EDIFICATION OR PERSUASION? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE APOLOGETICS PHILOSOPHIES OF MYRON B. PENNER AND OS GUINNESS

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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PREFACE

Doctoral students typically comment on the intense and time-consuming labor required to complete their theses and dissertations. They do so with good reason, but I feel compelled to share a sentiment that regularly flooded my heart and mind as I engaged in this process: writing this thesis was a tremendous, God-given privilege. So many capable people around the world will never have an opportunity to participate in such focused and formative study. I pray that God will open doors for those in places that lack libraries, seminaries, professors, and other resources so that they may grow in their faith and abilities for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Lord has blessed me with a host of people to walk alongside me on this journey. The staff and faculty members of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have granted me their time, the encouragement in their voices, the kindness in their eyes, and the sincerity of their hearts. I am especially grateful to Dr. Timothy Paul Jones, Dr. Joseph Harrod, Dr. Shane Parker, Dr. Michael Wilder, and Marsha Omanson for their investment in my project and in my personal development. I also owe a long-term debt of gratitude to the faculty of Grand Rapids Theological Seminary—especially to Dr. Michael Wittmer. He has always been accessible to students long after they graduate, and his wisdom proved instrumental in helping me refine my research topic.

Words cannot properly express my appreciation for Dr. Ted Cabal. I never imagined my supervisor would become someone I could call a friend and confidant. Rarely does one cross paths with a man so rich in knowledge who humbly remains open to the Lord's work both internally in his heart and externally with his abilities. Dr. Cabal offered exceptional and essential advice for the completion of this project, but his interest in me as a person touched me above all else. I value him as a brother in Christ who has a

deeply moving life testimony of God's transforming power.

While newness and novelty are often prized, the stable realities of our lives are what foster dedication and perseverance for prolonged and arduous tasks. My parents, Mike and Joyce Ryan, just celebrated fifty years of marriage. Not a moment of my life has passed when I doubted their firm commitment to me and to one another. I also enjoy a home full of treasures—our daughters Cana, Bethany, and Eden, and our son, Case. Each of them brings unique and exciting flavors to my family that season the dry and challenging times in life. Due to their vibrant faith and positive, affirming spirits, I worked on this thesis with substantial peace of mind. Moreover, our daughters may constitute the youngest proofreading team in history!

My wife, Jennifer, is a most precious jewel. I thank her sincerely for her companionship, patience, and unwavering support. She inspires me by deeply loving her friends, parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, and children. She spends many hours praying for their well-being and for the spiritual blessings of God to pour down upon them. She lights up every room she enters. The world is not worthy of women like Jennifer Jo Ryan. I only hope more people will see that Jesus is real and alive through her powerful example as we grow old together with God's blessing.

I give all my thanks ultimately to our Lord Jesus, whose kindness appeared to this undeserving but very grateful man (Titus 3:3-5).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Acclaimed writer Lee Strobel recently expressed a popular sentiment: "We're on the cusp of a golden era in Christian apologetics."[1] However, the perceived potency of today's apologetics enterprise might be more fragile than meets the eye. Contemporary apologists differ substantially in their assessments of what constitutes faithful Christian witness. Evidentialists, presuppositionalists, and those in between have long debated the merits of their respective views and models. Today the stakes are higher: some seek the demise of longstanding apologetics systems and envision new means to achieve prophetic Christian witness.

Postmodern ideology is partly responsible for these developments. Scholars debate how much impact and longevity postmodern philosophy will have, but it has presently succeeded in altering the thought processes that guide how people view faith and how they respond to Christianity.[2] Epistemological frameworks favored by postmodernists have penetrated Western culture, modified traditional perceptions of the nature of truth, and ignited fresh discussions concerning the roles of reason and subjectivity in the human experience of belief. Advocates of postmodernism interpret

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[1]Lee Strobel, "Lee Strobel: What's Trending in Apologetics Today?" *Outreach Magazine*, January 19, 2014, accessed February 15, 2018, http://www.outreachmagazine.com/interviews/5626-lee-strobel-what-s-trending-in-apologetics-today.html.

[2]Many prominent Christian apologists have long recognized the broad public influence of postmodernism, but they see postmodernism as self-refuting and ultimately unlivable. For this reason, they doubt its ability to captivate the masses to the extent that it has the philosophical elites. See Steven B. Cowen, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 181-83, 348, 376; Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 52, 58-59; J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 137-39.

biblical texts and historical apologetic writings in ways that sometimes challenge traditionally accepted limits of orthodoxy. Inevitably, the cumulative effect of postmodern influence is shaping how the current generation engages in gospel witness. Despite the abundance of traditional apologetics adherents and resources, the impact of postmodern thought upon apologetics may persist for years to come. While these circumstances should give the conscientious believer pause, they need not trigger alarm or despair. They afford plentiful opportunity to evaluate the wide spectrum of views and to clarify the role of apologetics for both current and future generations.

Two recent books serve as particularly lucid representations of the differing mindsets concerning contemporary Christian apologetics: *The End of Apologetics* by Myron Bradley Penner and *Fool's Talk* by Os Guinness.[3] Both works recently received *Christianity Today* Book Awards in the Apologetics-Evangelism category. Penner declares his "deep conviction that the modern apologetic paradigm does not have the ability to witness *truthfully* to Christ in our postmodern situation."[4] He considers today's apologetics approaches to be hopelessly hindered by a commitment to modern rationalism. He proposes an overhaul of the apologetics enterprise and its replacement with a model of witness that emphasizes the edification of others.[5] Guinness maintains affinity to historical understandings of Christian witness while tackling important deficiencies in how believers communicate gospel truth. He contends that Christians have

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[3]Myron Bradley Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013); Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015). All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

[4]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 15.

[5]Penner's proposal is not technically an apologetics model since he is essentially calling for the removal of apologetics practices from the agenda of Christian witness. However, his conception of Christian witness can be classified broadly under the heading of apologetics because it purposes to inspire others to trust Jesus, follow him, and assimilate into Christian community.

lost the art of persuasion and develops this theme as a corrective to contemporary apologetics approaches.

The purpose of this thesis is to compare the apologetics philosophies promoted in these two works. It endeavors to address defects in Penner's assessment while acknowledging the validity of some of his concerns. Furthermore, this study will demonstrate the biblical fidelity of Guinness' approach (in contrast to Penner's) and illustrate how his insights speak to Penner's most pointed criticisms of apologetics today.

Overview of the Literature

Several interconnected themes emerge as one compares *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk*. The most prominent themes fall into four major categories: (1) the authors' shared belief that significant deficiencies hamper contemporary apologetics, (2) their recognition of postmodern influence upon matters of faith, (3) their differing epistemological foundations, and (4) their applications of biblical passages and the writings of historical Christian apologists. Throughout this thesis, I will engage works that attend to these themes, some of which are discussed in the remainder of this section.

Apologetics literature of the past two decades sheds light on factors that prompted the writing of *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk*. The book *Five Views on Apologetics* is a widely read publication which represented prominent positions on apologetics methodologies.[6] Its contributors mainly debated which methods of argumentation were most biblical and logical. Apologists increasingly noticed potential for integration of the various methodologies and sought to better account for changes in Western culture that impeded Christian witness.[7] Today apologists pursue even broader

[6]Cowen, *Five Views on Apologetics*.

[7]Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 531-32. Boa and Bowman celebrate the thoughtful exchanges in *Five Views on Apologetics* for their successful (albeit unexpected) demonstration of similarities among the various traditional apologetics methodologies.

reforms within the apologetics movement to adapt to cultural shifts. In *Humble Apologetics*, John G. Stackhouse warns, "Apologetics is not primarily the acquisition and deployment of techniques."[8] He advocates a renewed emphasis on personal spirituality as vital to an apologist's faithfulness and success. James Sire argues for the role of intuition in apologetics and says the goal of apologetics is to represent the gospel with "an intellectually and emotionally credible witness."[9] K. Scott Oliphant repackages presuppositionalism in *Covenantal Apologetics* to inject it with fresh credibility and relevance.[10] Interestingly, he frequently utilizes a dialogical format throughout the book that appeals to twenty-first century readers, even though his apologetics position remains largely traditional. These authors acknowledge, along with Penner and Guinness, that people no longer respond to arguments as they once did. Apologists have begun to more deliberately emphasize interpersonal dynamics and the subjective elements that influence belief and witnessing.

Both Penner and Guinness recognize that postmodernism has escalated the need to account for the aforementioned factors. Penner's own postmodern leanings surface in a book he edited in 2005: *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*.[11] His postmodern perspectives solidified by the time he wrote *The End of Apologetics*, in which he casts today's apologists as wholly embedded in a web of modern rationalism. Guinness presents a largely unfavorable view of postmodern thought and its

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[8]John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4. Guinness devotes an entire chapter titled "Technique: The Devil's Bait" to highlight this same concern in Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 29-46.

[9]James Sire, *Apologetics Beyond Reason: Why Seeing Really Is Believing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 22.

[10]K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2013).

[11]Myron Bradley Penner, ed., *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).

consequences. Nevertheless, he realizes that postmodernism's impact must be accounted for as Christians practice apologetics.[12]

Probably the most substantial differences between Guinness' and Penner's views lie in their epistemological foundations. Penner argues that modernity's paradigm of truth is incompatible with his own. He considers truth claims to be contingent and provisional for humans and insists that "truth-telling becomes difficult in (post)modernity precisely because . . . absolute truth exists only for God."[13] He utilizes three classical apologists as primary foils throughout *The End of Apologetics* as he makes his case: William Lane Craig, Douglas Groothuis, and J. P. Moreland. Guinness, on the other hand, holds a more favorable view toward propositional, objective truth. Both authors develop their perspectives on truth and knowledge at intervals throughout their books as they tackle matters of apologetics practices. Further attention will be given to their respective epistemologies in order to evaluate their works with greater precision.

Finally, Penner and Guinness invoke biblical texts and historical writings to support their positions. They reference many of the same philosophers and apologists. Some of their most significant overlap occurs with Søren Kierkegaard, Augustine, and G. K. Chesterton. How they interpret these writers influences the solutions they offer to accomplish Christian witness in the twenty-first century.[14]

Void in the Literature

Fool's Talk and *The End of Apologetics* merit a generous hearing and a careful critique based upon several considerations. First, their models are unique because they either advocate a concept not previously applied to apologetics (edification) or accentuate

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[12]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 79-81.

[13]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 100.

[14]Guinness and Penner draw upon a host of writers throughout *Fool's Talk* and *The End of Apologetics*, including Aristotle, Francis Schaeffer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Sigmund Freud, and C. S. Lewis.

one that garners limited attention (persuasion). The authors present their proposals with passionate styles that inspire reflection and they offer contrasting conclusions that invite further engagement. However, *Fool's Talk* has not received an extensive academic analysis to date. The peer-reviewed articles covering *The End of Apologetics* are relatively short and tend to target only specific claims in the book. This thesis strives to furnish a more in-depth treatment of these two thoughtful publications to assess their usefulness for the contemporary apologetics movement.

Second, rarely does one encounter an analysis like this thesis in the field of apologetics in which two specific apologetics works receive a rigorous, side-by-side treatment. Reviews of apologetics writings tend to focus on only one writer's work and critique just a few of its controversial points. They often address aspects of an apologist's model without illustrating how each of its prominent features intertwine to form the apologist's overall philosophy. *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* serve as ideal candidates to observe how the philosophies of apologists derive from a combination of their presuppositions, methods of inquiry, and personal experiences. A thorough comparison of the ideas put forth by these two writers can provide insights to strengthen the contemporary base of apologetics literature. May this thesis prove valuable not only as a tool to understand their works, but as a model for future research within the field.

Thesis

Myron B. Penner's edification model of apologetics departs from the biblical principles and historical understandings of Christian witness. Os Guinness' persuasion-based approach maintains fidelity with Scripture, promotes continuity with church history, and effectively addresses Penner's most prominent concerns about contemporary gospel witness. In this thesis, I will juxtapose these two authors' philosophies to show how today's apologetics movement can account for cultural changes without sacrificing time-tested biblical principles.

CHAPTER 2

SYNOPSES OF *THE END OF APOLOGETICS* AND *FOOL'S TALK*

This chapter presents synopses of *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* to set the stage to compare these works throughout the remainder of this thesis. The synopses condense the two books to their fundamental arguments, draw out important points of agreement between the authors, and expose tensions between their philosophies. The tensions call into question whether both of their models can be said to maintain fidelity with Scripture and promote continuity with church history. *Fool's Talk* will be treated last so that the reader can gain initial insights into the ways in which it addresses the most prominent concerns outlined in *The End of Apologetics*.

Myron Bradley Penner and Os Guinness have both served God's church and his world in ways that require dedication and perseverance. Their ministry commitments reveal an orientation to reach outside of academia while remaining keenly aware of the connections between theory and praxis. Their personal histories complement their written works and should be remembered as the reader evaluates their positions and arguments. For this reason, the synopses in this chapter are preceded with brief biographical sketches which provide additional insight into the personalities that produced *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk*.

Biographical Sketches

Myron Bradley Penner is an ordained Anglican priest who earned his B.S. and M.A. degrees from Liberty University in the 1990s. He holds a Ph.D. from Edinburgh University and has taught at several colleges. His longest tenure as a professor stretched from 2001 to 2008 at Prairie College and Graduate School in Canada. In 2013, he and his

family departed for Santa Cruz, Bolivia, to minister to recovering addicts, vulnerable children, and pastors in need of training. Penner currently serves as a pastor at Trinity International Church of Santa Cruz and is on the leadership team of Novō Transformational Communities.[1]

Os Guinness is a well-known author and social critic who has written or edited more than thirty books. He was born to missionary parents in China in 1941. When he was 8-years-old, his family was forced to resettle in England due to the Chinese revolution. He committed his life to Christ as a young man and was greatly influenced throughout his adult years by mentors like Francis Schaeffer and Peter Berger. He holds an undergraduate degree from the University of London and earned a D.Phil. in the social sciences at Oxford University. Guinness is currently on the speaking team of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM). He long refused to write a book on apologetics practice, saying, "I made a promise to the Lord that I would always do it more than talk about it."[2]

Penner and Guinness hold and present their apologetics philosophies resolutely, yet neither espouses a specific, traditional apologetics theory. In Penner's case, he finds the current popular theories and their associated practices so wanting as to be unusable. He contends they should be disavowed because they propagate the modernist agendas which he decries.[3] He is deeply concerned about how apologetics

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[1]Novō is an organization dedicated to "creating transformational communities in developing nations where hurting and broken people can find healing, wholeness, and hope." Novō Transformational Communities, "About," accessed August 26, 2018, http://novocommunities.org/about-2-2/. The Penners were commissioned through the Evangelical Free Church of Canada Mission (EFCCM).

[2]Napp Nazworth, "Os Guinness: Why Balaam's Ass Is the Patron Saint of Apologetics and Christians Need to Recover the Art of Persuasion (CP Interview 1/2)," *The Christian Post*, June 15, 2015, accessed August 23, 2018, http://www.christianpost.com/news/os-guinness-why-balaams-ass-is-the-patron-saint-of-apologetics-and-christians-need-to-recover-the-art-of-persuasion-cp-interview-1-2-140293.

[3]Penner disputes the five theories designated in Steven B. Cowen, *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000). He adds fideism, mainly to defend against the criticism that he could be a fideist himself. Myron Bradley Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 10-11, 82.

proponents and practices are impacting Christian witness and he pursues a whole new paradigm to replace modern apologetics. Guinness openly appreciates how theorists and practitioners throughout history have contributed to the church's apologetics endeavors. He criticizes approaches that are prescribed and mechanical but simultaneously fears that apologetics may be "sidelined when it is so needed today."[4] Guinness' chief interest in *Fool's Talk* is to advocate for an enriched approach to Christian witness that is capable of effectiveness in the twenty-first century. The sections to follow further outline the authors' respective positions.

Synopsis of *The End of Apologetics*

Penner opens *The End of Apologetics* with a frontal assault on the Enlightenment, taking his cue from Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.[5] Penner argues that the transition from premodernity to the Enlightenment was an intellectual disaster which divorced "the rational grounds for belief from a dependence on tradition or any source outside the self."[6] The Enlightenment produced the perception that humans can reason as "free, autonomous, and sovereign moral agents."[7] He believes these conditions are so woven into modernity that they are invisible to those who live in them. Modern apologetics, also oblivious to these conditions, embraces a secular ethos—a form of positivism which precludes or eclipses faith by granting human reason an undo and damaging authority.[8]

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[4]Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 215. Guinness also believes that "Christian apologetics today is in far better health than it was a few decades ago" (217).

[5]Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

[6]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 3.

[7]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 3.

[8]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 44-46, 58. Penner charges, "Apologetics is a very serious *threat* to Christian faith . . . defending actual Christianity is, in a sense, *impossible* in modernity" (76).

Furthermore, the Enlightenment mentality assumes that the plurality of cultures and subcultures can communicate with one another about faith and be compared on the basis of reason, which is a common denominator shared by all humanity. Penner balks at this notion and argues, along with MacIntyre, that the postmodern world possesses only fragments of a once common moral language.[9] He likens the present conditions to the fairy tale *Alice in Wonderland*. Above ground Alice understands social vocabulary and practices, but in the rabbit hole she must wade through a quagmire of confusion. Penner says people today, like Alice, think that their communication is universal and that their ideas are transferable from one mind to the next. However, he considers these notions to be mistaken and that operating under such presuppositions makes agreement in moral discourse nearly impossible.[10] Therefore, Penner implores Christians to adopt "an entirely new way of conceiving the apologetic task."[11] Otherwise, they may "paradoxically end up doing something different than defending genuine Christianity."[12] The first step toward reviving Christian witness is to acknowledge the fragmentation of present-day discourse and to stop viewing postmodernity as the chief ideological enemy of apologetics. He contends that Christians must comprehend postmodernity not as a concept or a philosophy, but as an ethos. He describes this ethos as "a self-reflexive condition that emerges as modernity becomes conscious or aware of itself as modernity . . . and aware that modernity's claims to rational superiority are deeply problematic."[13]

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[9]MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1-3.

[10]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 4-7.

[11]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 12, 66.

[12]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 7.

[13]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 13. Penner echoes these same sentiments in Myron Bradley Penner and Hunter Barnes, eds., *A New Kind of Conversation: Blogging Toward a Postmodern Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic Books, 2007), 32-33.

In chapter 1 of *The End of Apologetics*, Penner packages his concerns about the epistemological foundations of modern apologetics using the acronym OUNCE, which stands for "objective-universal-neutral-complex."[14] He submits that in modernity reason is no longer perceived as the *logos* which structures the world, but as a detached entity which individuals possess to evaluate the world. Thus, rational grounds of belief are universally available to all minds, so every reasonable person can access them to objectively determine whether a given belief has merit. This process is neutral in the sense that no one has any more or less vested authority to judge the validity of another reasoning individual's belief. Penner contends that the OUNCE complex drives apologists to treat truth as propositional and to bypass the need to source truth in a transcendent reality. In doing so, OUNCE makes God optional and betrays its inherently secular nature.[15] Throughout *The End of Apologetics*, Penner consistently identifies OUNCE as the ingrained and guiding philosophy of all major apologetics theories, along with their public expressions.[16] His overall case rests heavily upon OUNCE and related epistemology topics which chapter 3 of this thesis will treat in depth.

In chapter 2 of *The End of Apologetics*, Penner moves to explore the social and spiritual implications of modern epistemology and apologetics. He employs Søren Kierkegaard heavily for this task, dubbing him a postmodern thinker for his assessment of modernity's ills and his attempts to expose them. Kierkegaard's treatise *The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle* establishes the basic framework of Penner's analysis.[17] Kierkegaard maintained that God has merely endowed geniuses with natural intelligence.

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[14]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 32.

[15]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 26, 31-32.

[16]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 40-42, 82.

[17]Søren Kierkegaard, "Addendum II: The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle," in *The Book on Adler*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Apostles, on the other hand, are called by God irrespective of their intellectual capabilities and often despite them. Kierkegaard introduced a third player: the crowd. The crowd is any group that is enamored with the genius and insensitive to the voice of the apostle—all because of modernity's misplaced trust in the authority of reason. Applying Kierkegaard's treatise to contemporary apologetics, the apologist plays the role of an expert (genius) whose hearers and followers in the public square (the crowd) gain epistemic assurance from their expert. In turn, the expert needs the crowd to affirm and propagate his views. The crowd is all too happy to do so since its social vision and views are empowered by the expert.[18] The result is an ongoing codependency between the expert and the crowd that ultimately produces social ideology.[19] The ramifications for apologetics are weighty since apologists and their adherents ultimately work to gain power and influence over society. The spiritual significance of this situation must not be overlooked—apologists will either speak based on God's revelation and endorsement (like apostles), or by another authority (their own reason and the crowd's approval).[20]

Both OUNCE and the genius-apostle distinction factor heavily into Penner's presentation of the nature of truth and human access to it. In the introduction to *The End of Apologetics*, Penner expresses his intention to explore the subjective elements of truth, saying, "How we believe—not just what we believe—is important to our belief being justified."[21] Rather than justify Christian truth as objective, the goal should be "to confess

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[18]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 49-56.

[19]Following the lead of Carl Raschke, Penner likens this codependence to a functional, epistemological nihilism because it seeks justification in the circularity of human reason rather than in any transcendent reality. Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 16, 56-58.

[20]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 62-66.

