worldview based on Metaphysical Naturalism will have some structural issues. For example, if a person's value is not grounded in the image of God⁷⁴ and God's desire to redeem the person, the scaffolding built upon this level (human rights) will be weak. Here is where it

⁷³ See addendum G for worldview criteria.

⁷⁴ Genesis 9:6.

might be useful to point out, in a humble way, the benefits of the Judeo-Christian worldview. It has been said that the Western World has been living off the borrowed capital of the Judeo-Christian worldview. Hospitals, universities, the legal system, science, art, literature, human rights, education, and a host of other things owe a lot to Christianity.⁷⁵ The apologist, in the right context, may want to point out that other worldviews, if taken to their logical conclusion, might be giving up a lot we take for granted, including basic rights.

One tactic is to question the language used by non-theists. Morality words (e.g. good), design words (e.g. purpose), and virtue words (e.g. courage) do not fit with a metaphysical naturalistic worldview. How can we say that we love our children if it is only a chemical reaction? How can we say that a short and slow but worthy basketball player has “heart”? What do we mean by that? Do we mean that there is something more than just his physical skills? We may bemoan the fact that matters of the heart so beautifully described by the great novels and poems of the past are now reduced to talk of genes, chemicals, and atoms but there is an apologetic opportunity here. We all still use the vocabulary mentioned above (love, courage, purpose). So the question to the skeptic is “Can a matter like happiness be described in both a physical and spiritual way? Can it be both about dopamine and the soul? Yes! Now let me tell you about body and soul, God and love, you and a life of flourishing.”

AESTHETIC APOLOGETICS

We now move to aesthetic⁷⁶ apologists. How might an artist or poet look at the claims of Christianity?

Useful Myths and Cultural Borrowing

One issue an aesthetically minded apologist needs to deal with is cultural borrowing. We notice many similarities between cultures. For example, everybody has a flood story. Three conclusions are plausible. First, Christianity borrowed (and shared) different stories and theological concepts with other religions. Second, the message Noah believed was handed down through the generations so that some stories (e.g. flood) and some theological concepts (e.g. sacrifice) are near universal. Third, there is a natural desire humans have for meaning, a moral code, and salvation⁷⁷ of some kind. However plausible it is impossible, without some significant archaeological discoveries, to trace a religion’s doctrine to one of the three causes. This vagueness protects the Christian claim from accusations that Christianity borrowed its stories and doctrine from other religions and did not receive them via revelation. It is interesting, however, to think about the possibility that all humans have the same spiritual desires and that some

⁷⁵ See Alvin Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2001).

⁷⁶ I use this term to mean something broader than just beauty but rather to include all that the humanities has to offer to the apologetic task.

⁷⁷ We are wise to see that many other religions do not have a concept of sin and salvation as we do. It is not always helpful to shoehorn another religions doctrine into our categories.

theological concepts could have filtered down to many cultures. Think about child sacrifice. We might speculate that some of the ancients knew that 1. There was a God, 2. God seems to be angry, 3. We please God with sacrifices, and 4. What is more valuable than blood, specifically *innocent* blood? How close does natural law get us to the truth! How far from grace and truth does natural law take us! The situation is obviously more complicated as we consider the nature of specific gods in specific regions but the conversation is a thoughtful one and has apologetic value.

“True” myth or useful myth is found in many disciplines, including science.⁷⁸ Useful myths deliver a truth even if the myth purposefully uses characters, events, and storylines that are not factually true. *The Chronicles of Narnia* immediately come to mind for English speakers. The apologist can use this simple (but profoundly theological) tale as a point of contact with the skeptic. Tolkien, Dostoevsky, John Donne, G.K. Chesterton, Dorothy Sayers, and many others are examples of literary apologists (even if they would not call themselves Christian apologists). Nor should we ever forget that the Bible is story. Not myth or even “true” myth but still story. I went to school with a Messianic Jew. One day I asked him, “If there is one thing you would say to me (a Gentile) from a Jewish perspective about the Old Testament, what would it be?” He answered “Story.” He did not mean myth. He is a six-day-twenty-four-hour-biblical-inerrancy kind of Christian. He meant story. We are not all lawyers or scientists. We are eclectic. We are artists and poets too. It is good for the apologist to know the arguments of resurrection apologetics, the classical arguments, and all the details about textual criticism but he must also be a poet. All things to all men.⁷⁹

Drama

I am convinced that we were made for drama and if we don't have drama in our lives we will make it up. We understand that we were made for something great. Generally speaking we do not see as admirable, but rather tragic, when someone ekes out a subsistence living. We are not satisfied with simple survival and some small amount of relational contact. We are different than the animals. We were made in the image of God and we know it even if we have lost it (at least in its perfect state). We have the rationality, beauty, and complexity that comes with being humans in the image of God. We search for knowledge, we strive for epic-ness, and we struggle for justice. We have a unique capacity for wonderment. At particular moments wonder overtakes us, stops us in our tracks, and forces us to muse upon the mysteries.

⁷⁸ There is a potential infinite in mathematics which is useful but not an actual infinite we observe in the world.

⁷⁹ I am so grateful for the classical liberal arts education I received (both in public elementary school and Lutheran high school and college). Two humble suggestions: 1. Our Lutheran Day Schools move towards a Classical model, which many other Christian and even public schools have been doing for years now. That's our heritage! 2. We teach philosophy. How can we call it a liberal arts education and have no philosophically trained teachers? “Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.” C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 50.

To be satisfied with the explanation “Things are the way they are and that is proof that they are necessarily so. No need to ask why” is to live the unexamined life. This has not been the *modus operandi* of the best of humanity, Christian or not. We were made for greatness and we know it. Why do humans have this insatiable desire not found in any other life form? Could it be that we are more than *homo sapiens* but *homo justificans*, that is, “the kind of being that seeks to be justified”.⁸⁰ We know that we are special and we know that we are not living up to this specialness, individually or collectively. Our discontent is not always selfish and petty; it is often righteous. Yet, we naturally put ourselves into the righteousness-by-law pathway. I desire to find value in myself. I desire to justify my existence and my value *coram mundo* and, whether I admit it or not, *coram deo*. This is a dead-end with God (who could do enough to earn the favor of the divine?). This is also a source of great melancholy and dissatisfaction (can a made-in-the-image-of-god-human ever be satisfied with the adulations of mere men?). The only remedy for our restless hearts and this modern discontent is a righteousness by gift (we are given value by the very God who created us) and vocation (we are used by God in his economy of love). We who desire epic story are made part of the story and it *is* an epic one. What other story (worldview) elevates humanity to such a startling degree?⁸¹