[21]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 17. Penner intends this statement to distinguish his views from modernist epistemology. To do so, he employs the phrases "hermeneutics of belief" and "ethics of belief" at various points in *The End of Apologetics* (17, 86). However, he concedes that his hermeneutics of belief is still "a *type* of epistemology" (69).

it to be true, to *win* its truth existentially."[22] Penner rejects the notion that propositions can deliver objective, absolute, or universal truth. He submits that modernity has invented a mechanism whereby propositions serve as intermediaries, "connecting the human rational mind to the brute universe."[23] Since truth is God's possession and can only come in the form of revelation from him, "any expression of human reason is less than adequate to ground the full truth."[24] Consequently, the truths humans can access are only and always contingent, approximate, and revisable.[25]

Penner views humanity's limited access to God's truth as an opportunity rather than a problem. In chapter 4, he argues that people do not need to do away altogether with the concept of truth—the solution is to think of objective truths "with a lowercase *t*."[26] At first glance, this revised approach to truth may not seem consoling, but Penner proposes that it is decidedly more valuable than simply knowing objective truths about God or the universe—it positions people to maintain personal encounter with God as the motive for their pursuit of truth and to see him as Absolute Truth. Thus, Christians should supplant the modern infatuation with epistemology in favor of a truth paradigm that depends upon encounter with God. Penner utilizes specific vocabulary throughout *The*

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[22]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 17.

[23]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 31.

[24]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 52.

[25]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 99, 109-10, 114, 123.

[26]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 115. Penner admits he does not wish to completely discard objective truth. He declares that edifying truth is "in some meaningful way both public and objective" (112). Chap. 3 of this thesis will explore whether Penner's writings successfully represent truth as a reality that can be understood as both subjective and objective.

End of Apologetics to represent such a paradigm: "being in the truth,"[27] "possessed by the truth,"[28] "gripped by the truth,"[29] and even "apocalypsed by the truth."[30]

The contingent truths that humans experience form the basis for Penner's construal of Christian witness as *edification*, the goal of which is love of God and neighbor.[31] Instead of seeking to know objective truth from Scripture, the Christian community should identify and approve contingent truths based upon their propensity to edify. Penner defines edification as "building up the self."[32] He insists that truth, rightly represented, "can *only* edify—it *cannot* tear down."[33] Edification has a corporate, public dependency, such that "the edification of an individual person necessarily takes place within a community of other persons who share (very nearly) the same commitments, values, and vocabularies."[34] To connect edification with his view of truth, Penner asserts that "if we really do not believe that achieving the Truth is necessary to attaining normative Christian truths, and if we further configure our thinking about Christian truth around edification, then it seems to me we will have the ability to attest to the contingent, fallible truths that edify us."[35] Penner proposes that edification is imparted through a holistic means of witness that starkly contrasts with modern apologetics. The ethical dimensions of how Christians believe and witness outweigh whether the content of their speech is objectively true—truth must be embodied by the witnesses.

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[27]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 90.

[28]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 130.

[29]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 168.

[30]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 167.

[31]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 117, 147, 165.

[32]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 17.

[33]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 139-40.

[34]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 111.

[35]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 126.

Several ingredients compose the kind of edifying witness that Penner envisions. First, essential personal elements must pervade Christian witness. Penner insists, "The character and quality of our lives together are a witness that we have been built up and shaped by the truths we confess."[36] If witnesses are to edify others, they must wholly embrace the truths they espouse in their consciences. Conversely, if the witnesses themselves are not built up by the truths, they will not be edifying to others. To advocate truth that edifies requires a form of martyrdom: a faithful witness is one who "stakes one's life on the truths by which one has been edified."[37] Consequently, the full speech act of the witness causes "those of us who receive it to imagine a truth bigger than our own lives . . . and it presents us with an opportunity to make that truth our own."[38]

Second, Christian witness does retain a substantial verbal proclamation aspect, called prophetic speech, which is inseparable from the process of personal and community edification. Penner harnesses a variety of concepts to develop this aspect. He cites the many functions of an apostle (exhortation, encouragement, reproof, etc.), saying that the apostle does not appeal to theoretical reason to justify any of them.[39] Prophetic speech is exemplified in both the lives and the words of biblical prophets. The speech of the biblical prophets was inherently ironic in that it conveyed scandalous messages without trying to validate them rationally for the hearers.[40] Thus, an ethical dimension pervades the mode of prophetic speech or proclamation—how the witness imparts truth is as important as what is spoken. Penner believes the overarching biblical mode is that of

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[36]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 128.

[37]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 129.

[38]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 129.

[39]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 82-83.

[40]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 92-94. Penner carefully notes that he is not referring to irony as a literary device but as a stance. The irony of a prophet's message lies in the fact that it comes from God through a fallible human vessel. The prophet's words are authoritative, even though they may appear unjustifiable to all, including the prophet.

appeal. An appeal to another person is not propositional and objective; it is an existential and subjective process by which "I ask them to believe me because I am interested in what interests them and I understand how they see the world."[41] Through appeal, witnesses embody sympathy and humbly put themselves at the disposal of those to whom they witness. Penner submits that the apostle Paul personified this mode of witness in the early church communities (1 Cor 1:10, 2:3, 9:22).[42]

Finally, the ethics of belief demand a corporate dimension which must collide with the personal elements of witness to make witness truly prophetic. Witnesses must be shaped by their Christian community, by its traditions, and even by those to whom they witness. The task also requires them to challenge their tradition while remaining committed to it. The truths they proclaim apologetically concerning the gospel are always those which have been formed in corporate context.[43]

The End of Apologetics culminates in chapter 5, which warns of disastrous consequences if the ethics of belief and witness are not embraced.[44] Penner dubs these consequences "apologetic violence."[45] He insists that modernity's OUNCE inevitably leads to the objectification of others when, instead of appealing to them, apologists coerce them with clever arguments. People are treated as faceless entities and their subjective interests are ignored when they are given impersonal labels such as "unbeliever."[46] By doing so, modern apologists unwittingly collaborate with the "powers

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[41]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 144.

[42]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 145-46, 152.

[43]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 83-84, 123, 168.

[44]Penner relates the stories of his friends Mabiala Kenzo and John as examples of such consequences. Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 77-78, 135-37. Chap. 4 of this thesis evaluates these stories in detail.

[45]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 148.

[46]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 87, 143-50. Penner censures Craig again in these pages for his frequent use of the term "unbeliever."

of the prevailing culture . . . to participate in or perpetrate what may be called systemic or ideological violence."[47] The public ethos (Kierkegaard's crowd) works to the detriment of humanity and the gospel message because it eclipses any differences between people and immorally perpetuates "the authoritative voice of the established order."[48] Penner considers the situation hopeless and declares that the modern apologetics paradigm should not be rescued with a "damage control operation."[49] In his view, Christians cannot pretend that modernity never happened; they can, however, move forward with prophetic witness built upon the foundation of edification.

Synopsis of *Fool's Talk*

Fool's Talk was published two years after the release of *The End of Apologetics*. Though Guinness does not reference *The End of Apologetics*, the themes and arguments in *Fool's Talk* correspond to many of Penner's concerns. Guinness recognizes that Christian apologetics "have been caught in the wake of the massive crossover between the grand philosophies of modernism and postmodernism."[50] He senses the tension of the times and strives to diagnose the cultural conditions to offer a way forward. Guinness' awareness of this tension provides further confirmation that Penner has rightly identified major issues related to apologetics. However, in contrast to Penner's intent to replace modern apologetics with a new paradigm, Guinness' goal is to recover forgotten dimensions of apologetics that can reinvigorate Christian witness.

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[47]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 157.

[48]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 163. This phenomenon makes witness unavoidably political since witness always takes place in the context of social powers and ideologies (139).

[49]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 171.

[50]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 16. Guinness believes that both modernity and postmodernity have strengths and deficiencies. He refuses to embrace either era as superior, insists that a biblical perspective is paramount, and believes a Christian worldview can accommodate aspects of each era (33-34, 215-16).

Guinness identifies his impetus for writing *Fool's Talk* as the abandonment of evangelism in the West. He also believes evangelism is ineffective because Christians tend to make wrong assumptions about the cultural situation and they must regain "a way of communicating that is prominent in the gospels and throughout the Scriptures."[51] Instead of fixating on arguments, the church needs a reorientation to "winning hearts and minds and people."[52] Such a reorientation requires a deeper understanding of human unbelief and how cultural, spiritual, and philosophical factors influence the ways people think and believe. None of the reforms suggested by Guinness require the disavowal of apologetic arguments, theories, or movements. He intends them to build upon the past and he refuses to denigrate Christianity's apologetics forebears.[53]

Guinness endeavors to convince his readers that his reform project is both necessary and achievable. In chapter 1, he declares that Western Christians "suffer from a glaring weakness": they communicate as though people sense a need to hear what they say, when in fact they do not.[54] In reality, hopes of reaching people with the gospel seem dire because they are more hostile than ever toward Christian influences. Guinness' solution is to recover the ability to persuade creatively. He recounts the story of a secular chauvinist novelist who pacified an antagonistic audience of feminists so that they would hear him out. The novelist exemplified creative persuasion because he "*communicated in a way that made them see his point—despite themselves*."[55] Guinness says such subversive communication can penetrate the hostility and lack of openness to faith that prevails in the West. Lest his readers conclude that persuasion is a secular skill, he also

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[51]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 18.

[52]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 18.

[53]Guinness encourages his readers to consult and benefit from historical and contemporary apologists' arguments and theories in Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 16-17, 50.

[54]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 22.

[55]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 21-22.

includes biblical illustrations of subversive communication at significant intervals in *Fool's Talk*. Above all, he wants his readers to embrace the following premise from the outset: "*there is no one anywhere and at any time to whom we cannot speak constructively*."[56]

Guinness identifies risks that accompany attempts to speak to the culture constructively. For example, in chapter 2 he explains how Christians can be easily seduced by current trends. Modernity has produced a "breathless idolizing of such modern notions as change, relevance, innovation and being on the right side of history."[57] Christians today feed these idols by employing techniques to protect and promote them. Guinness laments that an overemphasis on technique has polluted the practice of apologetics. Jesus did not prompt people using packaged techniques—he attended to them as unique individuals. By implication, apologetics should be viewed as the art of persuasion rather than a science, and one that Guinness insists must be biblical and holistic rather than modern or postmodern.[58] His main emphasis in this chapter parallels Penner's concerns—he wants to stifle the notion that technique is a core element of good apologetics and calls technique "the Devil's bait" which "empties the cross of its power and leaves people lost and floundering."[59] Like Penner, Guinness stresses the importance of apologists' motives, saying, "Love is the 'alpha and omega of apologetics' . . . . Christian advocacy must move from our love for God and his truth and beauty, to our love for the people we talk to."[60]

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[56]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 26-27.

[57]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 30.

[58]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 33-34.

[59]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 41.

[60]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 45.

In chapter 3, Guinness builds his case for why apologetics must continue. Apologetics is an exercise intimately related to the first sin of humankind. Sin has framed God. Lured by Satan, Adam and Eve initiated an insurrection against God's authority and justified it by accusing God for their disobedience (Gen 3:12). All humanity follows their pattern, either by pretending that God does not exist or by pointing the finger at him with intent to hold him responsible for evil and suffering.[61] As his faith-filled children, Christians are compelled to defend God's honor until his name is "*cleared and his existence and character brought to the fore beyond question*."[62] Guinness acknowledges the pressure that this commission could impose upon Christians—it could tempt them to be self-focused and rely on their brilliance and methods to defend biblical facts and the story of the gospel. He offers two reasons to avoid this mentality. First, even the most robust arguments do not produce conversion. The Holy Spirit instills faith and corroborates the apologist's message, even if it is poorly delivered. Second, Scripture represents God as his own best chief counsel. Apologetics is a God-ordained activity, but he has placed apologists in the supporting role of humble servants under his initiative.[63]

Chapters 4 and 5 transition from the overall need to do apologetics to underlying principles that sanction the use of creative persuasion. In chapter 4, Guinness contends that the onset of the Renaissance paralleled the postmodern era. Institutionalized Christianity was worldly and had long used power coercively. Governments oozed with corruption and relativism flourished as shared understandings of authority and social language began to crumble. Furthermore, as society and the church forfeited the ethos (moral character) which had long accompanied classical rhetoric, the church lost its "capacity to stand against the tide of worldliness and address its age with prophetic

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[61]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 49-54.

[62]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 55.

[63]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 58-60.

faithfulness."[64] What can be done in such times? Guinness' answer is to invoke "the foolish designs of the divine fool-maker."[65] Perceiving God and his works through this lens provides "the motive, the basis, and the dynamic for our persuasion."[66] Guinness posits that Christians should model God by serving as his fool-bearers. Like Christ, they must stand ready to absorb the scorn and derision of the fallen world and thereby subversively expose its madness. God himself commissions his fool-bearers and did so most decisively when he made Jesus into a mock king. The crucifixion was the most ironic event in history—weakness subverted sin and overcame worldly power.[67]

To model the designs of the divine fool-maker, Guinness says Christians must sometimes "play the jester, addressing truth to power."[68] Playing the jester often involves pointing humorously to the paradox of the human plight in order to awaken people to faith. Guinness identifies Kierkegaard and Chesterton as thinkers who played the jester artistically.[69] He highlights Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* as a prime example of how Christians may communicate in roundabout ways to a culture that is antagonistic to direct truth claims.[70] In *Fool's Talk,* fool-making and fool-bearing are indispensable aspects of the new ethos Christians must adopt to witness effectively today. These activities encapsulate the modes of creative persuasion Guinness presents as *Fool's Talk* progresses.

In chapter 5, Guinness turns to the issue of truth and illustrates how humans abuse it through willful unbelief. Human rebellion against God and its consequences are

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[64]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 65.

[65]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 78.

[66]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 78.

[67]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 67-70.

[68]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 72.

[69]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 78.

[70]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 64.

pervasive, but the current tendency in the West is to sidestep the implications of unbelief. Guinness supplies a framework for addressing unbelief under these circumstances: the "dilemma" and "diversion" poles.[71] Unbelievers who gravitate toward the dilemma pole tend to be skeptics who admit to the uncomfortable implications of their unbelief and seek to justify it. Most people, however, favor the diversion pole and inconsistently live as though no negative implications of unbelief exist. The hesitancy of unbelievers to explore their incredulity is precisely why God's people must resurrect the biblically-attested creative persuasion that has laid dormant for too long. Chapters 6 through 8 of *Fool's Talk* turn to the overarching means of persuasion that apologists can harness to penetrate unbelief.

Guinness introduces the concept of "turning the tables" in chapter 6. This process requires the apologist to proceed "by taking people seriously in terms of what they say they believe and disbelieve, and then pushing them toward the consequences of their unbelief."[72] The circumstances may call for a "blend of wit, playfulness, and deep seriousness" which frequently characterized G. K. Chesterton's works.[73] Table-turning often entails arguing on the unbeliever's grounds since obstacles must be removed before the gospel can be seen as good news. Unbelievers normally relativize Christianity because they are content with their incoherent worldview or they hold objections that their own worldview cannot shoulder. Either way, Christians know that the worldview of unbelievers is ultimately inadequate and unlivable, so table-turning applies logic, argumentation, and especially the use of questions to bring the frailties of their worldview

[71]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 96-99.

[72]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 109.

[73]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 109.

to the fore.[74] Table-turning may also require apologists to challenge unbelievers, as the biblical prophets sometimes did, to try to live according to their untenable beliefs.[75]

Guinness insists that table-turning must reach beyond epistemic issues to address matters of the heart. Table-turning should be deeply sensitive to the subjective elements that influence belief and consider the life situations of those it engages. True faith grows out of "a positive conviction of the adequacy of Christian faith . . . conviction of the truth of the gospel, and . . . a positive encounter with Jesus himself."[76] For these reasons, Guinness couples the table-turning concept with its more positive cousin in chapter 7: "triggering signals of transcendence." God has "put eternity into man's heart" (Eccl 3:11), and life presents humans with experiences that "beep like a signal, impelling us to transcend our present awareness and think more deeply, widely, and seriously."[77] Guinness says such experiences leave people longing for deeper meaning or challenge them to discard previously held beliefs and seek truth in fresh ways. Consequently, apologists can "expect them and count on them, and then encourage people to listen to such signals in their own lives—and to follow them wherever they lead."[78] He points to poet W. H. Auden's awakening to God's existence as one powerful example of how the signals of transcendence can stimulate unbelievers' primordial passions—desire, joy, sense of loss, and longing to regain.[79] These passions only make sense in the Creator's world, which is fallen yet infused with his truth. Guinness sees two possible paths: those who suppress the signals must eventually yield to them or utterly reject them. People who

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[74]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 112-15, 124-26. Table-turning often involves using unbelievers' own prophets (authorities) to expose the folly of their unbelief.

[75]Examples include 1 Sam 8:22 and Ps 81:11-12. Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 116-18.

[76]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 119.

[77]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 134.

[78]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 136.

[79]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 131-33. Guinness assures his readers that such experiences are commonplace rather than isolated or rare (146).

persist in unbelief and indecision "condemn themselves to be restless."[80] Inasmuch as table-turning addresses unbelievers' flawed reasoning about God, the signals of transcendence are God-supplied appeals to their existential yearnings.[81]

Chapter 8, titled "Spring-Loaded Dynamics," offers increasingly specific methods that apologists can utilize to engage in creative persuasion, most notably the practice of "reframing." Unbelievers often frame God by distorting Christian views about him, caricaturing him as "a god that we could never believe in a hundred years."[82] Apologists must look for opportunities to reframe the issues "and so defend God's name and restore the truth to the distorted view of reality."[83]

Chapters 9 through 11 of *Fool's Talk* deal with pitfalls that can hinder an apologist's effectiveness. To be trusted, apologists must radiate certain gospel-formed qualities, such as respect, humility, virtue, vulnerability, and interest in the public good. Their tone and style should match the substance of their message and they must abhor any self-magnifying desire to be proven right.[84] The use of persuasion is a privilege that "can only be pursued with humility and an overwhelming sense of God's grace to us."[85] Guinness insists that apologists can pursue these qualities without marginalizing the immense value of education or relegating persuasion to a form of manipulation or coercion. Persuasion is necessary in a world ravaged by sin; Christians simply cannot rely

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[80]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 139.

[81]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 142.

[82]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 159.

[83]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 159. For further treatment of reframing and related methods espoused in *Fool's Talk*, see pp. 100-101 in chap. 4 of this thesis.

[84]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 171-76.

[85]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 185.

on the goodwill of sinful, egocentric humans to arrive at corporate consensus concerning matters of truth.[86]

Unfortunately, Christians do not always exhibit the qualities that should accompany their witness. Guinness cites Kierkegaard's lament that millions of Christians "have succeeded in making Christianity exactly the opposite of what it is in the New Testament."[87] When they open themselves up to the charge of hypocrisy, the masses stand ready to convict them. Guinness agrees substantially with Penner on the seriousness of these matters, but he envisions solutions for managing the charges levied against Christianity on the grounds of hypocrisy.[88]

The tension between Guinness' and Penner's models becomes palpable in chapter 11. Guinness asserts that contemporary apologetics "*is poorly understood and openly dismissed as an unworthy and a wrong-headed enterprise.*"[89] A dangerous trend exists even within the church to emphasize proclamation alone and dismiss persuasion. Some say apologetics detracts from the authority of Scripture due to its over-emphasis on reason which purportedly "diminishes a direct reliance on the Holy Spirit."[90] Guinness acknowledges the potential for such erroneous outcomes but denies that the solution is to vilify apologetics and adopt a postmodern outlook on Christian witness. Instead, errors within apologetic approaches must be "diagnosed and remedied by the standards of the Scriptures."[91] Christians must confront both the "dangerously inflated place of reason in

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[86]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 177-81.

[87]Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Attack upon Christendom: 1854-1855,* trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 33, quoted in Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 190.

[88]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 192-208. In addition, see pp. 88-91 in chap. 4 of this thesis for a fuller treatment of the issue of hypocrisy.

[89]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 210.

[90]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 214.

[91]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 215.

modernism and the extreme conclusions about relativism and power in postmodernism."[92]

Guinness concludes *Fool's Talk* with a practical chapter describing four stages that tend to characterize a thinking person's journey from unbelief to faith. He stresses the continued importance of reason, logic, evidence, and arguments as apologists assist people down their path to faith. He pleads one last time for apologists to complement these essential elements by expressing "the love and compassion of Jesus, and using eloquence, creativity, imagination, humor and irony . . . to pry open hearts and minds that, for a thousand reasons, had long grown resistant to God's great grace."[93]

Conclusion

The synopses above further confirm the value of comparing *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* in greater depth. The issues explored in the present chapter illustrate areas of agreement and disagreement between Guinness and Penner concerning the goals, attitudes, theories, and practices of Christian witness. The authors agree that the clash between modern and postmodern perspectives is causing upheaval for the state of contemporary apologetics, and they both see the need for more holistic witness. They also disagree on matters of substantial import. Penner sees little overlap between modernity and postmodernity. He portrays modernity as an interruption of a premodern worldview that was more conducive to Christianity and he concludes that apologetics as devised and practiced during modernity is foreign to biblical apologetics. Guinness observes recurrent patterns in both premodernity and modernity, and he interprets postmodernity largely as a new instance of such patterns. The starkest contrasts between

[92]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 215. For the remainder of chap. 11, Guinness argues that the tendency to abandon apologetics and other staples of Christian tradition is not new. He presents a four-step process describing revisionism, which he believes recurs in history and presently threatens the faithful application of apologetics (217-25).

[93]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 253.

the two authors surface when practical matters are considered—most notably the question of whether apologetics is inherently coercive. The roots of their disagreement can be traced in part to their interpretations of historical and contemporary sources as well as their rival views concerning truth and reason. Chapter 3 will further explore these foundational issues.

CHAPTER 3

FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES

Chapter 2 began to unearth differences between the evaluations of modern apologetics expounded in *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk*. The synopses of the two works exposed dissimilarities between the beliefs of Myron Bradley Penner and Os Guinness concerning the nature of truth. The synopses also revealed differences in how they employ sources to make their cases. The present chapter examines these foundational issues and reveals how they undergird the authors' main arguments. The chapter accentuates the importance of these issues using representative material from *The End of Apologetics*, *Fool's Talk*, secondary works by Penner and Guinness, and additional sources relevant to the task at hand.[1] Analysis of these issues provides a basis for drawing preliminary conclusions about whether *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* maintain fidelity with Scripture and foster continuity with church history in preparation for the comparative analysis of their models in chapter 4.

Epistemological Foundations

History confirms that competing visions for how people define truth and justify knowledge claims can alter social institutions and religious worldviews. The writing of the current chapter commenced during the month of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation is one of the few unmistakable seismic shifts in

[1]Material from each work was carefully selected to highlight the central issues of the present chapter as thoroughly and concisely as possible. The following questions guided decisions concerning which sources and concepts to emphasize: How frequently do both authors employ a specific historical figure? How much does the author depend upon a given source to justify his position? Does the author's use of a source effectively draw attention to his arguments, to problems with his views, or to key differences between *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk*?

the trajectory of Christianity since the resurrection of Jesus. Its long-term consequences have proven vast and irreversible in terms of church theology, practice, and polity. Many influences contributed to the Reformation, but the foremost factors orbited around a central epistemic concern: who or what validates the veracity of Christian beliefs and practices? Biblical and ecclesiastical authority contended for the right to claim epistemic justification for Christian traditions. The result was a whole new direction for Christendom.

Epistemic starting points are consequential. If the models proposed by Guinness and Penner gain traction, their views of truth and knowledge will have paved the way. The following subsections expose key epistemological assumptions that guide their positions. These assumptions also shape the authors' treatments of historical and contemporary apologists, as will be shown as the present chapter progresses. Postmodernism poses unique challenges to this task and will be addressed first.

Perspectives on Postmodern Epistemology

The relationship between epistemology and postmodern thought is crucial to the issues at hand. Guinness distinguishes between postmodernity and postmodernism, the latter being a set of philosophical ideas which people defend and publicly articulate. However, he is far more hesitant than Penner to classify postmodernity as an era of history that is distinct from modernity and able to shake its fetters. Guinness views postmodernity more like a stage in the natural progression of modernity, calling it "advanced modernity."[2] Advanced modernity is characterized by a constant barrage of change and choices which fuel the notion that truth is uncertain and undecidable. Guinness believes this notion is illusory and that full-fledged postmodern relativism is

[2]Os Guinness, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 124-25. While the phrase "advanced modernity" may better capture the essence of the current era, this thesis will continue to employ the term "postmodernity" due to its ubiquitous usage.

ultimately unlivable. In *Impossible People*, he writes, "it is inconceivable to think of a true postmodernity, in the sense of a world after modernity, short of an unimaginable global disaster."[3] Others have noted, with sound reason, that an all-out abandonment of modern ideas and practices is unlikely. Modernity's methods of acquiring knowledge triggered the boon of its advances, and people live each day trusting (subconsciously or otherwise) that truth is objective and that knowledge is accessible.[4]

Penner insists that postmodernity is here to stay but agrees that it must be distinguished from postmodernism. He contends that critics of postmodernism wrongly characterize it as a philosophy, rather than as a broad, developing movement, condition or ethos. Furthermore, he insists that postmodernism is not "reducible to a philosophical set of propositions or doctrines about epistemology."[5] While this statement is essentially true, critics maintain valid reasons for demanding ongoing evaluation of postmodernism as a philosophical system. First, Penner and other postmodernists[6] frequently call for dialogue, but their tendency to generalize can impede discussion and effectively thwart dialogue. The phrases they utilize to explain postmodernity—such as "condition" and "ethos"—are noticeably vague and passive. Their critics struggle to articulate their ideas because postmodernists seem hesitant or unable to do so themselves.[7] Some

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[3]Guinness, *Impossible People*, 63.

[4]Alvin I. Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33, 87; Steven B. Cowen, *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 181-83, 348, 376.

[5]Myron Bradley Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 39. Penner calls postmodernity a "gut reaction" to modernity in Myron Bradley Penner and Hunter Barnes, *A New Kind of Conversation: Blogging Toward a Postmodern Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2007), 32.

[6]Hereafter, the term "postmodernists" will be used to denote postmodern thinkers—those who incline toward, subscribe to, or defend ideas typically associated with postmodern philosophy in academic and popular literature.

[7]Guinness states the problem succinctly: "Postmodernism is a movement and a mood as much as a clear set of ideas, so it often feels as if it is everywhere and nowhere." Os Guinness, *Time for Truth: Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype, and Spin* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 52. Tawa Anderson comments similarly in his review of *The End of Apologetics*, saying that Penner "presupposes postmodernism" but "never outlines what he presumes postmodernism to be." Tawa Anderson, review of *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context*, by Myron B. Penner, *Philosophia*

postmodernists circumvent discussion about the finer points of their views of truth and knowledge, whether by design or accident, and thereby elude identification with any specific epistemology framework.[8] Furthermore, while postmodernists have rightly noted the precipitous overuse of the label "postmodern" in many cases, they also lump their Christian critics into the "modernist" camp with little restraint. They continue to censure modernity's liabilities without sufficiently crediting the many Christians who resist postmodernism but, like Guinness, vociferously decry modernity's blemishes as well. In effect, the dialogue becomes a diatribe not against modernity *per se*, but against Christians who question postmodernism.[9] For these reasons, many Christian scholars believe the onus lies with postmodernists to exhibit a more pronounced propensity and determination to defend their stances.

Second, both homogeneity and variation exist within the advocate base of any movement or philosophical system. Postmodernists hold many positions that are customary among those who self-identify as postmodern. Even if they do not lend their voice to a single, unified philosophy, they surely form a "cluster of philosophies."[10] These clusters project a high degree of solidarity, which is precisely why their critics employ the available label "postmodernism" and address it as a system when challenging their ideas. If postmodernists insist on treating modernity as a distinct system with certain universal characteristics, they can expect their critics to do likewise with postmodernism.

Christi 7, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 241, 244.

[8]Goldman quips that postmodernists "suffer from an affliction that may be called *veriphobia*" and they "deliberately bracket questions of truth and falsity." Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World*, 7. He also considers it "tricky to pinpoint their theses and arguments" (9).

[9]In Penner, *A New Kind of Conversation*, 48-50, several respondents worry that the invitation to dialogue is a facade, and they divulge their agitation with the vagueness of postmodernism. Guinness believes the growing trend to replace defense with dialogue inevitably weakens the church's missional and apologetic efforts. Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 215-16.

[10]Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 12.

Third, Penner confesses that the postmodern movement has "an overall orientation toward epistemic questions."[11] If that is the case, his detractors are justified in diagnosing and addressing the postmodern perspectives on truth and knowledge irrespective of whether they treat postmodernism as a movement, a condition, or a philosophical system. Penner's own stances on truth and knowledge are consequential and beckon evaluation regardless of how developed or structured they are at present. His detractors rightly expect him to present his views with as much clarity and consistency as possible. If postmodernists wish to dismiss established epistemologies, a reasonable precondition is that they would contend for specific, viable replacements—a move that requires answering critical questions about postmodernism's epistemic orientation.[12] Failure to do so stymies the dialogue they ostensibly crave.

Finally, critics of postmodernism frequently cite the tendency of its advocates to gravitate toward new ideas and adopt them hastily.[13] Concerning epistemology, the long-held, dominant position within and outside of Christianity is that truth is objective and propositional in accord with the correspondence view.[14] Postmodernists should not be faulted simply because they question these principles, and neither Penner nor Guinness should be censured for entreating reform. However, Penner lobbies for the abandonment of apologetics, largely based on epistemological assumptions, for an

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[11]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 39.

[12]One would expect to see such questions answered and clear alternatives to modernism presented in Penner, "Blog One: What is Postmodernism?" in *A New Kind of Conversation*. However, Penner 's contributions to the blog threads only reiterate postmodernist dissent: "Whatever else postmoderns are about . . . they are unanimous in their refusal (or better, inability) to see the world as modernity suggests" (32-33). He adds that postmodernists oppose a "flawed conception of reason" as "the final arbiter of Christian belief and practice" (19).

[13]The ease with which postmodernists seem to switch positions on long-held beliefs of the Christian church troubles many evangelicals. Guinness is aware of postmodernism's attraction to newness. He perceives this trend to be a modern mutation of revisionism and a resurgence of Protestant liberalism. Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 223-24.

[14]Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World*, 42; Paul Horwich, "Truth," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 930.

admittedly undefined postmodern paradigm. This approach is more akin to a reformation. God's people have traditionally demanded a very high standard of acceptance for such monumental change.

Martin Luther first set out to correct the church rather than induce the full-scale Reformation. The contemporary situation seems quite different, and less urgent, than when the obstinate Roman Catholic church refused to entertain alterations to their program or practices. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, today apologists are responding to the need for improved practices that can better speak to postmodern concerns. Their willing adjustments may be viewed as a positive trend.[15] The apologetics movement shows hopeful signs that it may well be able to account for significant cultural changes, remain committed to time-tested biblical principles, and continue to honor the contributions of both historical and contemporary apologists.

The Epistemology of Myron B. Penner

The observations in the previous subsection validate the need to examine the epistemologies of Penner and Guinness in more depth.[16] The works of both authors demonstrate that their epistemological views have maintained a consistent trajectory over the course of their careers. Penner's writings tend to stress the theoretical, though not at the expense of practical consequences as evidenced by his frequent emphasis on the ethical dimensions of belief in *The End of Apologetics*. The early development of Penner's epistemology can be traced to his graduate studies, which concentrated heavily upon Kierkegaard's conception of truth as subjectivity. This theme was the focus of his University of Edinburgh Ph.D. dissertation but it first surfaced in his Liberty University

[15]Chap. 4 of this thesis discusses these trends in detail.

[16]The scope of this thesis does not permit a formal validation or rebuttal of any specific epistemology view. This thesis assumes that traditional positions concerning truth, knowledge, and belief are best retained unless they can be disproved decisively and replaced with a clear alternative that conforms more faithfully to Scripture.

M.A. thesis.[17] His presentation of epistemology issues in his M.A. thesis provides a natural framework for evaluating his views, since his subsequent works build upon and amplify the positions he presents within it.

Penner's M.A. thesis analyzed Alvin Plantinga's arguments on the primacy of epistemic environment in the human belief formation process. Plantinga views this process as both community-relative and person-relative. People rely upon testimony and their own perceptions to gain warrant for their beliefs (particularly those that may be considered properly basic).[18] Penner notes a problem: community contexts, personal perception, or both can be skewed and jeopardize the reliability of human cognitive faculties in the formation of properly basic beliefs. These dynamics make it difficult to determine when a given belief has warrant and they confirm that subjective influences are unavoidable and intrinsic to the belief formation process. He argues that Kierkegaard's representation of truth as subjectivity may be the key to keeping warrant for beliefs within reach.[19] Penner writes, "Kierkegaard's point is that if we are to know the objective content of the truth, we must align our actions appropriately and be the kind of person that may receive the truth."[20] We must "create the conditions upon which we may engage in DP [divine perception]" and subjectivity is "the appropriate epistemic environment for DP."[21] Penner says the reality of epistemic environment makes "the proper basicality of belief in God dependent, to some greater or lesser degree, upon our actions."[22] He ends

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[17]Myron Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity" (M.A. thesis, Liberty University, 1995); Myron B. Penner, "Kierkegaard's Post-Enlightenment Subject: The Grammar and Goal of Belief" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2000).

[18]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 56, 59; Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 82, 87-89.

[19]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 67-69.

[20]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 71.

[21]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 73.

[22]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 73.

his thesis declaring, "Kierkegaard's analysis of truth as subjectivity enhances Plantinga's epistemic account, and is actually needed to keep it distinctly Christian, affirming the possibility of exclusive truth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth."[23] All of these factors lead Penner to conclude that a human subject's belief may be warranted as truthful based upon direct experience of God, assuming the subject is properly prepared to perceive the divine and the perception is supported by sufficient community testimony.[24] This assessment coincides with the subject matter of his Ph.D. dissertation, which purposes to recast epistemology as dependent upon ethics. Since humans acquire and cultivate their beliefs by means of social activity and existential self-reflection in the context of a fallen world, the search for knowledge is always accompanied by ethical implications and conditioned by the subjective interests (passions) of the seeker.[25]

Penner's ambition to elevate the importance of virtue in the pursuit of truth is laudable and indispensable for the field of epistemology. However, his intentions are overshadowed by a conspicuous feature found in both his M.A. thesis and his Ph.D. dissertation—these works deal specifically with the *processes* by which humans seek and discover truth, not with the nature of truth itself. Evangelical Christians will readily agree that a properly conditioned subject is a desirable condition for truth discovery, if not a necessary one. However, the very act of discovery implies an objective reality (truth) to

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[23]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 78.

[24]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 59. Penner does not clarify why he concludes that it is preferable to ground belief in God in perception over testimony; he may simply agree with Plantinga. Likewise, Penner neglects to explain why the community component of warrant only requires that "at least one other person in the epistemic community has obtained and sustained that belief apart from testimonial warrant" (79).

[25]Penner, "Kierkegaard's Post-Enlightenment Subject," 258-59, 270-71. Penner arrives at his position by arguing that Descartes, Hegel, and Kant tragically perpetuated the notion that humans are mere autonomous rational agents. Their legacy was the detachment of the search for truth and knowledge from ethics, which Kierkegaard vehemently challenged (27-31). Penner then moves to demonstrate Kierkegaard's view that "a full account of belief must be located within the social and communal dynamics of our praxial engagements with the world" (143). Penner understands Kierkegaard to mean that humans can only accomplish this full account of belief via subjective channels. They do so through "the activity of repentance" for their failure to live transparently and through "ongoing activity in which a constant self-relation to God is sustained" (171). Ultimately, subjective depth and transparency are possible when one "is able to unify one's existence by transcribing it into and through Christ's redemptive narrative" (217).

be discovered. Penner admits that evidence for belief exists, should be sought, and may be found by the conditioned subject "if he assiduously worked at becoming the kind of person who could have recognized the evidence that God had actually provided."[26] Divine perception, then, is a subjective activity or event that pursues an objective result (truth acquisition via evidence). The community-relative aspects of belief formation similarly seek confirmation of an objective reality and constitute part of the warrant to believe it. Penner desires to affirm that truth is objective, as when he notes Plantinga's position that truth "has a non-negotiable objectivity about it."[27] However, he continues the project to define it as partially subjective.[28]

The previous paragraph points to a phenomenon in Penner's writings that suggests the subjective-objective dilemma is only superficial—he sometimes conflates terms or concepts that are rightly kept distinct. Though he attempts to distinguish between truth, warrant, properly basic beliefs, and truth acquisition, he fails to carefully do so in his thesis and dissertation at crucial points. For example, as he summarizes the main findings of his thesis, he diagnoses the impact of Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity upon warrant and properly basic beliefs.[29] However, he refers to the totality of his conclusions as "a Kierkegaardian analysis of truth."[30] This rendering fails to discriminate between the terms truth and belief and blurs the distinction between these

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[26]C. Stephen Evans, "The Epistemological Significance of Transformative Religious Experience: A Kierkegaardian Exploration," *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991): 184, quoted in Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 73-74.

[27]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 63. Penner also provides a definition of truth that parallels correspondence theory: "The truth of a particular belief refers (roughly) to its objective standing in relationship to the laws of logic in such a way that what is said to be true bears resemblance to how things actually are (ontologically)" (7).

[28]Penner distinguishes between truth acquisition and content, but he still insists that truth itself is both objective and subjective. Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 129; Penner, "Kierkegaard's Post-Enlightenment Subject," 115, 121-29.

[29]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 76-80.

[30]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 76.

related but semantically circumscribed concepts. Shortly thereafter, he states that Kierkegaard's analysis of truth as subjectivity helps Plantinga "affirm that belief in God is entirely rational, because it is grounded in DP [divine perception]; and that it is knowledge, because it is properly basic; and that it is true because it has been produced in an appropriate environment for DP."[31] In this case, Penner makes truth subservient to the belief formation process, but nowhere does he demonstrate that truth itself *depends upon* the formation, warrant, or rationality of beliefs.[32]

Penner also endeavors to show that propositions are unnecessary for justification of truth claims, but the task proves difficult. In the beginning of his M.A. thesis, he acknowledges that propositions serve as one necessary element of a belief system and its formation.[33] However, he states in his conclusion that "belief in God is rational for a person even if that person has no good propositional evidence (by way of abductive, inductive, or deductive arguments) in the obtaining or maintaining of that belief."[34] Such belief is rational, he argues, because belief in God is integrated within human noetic structures. Penner contradicts himself at this point—either propositions are necessary or they are not. The incongruity of his argument becomes most apparent when he states that a belief is rational only if it can be held "in such a way that it does not violate the integrity of the rest of the noetic structure."[35] How, then, can a belief be

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[31]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 78.

[32]As mentioned, Penner's Ph.D. dissertation likewise fails to show the dependence of truth itself upon subjective influence or activity. Though he asserts that truth is (partially) subjective, his arguments only imply at best that subjectivity is needed for appropriate and ethical belief formation. Penner, "Kierkegaard's Post-Enlightenment Subject," 259, 269-71. See also Myron B. Penner, "The Normative Resources of Kierkegaard's Subjectivity Principle" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1, no. 1 (March 1999): 80, 83-84.

[33]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 5. Penner's confidence in the role of propositions seems to diminish in his later works. He writes, "Human attempts at systems of knowledge and ideological constructs will always be mired in human sin. . . . Therefore, *all* propositional expressions of truth are approximate." Penner, "Kierkegaard's Post-Enlightenment Subject," 140.

[34]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 79.

[35]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 5-6.

considered rational if it completely omits the supposedly necessary and integrated propositional elements? Far from diminishing the role of propositions, Penner's discussion of noetic structure illustrates the difficulty of discussing matters of rationality without resorting to propositions.[36]

Penner overlooks another feature of the integrated human noetic structure: people inevitably assign a truth-value to the content of any belief they hold whether their truth discovery is person-relative, community-relative, or both. This feature may be what prompts Penner to remind his readers that even though a subject is unable to provide arguments to support a belief, it does not negate the fact that such arguments do exist nor that the subject might acquire and harness them.[37] The subtle implication is that a belief would not really be justified unless valid supporting arguments were possible. Consequently, Penner's explanations create a dilemma: does the presence of truth-ready noetic structures itself justify a belief, or does justification come from the supporting arguments? To state the issue another way, if no such arguments *could* be supplied, would the belief still be justified? The tendency to assign truth-values seems ingrained and active in human nature whether subjects are conscious of it or not. Humans naturally seek rational justification for their beliefs, and this instinct drives them back to a correspondence definition of truth which, in turn, implies truth's propositional predisposition.

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[36]Penner believes that Kierkegaard (pseudonymously through Climacus) finds an alternative to propositions by introducing the concept of doxastic states. Penner, "Kierkegaard's Post-Enlightenment Subject," 236-40. However, as Penner develops the concept of doxastic states he exacerbates the difficulty of discarding propositions. First, he asserts but does not prove that doxastic states "cannot be construed as abstract relations between propositions" (237). Second, the fact that a believing subject does not have a "conscious awareness or propositional attitude toward" their belief that *p* does not eliminate the propositional elements or force of the belief (237). On the contrary, Penner's entire argument continues to assume the existence of some proposition as the object of belief—to the point that sensations and intuition ultimately contribute to the formation of a belief that *p* (240). Even his definition of a doxastic state assumes some proposition (or set of propositions) to be believed as a consequence of the state: "Doxastic states . . . are psychological or mental states of persons regarding some person or object *p*" (237). To summarize, given that such doxastic states exist, under Penner's schema they would merely impact belief formation rather than constitute the object of belief.

[37]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 65-66.

Penner's later writings more forcefully deny that truth is inherently propositional or objective. In *The End of Apologetics*, he takes issue with apologetics that seeks to "justify the objective truth of the propositions of Christian doctrine."[38] However, some of his statements show a continued susceptibility to ambiguity:

> We can, of course, say objectively "true" things directly—like, for example, that it is -27ºC outside this morning or that God was in Jesus Christ reconciling to himself the world. The point, however, is first that these sorts of objective "facts" or statements are only approximately true and are made from a finite, contingent perspective . . . these objective truths (qua objective) are not ultimate, absolute, or the exclusive form truth must eventually take for us to *be in* the truth.[39]

These comments raise more questions than they answer. How does Penner define a Christian doctrine? Must the proposition "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor 5:19) be taken as a normative doctrinal position of Christianity if it is only an approximation? If propositions are inadequate means to express doctrines in a postmodern context, what other means can Christians use to do so? Finally, is it necessary or helpful to devalue cognitive expressions of truth just because not everyone will appreciate or live according to them? The persistence and import of such questions confirms that Penner's epistemology retains liabilities.[40] Forthcoming sections of the present chapter will reveal how some of these liabilities emerge acutely in his interactions with historical and contemporary sources.

The Epistemology of Os Guinness

Guinness appreciates the complexity of the theoretical issues surrounding truth and knowledge, but he resolves to handle them as "practical, public, and positive, not

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[38]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 17.

[39]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 99-100. Penner similarly presents truth as approximate, conditional, contingent, and always revisable for humans in Penner, "Kierkegaard's Post-Enlightenment Subject," 126, 138, 272.

[40]Significantly, near the end of *The End of Apologetics* Penner betrays his own doubts as to whether he has successfully argued for his view of truth. He states that "the reader has misread me entirely" if tempted to interpret his depiction of truth as "arbitrariness, relativism, or denial of objectivity." Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 129.

simply theoretical and analytical."[41] *Time for Truth* contains his most extensive treatment of epistemological matters. In this work, he decries any notion that truth is either personally or socially constructed.[42] Truth is objective in the sense that it is "independent of the mind of the knower, and there to be discovered."[43] Guinness affirms the correspondence view of truth by employing its definition and stressing the necessity of propositions for truth acquisition. In the process, he rejects pragmatist, subjectivist, and relativist views which he believes would deter people from trusting divine revelation on the correct basis—that "the message conveying the invitation is true."[44] Objectively true divine revelation empowers people, in a very practical sense, to "count on it and find it a source of strength."[45]

Guinness recognizes human limitations in the pursuit of truth. While he believes truth is universal (always and everywhere unconditionally true) he acknowledges that human beliefs are provisional. He is careful to differentiate human *belief* as the provisional factor; *truth* is dispensed by God and absolute.[46] Likewise, he rejects the modern rationalist position that truth is "knowable by the unaided intellect without the interference of personal distortions."[47] These careful distinctions reveal a critical contrast between Guinness and Penner concerning their understandings of truth and their utilization of the language of epistemology. Guinness maintains the semantic integrity of

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[41]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 14.