The Objectivity of Beauty

We are also attracted to beauty. But can we define it? I would argue that beauty is objective and so are emotions, or, at least, should be judged objectively. One way to think about this is to ask, “Is beauty in the eye of the beholder?” Think location. If beauty is located in the eye of the beholder then it is not located in the object. Does beauty even exist? Notice that we are very close to saying “Truth is in the mind of the thinker.” This strikes us as exclusive. Who judges what is beautiful and ugly? Well, God does. The skeptic may scoff but we might point out that we all make judgments about beauty and ugliness. What gives us the right?⁸²

In the end the objectivity of beauty is more inclusive because it finds beauty in many locations and it is not limited by the subjectivity of the individual. We might also say the same about emotion. Let’s say I tuck my four-year-old boy into bed and then walk to the living room to watch a movie with my wife. A violent R-rated movie. During a particularly violent scene I notice that my son has gotten out of bed and has been watching the movie from the hallway. I jump up thinking “This kid is going to have nightmares for weeks. We’ll probably have to take him to a psychologist.” As I approach him he points at the television and laughs out loud with a sinister sneer. Now I know I have to take him to a psychologist. It was the wrong emotion for the

⁸⁰ Gregory Schulz, “Nisi Per Verbum: A Disputation Concerning Postmodernism and the Pastoral Office” *Logia* XXVII:4, 32.

⁸¹ Gene Edward Veith Jr., *The Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 72.

⁸² This is not about preference (I like blue and you like yellow). Beauty and preference and different matters.

wrong situation.⁸³ Who would call an image of a rape “beautiful”? Who would call an image of a firemen carrying a child from a burning building “ugly”? Beauty and emotion are tied to morality more than we might think. Now we are in the realm of the anthropological argument. God decided morality and even beauty are objective. This is not exclusive but inclusivity at its best. This simple discussion about beauty may be the conversation the skeptic needs to think about God.

All Things to All People

Luther maintained that sin has malformed our nature so much that we cannot recognize God or his nature. But this did not mean that God is therefore absent. Rather he is covered.⁸⁴

God is present at all times and places and in all things. Whether or not they are aware of it, humans ever deal with God in all their affairs and transactions. For Luther, unlike for modern man, there truly is no secular space (other than one we fancy): God is masked in all things. So, in a sense, all creation images God, but not in any way that gives clarity apart from the gospel. God communicates himself to people throughout creations, in events, and surprisingly in specific artifacts and humans creations.⁸⁵

The apologist can be all things to all people because there is nothing in this world that God has not claimed even, and especially so, language. Permit me a personal example to close out our brief discussion on aesthetics.

One Sunday I was conducting a service at a local county jail. It was a small county jail and on that Sunday there were only two women in the jail, an older Mexican immigrant and a twenty-six-year-old Lakota. The elderly lady only spoke Spanish and cried the whole time. The best I could do was read to her from a *Santa Biblia*. The other woman could communicate a little with the crying immigrant. The next Sunday only the Lakota woman attended the service. The elderly woman was there but was going to be transferred to who knows where. I asked the Lakota woman how her only cellmate was doing.

“Better”, she answered.

I asked the Lakota woman if she knew Spanish. She replied, “No, but I know Italian so we can sort-of talk to each other.”

⁸³ Of course people, for example, mourn differently, the point is that they mourn instead of rejoice at the event.

⁸⁴ “Perhaps God appeared to Adam without a covering, but after the fall into sin He appeared in a gentle breeze as though enveloped in a covering. Similarly he was enveloped later on in the tabernacle by the mercy seat and in the desert by a cloud and fire. Moses, therefore, also calls these objects ‘faces of God,’ through which God manifested Himself. Cain, too, calls the place at which he had previously sacrificed ‘the face of God’ (Gn 4:14). This nature of ours has become so misshapen through sin, so depraved and utterly corrupted, that it cannot recognize God or comprehend His nature without a covering. It is for this reason that those coverings are necessary.” LW 1:11.

⁸⁵ Mark Mattes, *Luther on Beauty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 151.

I was intrigued how a young Lakota woman on the rural plains of Minnesota came to know Italian. She went to a Native school, as she called it, where she learned Lakota and Italian. I asked about her time at this boarding school. Turns out she had drug issues. Marijuana first. Heroin by thirteen. “I have been running for twenty years now.”

I did the math. “You started smoking at six?” That’s first-grade.

“With my mother”, she answered.

She had two kids of her own now, with a man also in jail whom I would see next. I made a connection with him too and he was grateful for the gospel. Their two children were with that mother as they sat in jail waiting sentencing. As she described her family, she told me about the Lakota word for love. She really did love her boyfriend and her children, even her mother. I was still intrigued by the Italian thing so we started talking about language. “Do you dream in a different language”, I asked.

“Yes,” she said.

She was a savant. She was the smartest person I have ever met. She blew me away. More than that, she was perhaps the most beautiful soul I had ever encountered. Also the most tragic. The next Sunday she came in balling. She had just gotten the news that her best friend committed suicide. She was, again, the only female in the jail that weekend. She cried for fifteen minutes as I remained silent. While she was a brilliant and beautiful soul there was an edge to her. She knew Christianity. The Presbyterians had been on the reservation since 1901 but there always a mix of native spirituality with the Christian message. She wasn’t quite convinced of all this Jesus stuff I was saying but she wasn’t a serious skeptic either. Since we talked language and love before I began to tell her about the four loves, C.S. Lewis’ take on the Greek concepts versus our almost singular concept in English. We finally got to agape, Christ’s agape. She got it.

We had a few more Sundays over a period of a few months. Then she was gone. Rehab. Again. This time in Minneapolis. I kept tabs on her through her boyfriend. She ran away from rehab. Again. I saw her a year or so later. Same jail. Same room. This time the jail was full. She was with her gals now. The edge was back. Then she was gone again. I had given her my number, “Anything you need,” I offered.

I don’t know what happened to her. Jail, rehab, dead, free, are all possible options but I would bet on the first three and not the last. More than tragic, devastating. But I was able to give her gospel. Now it is the Spirit’s time. Who knew that it would be linguistic apologetics, if there is such a thing, which opened the door to preaching in that tiny county jail? A rock in her shoe.

WHITHER LUTHERAN APOLOGETICS?

So where does the Lutheran apologist go from here?

Postmodernity

I would like to take a detour into postmodernity. Technically there is no such thing as postmodernism as a distinct doctrine. There is postmodern art and postmodern literature but not

an overarching postmodernism. Of course, this is the point when it comes to studies of epistemology. The postmodern *condition* is an incredulity to metanarratives.⁸⁶ Norman Melchert notes that “the postmodern—enlightenment dichotomy is in many ways a reenactment of the Sophist—Socrates quarrel in ancient Greece.”⁸⁷ Nothing new under the sun. We should also be careful not to equate relativism to postmodernism. It is a more complicated manner. Postmodern thought might lead to a practical relativism (my truth versus your truth) but it is probably more accurate and charitable to say that (most) postmoderns are simply saying that we can’t get to truth and that truth may or may not exist and it would be better if we weren’t so dogmatic about truth. The difference is important.

My concern here is not so much the linguistics or semiotics of the 20th Century as much as the culture in which we find ourselves. We don’t quite know where we are but we do know that we are “post”. Post-liberal, post-metaphysical, post-structural, post-race, post-critical, post-individual, post-dualistic, post-colonial, post-philosophical, post-rationalistic, etc. If we are “post” then we are post-something. If we are in a postmodern age then we ought to define modern. I will use the term modernity (and modernism) to loosely describe the period after the Reformation until the turn of this century. Modernism upheld enlightenment ideals. Some of these ideals were certainty in truth, progress, dualism, linear thought, the dialectic method, rationalism over superstition, reason over religion, and the material over spiritual.

In many ways postmodernism is hyper modernism, late modernism, or even the inevitable conclusion to modernism. Postmodernism is what happens when we insist on absolute certainty for truth. If we insist on absolute truth but cannot arrive at this certainty, can we be certain about anything? In this way, postmodernism is also a critique of modernism. While there are postmodern attempts to build an epistemology without foundationalism, postmoderns tend to stay true to Lyotard’s “Incredulity to metanarratives”. This sounds terrible since Christianity is a metanarrative but so is evolution, Marxism, Humanism, etc. It’s an open market place for ideas and that’s not such a bad thing.

A New Spiritual Age

I find Pitrim Sorokin⁸⁸ and Frederic Baue⁸⁹ helpful in this regard. Sorokin painstakingly researched cultural artifacts and found a pendulum swinging between a material age (he called it *sensate*) and an idea age (he called it *ideational*). To be more accurate it is an ebb and flow between two great ages one growing and one declining simultaneously and each sowing the seeds of its own demise. As each age grows “overripe” the other emerges more dominant.

⁸⁶ Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

⁸⁷ Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation* 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2007), 703.

⁸⁸ Pitrim Sorokin *The Crisis of Our Age* (Oxford: OneWorld, 1992).

⁸⁹ Frederic Baue, *The Spiritual Society: What Lurks Beyond Postmodernism?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

Neither age is ever absent but only a minority in the other's majority. A material age has a tendency to be more about power, land, politics, technology, and statesmanship. Truth is sensory. An idea age is more about spirituality, poetry, education, the arts, and the humanities. Truth is supersensory. In between these two confronting ages, or better yet, as one becomes overripe and the next emerges with strength, there is a time of great upheaval. Wars are common but so is advancement in the arts. These are passionate times. Sorokin called these transitions "idealistic".

An example:

Idea:	Ancient Greece ⁹⁰
Transition:	Alexander the Great's Conquest/Hellenization
Material:	Roman Empire
Transition:	Fall of Rome
Idea:	Medieval Age
Transition:	Reformation/Renaissance
Material:	Modernity
Transition:	Postmodernity
Idea:	A New Spiritual Age (?)

So where are we? Scholars may differ in the dating of postmodernity⁹¹ but all agree that we have moved past the modern era. We just do not know where we are going. Sorokin would predict a spiritual age or as Baue would call it a "Therian Age". Only future historians will have the proper perspective to decide where we are in this moment. I would argue that we seem to be in a transition age, or better yet, postmodernism is how modern man lives in modernity knowing full well that it has failed.

Unique Opportunities

No matter how historians might describe our current age we live in an era that offers some unique opportunities for the apologist, specifically the Lutheran apologist. The first is that this is an era of intellectual freedom despite the growing attacks on free speech. We cannot assume that people will have even a basic knowledge of the Bible⁹² but it does not follow that people are hostile to Christian theology. There is an open-market place for ideas. We might not

⁹⁰ I use Western Civilization as an example but Sorokin found his method to be true in other cultures as well.

⁹¹ Some see the fall of the Berlin Wall as a symbolic beginning of postmodernity since communism was a purely modern phenomenon. Some see September 11th as a huge change but that is probably too late. Some see the destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis in 1972 as the end of modernity, others the sinking of the Titanic. These events all symbolically display a failure of modern technology often produced by the hubris of mankind.

⁹² Don't be surprised if this changes. See Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007).

be able to simply assert our truth but we can defend it. This iron sharpening iron will be to our benefit for we have truth on our side.

Secondly, we live in a very righteous age. The piety might be different now (e.g. environmental justice) than it was in the Victorian Age (e.g. sexual purity) but the righteous indignation today makes the Victorian Age look laidback.⁹³ We feel an insatiable urge to make judgments. This is to the apologist's advantage. Something like this: You cannot be a respectable human being today and be indifferent. You have to have an opinion about just about everything from capitalism to plastic straws. You cannot shrug your shoulders and say about Donald Trump, Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Joseph Stalin, or even the latest pop sensation, "I don't know, he seems like a nice guy." So you cannot be opinion-less about the man who has been written about more than any other human, Jesus of Nazareth. And may I suggest you only have four options: legend, liar, lunatic, or who he claimed to be, Lord Almighty. Religion is not benign. Nor is Christianity. And Jesus certainly isn't either.⁹⁴

Third, postmodernity attempts to bring back together what modernity split, the physical and the spiritual. Modern man split the two in a secular way either atheistically (material only worldview) or deistically (God is distant). We find this modern split in the religious realm as well (the physical is suspect). Think of the subjectivity of Pietism over against the objectivity of doctrine and the physicality of the sacraments, liturgy, ministry, and institutional church. Pietism is as much spirituality-over-physicality as it is subjectivity-over-objectivity. "I am spiritual but not religious" is a modern idea! We cannot escape the physical and we know it. We are holistic in our food, entertainment, and parenting. There is an urge for physicality. This means that all things are moral from food to plastic straws, from our daily jobs to our civic duties.

The postmodern attempt, or better yet, struggle to place the physical and the spiritual together without being Christian leads to some interesting results. There is a renewed appreciation for the arts and, within the church, liturgics.⁹⁵ There is a rise in historical interest (even if not a rise in college history majors). Modernity saw history as bunk;⁹⁶ postmodernity does not.⁹⁷ Hand in hand with this is the modern idea of unlimited progress⁹⁸ versus an acute

⁹³ Gerhard Forde's "decedent pietism".

⁹⁴ Matthew 12:30. See addendum H for the "Four L's."

⁹⁵ There is such a thing as postmodern art but it is probably best described as a form of modern art. What I mean here is that there is move in the church to meaningful art away from minimalism.

⁹⁶ Henry Ford famously said "History is pretty much bunk. It's tradition." N. Rees, *Brewer's Famous Quotations* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006), 198.