[42]Guinness agrees with Peter Berger that a careful distinction must be made between the sociology of knowledge and determination of the truth of beliefs. Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 33-34.

[43]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 12.

[44]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 78.

[45]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 74-75.

[46]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 79.

[47]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 110.

the concepts of truth, belief, and knowledge throughout his works, thereby avoiding the conflation tendencies to which Penner too often falls victim.

Since postmodern ideology is in vogue, Guinness directs much of his commentary concerning truth toward postmodern accounts of epistemology.[48] However, he is also swift to disavow a modernist philosophical basis for understanding truth. He instead professes his commitment to the Judeo-Christian tradition and unabashedly mines the Bible for its representations of truth.[49] For example, in chapter 5 of *Fool's Talk*, Guinness offers an insightful exposé of the biblical portrayal of the relationship between truth and the fall of humankind. He harnesses a litany of OT passages to illustrate how humans abuse truth through willful unbelief. Humans exhibit unbelief in four specific forms: refusing to hear God's truth (suppression), employing it incorrectly for their own ends (exploitation), setting themselves in God's place (inversion), and accepting only the elements of truth that serve them (deception, self-deception).[50] These entrenched, sinister propensities of fallen humans demand that apologists address the heart and not only the mind. However, the dominating presence of sin precludes reliance upon the goodwill of people to arrive at corporate consensus concerning matters of truth. Reason remains critical because it is "God's instrument to be used in the service of truth."[51] Due to the complex human relationship to truth, which involves both the mind and the will, Guinness remains suspicious of any epistemology that is philosophically based rather than thoroughly informed by Scripture.

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[48]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 78.

[49]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 15, 125. Guinness believes that the Judeo-Christian tradition properly holds together the objectivity of truth and the subjectivity people bring to it." (115).

[50]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 85-89. The insidious nature of sin poses a significant challenge to Penner's ethics of belief, particularly to its corporate aspects. Chap. 4 of this thesis treats this issue in greater detail.

[51]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 94.

As much as fallen, truth-suppressing inclinations plague humanity, the capacity to seek truth remains an integrated feature of God's image-bearers. Guinness observes that humanity's incessant pursuit of knowledge—whether it is for scientific, philosophical, or practical purposes—illustrates how "our intellectual powers and our very disposition as truth-seekers are underwritten by the truthfulness of the Creator of the universe."[52] This reality places truth within humanity's grasp and simultaneously makes truth a highly personal matter. For this reason, Guinness recognizes the vital role subjectivity plays in belief formation. Truth is anything but a mere theoretical concept because its aims are ultimately ethical. Truth must be seized upon and lived:

> Both the objectivity of truth and the subjectivity of our response to it form a sharp moral challenge. . . . Here we face the uncomfortable fact that truth grows more urgent still when it goes beyond philosophy and theory to address character, and personal history—ours.[53]

The issue of subjectivity illumines some of Penner and Guinness' most transparent agreement and their starkest differences. They concur profusely that knowledge of the truth ensues actively living in truth, doing the things that truth requires, and striving to do so as a community of faith. However, the subjectivization of truth, by Guinness' account, is itself a flawed application of modern rationalist thinking. He holds that one may affirm the long-held, traditional views of truth without being blindly steeped in modernity's "profound ambivalence toward faith."[54] His own work and influence as an apologist signal that the subjectivization of truth is not a prerequisite for overcoming the deficiencies of modern rationalism. Guinness provides cogent reasons and stimulates hope that apologetics can rise above modernity's deficiencies without adopting a postmodern epistemic framework.

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[52]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 81. This observation coincides with Penner's view that belief is native to human noetic structures. For Guinness, however, truth itself remains distinct from human beliefs and subjectivity.

[53]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 109.

[54]Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 43.

Employment of Historical Sources

This section explores how Guinness and Penner harness historical sources to support their respective models of apologetics. Guinness references a broad spectrum of apologists and works of church history. His positive tone in each case confirms his intention to appreciate their use of persuasion and affirm their conformity to biblical principles and practices. Guinness utilizes his host of sources without stressing their shortcomings or anachronistically judging their methods based on modern thought categories. He leaves little room to doubt his aspirations to maintain solidarity with Christianity from its beginnings to the present.[55]

Penner also positively treats several apologists of history, though his purpose is to contrast them with contemporary apologetics. At crucial points in *The End of Apologetics*, questions arise as to whether Penner has accurately interpreted and represented these historical apologists' perspectives. His interpretations cast doubt on his model's fidelity to historical understandings of Christian witness. The following subsections examine three historical personalities that are common to *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* to evaluate whether these two books faithfully represent historical apologists in defense of the authors' models.

Augustine of Hippo

Guinness and Penner both enlist Augustine in support of key arguments in *Fool's Talk* and *The End of Apologetics*. Their treatments largely revolve around three major themes that pervade Augustine's *Confessions*. A primary theme is Augustine's intense yearning to know and worship the Triune God, which Guinness and Penner see as an essential disposition of those who engage in apologetics. A second important theme is

[55]Guinness positively cites Augustine, Barth, Chesterton, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Lewis, Pascal, and Schaeffer. He admits his indebtedness to them in Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 19. Notably, many of these personalities span the breadth of apologetic philosophies mentioned in Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005).

Augustine's personal reflections upon his own sinfulness. Guinness considers this subject germane to his efforts to expose the insidious nature of sin and its pervasive effects upon apologetics discourse. A third theme is Augustine's interpretation of the opening verses of Genesis, which Penner sees as buttressing his case for subjective truth.

The worship theme in *Confessions* is apparent even in its genre. *Confessions* is a prayer that is predominantly autobiographical but peppered with regular bursts of praise to God for his acts and attributes.[56] Prominent Augustinian scholars have explored how the work's unique design features contribute to the profile and propagation of the worship theme. Henry Chadwick notes the Psalter's immense influence upon Augustine's life and his substantial reliance upon it for the content and form of *Confessions*.[57] In addition, he perceives *Confessions* as steadily advancing toward its concentration on Genesis in Books 11 through 13, which culminate in praise of God for his transformative works in his people and in his creation. He states that "Augustine understood his own story as a microcosm of the entire story of the creation, the fall into the abyss of chaos and formlessness, and the 'conversion' of the creaturely order to the love of God as it experiences griping pains of homesickness."[58]

Garry Wills contends that Augustine prepared his readers all along for Books 11 through 13, saying, "the text of *Confessions* is haunted by Genesis."[59] Furthermore,

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[56]Traditionally, scholars have believed Augustine wrote *Confessions* intermittently over the course of several years (roughly between 397 and 401 CE). Modern scholars contend that he likely composed it in less than a year as a "sustained single effort." Garry Wills, *Augustine's Confessions: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 10. This view supports the narrative unity of *Confessions* and is also reflected in James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), xiv. Regardless of the precise timeframe, substantial agreement exists that the work aimed to reassure North African inquirers and local believers in Hippo of the veracity of Augustine's conversion from Manichaeism and Platonic philosophy to orthodox Christianity. Wills, *Augustine's Confessions*, 18-21; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo,* rev. ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 151, 156; Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 66.

[57]Chadwick, *Augustine*, 44.

[58]Chadwick, *Augustine*, 68. For Chadwick, this rendering best explains the seemingly awkward transition to Books 11-13, which largely abandon the autobiographical features of Books 1-10 to focus on Genesis.

[59]Wills, *Augustine's Confessions,* 32. The narrative unity of *Confessions* is supported by

Wills stresses the trinitarian focus of Augustine's worship, arguing that each of the final three books highlights a person of the Trinity.[60] Augustine's use of triplets throughout *Confessions* also signals his determination to exalt the Triune God.[61] The trinitarian worship theme is so prominent that it leaves readers with a palpable sense of God's transcendence. An inevitable inference, as Penner aptly points out, is that God himself must be viewed as "the ultimate object of our passion for truth [and] the origin of all wisdom and knowledge."[62] Accordingly, Penner eschews the notion that Augustine sought to know truth in any way that might parallel modern rationalism. He insists that the thirst to know God personally, rather than just facts about him, has enormous implications for the apologetic task. Guinness concurs, saying, "Our goal is not to teach people to come to know something *about* God, but to come to know and love him."[63]

A second relevant theme in *Confessions* is foundational to Guinness' perspectives in *Fool's Talk*: Augustine's profound portrayal of human sin. Augustine's chief interpreters have treated this matter in some depth. O'Donnell and Wills view Augustine's struggle with sinful impulses in the *Confessions* narrative as singularly focused on his efforts to give up sex. By their account, the Milan garden conversion scene in Book 8 is simply Augustine's renunciation of lust—it does not reflect a comprehensive repentance of sin in all its complex manifestations.[64] Chadwick

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ubiquitous references and allusions to Genesis throughout Books 1-10 (13, 76).

[60]Wills, *Augustine's Confessions*, 114-32, 148.

[61]O'Donnell, *Augustine*, 65.

[62]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 116-17.

[63]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 142. Guinness' treatment of Augustine shows substantial overlap with some of Penner's main concerns about apologetics and the human pursuit of truth. For example, he relates how Ambrose of Milan hesitated to teach rhetoric to Augustine because Augustine needed time to develop into a person disposed to receive truth. Arguments would not suffice for Augustine apart from an existential thirst to know God—knowing the truth would serve him if he sought to walk in it (122). This idea parallels Penner's representation of a subject properly prepared for divine perception on p. 34 of this thesis.

[64]O'Donnell, *Augustine*, 69, 74-76; Wills, *Augustine's Confessions*, 59, 68. Matthew Barrett notes that Wills inadvertently signals that deeper motives fueled Augustine's conversion and that "even Wills cannot escape the fact that a 'rescue', a redemption, is in view, not a mere moral reform of a sex addict." Matthew Barrett, review of *Augustine's Confessions: A Biography*, by Garry Wills, *Journal of*

acknowledges Augustine's battle to remain chaste as central to his conversion, but he also cites secular ambition, desire for wealth, and pursuit of honor as motives that composed Augustine's elaborate understanding of human sin.[65] Brown grasps that Augustine could not easily have discarded his love of philosophy, along with the social relationships, the recognition, and the career stability he gained from philosophy.[66] His resolve to pursue chastity must not detract from the many factors affecting his life as it climaxed in the garden scene. Augustine's *Confessions* and his entire written corpus represent human sin as an intricate and multi-faceted reality.

Guinness harnesses the broad implications of Augustine's perspective on sin to expound its modern relevance for Christian apologetics. He notes how Augustine exhibited a keen awareness of the human propensity to love self and to self-deceive.[67] He affirms that the effects of the fall feed a persistent temptation to utilize language and arguments as self-serving means to seek justification and gain power.[68] Self-deception also impedes a believer's worship and an unbeliever's openness to the gospel. Guinness maintains that sin compromises one's ability to walk in God's truth and practice apologetics faithfully. His views comport with the biblical representation of sin's influence upon humanity and fuel his commitment to address the issue of sin with adjustments to apologetics approaches. Since the negative consequences of sin will not completely resolve until the Parousia, Guinness denies that a systematic overhaul of the apologetics movement can eradicate problems with apologetics, as Penner's model intimates.[69]

Theological Studies 62, no. 2 (October 2011): 753.

[65]Chadwick, *Augustine*, 26, 33.

[66]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 93, 98-99.

[67]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 89-90.

[68]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 170.

[69]Guinness' perspectives regarding the influence of sin and hypocrisy upon apologetics are

A remaining issue must be addressed in detail because it is critical for proper assessment of the portrayal of truth in *The End of Apologetics*: Penner's interpretation of Book 12 of *Confessions*. Penner argues that Augustine promotes a subjective view of truth which supports his edification model. He contends that Augustine became perplexed as he struggled to comprehend the initial verses of Genesis and that Augustine eventually concluded that all interpretations under discussion seemed to be true. Penner observes that Augustine maintained his passion fixed on God as the eternal Truth despite his indecision about which interpretation was correct. He insists that Augustine clearly distinguishes the profitable but contingent truths presented in Scripture from God himself, who "is the Truth and the 'fount of truth' as well as the object of our passion for Truth."[70] Augustine has thus made "a radically ironic move that puts Truth outside of our grasp and mastery."[71] This move purportedly freed him to permit fellow Christians to subscribe to any of the multiple interpretations based on their propensity to edify the interpreter, in accordance with the rule of love (*regula caritatis*). Penner views Augustine's approach as archetypical of his own edification model.

Contextual considerations in Book 12 of *Confessions* indicate that Penner pushes Augustine too far. First, Augustine does reflect on the inability of meager human intelligence to fathom "that heaven whose nature lies beyond knowledge."[72] This and similar statements by Augustine certainly affirm that aspects of the created order are incomprehensible to finite creatures, but they do not imply that Augustine thought humans cannot know anything with certainty. Second, Augustinian scholars acknowledge

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treated at length in chap. 4 of this thesis. See pp. 88-91, 102.

[70]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 116.

[71]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 117.

[72]Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 246. If understood in the sense of exhaustively grasping God's transcendent majesty and infinite knowledge, Augustine would concur with Penner that Absolute Truth is beyond the human capacity to fully grasp.

his penchant for symbolism and allegory; his interpretations frequently fluctuate between the literal and the figurative.[73] The early chapters of Genesis posed a particularly intense interpretive challenge for Augustine and he wrestled with the passage from his conversion onward.[74] While Books 11 through 13 of *Confessions* shed significant light on Augustine's complex approach to hermeneutics, the sheer depth and difficulty of the subject matter militates against interpreting the books in isolation from other works by Augustine or using them to formulate a modern day hermeneutic of truth.[75]

Third, Penner subtly implies that Augustine places *all* Scripture in the category of contingent truth. Such a conclusion is unwarranted upon examining the context leading up to Augustine's "provisional interpretations."[76] Prior to this point in Book 12, Augustine establishes a set of truths which he considers indisputable despite the provisional aspects of his understanding of Genesis 1:1-2. He clearly believes that genuinely false interpretations of the passage exist; he denies that any interpretation could be right if it contradicted God's timelessness, his ontological distinction from his creation, or creation *ex nihilo*.[77] He expects solidarity amongst believers concerning such critical, overarching truths of Scripture.

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[73]Chadwick, *Augustine*, 36-37; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 249-52.

[74]O'Donnell, *Augustine*, 84; John J. O'Meara, *Understanding Augustine* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 111-12. O'Meara notes that he made "four attempts to expound this truth and had no final confidence in any of them" (111-12).

[75]In particular, interpretation of Book 12 should be refined by comparison with Augustine, *De Doctrina Christina*, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Augustine composed the first three books of *De Doctrina Christina* contemporaneously with *Confessions*—during the same year if one accepts the timelines proposed by Wills and O'Donnell. An insightful treatment of the intersections between *Confessions* and *De Doctrina Christiana* may be found in Brett W. Smith, "Complex Authorial Intention in Augustine's Hermeneutics," *Augustinian Studies* 45, no. 2 (2014): 203-225. Smith concludes that Augustine maintained that a biblical text's meaning lies with the intent of the author, but that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate author whose intention is paramount (221). Furthermore, Smith observes that "Augustine believes God has provided objective limits for the range of possible meanings. . . . They must remain within the bounds of the Nicene Creed and the clear passages of scripture" (225).

[76]Augustine, *Confessions*, 253.

[77]Augustine, *Confessions*, 249-52. Note especially Augustine's comment that the only kind of person who would doubt these principles is one "whose empty heart makes his mind roll and reel with private fantasies" (252).

Fourth, Augustine does want to acknowledge that various true interpretations can be extracted from Genesis 1. However, he never says that the truths themselves originate in the subjective mental processes of the interpreter, and he nowhere overtly supports that *contradictory* truths should be affirmed.[78] Fifth, Augustine proposes that Genesis 1 contains objective truth that Moses may have understood even though Moses may be misunderstood by his readers.[79] Thus, Augustine operates as though objective truth is present and should be sought eagerly even though it may not be obtained. These observations suggest that his dilemma in Book 12 centers primarily around ways committed believers seek to *justify* their truth claims and tolerate differing views of challenging passages; the book says much less about his beliefs concerning the nature of truth itself and by no means commends a subjective view of truth.

Finally, Augustine is lenient on matters which believers find confusing and encourages them, in love, to permit interpretations that edify their brothers and sisters without contradicting the clear counsel of God. Edification functions for Augustine in Book 12 like a test of a believer's authenticity in the search for truth. Genuine faith is manifest through forbearance toward fellow believers when the truth of a matter is difficult to ascertain. However, Augustine does not make edification a prerequisite for any truth claim and it is doubtful whether he would have supported Penner's model of apologetics then or now.[80]

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[78]A careful reading of Augustine's five possible interpretations of Gen 1:1-2 reveals that any one of them align with his view of God. Furthermore, Augustine seems to believe that the interpretations are not mutually exclusive and could each be simultaneously true. Augustine, *Confessions*, 258-61.

[79]Augustine, *Confessions*, 264, 271. In Book 3 of *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine states, "Even if the writer's meaning is obscure, there is no danger here provided that it can be shown from other passages of the holy scriptures that each of these interpretations is consistent with the truth. The person examining the divine utterances must of course do his best to arrive at the intention of the writer through whom the Holy Spirit produced that part of scripture." Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*,169.

[80]Augustine's unbelieving detractors certainly would not have received his reprimands as edifying. Unlike Penner, Augustine liberally utilizes terms like "unbeliever" in Book 12 of *Confessions*. His posture often contrasts sharply with the picture painted in Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 148-51. Furthermore, John J. Johnson observes that Augustine "spends several hundred pages of his *City of God* engaging in offensive apologetics to show the utter absurdity and wickedness of Roman paganism." John J. Johnson, "Is Apologetics Counter-Productive? An Evaluation and Critique of Myron Penner's *The End of*

Guinness' application of Augustine is more measured and avoids the pitfalls that accompany Penner's interpretations. He places Augustine among the resolute apologists of history who would balk at the notion of dismissing apologetic efforts to persuade unbelievers.[81] His evaluation is justified given Augustine's many treatises in which he sought to impact others to turn to Christ with their heart and intellect. Augustine was aware of the danger to serve his own interests while carrying out the apologetic task, but he would have encouraged Christian witnesses to press on with the vigilance and prudence that Guinness entreats in *Fool's Talk*.

G. K. Chesterton

Guinness and Penner also perceive G. K. Chesterton as an ally for their respective causes. Guinness views Chesterton as a master persuader and depends upon him for multiple practical illustrations throughout *Fool's Talk*. Penner's use of Chesterton is not voluminous but it is sufficient to accent his criticisms of contemporary apologetics. Two of Chesterton's works are particularly relevant for comparison of Guinness' and Penner's arguments: his novel *The Man Who Was Thursday* and his personal account of his attraction to Christianity, *Orthodoxy*.[82]

As with many of Chesterton's works, these books challenge the religious skepticism and pessimism prevalent in the Western world during his lifetime. His primary antagonists were the scientific materialists. Chesterton lamented the implications of their worldview, saying, "The materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest speck of spiritualism or miracle."[83] Even though they

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Apologetics," *Global Journal of Classical Theology* 12, no. 3 (2015): 10n24.

[81]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 213.

[82]G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1908). G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: John Lane, 1908).

[83]Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 41.

presented themselves as pioneers of progress, open-minded, and capable of moral discourse, Chesterton deemed any positivity on their part to be disingenuous—their determinism limited human inquiry and was fundamentally fatalistic.[84] Furthermore, much of what they passed off as rational thinking Chesterton exposed as irrational when lived out to its logical consequences.[85] Chesterton's friend and foremost biographer, Maisie Ward, confirms that his views were not antithetical to science, sound reason, or logic. Chesterton simply believed that unrestrained rationalism shackled the human faculties of reason—faculties which he considered essential to "the abundance of the mind's life."[86]

Penner aspires to capitalize on Chesterton's aversion to modern rationalism. He construes the plot in *The Man Who Was Thursday* as an indictment of contemporary apologetics. Throughout this literary thriller, the good guys look like bad guys and vice versa. Penner contends that the novel's chaotic circumstances parallel the current state of the apologetics movement since "it is not clear where the *real* threat is coming from."[87] He asserts that the apologetics industry "can only exist in conditions of permanent threat and therefore has a vested interest in maintaining a permanent state of emergency."[88] More books, videos, debates, and experts are necessary to sustain the enterprise. Penner believes this cycle is partly driven by a consumerist mentality that engulfs anyone who participates in the frantic efforts to defend God from the attacks of secular modernity. He

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[84]Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 44-45. Chesterton provides numerous examples of logical contradictions in the arguments of the rationalists, who looked for every possible way to criticize Christianity. They jumped from one extreme to the other, one "calling Christianity a nightmare before another began to call it a fool's paradise" (156).

[85]Throughout *Fool's Talk*, Guinness applauds Chesterton's brilliant use of table-turning to expose the irony of the materialists' views and touts him a prototype for today's apologists to emulate. Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 88, 107-9, 114-15, 123-26. See pp. 22-24 in chap. 2 of this thesis for a summary of table-turning and other persuasive forms promoted by Guinness.

[86]Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1945), 190.

[87]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 65.