⁹⁷ Notice the rise of ethnic studies, DNA tests, and ancient spiritualities. This is more an interest in the "past" versus what we normally think of as "history". There is also an urge to rewrite history that can be troublesome.

⁹⁸ Consider Émile Coué's famous saying: "Every day and in every way I am getting better and better." Rees, *Brewer's Famous Quotations*, 155.

awareness of pain and suffering in the postmodern conscience. We no longer settle for the human or environmental damage done in the name of progress. Notice that the very Lutheran hallmarks of the Theology of the Cross, vocation, the sacramental nature of our worship, and our historical appreciation for art, each fit a specific contemporary desire.⁹⁹

Theology of the Cross Optimism

The Theology of the Cross offers both an epistemological insight and a theology of suffering all under the matrix of law and gospel. Luther's Heidelberg Disputation defines law and gospel (grace) as "The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, but rather hinders him. . . The law says 'Do this', and it is never done. Grace says, 'believe in this' and everything is already done."¹⁰⁰ Because of this the good works that seem so good through human eyes (the lens of the glory story) are actually evil if they work against grace. On the opposite side what seems to be evil is actually good (the cross story). Epistemologically God calls a spade a spade and so should the theologian of the cross even if he *sees* something else. Our view of God through natural law is so faulty that we cannot, in the end, know the truth about God's love. Only through the hidden but revealed God (clothed in word and hidden in the crucifixion) can we know.

This allows the apologist to do what no other philosophy (besides philosophy kata-Christon¹⁰¹) can offer: a theology of suffering. If the goal is faith in God and the opposite of faith in God is faith in anything else (usually ourselves), then it could be that God must first beat the false piety out of us (law and suffering) so that we are turned to him (gospel). So there is a fourth option to the problem of evil. It is that God is control of evil. Yet, even that is too soft. We allow God to have the right to send what we perceive as evil but by faith see as him hidden, yet revealed, in that evil. This kata-Christon philosophy alters everything. All thoughts are captive to Christ. The cross is beautiful even if we rightly perceive it as ugly (aesthetic apologetics). So is my cross. And so are the crosses of the people we serve. I can even rejoice in my sufferings.¹⁰²

Notice how the Theology of Cross speaks to postmodern concerns without giving up knowledge or falling into a relativistic ethic. The physical and spiritual are put back together in

⁹⁹ Notice also that both America and the modern Protestant denominations have grown up in and have only known modernity. This is one of the underlying concerns for both in our present age. I went to an Evangelical school for a doctoral degree. It was amazing to hear fellow pastors speak about the need to engage the physical. Like excited students they were amazed as they seem to "discover" things like the creeds, liturgy, sacraments, etc. One of the teachers was telling us about famous churches in the area (Southern California) that we could visit for Sunday worship while we were on campus. After mentioning Saddleback and Calvary Chapel, etc. he said he attended a small Baptist congregation. His reason: they offer Holy Communion every Sunday! Even Rick Warren stated "At Saddleback, we always have more seekers come to Christ during communion services, in which the supper is fully explained, than during any other service." D. Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 164.

¹⁰⁰ LW 31:39, 41.

¹⁰¹ Schulz, *Nisi Per Verbum*, 23-36.

¹⁰² Romans 5:3-5.

the incarnation and the cross (both Christ's and ours). Vocation speaks to the morality and meaning of everyday life. Theologians of the cross are fully aware of the epistemological hubris of modernity. Theologians of the cross are also acutely aware of suffering and provide meaning. Suffering is not a meaningless matter that we will overcome with a pill or therapy as the unlimited optimism of modernity taught us.

As we go forward into a chaotic world with seelsorge apologetics in mind we can carry out the apologetic task with great optimism. The Theology of the Cross has been labeled too pessimistic but it is true optimism for it does not pretend all is right with us or the world. Nor does it lay out glory roads to optimism. It gives us permission to enter the darkness with confidence.¹⁰³ So we should not be anti-apologetics. Quite frankly we have greater threats to the doctrines of sola gratia and bound choice than a misuse of apologetics.¹⁰⁴ We also should not be afraid of preaching the full counsel of God. The Christian worldview is a robust worldview. It answers all the great questions we have while leaving room for wonderment and mystery. Nor should we be afraid of our people thinking. We ought to encourage our people to think and teach them how to think clearly. This begins at an early age. The classical model of education understood that the logic age starts in about fourth grade. College apologetics is too late. High school apologetics is too late. Start catechism early and throw in some apologetics there as well. That's how we equip the saints. We preachers also need to think and read widely. In the parish my sermons grew tired for one of two reasons: either bad text study or because I had not read a novel, poetry, or biography in a while. For every practical book on church work we should read ten others books. Nothing beats having something profound to say to the skeptic, the prospect, the Bible Class attendee, or the person in the pew. People are looking for quality, for profundity, for epic-ness, and for hope. We will always remain clay jars but we don't need to strive for mediocrity.¹⁰⁵ Say something profound!

Finally, we should lose the martyrdom complex. Sure things are rough but no rougher than any other time. There are real martyrs out there. If we actually engage people we will find a much gentler world than the one we have been told will not listen to us. The truth is many people in this open market place of ideas will listen if we have say something worthy of their listening. It's a good day to be a Christian, when isn't? It may also be a peculiarly Lutheran moment. I cannot help but end with this quote from Thomas Oden that provides a passionate optimism so many of us feel despite all the chaos around us.

To all sufferers from decadent modernity, I bring greetings on behalf of the young classicists of the postliberal underground that abides patiently in the crevices of our heartsick modern culture. They bear good news to harassed Christian believers who may

¹⁰³ Ernst Käsemann quoted in Douglas John Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross* (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal, 2001), 117.

¹⁰⁴ Worship practices which assume free will in spiritual matters (attracting people to God), preaching that distrusts the power of first order proclamation (preaching about the gospel instead of preaching the gospel), and Aristotelean ethics instead of a proper understanding of the simul (an emphasis on growing spiritually instead of "you are sanctified"). All modern-like ideas hanging around in postmodernism.

¹⁰⁵ Practicality leads to mediocrity. Sometimes pastors are too much CEO and too little prophet.

be tempted to despair over the momentum of these times. My purpose in writing this is to provide reasons why despair is not the appropriate response to these times.

I shall describe the impassioned values of an emerging group of young orthodox cultural renovators who, having understood the values and methods of modern inquiry, and been disillusioned by their consequences, are now turning in earnest to classical Christianity. They are young in spirit because they are not intimidated by modernity.

I like to call them young fogeys to distinguish them as postmodern pacesetters from the “old fogeys” who remain bogged down in the quagmire of liberal Protestant pietism... They understand that the surest form of cultural renovation begins one by one with personal religious conversion, the turning of the heart away from arrogance and folly and toward faith in God. They are the newest work of the Holy Spirit.