[88]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 65.

says the underlying problem is that Christian apologists adopt the tools and posture of modernity in God's defense instead of speaking on God's terms—with appeal to faith, tradition, and Christian community. Thus, God is ironically evicted from proceedings in the public square, making them inherently nihilistic.[89] Penner warns that while the contemporary apologetics movement appears to benefit Christianity, it may actually pose a greater threat to the advancement of the gospel than the New Atheism. He concludes that these circumstances "at a minimum should elicit some care and concern among Christians over the cultural and social implications of these dimensions of the apologetic industry."[90]

Chesterton's precise themes in *The Man Who Was Thursday* have long been a matter of debate. The evidence suggests that Penner has misidentified the undercurrent of the novel and stretched its application beyond Chesterton's vision for it.[91] Nevertheless, Penner's conclusions concerning contemporary apologetics are not entirely unwarranted. Guinness is partially sympathetic to aspects of Penner's analysis and levels his own criticisms at the seductive techniques and commercialization that have infiltrated modern Christian practices.[92] In contrast to Penner, however, Guinness exudes optimism that any

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[89]Penner criticizes William Lane Craig and other apologists for contributing to this cycle through participation in the God Debates with the New Atheists. Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 58-64. Johnson agrees that Christian apologetics has a "tendency to devolve into 'big business,' with prominent apologists writing book after book . . . and endlessly engaging with the so-called New Atheists in public debates." Johnson, "Is Apologetics Counter-Productive?" 1-2.

[90]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 66.

[91]In the years following the book's release, Chesterton's critics reacted to its contents with derision and conjecture. Even his own brother voiced cynicism in Cecil Chesterton, *G. K. Chesterton: A Criticism* (London: Alston Rivers, 1908), 137, 189-90. Twenty years later, G. K. Chesterton was still just hinting at the significance of Sunday (the main character in the novel). Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, 168-69. In his autobiography, he provided only partial direction to the public, saying that Sunday represents "Nature as it appears to the pantheist, whose pantheism is struggling out of pessimism [and] so far as the story has any sense in it, was meant to begin with the picture of the world at its worst and to work toward the suggestion that the picture was not so black." G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1937), 102.

[92]Guinness calls this phenomenon "McDonaldization" and cautions against any form of "McApologetics." Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 30-32.

ills plaguing the apologetics movement can be significantly remedied and he prescribes a healthy dose of Chesterton as part of the cure.

By Guinness' account, Chesterton offers essential insights for contemporary apologetics because his world "was remarkably similar to our postmodern one."[93] Rather than abandon rational discourse to face the challenges of his time, Chesterton sought to persuasively confront the extreme rationalist elements of modernity. This goal required him to esteem truth as an objective reality. Douglas Groothuis notes that Chesterton deemed the rationalist agenda to be an affront to truth and genuine rationality. He feared that modern man might even halt its search for truth using reason, though he himself maintained "confidence that truth is available through reason."[94] Chesterton's arguments in *Orthodoxy* support Guinness and Groothuis' assessment:

> A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. . . . We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. We are in danger of seeing philosophers who doubt the law of gravity as being a mere fancy of their own . . . The meek do inherit the earth; but the modern sceptics are too meek even to claim their inheritance. . . . The last chapter has been concerned only with a fact of observation: that what peril of morbidity there is for man comes rather from his reason than his imagination. It was not meant to attack the authority of reason; rather it is the ultimate purpose to defend it. For it needs defence. The whole modern world is at war with reason."[95]

Chesterton remained convinced that truth was objective; views of truth tending toward subjectivity seem to be just the kind of outcomes he hoped to avoid.[96]

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[93]Guinness, *Time for Truth*, 93.

[94]Douglas Groothuis, "Why Truth Matters Most: An Apologetic for Truth-Seeking in Postmodern Times," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47 no. 3 (September 2004): 448.

[95]Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 55-57.

[96]Penner emphasizes how aspects of the Christian faith impacted Chesterton's belief formation in a pragmatic sense, but he fails to account for the breadth of Chesterton's views on truth. Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 75-76. *Orthodoxy* ornately illustrates the sophistication of Chesterton's perspectives. For example, he went so far as to admit being a rationalist himself—in the sense of seeking justification and evidence for his faith "in an enormous accumulation of small but unanimous facts." Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 265. He acknowledges that pragmatism can serve as "a preliminary guide to truth" but that belief in objective truth is still needed (64). Guinness more faithfully interprets Chesterton by recognizing the diverse evidence that pointed him to Christianity's truthfulness—reasons, explanations, encouragement, and the lifestyle of God's people all became truth-telling mechanisms with the power to persuade him.

Finally, Chesterton's interpreters must consider the resulting impact of Christianity's truthfulness upon his life—far from deterring him from practicing apologetics, it motivated him to engage energetically in apologetic discourse. He fashioned arguments, propagated them publicly, and engaged in debates with atheists and agnostics of his day like George Bernard Shaw.[97] Given his epistemic views and his extensive efforts to defend Christianity, it is unlikely that Chesterton would have participated in polemical attacks directed toward Christian apologists. However, one can imagine him expressing dismay, along with Penner and Guinness, over the disaffecting form of some apologists. Perhaps one reason Penner finds the contemporary apologetics enterprise indigestible is that there are too few apologists with Chesterton's winsomeness and wit.

Søren Kierkegaard

In much the same way they employ Chesterton, Guinness and Penner look to Kierkegaard to gain significant support for their models. Guinness states that both apologists represent "the minority party in Christian communication . . . [whose] approach lines up with a powerful strand of persuasive biblical communication, and they bring a timely contribution at a point where many of us in the church are lamentably weak today."[98] From Guinness perspective, Kierkegaard serves as a useful prototype for contemporary Christian apologetics in that he brilliantly harnessed literature to confront critical issues at a time in history when the church needed his insights and methods.

Guinness' default posture is to utilize Kierkegaard in an anecdotal sense. His appreciation for Kierkegaard surfaces in *Fool's Talk* through a plethora of examples

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Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 244-46.

[97]Near the end of *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton writes, "I do not propose to turn this book into one of ordinary Christian apologetics; I should be glad to meet at any other time the enemies of Christianity in that more obvious arena." Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 264.

[98]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 178.

intended to highlight Kierkegaard's literary genius and demonstrate the apologetic thrust of his writings. Several times Guinness cites Kierkegaard's vicious challenges to hypocrisy in the church and his solemn plea for Christian honesty as he neared the end of his life.[99] He observes how Kierkegaard's incongruity theory of humor coincides with a genuine Christian view of reality—a feature of the faith that many apologists, including Chesterton, have heralded as well.[100] Guinness also couples the solemn warnings of Kierkegaard and Augustine concerning the dangerous human propensity to self-deceive.[101] Additionally, Guinness recognizes that C. S. Lewis owed much to all of these apologists, saying that "they each have strengths that complement Lewis's own great arguments."[102] These examples further illustrate Guinness' resolve to look beyond differences between historical apologists and neither condemn nor sanction their deficiencies—he endeavors to emphasize the synergy of their contributions and their longitudinal solidarity.

Whereas Guinness says little about Kierkegaard's specific religious convictions or dogma, Penner depends heavily upon Kierkegaard's philosophical reflections and theological views to support his overall argument in *The End of Apologetics*. The section titled "The Epistemology of Myron B. Penner" in the present chapter of this thesis signaled the importance of Kierkegaard's analysis of truth as subjectivity for Penner's own epistemology.[103] His choice to rely on Kierkegaard for philosophical justification is itself relevant; scholars have long recognized the difficulty of interpreting Kierkegaard's works and settling consequential matters concerning his

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[99]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 84, 190.

[100]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 71, 78.

[101]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 89.

[102]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 107.

[103]See pp. 33-37.

life.[104] Regarding Kierkegaard's theological positions, Lee C. Barrett writes, "Given the amenability of Kierkegaard's corpus to such a variety of interpretations, it is unlikely that any consensus about Kierkegaard as a theologian will ever emerge."[105]

Penner himself is aware of the interpretive challenges that accompany dependence upon Kierkegaard to support his views of truth. He notes in his M.A. thesis that Kierkegaard's account of faith is "unique, if much maligned and misunderstood."[106] He adopts the position that Kierkegaard is an unconventional rationalist, concluding that this shields Kierkegaard's subjective account of truth from accusations of logical contradiction. Despite his espousal of this position, he admits it is dubious:

> What is meant here by calling Kierkegaard a rationalist is to connote that he was not an irrationalist who stood in opposition to the application of any rational principles to Christianity. . . . In any event, for our purposes this is how we will interpret him because interpreted this way his idea is more cogent. If Kierkegaard actually meant something different, so be it; we do not. It is the concept we are concerned with, not an engaging in a defense for an interpretation of Kierkegaard's philosophy (which, by the way, shows promise as the most accurate one).[107]

In *The End of Apologetics*, Penner confesses that the confusion lingers to this day concerning the question of "Kierkegaard's alleged *fideism*."[108] He states, "The typical treatment of Kierkegaard as a fideist is not quite accurate—or at least it is not how I wish

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[104]John Lippett and George Pattison, eds., "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-3; Lee. C. Barrett, "Kierkegaard as Theologian: A History of Countervailing Interpretations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 528-29, 545-46; Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino, eds., "Introduction" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-2. Contemporary apologists also advise caution in approaching Kierkegaard's life and works: "Like many profound thinkers, Kierkegaard is often cited but rarely understood. Perhaps it would be best to say that the project of understanding Kierkegaard is still underway. He is the subject of an unending stream of books and articles analyzing his life and thought in minute detail." Boa, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 346.

[105]Barrett, "Kierkegaard as Theologian," 529.

[106]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 68. See also Penner, "Kierkegaard's Post-Enlightenment Subject," i, 2.

[107]Penner, "Plantinga, Belief in God, and Religious Diversity," 69n60.

[108]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 10. Many scholars have traditionally regarded Kierkegaard to be a fideist. Even if this label proves inaccurate, it would remain difficult to square his views with the belief in a correspondence theory of truth that defends objective, propositional truth as Guinness does. See the section titled "The Epistemology of Os Guinness" on pp. 39-42 in the present chapter of this thesis.

to read Kierkegaard."[109] Penner's comments raise serious questions as to the aptness of so heavily depending upon this unconventional figure as his primary support to substantiate his model. The fact that Kierkegaard's life and works prove difficult to decipher does not altogether thwart his utility, as Guinness demonstrates. However, one wonders why a historical personality who easily eludes definitive interpretation would be chosen as the exemplar for the sweeping changes that Penner proposes.

Finally, both Guinness and Penner draw upon Kierkegaard's most piercing challenges when making their valuations of the contemporary cultural situation in the West. They enlist Kierkegaard's oft-cited illustration of the second kiss of Judas, which he ascribed to the wrong-headed rationalist approaches to defend Christianity.[110] Not surprisingly, Penner applies the illustration to modern rationalism and Guinness extends it to the trends of postmodernity.[111] One may argue that Penner has faithfully interpreted Kierkegaard with respect to the state of Christendom in nineteenth century Denmark.[112] However, Guinness and other apologists would question whether the cultural and ecclesiastical conditions that plagued Kierkegaard's Denmark equate with those that impact the church today. If the contemporary state of the apologetics movement differs substantially from Kierkegaard's context, one may rightly hold reservations about the use of his writings to promote Penner's cause. This observation beckons further analysis of

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[109]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 11.

[110]Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 87.

[111]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 9; Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 225-26. Note that the section on "Kissing Judases" in *Fool's Talk* is focused on a Christian revisionism that Guinness associates with the emergent church movement's postmodernist orientation (224).

[112]Kierkegaard confronted the church in Denmark, believing it to be blindly immersed in nationalism and in modernist philosophical influences that thoroughly permeated society. His criticisms of institutionalized Christianity and its devotees increased in intensity during the latter stages of his life. John W. Elrod, *Kierkegaard and Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), xvi-xviii; C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9. A balanced and insightful summary of Kierkegaard's complex relationship to the church may be found in Anders Holm, "Kierkegaard and the Church," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 112-128.

the contemporary sources in *Fool's Talk* and *The End of Apologetics* in the forthcoming section of the present chapter.

Employment of Contemporary Sources

A primary goal of this thesis is to demonstrate that Penner's model of apologetics unnecessarily departs from historical understandings of Christian witness while Guinness' model promotes continuity with church history. Today's notable Christian apologists represent the most recent link in the long chain of apologists throughout the history of Christianity. Guinness seldom cites a contemporary apologist in *Fool's Talk*, and he normally steers clear of confrontational citations by planting a naysayer to make his boldest points. Penner, on the other hand, strongly criticizes the views of several influential apologists to defend his arguments. Therefore, this section will focus primarily on Penner's evaluations of contemporary sources to appraise whether he has done so fairly and assess whether his evaluations of these apologists legitimately support his claims concerning apologetics.

J. P. Moreland

In *The End of Apologetics*, Penner's most pronounced criticism of contemporary apologists is that they "attempt to understand postmodernism as something primarily conceptual . . . rather than in terms of its overall *ethos*."[113] According to Penner, they are blinded by their dependence upon modern philosophy and epistemology (specifically, upon OUNCE) and "they cannot see their complicity with modernity."[114] This blindness purportedly infused J. P. Moreland's provocative 2005 article "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn." In this article, Moreland argues

[113]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 37-38.

[114]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 40. See p. 11 in chap. 2 of this thesis for a summary of Penner's OUNCE acronym.

that "postmodernism is an immoral and cowardly viewpoint that people who love truth and knowledge, especially disciples of the Lord Jesus, should do everything they can to heal."[115]

Moreland's purposefully polemical tone triggered a strong response from Penner, who rightly pointed out some of the article's weaknesses. However, the notion that Moreland betrays a misunderstanding of postmodernism by treating it as a philosophy rather than an ethos is dubious. Moreland largely *responds* to philosophical arguments made *by postmodernists*. Penner's own works are steeped in philosophical justifications of postmodern ideas and references to philosophers who have promoted them.[116] Since postmodernists gravitate to philosophy, what prevents Moreland from treating their works as philosophically-oriented? Furthermore, Moreland does show a sophisticated understanding of postmodernism and realizes the need to broadly describe it as "a loose coalition of diverse thinkers from several different academic disciplines, so it is difficult to characterize postmodernism in a way that would be fair to this diversity."[117] He clearly indicates his article's intent to address postmodernism from a philosophical vantage point so as to facilitate structured debate.

Moreland's article evidences his acute awareness that postmodernism embodies an ethos. For example, he discusses the practical and moral reasons why postmodernists often reject the correspondence view of truth—from their perspective, it

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[115]J. P. Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (March 2005): 77. Guinness recently made a related remark: "the postmodern church has become a breeding ground for the undecided, for fence sitters." Guinness, *Impossible People*, 111.

[116]Penner's heavy reliance on postmodern philosophers for his views is evident in *The End of Apologetics*, to the extent that some readers have found it objectionable. Richard Rocheford laments that "Penner sees no need to quote the various passages where the apostles engaged in reason, evidence, and debate. He would rather cite from Søren Kierkegaard, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault." See Richard Rocheford, "A Critical Review of Myron Penner's *The End of Apologetics*," Evidence Unseen, December 2013, accessed July 24, 2018, http://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/book-reviews/a-critical-review-of-myron-penners-the-end-of-apologetics/.

[117]Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," 79.

is "a power move that victimizes those judged not to have the truth."[118] Moreland grasps that such beliefs form strands of the postmodern ethos and judges them to portend dire consequences. He believes rejection of the correspondence view of truth inevitably empowers individuals and communities to define truth for themselves, ultimately making them its arbiters, which is a power move of its own.[119] Rather than enhance the significance of human choices or truth judgments, Moreland contends that this move leads to a lack of responsibility for one's choices and can even relegate them to insignificance.[120] Whether Moreland's analyses of these potential effects of postmodernism are right or wrong, they show that he views postmodernism as much more than mere philosophy detached from ethics and social conditions.

The interaction between Moreland and Penner primarily revolves around the nature of truth. Penner expresses his suspicion of correspondence theory and objects to defining truth in entirely metaphysical categories.[121] He rightly shows that Moreland does not escape all difficulties by maintaining truth as a metaphysical concept and justification as an epistemic one.[122] However, Penner does not prove that locating truth in metaphysics is ill-conceived, nor does he present or endorse a convincing alternative. In this case, Alvin Goldman's balanced insight is well-advised: "The various rivals of the correspondence theory are subject to crippling objections, so that the correspondence theory, while requiring further metaphysical clarification, is still the best bet."[123]

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[118]Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," 80.

[119]Moreland's concerns align with Guinness' aforementioned analysis of the human propensity to abuse truth. Goldman provides several illustrations of how replacement of a correspondence view of truth (in this case, with coherentism) does little to resolve the power issue and can even exacerbate it. Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World*, 30-33.

[120]Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," 87.

[121]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 112-15.

[122]Myron B. Penner, "Cartesian Anxiety, Perspectivalism, and Truth: A Response to J. P. Moreland," *Philosophia Christi* 8 no. 1 (Summer 2006): 86-88.

[123]Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World*, 68.

Finally, Penner undermines his arguments with distortions of the views of truth held by Moreland and other apologists. He asserts that Moreland is a victim of Cartesian anxiety who "thinks of truth in all-or-nothing terms and one either has it all (absolute) or one has falsity."[124] In *The End of Apologetics,* he says proponents of objective truth maintain that "the truth about something tells us the way it really is, and does that in a way that no other description of it could also be true. . . . They believe humans grasp the full and complete truth about things as they really are."[125] Correspondence theorists would heartily disagree with this conclusion. Instead, they would say that the truth about something tells the way it really is *in a way that no contrary description of it could also be true*. Thus, truth is objective and absolute in the sense that it is incontrovertible (independent of whether a subject recognizes it as such) without being exhaustive to the exclusion of other truth statements that correspond to the same reality. Penner's assessment of Moreland harkens back to his tendency to conflate concepts: belief in objective truth does not imply the belief that one may acquire exhaustive knowledge of it. Penner continues to denounce a view of objective, absolute truth that correspondence theorists, like Moreland, do not subscribe to either.[126]

William Lane Craig

William Lane Craig is Penner's primary foil in *The End of Apologetics*. Penner interacts substantially with Craig's defense of classical apologetics in *Five Views on*

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[124]Penner, "Cartesian Anxiety, Perspectivalism, and Truth," 87n5.

[125]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 114. Similarly, in his Ph.D. dissertation Penner argues that Hegelian philosophy has firmly planted Cartesian anxiety in the modern mind with "the epistemological assumption that human cognition and reason have unimpeded access to reality in its fullest and deepest expressions." Penner, "Kierkegaard's Post-Enlightenment Subject," 33.

[126]Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 65, 70-71. Also, note Moreland's discussions of psychological and rational objectivity and his comments about modest foundationalism and certainty. His remarks show that he does not hold an all or nothing perspective about truth as Penner intimates. Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," 81-84. In a dialogue with Penner, one blogger stated the matter succinctly: "All that is necessary is that we have sufficient knowledge as opposed to exhaustive." Penner, *A New Kind of Conversation*, 14.

Apologetics. He begins by providing a summary of Craig's conversion followed by an appraisal of his knowing-showing paradigm, which Craig developed to describe the complex relationship between faith and reason.[127] According to Craig, Christians can *know* Christianity to be true by the direct witness of the Holy Spirit, but they normally *show* it to be true using arguments and reason. Penner finds it ironic that Craig was moved to faith by the exemplary lives of his Christian friends in high school but later considered it necessary to resort to arguments for defense of the faith. Craig admits that Christ is so real to him that he would still believe even if he could suddenly no longer support his faith rationally. Penner concludes that Craig is so deeply influenced by modernity's endemic OUNCE complex that he feels compelled to witness using reason and arguments, even though it contradicts his own experience.[128] Thus, Craig becomes the prototype in *The End of Apologetics* for Penner's appraisal and disavowal of contemporary apologetics as a form of "apologetic positivism."[129]

Each contributor to *Five Views on Apologetics* acknowledges the insights of Craig's knowing-showing paradigm while expressing some reservations.[130] However, Penner draws some baffling conclusions that stem from various oversights and omissions as he reads Craig. Most notably, he examines several of Craig's comments concerning the Holy Spirit and interprets him to mean that "when the unbeliever does not accept the straightforward proclamation of biblical truth—the Holy Spirit then needs our further witness of arguments."[131] A careful reading of Craig shows that he considers arguments

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[127]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 22-26.

[128]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 22-26, 90. For the full development of Craig's position, see Craig, "Classical Apologetics," in Cowen, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 26-55.

[129]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 44.

[130]Cowen, *Five Views on Apologetics,* 62-63, 67-68, 77-78, 83. The book's contributors agree that Craig's knowing-showing paradigm steers far clear of rationalism. The intention of the current subsection of this thesis is not to defend Craig's paradigm, but to illustrate that Penner has misrepresented key elements of Craig's positions.

[131]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 26n11. Strikingly, Penner makes this assertion after

to be *one* of the many means by which God's Spirit guides unbelievers to faith; he never implies that the Spirit is unable to work apart from apologetic intervention. Craig declares that "for the unbeliever as well as for the believer, it is the testimony of God's Spirit that ultimately assures him of the truth of Christianity."[132] By Craig's account, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not accessible to the unbeliever prior to conversion to produce the perpetual internal attestation of the gospel's truthfulness. Nevertheless, the Spirit convicts the unbeliever of the truthfulness of the gospel en route to conversion—whether by arguments, evidences, or other means.

Craig signals in his *Five Views on Apologetics* essay that his knowing-showing paradigm is not a byproduct of modern rationalism. For example, he champions Martin Luther's distinction between the magisterial and ministerial uses of reason: "In its magisterial use, reason stands over and above the gospel like a magistrate and judges its truth or falsity . . . in its ministerial role, reason submits to and serves the gospel."[133] Throughout this section of his essay, Craig repeatedly concedes the subservient role of reason and evidence while expressing his own reservations about modern rationalism. Penner cites none of these instances in his criticisms of Craig in *The End of Apologetics*.

As Penner's criticisms of modern apologists unfold throughout *The End of Apologetics,* he insists that they superimpose modern rationalist assumptions upon premodern works. He focuses heavily on Craig's support for the apologetic use of natural theology in *Reasonable Faith*. Penner believes that Craig has wrongly interpreted Thomas Aquinas' views and supplanted them from their premodern context:

> Craig (and other contemporary apologists) seems to invoke Thomas's natural theology without paying much attention to the theological (and what is the same to Thomas, philosophical) assumptions that underlie them or even making a passing

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acknowledging at the beginning of this same footnote that it is not Craig's stated position.