My own generation of liberated theologians consisted mostly of novelty-fixated sixties revolutionaries. We applied our radical chic imagination to everything that seemed to us slightly old or dated. The emerging young classicists are critics of my generation’s modern chauvinism, which assumes that newer is better, older is worse. As I emphasize with and speak for and about this spirited, emergent generation of young classic Christian men and women, I find myself ironically entering into a kind of resistance movement in relation to my own generation of relativists, who have botched things up pretty absolutely. I will explain how I made this circuitous transit from being a sixties radical to a young-at-heart-fogey, happy to be thrown by providence into this singular, wonderful, historical moment.¹⁰⁶

Considering Lutheranism’s insistence on knowing its history, its theology of the cross, its dependence on revelation for truth, its proper balance of the spiritual and the physical, its doctrine of bound choice, its culture of beauty, its historically classical education model which included apologetics, and its incarnational and sacramental emphases this just may be a Lutheran moment.

But that would be a theology of glory, wouldn’t it?

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Oden, *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 13-14.

Apologetic Resources

Getting Started

Evidence that Demands a Verdict

Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell (Thomas Nelson)

Handbook of Christian Apologetics

Peter Kreeft & Ronald K. Tacelli (InterVarsity)

History, Law and Christianity

John Warwick Montgomery (New Reformation)

How Christianity Changed the World

Alvin Schmidt (HarperCollins)

Postmodern Times

Gene Edward Veith (Crossway)

Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air

Francis Beckwith & Gregory Koukl (Baker)

Religion on Trial

Craig Parton (Wipf & Stock)

Sensible Christianity (audio)

John Warwick Montgomery (1517)

The Heresy of Orthodoxy

Andrea Köstenberger & Michael Kruger

The New Testament Documents

FF Bruce (Eerdmans)

The Spiritual Society: What Lurks Beyond Postmodernism?

Frederic Baue (Crossway)

You Can Give an Answer

Steven Hein (1517)

Apologetics in General

A History of Apologetics

Avery Dulles (Ignatius)

Called to Defend

Valarie Locklair (1517)

Christian Apologetics

Norman Geisler (Baker)

Christian Apologetics

Douglas Groothuis (InterVarsity)

Christian Apologetics is the Postmodern World

Edited by Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm (InterVarsity)

Christianity for the Tough-Minded

edited by John Warwick Montgomery (Canadian Institute for Law...)

Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church.

Michael Horton (Baker)

Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospel

J. Warner Wallace (David C. Cook)
Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy, and Science
 edited by Michael Licona and William A. Dembski (Baker)

Evidence for Faith
 JW Montgomery (Probe Books)

Human Rights and Human Dignity
 John Warwick Montgomery (Zondervan)

Mere Christianity
 CS Lewis (Harper)

Orthodoxy
 GK Chesterton (Hendrickson)

Principalities and Powers
 JW Montgomery (Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy)

Prepared to Answer and More Prepared to Answer
 Mark Paustian (Northwestern)

Prophetic Untimeliness
 OS Guinness (Baker)

Reasonable Faith
 Wm Lane Craig (Crossway)

Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements
 Thomas Oden (Abingdon)

Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing your Christians Convictions
 Gregory Koukl (Zondervan)

The Case for Christ, The Case for Faith, and The Case for a Creator
 Lee Strobel (Zondervan)

The Courage to Be Protestant
 David Wells (Eerdmans)

The Closing of the American Mind
 Allan Bloom (Touchstone)

The Defense Never Rests
 Craig Parton (Concordia)

The Law above the Law
 John Warwick Montgomery (Bethany House)

The Loser Letters
 Mary Eberstadt (Ignatius)

The Reason for God
 Timothy Keller (Riverhead)

The Reason I Believe
 Allen Quist (Concordia)

The Story of Reality
 Gregory Koukl (Zondervan)

The Suicide of Christian Theology
 JW Montgomery (Bethany Fellowship)

The Weight of Glory
 CS Lewis (HarperCollins)

Theologia et Apologia

edited by Adam Francisco, Korey Mass, & Steven Mueller (Wipf & Stock)
Tough-Minded Christianity
edited by Wm Dembski & Thomas Schirrmacher (B&H Academic)
Tractatus Logico-Theologicus
John Warwick Montgomery (Culture & Science Publications)
Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies
edited by Wm Dembski & Jay Wesley Richards (InterVarsity)
Urban Apologetics
Christopher Brooks (Kregel)
Where is History Going?
JW Montgomery (Bethany Fellowship)

Philosophical Apologetics

A Grief Observed
CS Lewis (HarperCollins)
A Guide for the Perplexed
EF Schumacher (Harper)
A Primer on Postmodernism
Stanley Grenz (Eerdmans)
A Refutation of Moral Relativism
Peter Kreeft (Ignatius)
A Secular Age
Charles Taylor (Belknap/Harvard)
After Modernity...What? Agenda for Theology
Thoams Oden (Zondervan)
Gnostic America
Peter Burfeind (Pax Domini)
Faith of the Fatherless
Paul Vitz (Spence)
Fashionable Nonsense
Alan Sokal & Jean Bricmont (Picador)
Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God
Paul Copan (Baker)
Lighten Our Darkness: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross
Douglas Jms Hall (Academic Renewal)
Like a Pelting Rain: The Making of the Modern Mind
Roland Cap Elke (1517)
Luther's Augustinian Theoglogy of the Cross
Marco Barone (Resource)
Martin Luther: The Problem of Faith and Reason
David Anderson (Culture and Science Publications)
Mind Your Faith
David Horner (InterVarsity)
Solomon among the Postmoderns
Peter Leithart (Brazos)

The Best Things in Life
Peter Kreeft (InterVarsity)

The Christian Mind and The Post-Christian Mind
Harry Blamires (Regent)

The Crisis of Our Age
Pitrim Sorokin (OneWorld)

The Cross In Our Context
Douglas Jms Hall (Fortress)

The Compassionate Mind
Donlad Deffner (Concordia)

The Great Conversation
Norman Melchert (Oxford)

The End of Reason: A Response to the New Atheists
Ravi Zacharias (Zondervan)

The End of Secularism
Hunter Baker (Crossway)

The God Conversation
JP Moreland and Tim Muehlhoff (InterVarsity)

The Problem of Pain
CS Lewis (Macmillan)

The Problem of Suffering
Gregory Schulz (Concordia)

The Sacred Canopy
Peter Berger (Anchor)

The Shaping of America
JW Montgomery (Bethany House)

Three Philosophies of Life
Peter Kreeft (Ignatius)

Total Truth
Nancy Pearcey (Crossway)