[132]William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 47.

[133]Craig, "Classical Apologetics," 36; Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 47-48.

> reference to the premodern context that informs Aquinas's thought. For instance, Craig argues that natural theology is entirely focused on presenting "arguments and evidence in support of theism independent of divine authoritative revelation." But it is not at all incidental that Thomas formulates his "natural theology" in the theoretical context of the rest of his theology, which presupposes a certain understanding of the structure of reality (or metaphysics) and assumes the existence of God . . . When premodern Christian thinkers engage natural theology, their appeal is always situated within a specific set of practices of the community of faith—the life of devotion and prayer that gives their worldview its context and meaning."[134]

Penner concludes that Craig and other contemporary apologists have overlooked the fact that "the motivation then, for undertaking natural theology is primarily *dogmatic*, not *apologetic* in the modern sense."[135] Penner's evaluation of Craig here requires unpacking. First, in the immediate context in *Reasonable Faith* from which Penner quotes Craig, Craig is not specifically referring to the natural theology of Aquinas but to its popular usage today.[136] Second, in the subsequent chapter of *Reasonable Faith*, Craig does evaluate Aquinas' natural theology. He shows sensitivity to Aquinas' context even though he does not provide an in-depth analysis of the differences between modern and premodern conceptions of the world. Craig concurs that Aquinas did not argue for natural theology as the exclusive basis of faith apart from divine revelation. He agrees with Aquinas that there are "truths that completely surpass the capability of human reason."[137] Taking these factors into account, Craig's treatment of Aquinas hardly resembles a modern rationalist or naturalist superimposition.

Finally, while Penner is right that Aquinas' focus was normally on the development and authentication of dogma as conceived within Christian community, Craig identifies a genuinely apologetic thrust in Aquinas' use of natural theology. He cites *Summa Contra Gentiles* as one example, in which Aquinas says that where truth

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[134]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 43.

[135]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 43-44.

[136]Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 24.

[137]Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 32.

exists that "the research of reason is able to reach . . . we must proceed by demonstrative arguments whereby we can convince our adversaries."[138] In *Summa Theologica,* Aquinas affirms the value of natural theology for unbelievers, saying that "philosophers came to the knowledge of God not otherwise than by natural reason."[139] Thus, Craig provides cogent evidence that Aquinas, in these instances, was considering the ramifications of natural theology *for unbelievers*.[140] These important features of Craig's arguments are inexplicably absent in *The End of Apologetics,* casting doubt on whether Penner has interpreted him carefully.

Douglas Groothuis

Many of Penner's criticisms of Moreland and Craig are equally directed toward Douglas Groothuis. Penner reissues his charge that all three apologists are unable to understand postmodernism and cannot perceive their own enslavement to modernist influences.[141] Like Moreland, however, Groothuis offers substantial evidence that he grasps the multi-faceted nature of postmodernism and treats it with ample versatility. Thirteen years before *The End of Apologetics* was published, Groothuis produced *Truth Decay*. The book contains lengthy analyses of postmodernism, describing it as both a philosophy and a condition.[142] Penner interacts directly with *Truth Decay* only three

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[138]Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.9, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates, & Washbourne, 1924), 16.

[139]Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.32.1 obj. 1, trans. English Dominican Fathers from the Latest Leonine Edition (London: Burns, Oates, & Washbourne, 1921), 60. In this text, Aquinas warns believers not to over-rely on theological arguments because faith is required to believe in theological realities (such as the Trinity). For this reason, theological arguments often lack "the utility of drawing others to the faith." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.32.1 resp. 1, trans. English Dominican Fathers, 62. Aquinas contends that it is normally better to enlist natural reason to dispose the unbeliever to faith, rather than appeal to principles that they will ridicule due to their inability to comprehend truths that may be grasped only after they believe.

[140]Accordingly, Guinness recognizes Aquinas as an "unashamed apologist" in Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 213.

[141]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 40-41.

[142]Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 32, 52-59.

times in *The End of Apologetics,* and the extent of the interaction is limited and relegated to footnotes. In two of these instances, Penner contends again that Groothuis has wrongly read postmodern arguments as prescriptive rather than descriptive of the times.[143] In the other instance, he states that Groothuis' portrayal of postmodernism has been sufficiently rebutted by Carl Raschke in his book *The Next Reformation*.[144] Raschke does challenge Groothuis' positions on propositional truth, correspondence theory, and foundationalism in some depth. However, the most noticeable feature of Raschke's interaction with *Truth Decay* is that it repeats Penner's charge: modern apologists use the term "postmodernism" too broadly and wrongly understand postmodernity as a philosophy rather than a condition.[145] The debate over this matter appears to have arrived at an impasse with no foreseeable end in sight.

Perhaps the most conspicuous complaint that Penner directs toward Groothuis, Craig, and Moreland is that they see all worldviews "as if they were philosophical positions and propositions that are more or less disembodied and disconnected from the practices and practical concerns of everyday life."[146] Groothuis correctly identifies this charge as a false dichotomy in a direct response to *The End of Apologetics*:

> Penner condemns the modern apologists for defending Christianity as a set of rationally compelling *propositions*, rather than as practices such as worship, confession, witness, and so on. . . . But none of the mentioned apologists deny the need for Christian devotion through these practices. . . . I know of no major apologist who advocates intellectual assent *at the expense of* devotional actions.[147]

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[143]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 57n19, 62n34.

[144]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 41n50.

[145]Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 16, 20.

[146]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 41.

[147]Douglas R. Groothuis, "Caricatures of Reason and its Users," *Christian Research Journal* 37, no. 5 (2014): 53.

In similar fashion, Penner contends that contemporary apologists appear more concerned about defending their epistemological positions than about sharing the gospel.[148] This tendency purportedly stems, in part, from a lack of humility on the part of apologists. He cites John Stackhouse's book *Humble Apologetics* as providing some helpful direction in this area but concludes that it does not go far enough; the only viable solution is to abandon apologetics altogether.[149] Groothuis, however, identifies troubling statements in *Humble Apologetics* and reflects on the dangers they pose:

> A tendency toward tentativeness about objective truth—hidden under the guise of "humility"—is advocated in a recent book by an evangelical writer. While rightly warning of the dangers of arrogance and triumphalism in apologetics, John Stackhouse affirms an attitude quite foreign to the great apologists of Christian history by claiming that Christianity cannot be known to be true "beyond a reasonable doubt." . . . Certainty is no vice, as long as it is grounded in clear and cogent arguments, held with grace, and is willing to entertain counter-arguments sincerely.[150]

Here, Groothuis identifies several relevant issues. First, he acknowledges the dangers of arrogance and the need for humility in apologetics; he simply denies that such dangers require the adoption of postmodern approaches to Christian witness.[151] Second, Groothuis discloses his deep concern that Christian truth be esteemed as knowable. While not every stated doctrine or tenet of Christianity should be regarded as settled knowledge, the notion that biblical Christianity itself may be untrue is foreign to the Bible's own self-attestation.[152] Third, Groothuis is not protecting the concept of truth for its own sake. He wishes to maintain a social and intellectual climate conducive to belief in the gospel. He does so out of genuine concern for unbelievers, as evidenced in his writings and those of

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[148]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 42.

[149]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 8-9; John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[150]Groothuis, "Why Truth Matters Most," 447-48.

[151]Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 12-13.

[152]John 8:32, 1 Tim 2:4, 2 Tim 2:25, 1 John 5:13.

his contemporaries.[153] On these grounds, Groothuis vehemently opposes the notion that Stackhouse's formulation of humility aligns with historical Christianity.

Groothuis sees the need to champion humility and tackle the potential drawbacks of granting it undue emphasis. He deploys Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* to illustrate that historical apologists held the same view. Chesterton delivered a dire warning against the exaltation of humility that could lead people to doubt truth or deny that it is within the grasp of reason.[154] In *Fool's Talk*, Guinness presents self-awareness of hypocrisy as one culprit of timidity to stand for truth: "humility and candor can be taken too far, to the point where people who know they are hypocrites are reluctant to say anything affirmative at all."[155] These treatments of humility illustrate that it is a multidimensional virtue with potentially undesirable repercussions, and they challenge the notion that apologetic arrogance is as pervasive and insurmountable as Penner contends.

Conclusion

The present chapter of this thesis examined foundational issues relevant for the comparison of Os Guinness' *Fool's Talk* and Myron Penner's *The End of Apologetics*. It emphasized the epistemological structures that underlie each author's works, their employment of historical apologists, and their views of contemporary apologists. The chapter also explored whether the authors have sufficiently supported the need for their models for present-day Christian witness. The following paragraphs summarize the findings and main conclusions of chapter 3.

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[153]These contemporary apologists often stress the importance of exposure to Jesus Christ via the Scriptures, and they express their heartfelt concern for the advancement of the gospel and for the souls whom they hope will embrace it. Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 181-82; Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 19.

[154]Groothuis, "Why Truth Matters Most," 448.

[155]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 195.

Penner admits that his postmodern perspective is a reaction against the defects of modernity. Guinness and Penner agree that many theoretical and practical elements of modernity are unbiblical and incompatible with Christian witness. Penner and other postmodernists insist that postmodern solutions must be enacted. However, Penner's writings give insufficient consideration to the solutions offered by Christians who actively seek to address modernity's shortcomings without embracing postmodernism.

Epistemological assumptions undergird all suggested models for reform within apologetics. At present, postmodern renderings of epistemology are not well-articulated alternatives to traditional formulations of truth, knowledge, and belief. Liabilities afflict Penner's accounts of his own epistemological views. He betrays a tendency to conflate concepts and has not demonstrated the inadequacy of traditionally held conceptions of objective and propositional truth. Guinness' epistemology is more carefully articulated and aligns with historical perspectives. Furthermore, his persuasion model is partly an attempt to address concerns which Penner also holds—most notably, accommodation of the subjective influences upon belief which apologists have sometimes neglected.

Guinness and Penner rely on shared historical sources including Augustine, Chesterton, and Kierkegaard to support their models. Penner's interpretations of these authors are strained at best; he overextends the applicability of their works in his attempt to justify his model. Furthermore, Penner overlooks how the practices of these historical Christians affirm the merit of apologetics. Their lives and writings point to the continuing relevance of maintaining apologetics as a key element of Christian witness. Guinness' interpretations and applications of these authors are astute and harmonious with his objectives. He sees their continued usefulness for today's apologetics movement and effectively draws upon their capacity to fuel and promote his persuasion model.

Penner's justification for the necessity of his edification model is based primarily on his disagreement with the views and practices of contemporary apologists such as Craig, Moreland, and Groothuis. However, he misrepresents their stated purposes

and positions when making his most critical contentions. Guinness, on the other hand, applauds some of these same apologists for their contributions and presumably envisions a significant role for them within his model. He views their labors as a continuation of the chain of historical Christian witness which need not be broken.

The topics examined in chapter 3 facilitate the formulation of tentative conclusions concerning the viability of Guinness' persuasion model and Penner's edification model. Thus far, Penner has failed to demonstrate the need to abandon the contemporary apologetics movement. His critics rightly question whether a drastic overhaul of apologetics theory and practice is advisable. On the other hand, Guinness' persuasion model is a possibly warranted solution to the deficiencies of contemporary apologetics. One can see how his emphasis on persuasion and incorporation of more holistic elements into apologetics provides a feasible framework for the future of the movement.

This thesis has exposed significant strengths and limitations in Guinness' and Penner's efforts to justify their views, but it has not yet proven nor disproven the aptness or utility of either of their models. The comparative analysis to follow in chapter 4 examines the most critical contentions in *Fool's Talk* and *The End of Apologetics*. The analysis facilitates final conclusions concerning each model's biblical fidelity and potential value to propel Christian witness forward in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 4

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The End of Apologetics by Myron Bradley Penner and *Fool's Talk* by Os Guinness present models of apologetics that overlap significantly in their subject matter and implications for Christian witness. This thesis commenced with the proposition that these two works make for ideal candidates to observe how the philosophies of apologists derive from a combination of their presuppositions and personal experiences. Both authors communicate candidly and present their positions with passion and little ambiguity. *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* intersect thematically and seek solutions to many of the same problems with apologetics principles and practices. The juxtaposition of their works confirms that many of the problems are real and solutions should be pursued within the contemporary apologetics movement.

The present chapter assumes that the reader is well-acquainted with the content of *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* or has already read chapter 2 and chapter 3 of this thesis. Chapter 2 presented synopses of *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* to expose areas of agreement and disagreement between the two authors and familiarize the reader with key terminology. Chapter 3 examined foundational issues that undergird the perspectives put forth in these two works. The views of the two authors diverged regarding the acceptability of postmodernism, the nature of truth, and the interpretation of historical and contemporary apologists. However, both authors agree that many interpersonal and social dynamics contribute to the shaping of apologetics practices. The present chapter compares significant overlapping themes in *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* which address these dynamics. Furthermore, this chapter inspects how these two works apply Scripture to support their models.

The Problem of Professional Apologetics

To begin his third chapter of *The End of Apologetics*, Penner recounts the heart-wrenching story of his friend John. John professed to have lost his faith, but he was admittedly saddened by the existential consequences of this development in his life. Two graduate seminary students had just finished an apologetics course with an apparently haughty but popular professor. Upon hearing that John no longer believed, the two students sought to re-convert him using apologetics tactics. John found their attempts offensive and petitioned them to stop, but the two students continued to assail him with questions and arguments. Penner's conclusions seem warranted: the students demeaned John by treating him as an evangelism project and disrespected him by overlooking the experiences and emotions integral to his faith crisis. Their posture and actions failed to demonstrate the truth of Christianity to him.[1]

This story and others like it legitimize Penner's concerns about how apologists operate. Penner believes these students were themselves victims of the expert-crowd phenomenon, as evidenced by their tight association with the popular apologetics professor. They garnered motivation and legitimized their apologetic toolset based on his expertise, and he presumably fed off of their approval and reliance upon his know-how. Penner concludes that the expert-crowd phenomenon is ubiquitous, unmanageable, and a main culprit of the ills of Christian witness. Guinness is sensitive to the phenomenon but believes the church is situated to curtail it. The subsections below assess the two authors' perspectives concerning these matters.

The Expert and the Crowd

The expert-crowd phenomenon appears early and frequently in *The End of Apologetics*. Penner believes that Kierkegaard's distinction between a genius and an

[1]Myron Bradley Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 77-78.

apostle explains why this phenomenon exists and signals the measures needed to counter it. He contends that apostolic witnesses speak based on God's revelation and endorsement, whereas modern apologists speak by the authority of their own reason due to the influence of modern rationalism. This trend continues due to the persistent support of those who attend their events and buy the stream of products emanating from the apologetics movement. Penner wonders how debates between Christian apologists and atheist scientists can benefit anyone—particularly when so few people comprehend the minutiae of the scientific concepts presented.[2]

Penner faults modernity for the expert-crowd phenomenon and lauds premodernity as superior throughout *The End of Apologetics*. He asserts, "The Enlightenment is marked by an attempt to free human thought from its dependence on external sources—such as traditions, assumptions, or other authorities. . . . This project is critical to secular modernity because it has stripped away from the premodern cosmos its implicit *raison d'etre*."[3] He laments that modernity has superseded premodern notions of the divine *logos* as reason permeating the universe, which has made reason the "possession of individuals."[4] Reason becomes the human instrument to "measure, categorize, and exercise intellectual mastery and control over an otherwise brute and irrational universe."[5]

For decades, Guinness' publications have noted unhealthy connections between Christianity and modernity that coincide with those cited by Penner. He frequently condemns modern rationalism for stimulating worldliness in society and the church, and he laments that it fosters an ambivalent disenchantment with God's sovereign

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[2]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 48.

[3]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 29.

[4]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 30.

[5]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 30.

guidance of creation.[6] Guinness also agrees that modernity has wrought a mindset that every problem must have a rational solution with an expert to deliver or confirm it—a perspective very in line with the concept of Kierkegaard's crowd.[7]

Penner's warnings warrant careful reflection, but elements of his position are problematic. To begin, premodern constructions of the divine *logos* derive from Platonic and Stoic philosophies that do not comport with early Christian thought or biblical representations. The premodern *logos* was decidedly more pantheistic and incompatible with Jesus, the incarnate Logos of John 1.[8] Penner himself distinguishes between God and the cosmos, but he does not show how the premodern *logos* does so. Accordingly, he makes a flawed case that a premodern philosophical setting would prove innately superior to modernity for the development of Christian belief and practice.

Penner's attraction to premodernity presents further difficulties when considered alongside the expert-crowd phenomenon. One could argue that modernity actually liberated the Western world from many extreme manifestations of the phenomenon. Throughout centuries of the premodern era, the Roman Catholic church administered a hierarchy within Christendom that buttressed firm clergy-laity distinctions. The church's deterrence of non-Latin translations limited the common people from direct access to God's word.[9] The magisterium retained jurisdiction over the interpretation of doctrine and administration of church polity prior to the Reformation.[10]

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[6]Os Guinness, *The Last Christian on Earth: Uncover the Enemy's Plot to Undermine the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 11; Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 48.

[7]Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, 51, 63; Os Guinness, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 115.

[8]Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 356-61, 368, 481-82.

[9]David S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 6, *The Middle Ages, from Boniface VIII, 1294, to the Protestant Reformation, 1517*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 722-28.

[10]David S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 5, *The Middle Ages, from Gregory VII, 1049, to Boniface VIII., 1294*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 772-80. Of course, the

Many complexities characterized the transition to modernity, so certainly not all consequences of the Renaissance and Enlightenment fit the calamitous depiction that Penner presents. Modernity opened doors to expansive production of written works and exchange of ideas still enjoyed in the West today. These aspects of modernity facilitate important checks upon intellectual elitism which are embraced by the contemporary apologetics movement.[11] The movement sustains an impulse to guard against the expert-crowd phenomenon at a practical level as well as in theory. Widespread efforts are underway to make the tools and arguments of apologetics accessible to the masses. Apologists openly encourage lay members of churches, including teenagers, to harness the resources of apologetics to strengthen their faith, protect them against the aggressive intellectual attacks against Christian beliefs, and promote the gospel winsomely.[12] Dissemination of ideas seems to be the *modus operandi* of the apologetics movement, rather than the protection of proprietary rights to arguments or the preservation of authoritative roles.[13]

For these and other reasons, some scholars detect a false dichotomy in Penner's application of Kierkegaard's genius-apostle distinction. In his largely favorable review of *The End of Apologetics*, Brad Seeman acknowledges that the New Atheists present formidable challenges to the church and he wonders how Christian witness would

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Catholic church did not always enjoy the full respect of the populace. However, one wonders how the premodern world would have facilitated the individual and community edification results envisioned by Penner given the extent to which the laity was often unempowered by the established religious order for centuries prior to the Reformation.

[11]Penner argues that modern apologists breed such intellectual elitism because they are entrenched in rationalism—an assertion already exposed as dubious. See pp. 53, 57, 61-65 of this thesis.

[12]Sean McDowell, ed., *Apologetics for a New Generation: A Biblical & Culturally Relevant Approach to Talking about God* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 25, 158-59.

[13]Obviously, proprietary restrictions are in place for publication purposes, and apologists' works gain recognition as they become widely known. For example, William Lane Craig developed his own version of the Kalam cosmological argument for the existence of God. Regardless, Penner does not provide examples of intentional efforts by contemporary apologists to hoard their intellectual property or insist upon its superiority over the offerings of other apologists.

fare without some intelligent apologists responding to the challenges with objective answers. He inquires, "What role should 'apostles' who happen to be 'geniuses' play?"[14] In similar fashion, John J. Johnson exposes the dilemma of Penner's position:

> Penner says that he is not advocating a completely "argument free" Christianity. But though he several times makes the claim that he is not opposed to all evidential arguments in favor of Christianity, he never tells us which arguments in his estimation are worth pursuing. So, it seems to me that Penner has no way to distinguish one religious "apostle" from another.[15]

Finally, contemporary apologists themselves have noted the danger of the expert-crowd phenomenon. Ravi Zacharias edited *Beyond Opinion* eight years prior to the publication of *The End of Apologetics*. His introduction to the book includes a subsection titled, "Apologetics is Not Just for Experts." He intends the book to "encourage and challenge the nonexpert to feel comfortable talking about the gospel without feeling the burden of needing a high level of philosophical training."[16] Guinness trumpets his own viewpoint on this matter: "God forbid that we ever see the day when we have a guild of apologist experts to provide all our public answers. . . . Christian persuasion is a task for all Christians, not just the expert few."[17] He cautions against viewing apologetics as "a chess game in which our task is to . . . checkmate all objections and make us invincible Grand Masters in argument."[18] While these apologists' sentiments

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[14]Brad Seeman, review of *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context*, by Myron B. Penner, *Trinity Journal* 35 NS, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 376. Similarly, Guinness believes certain Christian expert apologists have played a critical role in the apostolic mission of the church by countering powerful influences that dissuade belief in the gospel: "A distinguished cadre of brilliant Christian philosophers, scientists, historians, sociologists and theologians has risen in the last generation with books and arguments that make the new atheists sound shallow, strident and irrational." Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 217.

[15]John J. Johnson, "Is Apologetics Counter-Productive? An Evaluation and Critique of Myron Penner's *The End of Apologetics*," *Global Journal of Classical Theology* 12, no. 3 (2015): 20.

[16]Ravi Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith We Defend* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), xix.

[17]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 37.

[18]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 38. Statements like these demonstrate Guinness' substantial agreement with Penner that rationalist tendencies can lead Christian witnesses to view apologetic discourse too much like a science. Nevertheless, the thrust of *Fool's Talk* is not to supplant the role of reason in apologetics, but to reinstitute persuasion as a more personal, artistic form of engagement that mitigates

do not vanquish the problem of the expert-crowd mentality, such exclamations illustrate a mainstream determination to surmount the problem; apparently the expert-crowd phenomenon is not as all-pervading as Penner purports.

Experts in the First Century

The expert-crowd phenomenon can also be seen in the first century and further illustrates why uniquely correlating it with modernity is a misguided enterprise. The NT devotes significant attention to the social efforts and influences of false prophets. The early church considered them dangerous because they possessed a keen ability to attract followers and lead many astray from the genuine apostolic teaching. Jesus warned of their wiles and the apostles fought vigorously to counter them.[19] The formation of rabbinic schools and the creation of a class of professional scribes also validates the tendency of the premodern public to band together with the like-minded and sanction preferred leaders. First and second century Jews lauded certain teachers for their oral skill and literary achievements.[20] The Catholic magisterium, which significantly prescribed the direction of Christianity for more than a millennium, may be viewed as a fully institutionalized premodern expression of the expert and the crowd.

Biblical precedent poses the chief challenge to Penner's idealization of an elitism-resistant premodern context. First Corinthians 1:10-18 offers a gripping illustration of how the expert-crowd phenomenon beset one of the original first-century church communities. The Corinthian Christians formed splinter groups and named their expert of choice based on their specific teachings or other enticing attributes, prompting

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unbridled rationalism.

[19]Matt 7:15, 24:11; Acts 20:29-30; Col 2:18; 2 Tim 2:17-18, 3:6-8; 1 John 4:1.

[20]Ferguson comments on the influence of Hillel, Shammai, Rabbi Akiba, and Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, some of whom were treated with near veneration for their lives, work, and talents. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 490-92.

the apostle Paul to condemn the church's mentality. The Corinthian situation proves that genuine dangers of personality cults and professionalization can surface in any age.

In sum, Penner omits important biblical and historical data to arrive at his conclusions regarding the problem of professionalization in apologetics. Modernity cannot be the root cause of the expert-crowd phenomenon if documented premodern parallels appear in Scripture and have characterized human behavior in other eras of history as well as modernity. Penner overemphasizes the dangers of professionalization in *The End of Apologetics* and overlooks hopeful signs of improvement in the present era. Guinness and other high-profile apologists are astutely aware of society's susceptibility to personality cults and commercial excesses. They advocate promising efforts to counter such obstacles, which suggests that the problems are not as entrenched and debilitating as Penner insists. To further alleviate the expert-crowd phenomenon, Guinness would point to another problem which he and Penner speak to profusely: the problem of unbelief, which is the subject of the next section.

The Problem of Unbelief

John's story in the previous section surfaces genuine concerns about how Christians should treat those who do not trust in Jesus or in the biblical testimony. Under Penner's model, apologetics must be an edifying activity that is "*person-preserving*."[21] He contends that apologists often violate the dignity of people who are not Christians by treating "those without faith *en masse* under a universal category such as 'unbeliever.'"[22] Employing this impersonal vocabulary is egregious in his view, so he reproves William Lane Craig for including a section titled "The Unbeliever" in *Reasonable Faith*. Penner believes such labels betray a dehumanizing tendency, asserting that "the goal here is to

[21]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 148

[22]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 148.

change 'the unbeliever's mind' rather than edify the person."[23] The subsections to follow expose several problems that afflict Penner's position on this matter and demonstrate how Guinness develops a more balanced and biblical approach.

Biblical Perspectives on Unbelievers

The most glaring weakness with Penner's reticence to use the term unbeliever is its frequent appearance in Scripture. The apostle Paul uses it unapologetically in the NT, where it appears in noun form in 1 Corinthians 6:6, 7:12, 10:27, 2 Corinthians. 6:14, and 1 Timothy 5:8. Strong distinctions between believers and unbelievers abound in Scripture even when "unbeliever" is not the label of choice. Sometimes Jesus and the apostles compared believers to the "Gentiles," as in Matthew 6:32 and Ephesians 4:17-20. They used such terms in a non-pejorative but candidly disapproving sense in order to highlight the foolishness, futility, and moral impoverishment of unbelief.[24] Were the biblical authors wrong to employ such labels to evaluate and influence their culture? Did they thereby objectify and treat the people of their day as faceless entities? Surprisingly, Penner omits any discussion of these passages or similar biblical examples.[25]

Penner does qualify his position though, saying that his refusal to label unbelievers "does not rule out vigorous disagreement with (or rigorous critique of)

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[23]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 149n26. Craig's section on unbelievers is not intended as a derogatory affront against non-Christians. It is written to Christians to motivate them to share the gospel with confidence that the Holy Spirit works in unbelievers to inspire faith. Incidentally, in this section Craig affirms that faith is a matter of the heart and declares, "When a person refuses to come to Christ, it is never just because of a lack of evidence or because of intellectual difficulties. . . . No one in the final analysis really fails to become a Christian because of lack of arguments." William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 47.

[24]Guinness points out that "the Bible uses many strong terms to describe unbelief, including *hardening, twisting, blindness, deafness, unnaturalness, lies, deception, folly, rebellion,* and *madness*." Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 85. All of these characterizations derive from the fallen human predisposition to "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18).

[25]This omission is also observed by Richard Rocheford, "A Critical Review of Myron Penner's *The End of Apologetics*," Evidence Unseen, December 2013, accessed July 24, 2018, http://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/book-reviews/a-critical-review-of-myron-penners-the-end-of-apologetics/. Due to the biblical endorsement of the term "unbeliever," this thesis employs it without reservation as a description and without any intent of condescension.

someone's beliefs or worldview or their reasons for belief."[26] This statement reveals the impulse to confront unbelief and implicitly classifies individuals as believers or unbelievers even though it circumvents direct labels. The classifications are indispensable because they identify the very differences that generate meaningful dialogue and reveal the presence of a context for witness. For this reason, Guinness is not opposed to using the term "unbeliever." He implores Christian witnesses to discern the presence of unbelief because "unbelief in any form is not open to God and his good news."[27] The task of apologetics is to expose and challenge incredulity, so recognizing the intensity and nature of a person's unbelief can open channels of communication—including the kind of vigorous disagreement that Penner envisions under some circumstances.

Like Penner, Guinness would never endorse treating unbelievers as impersonal entities who merely need epistemic conversion. He upholds that "we should therefore never view unbelief as flatly theoretical, loftily neutral, or merely as a worldview that people just happen to have. . . . [because] *the heart of apologetics is the apologetics of the heart*."[28] Guinness views unbelief as a corollary of the fallen human will and a profoundly personal matter because it plagues each individual. Although Christians have a renewed will to live for God, they retain the propensity to disbelieve and commit moral evils. This propensity is a crucial "point of contact we have with every single human we ever meet."[29] The point of contact appears wholly negative at first glance, but it impels Christians to confront unbelief out of respect for their neighbor as a co-equal. Guinness believes Christians must persuade their neighbors to accept God's truth, rather than sinfully suppress it, because they are image-bearers endowed with the capability of

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[26]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 148.

[27]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 110.

[28]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 93.

[29]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 95.

knowing truth. In his popular publication *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, Cornelius Plantinga shares this viewpoint and, without mincing words, offers a compelling vision of the Christian responsibility to address sin and unbelief:

> In general, we ought to pay evildoers, including ourselves, the "intolerable compliment" of taking them seriously as moral agents, of holding them accountable for their wrongdoing. This is a mark of our respect for their dignity and weight as human beings. After all, what could be more arrogant than treating other persons as if they were no more responsible than tiny children or the mentally maimed? What could be more offensive than regarding others not as players but only as spectators in human affairs, including their own?[30]

Plantinga presents his comments in the context of a discussion of sinful human actions. Nevertheless, they accord well with Guinness' anatomy of unbelief. All humans are culpable moral agents who sin and have no excuse for rejecting God's truth and revelation (Rom 1:20). Christians do no service to their neighbors by leaving them to feel justified in their unbelief. They dignify their neighbors and treat them as co-equal image-bearers by unmasking their unbelief and sin. For this reason, Guinness views exposure of unbelief as a crucial step in leading a fellow human being toward faith and proper expression of their image-bearing responsibility.

Practical Issues Concerning Unbelievers

Penner's fears concerning terminology are not altogether unwarranted. Derogatory or even perfunctory use of such vocabulary may produce adverse side-effects. Christians who think too frequently with a segregating mindset may experience a subconscious impact upon their internal motives and attitudes. The consequences may be manifested in how they relate to their neighbors. Penner explains:

> When I engage "the unbeliever," I am less concerned with who they are; how their cultural concepts, categories, and symbols function to convey the gospel; where

[30]Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 66.

> they are in their spiritual journey; or why they believe and think like they do, than I am with whether they acknowledge a specific set of beliefs.[31]

Fool's Talk again offers helpful checks upon such a mentality. Guinness recommends that apologists consistently discern the specific nature of the unbelief that plagues those to whom they speak and relate. His dilemma and diversion poles orient Christian witnesses toward identifying both emotional and intellectual reasons that may cause an unbeliever to resist faith in Christ. Is the person gratified by his or her current beliefs and lifestyle? Does he or she object to Christianity for specific reasons?[32] The starting point is to thoughtfully and lovingly listen to the formative story behind the person's life.[33] This approach parallels Penner's insistence that a witness sympathetically seek to "understand how they view their world, what their interests are, and why they do what they do."[34]

Regarding terminology, Guinness emphasizes the continual need to acknowledge the insidious nature of unbelief, but he suggests that words like "seeker" may on occasion be used to describe the trajectory of a person in whom the Holy Spirit appears to be working—a person who is responsive to dialogue and introspection concerning belief in God and the gospel. However, Guinness warns that care is needed to determine if seeking is really taking place.[35] The teachings of Scripture beckon followers of Jesus to cautiously consider how they understand movement from unbelief to belief. Their conclusions will impact how they speak to and about those who have not professed faith in Christ.[36]

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[31]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 151.

[32]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 96-98, 113.

[33]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 112, 232. Guinness' emphasis on personal conversation is not incidental. Like Penner, he expresses reservations about methods of Christian witness designed for public forums. However, he is not opposed to participating in them and frequently does so himself because "some Christians are superbly gifted in using this format" (58).

[34]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 145.

[35]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 119, 235.

[36]The apostle Paul taught unequivocally that those whose wills have not been transformed by

Thus, reasons exist to maintain clear distinctions between believers and unbelievers with fervor and wisdom. Employing the terminology of unbelief follows biblical precedent, takes the fallen human condition seriously, and may open the doors of communication toward redemptive outcomes. Penner holds valid concerns about the verbal and attitudinal posture that apologists assume, but his solutions stray beyond the limits of the biblical pattern. Guinness' model holistically accounts for biblical and social dynamics related to unbelief and Christian witness. The subsection to follow highlights the next significant theme in *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* that relates to the attitudes and lifestyle of apologists.

Living and Speaking the Truth

Jesus said to his disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Years later, Peter would write, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12). Penner takes seriously the biblical mandate for Christians to live consistently with what they claim to be true and thereby show the subjective realities of the Christian faith.[37] He states that only Christians who fully internalize the truths they profess will holistically reflect those truths in their words and deeds. He says Christian truths "do not exist for us or those to whom we witness apart from our full testimony."[38] Likewise, Guinness advises that the first responsibility of Christians is "to live lives that support

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the Holy Spirit through conversion are "dead in the trespasses and sins" in which they walk (Eph 2:1). The Scriptures generally present belief and unbelief as states rather than a continuum. However, they contain examples of the path to conversion which suggest that the Holy Spirit operates existentially in the life and circumstances of an individual en route to faith. For example, the disposition of some of the Athenians changed upon listening to Paul. Although many mocked his message, others exuded curiosity that implied openness and movement toward belief. Some even believed before Paul left for Corinth (Acts 17:32-34).

[37]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 90.

[38]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 130.

what we say."[39] The following subsections examine whether *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* sufficiently address these matters and whether they convincingly represent the contemporary apologetics movement's competence to reflect the holistic testimony envisioned in the two works.

Trends in Contemporary Apologetics

When Penner compares modern apologetics with Scripture, he perceives an irresolvable tension between presenting objective apologetic arguments and representing Christianity as "a way—of life, of being in the truth."[40] Implicit in his position is the assumption that the contemporary apologetics movement is incapable of faithfully representing biblical Christianity. John's story again serves as an instructive practical example of Penner's viewpoint. The two seminary students incited a negative subjective response from John during their exchange; they failed to truthfully witness to Christ by neglecting John's felt needs and exhibiting attitudes and conduct that were not Christlike.

Such emotionally charged events are formative and demonstrate how personal experiences inescapably intertwine with the faith formation process. John's story confirms that Penner has identified yet another potential problem with apologetics practice: Christians can, and sometimes do, witness in destructive ways. However, Guinness would balk at the notion that contemporary apologetics lacks the elements of holistic testimony needed to faithfully represent Christ. He acknowledges that many who practice apologetics exhibit flawed conduct that should be corrected, but he vehemently disagrees that their defects entirely invalidate their verbal proclamation.

Several points may be offered to substantiate Guinness' perspectives. First, the story about John is moving not because the actions of the two seminary students were

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[39]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 189.

[40]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 90.

acceptable, but precisely because they were appalling. Guinness would certainly condemn the way the students treated John. Arguably the vast majority of Christians (apologists or otherwise) recognize the waywardness of the students' approach and would instinctively strive to conduct themselves in a much more loving manner when sharing the gospel. Penner himself admits that the illustration is an exaggeration and that "not all apologists think and act like the two who confronted John."[41] The John story seems to fit so well in the agenda of *The End of Apologetics* only because, if it were the status quo, decisive and revolutionary modifications to contemporary apologetics would be in order.

Second, the current positive trends and trajectory of the contemporary apologetics movement advise against its overhaul. As already noted, Guinness is a zealous proponent that humility, compassion, and sensitivity to the subjective experiences of unbelievers must undergird faithful witness to the gospel. Furthermore, prominent apologists agree with Guinness that these qualities accompany a vibrant testimony of one's relationship with God and that all are central to witnessing efforts. A survey of some of their recent works confirms this assessment.[42] Douglas Groothuis opens his *Christian Apologetics* with several pages that advocate for the spirituality of the apologist while reminding his readers that humility and intellectual pursuit of Christian truth are not mutually exclusive:

> One may have a sword (arguments) but lack a shield (godly character). . . . Humility is the cardinal virtue of the apologist (and of every Christian). Humility does not require abjuring religious certainty in favor of intellectual timidity. . . . Humility lives only in love. We love God only because he loved us first; we love others and want them to live as lovers of Christ because God loves them and has commissioned us to love them as well. So the virtues of love—patience, kindness, endurance, truthfulness, and so on—should animate all apologetics (1 Corinthians 13).[43]

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[41]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 79. Penner does not supply any examples of prominent apologists directly treating an unbeliever in such a rude manner.

[42]Penner does not reference any of the works mentioned in the remainder of the present subsection, though all were written prior to *The End of Apologetics*.

[43]Douglas R. Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 37-38.

Other contemporary apologists expand on these themes. William Lane Craig renders highly intellectual arguments in his works and public presentations, but he also relays stories of deeply personal encounters with people that illustrate his concern for their specific needs and desires. He insists that apologetics should be "relational, humble, and invitational."[44] He ends *Reasonable Faith* by emphasizing an apologetic of love for others inspired by 1 Corinthians 13: "When people see this—our love for one another and our unity through love—then they will in turn be drawn to Christ. . . . For the ultimate apologetic is—your life."[45]

Recent publications illustrate a remarkable diversity of thought amongst contemporary apologists concerning the relationship between lifestyle and witness. The chapter titled "Renovating of the Soul" in J. P. Moreland's *Kingdom Triangle* implores Christians to attend to their faith formation through spiritual disciplines. By doing so, they can become equipped to confront modern tendencies toward individualism, form authentic relationships with others, and live attractively for God's kingdom.[46] Ravi Zacharias authored *Beyond Opinion* as a call to believers to internalize the arguments they use to promote the gospel. He expresses "little doubt that the single greatest obstacle to the impact of the gospel has not been its inability to provide answers, but the failure on our part to live it out."[47] The twelve contributors to *Beyond Opinion* challenge Christians to examine their motives and learn from their encounters in unique ways. As part of their apologetic task, readers are encouraged to expand their capacity to love others (including their enemies), adjust theological emphases that may be unbalanced, visibly exemplify

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[44]Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 19.

[45]Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 407. Even though Craig and Groothuis did not design these particular works to tackle the lifestyle, manner, or attitudes of apologists, they still consider these elements of Christian witness important enough to address.

[46]J. P. Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle: Recover the Christian Mind, Renovate the Soul, Restore the Spirit's Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 141-42, 146-47.

[47]Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, xiii.

Christian community, concede personal inadequacies, and even provide Christian-based community refuge for the lonely.[48]

Other prominent apologists openly illustrate the intersection between their own lives and their witness. Josh McDowell presents his moving personal testimony in the introduction to *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and ends by reminding his readers that "Christianity is not something to be shoved down your throat or forced on you."[49] In a transparent account of his own, Sean McDowell explains his failure of sensitivity during a conversation with his hairdresser; he realized that he should have worked harder to understand her life circumstances before suggesting logical answers to her questions.[50] These apologists' efforts and experiences align with Penner's insistence that they be built up and edified by the truths they proclaim and demonstrate to others.[51]

The examples in the preceding paragraphs demonstrate that the leading figures of the apologetics movement are keenly aware of the challenges of modernity, the profoundly personal elements of Christian witness, and their shared humanity with those who have not trusted in Jesus. Their dispositions exude evidence of loving compassion for humanity and an eagerness to address their own shortcomings. They aspire to meet non-Christians on their ground and remain sensitive to the subjective experiences that influence their relationship to God. These outcomes are of the very sort one would hope to find, and they give credence to Guinness' more optimistic portrayal of the contemporary apologetics movement in *Fool's Talk*. Furthermore, they illustrate that

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[48]Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, 78, 103, 105, 268, 328-29.

[49]Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), xiii.

[50]Sean McDowell, *Apologetics for a New Generation*, 24.

[51]The examples in the present subsection indicate an implicit impulse within genuine evangelical Christianity to adapt to changing circumstances and culture without sacrificing the core elements of biblical teachings and the gospel message. People frequently stereotype older believers as unchanging, uncompromising, and unwilling to accept the insights of younger Christians. Many of the Christian thinkers just mentioned are in the latter stages of their lives and have practiced apologetics for decades, yet they are leading the charge to make adjustments alongside younger generations of believers.

Penner overlooks relevant data about the field of influential apologists in his analysis of the current situation.

The Problem of Hypocrisy

The positive trends recounted in the previous subsection do not prove that contemporary apologists have resolved all tensions between the verbal proclamation and lifestyle elements of Christian witness. Christians can say that they desire a vibrant and faithful testimony, but consistently accomplishing such a feat is much more challenging. Guinness contends that "hypocrisy is a massive challenge for the Christian faith and for all of us as Christians. . . . it squarely undercuts our testimony before we may have said a single word. . . . In my view, hypocrisy is second only to the problem of evil and suffering that is the so-called rock of atheism."[52]

Penner would heartily agree with this statement, but once again the difference between the two authors lies in the nuances of their proposed solutions. Penner's solution in *The End of Apologetics* is to promote the ideal. He states, "The full testimony of a witness, then, is the dialectic between what the witness professes and the manner in which this is embodied in the witness's life and actions."[53] He cites the powerful examples of the prophets Ezekiel and Hosea, who willingly endured harsh circumstances to represent the truth from God which they also proclaimed verbally. Guinness, likewise, recalls how Jeremiah suffered profound embarrassment before his own people to model his commitment to God and his word. He relates Jeremiah's example to Christian witness by reminding his readers that "faithfulness in a fallen world carries a cost."[54]

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[52]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 189-90.

[53]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 106.

[54]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 68.

At first glance, such statements would seem self-evident. However, while they speak to what a witness *ought* to be, they do not account for what witnesses *are* in many cases. Scripture contains evidence of witnesses who speak truthfully and effectively despite the impurity of their motives or lifestyle. For example, the prophet Jonah refused to obey God initially and only reluctantly preached to the Ninevites. His judgmental spirit plagued him to the very end of the narrative, at which point God chastised him for his lack of compassion. Nevertheless, his message proved crucial for the Ninevites; its truthfulness remained intact, and it moved them to act despite Jonah's deeply flawed character (Jonah 4:1, 9-11).[55]

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus rebukes James and John for calling down fire on the Samaritans (Luke 9:51-55). These were some of the same men Jesus had recently sent on an evangelism and healing campaign (Luke 9:1-6). They were the very men who asked Jesus to give them seats of privilege in heaven (Mark 10:35-37). Given their track record, one can only imagine how many times they must have said or done things to unfaithfully represent God as they witnessed. Other NT teachings confirm the tension between the verbal profession of Christian witnesses and their ability to embody the message they deliver. The following segment of Paul's epistle to the Philippians confidently affirms that the truth-filled message of the gospel is distinct from the flawed methods and motives of the messenger:

> Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. (Philippians 1:15-18)[56]

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[55]This evaluation stands in stark contrast to Penner's statement that "the message of prophets like Amos—and even more so, Jonah—are often of the sort that can be falsified by us if we change our behavior." Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 86.

[56]Paul does not consider the actions and motives of the messengers to be unimportant, and he challenges misguided messengers when appropriate (Gal 2:11-14). He acknowledges believers' culpability for their flaws, but he ultimately trusts God's sovereign oversight of any discrepancies between their verbal testimony, motives, and actions (1 Cor 3:12-15, 4:4-5).