Why You Think the Way You Do
Glenn Sunshine (Zondervan)

Worldviews: A Christian Response to Religious Pluralism
Anthony Steinbronn (Concordia)

Evidential Apologetics

An Introduction to the New Testament
Douglas Moo and DA Crason (Zondervan)

Bible Difficulties
W Arndt (Concordia)

Can We Trust the Gospels
Peter Williams (Crossway)

God's Inerrant Word
John Warwick Montgomery (Bethany House)

Four Portraits, One Jesus
Mark Strauss (Zondervan)

Isaiah 53 Explained
Mitch Glaser (Chosen People Productions)

Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament
FF Bruce (Eerdmans)

Leading Lawyers' Case for the Resurrection
Ross Clifford (New Reformation)

Making the Case for Christianity: Responding to Modern Objections
edited by Korey Mass & Adam Francisco (Concordia)

Paul Meets Muhammad: A Christian-Muslim Debate on the Resurrection
Michael Licona (Baker)

Richard Whately: A Man for All Seasons
Craig Parton (Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, & Public Policy)

The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus
Gary Habermas and Michael Licona (Kregel)

The Discovery of Genesis
CH Kang and Ehtel Nelson (Concordia)

The Resurrection Fact
edited by John Bombaro & Adam Francisco (New Reformation)

The Text of the New Testament
Bruce Metzger (Oxford)

Scientific Apologetics

A Matter of Days
Hugh Ross (NavPress)

Can Science Explain Everything
John Lennox (Good Book)

Darwin's Black Box
Michael Behe (The Free Press)

Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion
Ronald Numbers (Harvard University Press)

Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists are Missing the Target
John Lennox (Lion Hudson)

Darwin on Trial
Philip Johnson (Regnery Gateway)

In Christ All Things Hold Together
(Commission on Theology and Church Relations LCMS)

Is There Purpose in Biology
Denis Alexander (Lion)

Miracles
CS Lewis (Harper)

Science and Religion
John Brooke (Cambridge)

Scientism and Secularism

JP Moreland (Crossway)
Signature in the Cell
Stephen C Meyer (HarperOne)
The Beginnings of Western Science
David Lindberg (Chicago)
The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science
Peter Harrison (Cambridge)
The Dawkins Delusion
Alister McGrath & Joanna McGrath (InterVarsity)
The Mind and the Brain
Jeffery Schwartz & Sharon Begley (Harper Collins)
The Polkinghorne Reader
edited by Thomas Jay Oord (Tempelton Press)
The Realist Guide to Religion and Science
Paul Robinson (Gracewing)
The Spiritual Brain
Mario Beauregard & Denyse O’Leary (HarperOne)
The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy
Nancy Pearcey & Charles Thaxton (Crossway)
When Science and Christianity Meet
Edited by Ronald Numbers and David Lindberg

Aesthetic Apologetics

Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art
Translated by SH Butcher (Dover)
Concerning the Spiritual in Art
Wassily Kandinsky (CreateSpace)
Myth, Allegory & Gospel
Edited by JW Montgomery (Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy)
On Beauty and Being Just
Elaine Scarry
Six Names of Beauty
Crispin Sartwell (Rutledge)

Online Resources

Cross Examined (crossexamined.org)
Gary Habermas (garyhabermas.com)
Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (rzim.org)
Reasonable Faith (reasonablefaith.org)
Stand to Reason (str.org)
The Veritas Forum (veritas.org)
Thinking Fellows (thinkingfellows.com)
Library of Historical Apologetics (historicalapologetics.org)

Addendum A

A Very Brief Sketch of the History of Apologetics

Era	Context	Tactics/Examples
New Testament	Greeks to which the resurrection is foolishness and to Jews to which the resurrection is a scandal.	Eyewitness accounts of the resurrection (e.g. 1 Cor. 15) and Christological treatises (e.g. Hebrews).
Early Church	Roman suspicion of Christians	Literal legal defense against accusations (e.g. Justin Martyr's <i>Apology</i>).
Patristic	Attacks on Christology and Trinity	Long treatises targeting Judaism (e.g. Justin Martyr's <i>Dialogue with Trypho the Jew</i>), Greek thought (e.g. John Chrysostom's <i>Demonstration to Jews and Greeks that Christ is God</i>), Roman practices (e.g. Tertullian's <i>Apology</i>), the general curiosity and/or suspicion of Christianity (e.g. <i>Letter to Diognetus</i>), and specific attacks on Christian doctrine (e.g. Origen's <i>Contra Celsum</i>).
Medieval	Islamic Expansion, both a weariness of an Islamic/Aristotelian worldview but an engagement with Greek philosophy	Treatises targeting Judaism (e.g. Peter Damian's <i>A Reply to the Jews</i>) and Islam (e.g. John Damascene's <i>Dialogue between a Saracen and a Christian</i>). Systematic approaches (e.g. Thomas Aquinas' <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> which shows both a weariness to and a use of Aristotle).
Reformation	Engaged in doctrinal disputes	"Apologies" versus other Christians. Some still concentrate on apologetics to non-Christians such as Blaise Pascal.
Post-Enlightenment	Rationalism, attacks on Scripture and theism.	Attempts to discredit Enlightenment philosophy (Soren Kierkegaard (?), Johann Hamaan (?), Giovanni Perrone's <i>On the True Religion against Unbelievers</i>). Attempts to counteract Metaphysical Naturalism (e.g. Charles Hodge). A host of others including C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton.

Addendum B

Resurrection Apologetics in Simple Form

There are eyewitness accounts of the resurrection.
Followers of Christ were willing to die rather than deny the resurrection.
Followers of Christ gained nothing for their claim of the resurrection.
There is no evidence or reason that this many people would lie about this.
There is no evidence that this many people would all be crazy.
There is no evidence or reason why the three groups able to fake a resurrection would do
so (Jews, Romans, Apostles).
Therefore Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus claimed to be true God.
There is no evidence or reason that Jesus would lie about this.
There is no evidence that Jesus is crazy.
There is no evidence that Jesus was a bad man.
Jesus proved his divinity by rising from the dead.
Therefore Jesus is who he claimed to be, that is, true God.

Jesus is divine.
We are not divine.
Therefore we ought to believe what he says.

Jesus says that the Old Testament is the inerrant Word of God.
Jesus says that he sent his Spirit to give the apostles total recall.
Therefore we ought to accept the Bible as the inerrant Word of God.

Addendum C

Textual Tests

The Biographical Test: Did the text get to us in an authentic and accurate form?

The time gap between the “autographs” and earliest copies is about 250 years. This is by far the best of ancient texts (e.g. Caesar’s Gallic Wars’ gap is about 1000 years).

There are over 5,600 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament. This is by far the best of ancient texts (e.g. Caesar’s Gallic Wars boasts ten copies). The more copies (even with mistakes) allows for a more accurate picture of what was originally written.

This does not include translations and quotes from the church fathers.

This amount of evidence far surpasses the threshold used by legal systems concerning the authenticity of older documents and “non-hearsay material”.

Therefore the New Testament texts pass the bibliography test.

The following chart provides *some* of the scholarship concerning dating of the NT Texts. The dates are taken from a variety of sources and should be taken with a huge grain of salt. I also tried to be generous to more liberal dating. The apologetic tactic here is not to win an argument about specific dating but to show that the evidence overwhelming points to the 1st Century.

Book	Early	Late	Notes
Galatians	48	53	After 1 st Journey (47-48) before the end of the 3 rd (52-55)
1 Thessalonians	50	51	After visit in 50 AD
1 Corinthians	52	55	During 3 rd Missionary Journey (52-55)
Romans	55	57	End of 3 rd Missionary Journey (52-55)
Prison Epistles	60-62	63-65	During his imprisonment in Rome
Mark	50’s	68	Mark is probably Peter’s scribe (according to Papias). Perhaps after Peter’s death (late) but Luke seems to quote Mark thus early date. Luke seems to quote Mark (and Matthew).
Luke	50’s	80’s	Acts (written before Luke) does not mention Paul’s (64-68), Peter’s (64-68), or James’ death (62) and ends the “biography” of Paul with him in Rome (58-60) but Irenaeus implies that it was written later. Paul may have quoted Luke in 1 Cor. & 1 Tm.
Acts	60-62	80’s	Luke’s 2 nd letter to Theophilus (Luke is the 1 st). See above.
Matthew	50’s	80’s	Doesn’t mention fall of Jerusalem (70 AD) despite Jesus’ prediction (Mt. 24). Thus it seems to be before 70 AD unless one has an <i>a priori</i> conviction against prophecy, thus a later date. See note on Mark.
John	75	90’s	Strong evidence that John had a ministry, as he said, in Ephesus during this time.

Book	Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	Copies
Caesar's <i>Gallic Wars</i>	58-50 BC	900 AD	950 years	10
Thucydides' <i>Histories</i>	480-425 BC	900 AD	1300 years	8
Catallus' <i>Poetics</i>	84-54 BC	1400 AD	1500 years	3
Plato's <i>Tertalogies</i>	427-347 BC	900 AD	1300 years	7
Tacitus' <i>Annals</i>	100 AD	1100 AD	1000 years	10
Pliny the Younger's <i>Letters</i>	61-113 AD	850 AD	800 years	7
Seutonius' <i>Life of Caesar</i>	75-160 AD	950 AD	800 years	8
Homer's <i>Illiad</i>	850 BC	400 BC	450 years	643
Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John	60-90 AD	200- 325 AD	140-265 years	Around 5,600

Chain of Custody: Can We Get to Codex Sinaiticus from the Apostles?
(from J. Warner Wallace et al. Wallace's dates are admittedly pro-Christian)

JOHN 6-100 AD

Ignatius 35-117 AD (disciple of John, mentions many apostles, confesses orthodox Jesus)
Polycarp 69-155 AD (converted by eyewitness accounts, knew John, quotes or alludes to 14-16 NT books, confesses orthodox Jesus)
Irenaeus 120-202 AD (taught by Polycarp, identified 24 NT books)
Hippolytus 170-236 AD (taught by Irenaeus, identified 24 NT books)

PETER 1 BC-67 AD

Mark d. 68 AD (most likely the pen for Peter – so says Papias C. 130 AD, cf. 1 Peter 5:13)
Alexandrian School (Anianus d. 82 AD, Avilius d. 95 AD, Kedron d. 106 AD, Primus d. 118 AD, & Justus d. 135 AD)
Pantaenus d. 200 AD (took over Alexandria school from Justus)
Clement of Alexandria 150-215 AD (taught by Pantaenus, quoted or alluded to 22 NT books)
Origen 185-254 AD (student in Alexandrian School, quoted all NT books with hesitation about some)
Pamphilus of Caesarea d. 309 AD (apologist of Origen, accepted NT)
Eusebius 263-339 AD (student of Pamphilus, church historian, affirmed 26 NT books with hesitation about some)

PAUL 5-67 AD

Linus 10-76 AD (Irenaeus calls him co-worker of Paul, cf. 2 Pt 4:21)
Clement d. 110 AD (coworker of Paul cf. Ph 4:3, letter to Corinthians quotes or alludes to NT books, confesses orthodox Christ)
Bishops of Rome (Evaristus d. 109 AD, Alexander I d. 115 AD, Sixtus I d. 125 AD, Telesphorus d. 136 AD, Hyginus d. 140 AD, & Pius I 90-154 AD)
Justin Martyr 103-165 AD (Roman Christian during Pius' ministry, quotes or alludes to the 4 Gospels & Revelation)

Tatian the Assyrian 120-180 AD (unorthodox student of Justin kicked out of Rome, wrote harmony of Gospels, Syrian church records identified this harmony with Paul's letters an Acts as an early canon)

CODEX SINAITICUS c. 330-360 AD (the oldest (almost) complete Greek bible found at St. Catherine's Monastery on the Sinai Peninsula, includes complete NT, large section of OT and apocryphal books)

Addendum D

The Internal Test: Did the documents themselves claim to be what we think they are?

The New Testament writers claimed to be eyewitnesses or talked to eyewitnesses.

The New Testament writers “welcomed” criticism and claimed inspiration.

Coherence: Does it make sense and correspond to reality? Yes.

Means: Did the writers have the means to record the events? Yes.

Motive: Were the motives of the authors nefarious? No.

Opportunity: Did the writers have access to the events and/or eye-witnesses? Yes.

Refutation of Forgery Theories

All Greco/Roman literature was preserved by Christian scholars in the West. It seems that they would, if conspirators, change these stories to fit their worldview or not preserve them at all. It should also be mentioned that it would be very difficult for scribes, centuries later, to imitate styles of Latin (e.g. Silver versus Gold).

Many small, seemingly insignificant, details are used by the Gospel writers such as names, places, geographical details, which match up with what we know now to be true of the time and place. Later forgers would not have had access to these details nor would they desire to use a lot of details in their forgeries. N.B. This is not the case with the Gnostic Gospels.

Consider that there are four historical accounts of Christ (the same number we have for the most famous person of the time, Tiberius).

The Christian “movement” spread remarkably quickly making conspiracy difficult.

An a priori against inspired Scripture leads to the assumption of a dishonest and manipulative force in a fairly large section of Christianity. Yet there is no evidence of this.

Addendum E

The External Test: Are there extra-biblical sources which confirm or deny these claims?

Tacitus (b. 56 AD), first rate historian

Founder of Christianity was Jesus

Jesus was executed under Tiberius (14-47 AD) and Pilate (26-36 AD)

The religion started in Judea and spread rapidly

Pliny the Younger (b. 61/62 AD), Governor of Bithynia & Pontus (109-111 AD)

Writes to Trajan complaining about the Christians

Christians are regularly put on trial and often executed if they do not “repent” (they are given ample chances to deny Christ)

Early morning worship

Implications that Christ is worshipped as God

Mentions deaconesses from the slave class

Complains that the temples are empty which is affecting the local economy

Josephus (b. 37/38 AD), Jewish military commander turned historian

Mentions John the Baptist

Recounts the stoning of James, “brother of Jesus,” in 61/62 AD

Addendum F

The Classical Arguments

*Please note that these are brief outlines of only some of the classical arguments.
These arguments are not without their critics or rebuttals of those criticisms.*

Cosmological Arguments

Argument from Contingency

Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its nature or, in an external cause.

The universe does not exist necessarily, it is logically possible that things in the universe (you and me) did not have to exist and that the universe itself did not have to exist.

The universe does exist.

Therefore the universe is contingent on a necessary thing.

There are types of things that exist in the necessity of their nature: God and abstract objects (e.g. right angles).

Abstract objects cannot cause things to be brought into existence.

Therefore the existence of the universe is contingent on God.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

All things that begin to exist have a cause.

The universe began to exist.

Therefore the universe has a cause.

If the universe is eternal there would be an infinite number of moments prior to the present moment, then the present moment would never have arrived because it is impossible to traverse an infinite number of moments.

The present moment has arrived.

Therefore there were not an infinite number of moments before the present moment and the universe began a finite time ago and is not eternal.

The universe has a First Cause.

The creative act of the First Cause was either determined, undetermined, or self-determined.

It cannot be determined since there is nothing prior to the First Cause.

It cannot be undetermined since that would contradict the Principle of Causality.

Therefore it must be self-determined.

Self-determined acts are existentially free acts of existentially free agents.

Therefore the First Cause must have been the decision of an existentially free agent.

Anthropological Arguments

The Anthropological or Moral Argument

If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
Objective moral and duties do exist.
Therefore God exists.

Three Options:

An action is good because God wills it.

God wills an action because it is good.

God wills good because he is good.

The Argument from Truth

Our limited minds can discover eternal truths about being.
Truth properly resides in a mind.
But the human mind is not eternal.
Therefore there must exist an eternal mind in which these truths reside.

The Argument from Conscience

(This argument does not presuppose objective morality)

Everybody has a conscience.

It is fairly universally accepted that one should follow their conscience.

There are only a handful of possible answers to the question "From where does this authority come?"

From nature (something less than me)

But how could I be obligated to something less than me?

From self (me)

But how could I obligate myself absolutely?

From society (something equal to me)

But does this mean that reformers are wrong?

From the divine (something more than me)

The only one left.

Therefore there is an authority more than us which obligates us.

Teleological Arguments

The Teleological Argument

All things have an order or arrangement and work for an end.
The order of the universe cannot be explained by chance, but only by design and purpose.
Design and purpose is a product of intelligence.
Therefore nature is directed by a Divine Intelligence or Great Designer.

The Argument from Consciousness

We experience the universe as intelligible. This intelligibility means that the universe is graspable by intelligence.
Either this intelligible universe and the finite minds which grasp it are the products of intelligence, or both intelligibility and intelligence are products of chance.
This cannot be because of blind chance.
Therefore both are products of intelligence.

The Argument from the World as Interacting Whole

The universe is an ordered system with many active parts which interact and interlock with each other.
Each active part is defined by its relation with others and so presupposes others for the ability to act.
The parts cannot be understood apart from the whole.
The whole cannot be not self-explanatory because it is made up of parts.
This requires a unifying efficient cause.
This unifying cause must be intelligent.
Therefore the universe depends on an intelligent cause.

The Design Argument and Fine Tuning

Without precise fine-tuning life would not exist.
Life exists.
Therefore the universe is fine-tuned.

The fine-tuning of the universe is either the result of

1. Change,
2. Natural Law,
3. A combination of chance and natural law, or
4. Design.

The universe is not a result of chance or natural law.
Therefore the universe is a result of design.

Ontological Arguments

The Ontological Argument

It is possible that a maximally great being exists.

If it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world.

If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world.

If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world.

If a maximally great being exists in the actual world, then a maximally great being exists.

Therefore a maximally great being exists.

The Argument from Degrees of Perfection

We think of many things in degrees (e.g. colder, hotter).

Degrees of “more” and “less” imply the ideas of “most” and “least” or extremes on a continuum.

Without the extremes as standards of measurement, the idea of a continuum falls apart.

Sometimes a degree of a particular attribute is communicated to an object by an outside source (e.g. the closer a thing is to a heat source the hotter it is.)

Being itself, though it may seem like a binary quality (either/or), admits of degrees of perfection. (e.g. An intelligent being exists to a more perfect degree than an unintelligent one).

If these degrees of perfection pertain to being and being is caused in finite creatures, then there must exist a best, that is, a source and real standard of all the perfections that we recognize belong to us as beings.

This perfect being is God.

Addendum G

Worldview Criteria (adapted from Douglas Groothuis Christian Apologetics)

1. If a worldview's (WV) proposition is only a base assertion or if it is utterly mysterious (or unintelligible), then it has a strike against it.
2. If various propositions of the WV do not contradict which other, the WV may be true. The opposite is a strike against it.
3. If various propositions of the WV are coherent the WV is more likely to be true.
4. The greater extent to which the WV's essential facts can be established empirically, the more likely the WV is to be true.
5. If the WV is philosophically hypocritical, then it is rationally disqualified (existential viability).
6. If the WV is not intellectually and culturally productive, it has a strike against it.
7. If a WV substantially alters its essential claims, it loses rational justification.
8. The more explanation needed to explain the WV's claims, the less credibility it has.

Addendum H

The Four L's (The Ancient "Bad Man or God" made famous as CS Lewis' "Trilemma")

Either Jesus of Nazareth is...

Legend (He didn't exist or didn't say/do the things testified to in the NT)

There is more evidence for Jesus' words and actions than any other person/event of the era and it is not even close.

Liar (He claimed to be true God for gain)

We humans tend to lie for three reasons (sex, money, and power). Jesus gained only death by crucifixion.

Lunatic (He was crazy)

There is no evidence of this and the burden is on the accuser of insanity (thankfully). See Albert Schweitzer's *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus: Exposition and Criticism*.

Lord (Who he said he was)

The only option left.

Some (Bart Ehrman) make the claim that Jesus was an apocalyptic Jew of his time and simply believed that he was the Messiah but was not insane.