Penner does not deny that Christians will sin and falter in their testimony, and he affirms that they will struggle to be faithful.[57] The problem is that his model neglects to account for the possibility of legitimate witness apart from the intensely faithful holistic testimony he advocates. Guinness, while agreeing that hypocritical living is inexcusable, denies that it inevitably thwarts the verbal proclamation of the gospel: "A truth claim needs to be distinguished from the baggage carried by those who affirm the claim. . . . *If the Christian faith is true, it would still be true even if no one believed it, or if all who did were hypocrites*."[58]

Guinness supports his position on hypocrisy with several points that contrast starkly with Penner's more idealistic stance. Ironically, Guinness argues that believers can harness hypocrisy in apologetic discourse because it nicely confirms the core Christian message—that all humans are sinners in need of salvation. Everyone falls prey to hypocrisy; even Christianity's most pious detractors are guilty of it at times. Hypocrisy highlights the fact that "deception is endemic to humanity."[59] When unbelievers rage against the hypocrisy of Christians, it exposes their awareness of the pristine virtue to which they wish to hold humanity accountable. Their complaint invites a solution only obtainable through the gospel since "no one has ever offered a sterner but more gracious and effective cure to hypocrisy than Jesus."[60]

Guinness carefully warns Christians not to flaunt this argument; his main concern is to prevent the problem of hypocrisy from scaring believers into hiding.[61] They may continue to speak out for Christ while admitting the hideousness of hypocrisy and

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[57]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 106.

[58]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 196.

[59]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 192.

[60]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 207.

[61]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 192-194.

sin. He implores all Christians to honestly confess the church's hypocrisy as well as their own while vigorously pursuing a more faithful walk with God.[62] Hypocrisy, if handled rightly, need not be a barrier to our witness but can instead serve as a "powerful attraction to Jesus and his way of life."[63]

The value of Guinness' elaboration on hypocrisy is that it tolerates the ongoing imperfections of Christian witness without condoning sinful actions. Even the interactions of redeemed witnesses are not pristine, nor void of impure motives, nor immune to subtle mistreatments of those to whom they witness (Jer 17:9). If their defects necessarily invalidate their arguments, no hope exists for faithful gospel witness.[64] These observations make the model offered in *Fool's Talk* decidedly more balanced and tenable than the model presented in *The End of Apologetics*. Penner allows little room for Christians afflicted by fallen frameworks of thought (like modern rationalism) to engage in legitimately prophetic witness. Guinness' model opens the door for flawed witnesses committed to a process of dynamic growth and can welcome the positive trends within today's imperfect apologetics movement.

The Nature of Prophetic Witness

Much of the discussion in the previous sections stressed shortcomings that obstruct the effectiveness of apologetic efforts. The present section endeavors to expose the biblical characteristics of faithful prophetic witness through further comparison of *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk*. The subsections to follow will analyze major

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[62]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 202-206.

[63]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 208.

[64]Guinness notes that "it is fashionable today to prattle on about 'transparency,' 'authenticity,' 'accountability' and 'sincerity' as if these were easily attainable." Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 192. He considers the notion that believers can cease altogether to be truth-twisting hypocrites to be a chimera and dangerously idealistic.

tensions between Guinness' and Penner's models to inform final decisions regarding the biblical fidelity of their respective philosophies.

Proclamation versus Argument

Throughout *The End of Apologetics* Penner expresses considerable reservations about the use of arguments in Christian witness. He takes aim at argument-laden apologetics practices with the accusation that they constitute "rhetorical violence. . . . a kind of violence we perform through our acts of persuasion—our rhetoric."[65] He strongly favors a proclamation-oriented witness that strives to communicate the unembellished tenets of the gospel.[66] In contrast, Guinness worries that the prevailing inclination within Western Christianity to gravitate toward proclamation alone diminishes the vital importance of reasoned arguments for Christian apologetics. He warns against pitting faith and reason as rivals, saying, "the step of faith is fully rational. . . . it is certainly more than rational because it is a commitment of the whole person."[67] He holds that "the rationality of a profoundly warranted faith . . . provides the grounding for a proper trust in reason that rationalism has never found."[68] Consequently, Guinness remains suspicious of any model that overemphasizes proclamation and downgrades the role of reason.

In *Fool's Talk*, Guinness includes few examples of biblical support for the validity of using arguments. He assumes the ongoing role of reason and logic since they

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[65]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 148n25.

[66]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 146, 146n21. Penner says that "Paul steadfastly resists any form of persuasion with the Corinthians other than the message of the cross and the power of the Holy Spirit" (146). To support this claim, he cites Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 121-29. However, Witherington acknowledges here that Paul used arguments and rhetoric extensively in his speeches and writings—to the point that "there are passages that reflect real rhetorical skill and polish" (123). In the case of 1 Cor 2:1-16, Paul strove to avoid arrogant and "ornamental or Sophistic rhetoric" (123). Paul's strategy was intentional (121, 124-25).

[67]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 249.

[68]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 250.

are inherent features of humanity's image-bearing status. Nevertheless, many passages of Scripture affirm the vigorous employment of arguments for Christian witness. The OT prophets utilized pleas and poetic style to communicate, but their messages constituted structured arguments to convince Israel of its sins and awaken the need to return to God. Groothuis notes that Jesus frequently harnessed logical argument forms in his interactions, including escaping the horns of a dilemma (Matt 22:23-32), *a fortiori* arguments (John 7:21–24, Luke 13:10-17), *a modus ponens* (Matt 11:4–6, John 5:45-46), and *reductio ad absurdum* arguments (Matt 22:41–46).[69] The apostles considered argumentation central to the apologetic task. Acts recounts how Paul customarily reasoned with both Jews and Gentiles in various cities on his missionary journeys, intending to persuade them to trust in Christ.[70] Luke and John admit that their works were intended as arguments for the validity of the gospel message and the NT authors did not hesitate to bolster their case with evidences in their works (Luke 1:3-4; John 2:20-31; 1 Cor 15:3-8). Significantly, *The End of Apologetics* bypasses discussion of these passages and others that stress the role of reason in faith formation.

Johnson's review of *The End of Apologetics* posits that Penner's aversion to apologetic arguments is unsustainable given the biblical record. He insists that the faculty of reason is irrefutably the God-given mechanism through which people process truth claims, even though it may be misused in its fallen state. Johnson notes that OT prophets like Isaiah appealed directly to human reason and that Paul undeniably utilized extensive arguments during his ministry—trusting all the while that the reasoning faculties of his

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

[70]See especially Acts 17:2, 17:17, 18:4, 18:19, 24:25. The Greek term translated "to reason" is διαλέγομαι. It can connote simple discussion, but in the context of Acts it entails more formal speeches or "lectures that were likely to end in disputations." Walter Bauer, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 185; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 2:439.

audiences remained intact (Isa 1:18, Acts 17:22-31).[71] He laments Penner's struggle to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit may work sovereignly and synergistically with arguments and proclamation of the gospel through human agents.[72] Finally, Johnson concludes along with Groothuis that "Christian truth is public truth—truth for the marketplace that can be assessed according to universal criteria by which a thinking person . . . is willing to consider it openly, seriously, and humbly."[73]

In the conclusion to *Fool's Talk*, Guinness cites 2 Corinthians 10:5 to encourage apologists not to give up on traditional apologetics practices. The passage is an example of early church *dissuasoria* which "used all the highest strengths of human reason in defense of the truth. Mustering all the powers of reason, logic, evidence, and argument. . . answering every objection, countering every objection, and dismantling false objections to the faith and to knowing God."[74] In the context of 2 Corinthians 10, Paul himself employs rhetorical devices through the application of *refutatio* and multiple metaphors.[75] Paul's *dissuasoria* confronts the spiritual strongholds that may steer a believer away from faith and obedience to Christ. Defeating such strongholds requires an aggressive altercation with seductive ideas disseminated in the cultural context by real people (Paul's opponents).[76] As such, the passage upholds the immense value of

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[71]In his Acts 17 speech to the Athenians, Paul employed various "micro-rhetorical devices"—such as assonance, paronomasia, and alliteration—which "would have resonated with those members of the evangelistic audience and early audiences who were sufficiently familiar with rhetoric." Stephen S. Liggins, *Many Convincing Proofs: Persuasive Phenomena Associated with Gospel Proclamation in Acts,* Beihefte zur Zeitschrift fur die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, vol. 221, ed. Carl R. Holladay (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016), 193.

[72]Johnson, "Is Apologetics Counter-Productive?" 7-11.

[73]Johnson, "Is Apologetics Counter-Productive?" 9, quoting Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 178.

[74]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 253.

[75]Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 483; Fredrick J. Long, *Ancient Rhetoric and Paul's Apology: The Compositional Unity of 2 Corinthians*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, vol. 131, ed. Richard J. Bauckham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 178.

[76]Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 488; Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A*

argument-based apologetics in discourse with non-Christians for the enhancement of the faith of believers. The biblical record indicates that argument functions alongside proclamation for effective gospel witness and that rhetoric is not inherently antithetical to ethically conscious apologetics.

Coercion versus Subversion

The perspectives of Penner and Guinness concerning arguments and rhetoric are symptomatic of deeper philosophical underpinnings. Penner's aversion to arguments is not merely a distaste for modern rationalism—it stems from a conviction that the systems of modernity are innately political and coercive. Conversely, Guinness desires to employ persuasion in what he himself calls a subversive manner. One must carefully unpack how the authors describe the concepts of coercion and subversion to grasp why tensions between their positions run so high.

Penner provides substantial detail in *The End of Apologetics* to describe his view of coercion:

> Coercion, then, is a subtle form of violence against another person. With coercion I use reason and argumentation almost as a cudgel to bend someone's mind to my will. Evidence and arguments become a way for me to shield myself simultaneously from genuine personal engagement and self-examination in the encounter with the other, and to remove any threat to my beliefs and self-perception by transforming the other into my likeness. So not only does apologetic coercion reduce others in our eyes, but if successful, it also diminishes others in their own eyes.[77]

He relays his conviction that coercive inclinations are systemic, saying, "a prophetic Christian witness cannot avoid addressing the person in complex entanglement in and with the powers of this world."[78] He believes coercion is exemplified in his story of

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Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 683.

[77]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 145.

[78]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 156-57.

Mabiala Kenzo.[79] Kenzo's family struggled to rise above racial and ethnic persecution in the Belgian Congo—much of which was instigated by supposedly well-intentioned Westerners. The Belgian authorities required Kenzo's parents to conform to Western lifestyle and etiquette to be given citizenship in their own homeland. Penner also cites participation by Christian institutions in the abusive separation of indigenous Canadian children from their families to place them in government residential schools.[80] Surely he is right to observe that "even the categories we use to understand and interpret the world are all part of a system (or ideology) that generates destructive attitudes and patterns such as racism and sexual discrimination, but is always already operative before we are consciously aware of it."[81] Even Christians who reject Penner's overall thesis should seek to confront inbred social and psychological structures that impede their ability to love their neighbor and represent Christ faithfully.

Penner's passion to face coercion is laudable, but several predicaments afflict his position. First, his depiction of coercion implies that formal apologetics arguments formulated under the sway of modern values will necessarily be coercive. He assumes that modern apologists will impose ideology on others without regard for their contexts. The imposition is inevitable because they view truth through the lens of OUNCE and their modernist impulse is to programmatically control social structures. However, he indicates that the personal disposition of the witness may prove instrumental for overcoming coercion: "I am always careful to fight against all my tendencies to dominate, subjugate, or otherwise coerce my neighbor."[82] If Penner himself can fight

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[79]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 135-36.

[80]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 137.

[81]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 157.

[82]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 155. He later adds the positive complement of these actions, saying "the deep political requirement of Christian witness is love" (165). Some of Penner's reviewers find his treatment of coercion particularly strident and polemical. Penner seems to assume the worst about the motives and potential of modernist-leaning apologists to exhibit Christian character in interactions with others. Tawa Anderson, review of *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context*, by

against this tendency and pursue love of neighbor, what prohibits other Spirit-sealed believers from doing so, including those with modern rationalist tendencies? He does not demonstrate that they would be incapable of cultivating similar commitments and capabilities. Second, he admits that an apologist's entanglement with worldly powers is unavoidable. In that case, elimination of modern apologetics would not eradicate the problem of coercion—Christian witnesses would still need to introspectively combat their impulses to oppress or control others.[83]

A third predicament for Penner arises from his contrast between coercion and what he considers to be its biblical inverse: appeal.[84] He argues that appeal is the definitive mode of witness in Scripture. Through appeal, rather than manipulation, witnesses embody sympathy and humbly put themselves at the disposal of those to whom they witness.[85] His observations are essentially correct, but he defines the nature of the biblical mode of appeal too narrowly. In his primary example, Penner cites Amos' plea to Israel prior to the Assyrian captivity: "Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said" (Amos 5:14). He says that Amos did not "produce a formally valid, or even inductively cogent, argument that uses objectively agreed upon premises for his conclusion that the Hebrew God is faithful."[86]

Myron B. Penner, *Philosophia Christi* 7, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 245; Seeman, review of *The End of Apologetics*, 376.

[83]Premodern history is riddled with examples of coercive and oppressive acts. Forced conversions, compulsory religious practices, the Crusades, and deep-rooted alliances between the church and the state all occurred under the banner of Christianity. Such realities signify that coercion is endemic to the human sinful condition and not a unique product of modernity.

[84]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 144-145.

[85]He submits that the apostle Paul exemplified this mode of witness in the early church communities (1 Cor 1:10, 2:3, 9:22). Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 146, 152.

[86]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 85-86. If Penner means that the prophets did not produce *scientific* arguments or arguments that follow the *rules* of formal logic, he is surely correct. However, such an expectation would be severely anachronistic.

The preceding chapters in Amos paint a different picture. They present multiple specific evidences of God's faithfulness and the sinful acts of Israel (Amos 2:6-12). Amos 3 asks a series of rhetorical questions which form the prophet's argument that Israel's sinfulness rightly merits the pending judgment of God. The context proposes these facts as objective propositions to be accepted as unambiguously truthful—facts which Israel *should* agree to even if they stubbornly reject the irrefutable evidence Amos offers.[87] Penner rightly observes that the main verb in Amos 5:14 is modified by a conditional clause, but this fact does not conflict with its imperative grammatical force.[88] The thrust of the passage is to command Israel to obey God, despite the fact that God furnishes the benefits of obedience and petitions them to remember his past faithfulness. To call Amos' prophetic activity appeal, then, is accurate but understates the breadth of his undertaking. Prophetic appeals bearing the element of command infused the messages of the prophets and the evangelistic efforts of the early church.[89] Therefore, Penner is mistaken to assert that "it never occurs to prophets to present their message in the mode of universally valid truths and imperatives."[90] If tailored arguments, directives to obey, and relentless persuasion are coercive activities, then the prophets' were patently coercive witnesses. In light of these observations, Penner's most candid statement in *The End of*

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[87]Other passages of Scripture overtly confirm that humans should also accept and submit to universal, timeless truths (Ps 14:1; Ps 19; Rom 1:20).

[88]The Hebrew phrase for "seek the good" is דִּרְשׁוּ־טוֹב and contains a Qal imperative verb, which the LXX translates using the aorist imperative second person plural: ἐκζητήσατε. The idea of command is inherent in the grammatical usage of the verb and in the context. Thomas Edward McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 423; David Denninger, "דָּרַשׁ," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis,* ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:998.

[89]See especially Acts 17:30-31, where Paul makes the objective and universally applicable claim that God "commands all people everywhere to repent . . . and of this he has given assurance to all by raising [Christ] from the dead."

[90]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 85, quoting Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 10.

Apologetics concerning prophetic witness sorely contradicts the biblical portrayal of their activity and charge:

> When an apostle or prophet declares they have a message from God to me, it is a form of address that leaves me free with respect to what I understand them to really be saying and also to appropriate (or not) what I understand in the message.[91]

Penner treats coercion and persuasion as near synonyms in *The End of Apologetics*.[92] Guinness' use of the terms coincides with standard dictionary definitions. Coercion involves forced obedience and extinguishes the intellectual and moral decision-making power of the human agent.[93] Guinness strongly objects to coercion thus defined, and like Penner he decries the modern tendency to weaponize faith for political interests. His convictions concerning the foundational issue of the nature of truth inform his stance on coercion—he contends that people are more likely to use their beliefs to manipulate others when they hold a view of truth that leans toward pragmatism and relativism.[94] They will abuse truth by capitalizing on its usefulness, rather than maintaining their faith commitment for the sake of truth itself.[95] This abuse is most dangerous, he cautions, when believers "unwittingly transform their own faith into a vehicle for expressing their personal, social, or national aspirations or needs."[96] In Guinness' view, modern rationalism may sometimes foster this kind of manipulation, but replacing

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[91]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 92-93.

[92]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 146. Even though Penner does not describe what valid persuasive speech would entail, he utilizes language charged with implications of violence to designate any use of rational arguments, such as "rational force," "intimidation," and "militancy" (144). Since Penner himself utilizes carefully formed arguments in *The End of Apologetics* aimed at overturning the deeply held beliefs and practices of his readers, one could argue that Penner coerces his readers.

[93]The definitions "to restrain or dominate by force" and "to compel to an act or choice" appear in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. "coerce." The same senses of force and compulsion surface in all definitions found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "coerce."

[94]Os Guinness, *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 172; Os Guinness, *Time for Truth: Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype, and Spin* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 13-14; Guinness, *The American Hour: A Time of Reckoning and the Once and Future Role of Faith* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 70.

[95]Guinness, *The American Hour,* 374.

[96]Guinness, *The American Hour,* 375.

correspondence views of truth with postmodern representations (which tend to be more relativistic and pragmatic) only exacerbates the problem.

Guinness carefully distinguishes between coercion and subversion. Subversion is an attempt to artfully destabilize an unbeliever's philosophical assumptions and worldview. The principle aim of subversion is to expose wrong understandings, personal ideology, and subjective motives.[97] His complementary frameworks for such exposure, table-turning and signals of transcendence, inject new information and illumine the past experiences of unbelievers. Apologetics that harnesses these frameworks unleashes the possibility for what Peter Berger calls "alternation"—a phenomenon in which people unexpectedly imagine themselves embracing another worldview (or, in some cases, are shocked into doing so).[98] The state of alternation can stir the unbeliever to desire changes entailed by the new perspectives they gain through interaction with the apologist.[99] As such, the goal of subversive persuasion is not to force other moral agents to change their will but to lead them to the point where they want to change. Seen in this light, subversion has a thoroughly compassionate aim of inspiring self-reflection and pointing unbelievers to their need for repentance, salvation, and relationship with God.

Guinness proposes that apologists deliberately utilize a repertoire of subversive table-turning and reframing mechanisms which pervade the Word of God. They involve rhetorical strategies implemented through forms such as stories, questions, parables, dramas, and ploys.[100] For example, Guinness cites the prophet Nathan's use of the ewe

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[97]Dictionary definitions of subversion align well with Guinness' usage: "to overturn, overthrow (a condition or order of things, a principle, law, etc." appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "subvert." The definition "to overturn or overthrow from the foundation" appears in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. "subvert."

[98]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 151-53; Peter L. Berger, *The Precarious Vision: A Sociologist Looks at Social Fictions and the Christian Faith* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 10, 17.

[99]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 151-53.

[100]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 158-67.

lamb parable in 2 Samuel 12 to awaken David to the gravity of his sin.[101] The prophets of 1 Kings 20:26-43 and 1 Kings 22:1-28 applied the element of surprise in their ploys to deal with the resistant King Ahab.[102] Jesus designed many of his questions, parables, and discourse to draw out responses by stealth—responses which publicized the inner motivations and allegiances of his hearers.[103] The public speeches of the apostles held their audiences in suspense until a climax exposed the people's unbelief and sin.[104] Finally, Guinness contends that God himself practices subversion by pushing those trapped in unbelief to experience its consequences.[105]

Christians should assent to the use of subversive communication due to its ubiquitous presence in Scripture, but Guinness realizes that some will still consider persuasion to be manipulative.[106] He retorts that biblical persuasion strategies are "indirect, involving, and imaginative"[107]—they make the communications of Christians powerful and influential in an era of shallow soundbites and the cavalier use of words. Subversive communication may require witnesses to appear foolish to the unbelieving world and they may be met with animosity. Jesus himself was the victim of public retaliation when he employed persuasive speech.[108] As such, Jesus is the best affirmation that manipulation is not a matter of the use of subversive forms, nor of the reaction to their use, but of the motivation of the apologist. One reviewer of *Fool's Talk,* David Parry, confirms this perspective in his reflections on the use of rhetoric. Parry wisely

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[101]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 155.

[102]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 23-26.

[103]Matt 21:23-27; Mark 12; Luke 7:41-42; Luke 10:36; John 4:16.

[104]Acts 7:51-54, 22:21-22, 26:27.

[105]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 116-17. See Ps 81:11-12; 1 Sam 8:22; Rom 1:24-28.

[106]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 178-183.

[107]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 165.

[108]Luke 4:23-28, 6:9-11.

instructs that "rhetoric is a tool whose use is ethically ambivalent."[109] Persuasion can become unethical if it is not used in the service of truth, but it is not inherently unethical or coercive. Parry carefully qualifies this observation saying, "inelegantly expressed truth is to be preferred to rhetorically skilled deception."[110]

If subversive communication is biblically authorized and not coercive or manipulative by default, how can true coercion be rooted out and prevented? Guinness agrees that people of faith can coerce others, but he denies that the origin of coercive practice is widespread Christian commitment to modern rationalism. Coercion exists because of the impact of the fall on the human heart that persists through every generation. Christians must accept that coercion and manipulation cannot be eradicated until the Parousia.[111] Even believers with the best intentions and most refined motives can fall prey to manipulating or coercing others. However, Guinness denies that the inevitability of coercion alleviates believers' responsibility to confront it. Coercion is hypocritical for Christians, so they must "submit to the toughest counter hypocrisy program ever."[112] Where Penner asks Christians to do the impossible (eliminate coercion by stifling its supposed cause, modernity), Guinness advises them to take biblical steps toward maturity to minimize coercive acts and motives.

Edification versus Persuasion

An outstanding question remains as to whether specific elements in Scripture justify the conception of apologetics as either edification or persuasion. Penner employs

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[109]David Parry, "Open-Handed Communication: The Rhetoric of Christian Persuasion," *Emerging Scholars Blog: InterVarsity's Emerging Scholars Network*, January 10, 2017, accessed July 16, 2018, http://blog.emergingscholars.org/2017/01/openhandedcommunicationtherhetoricof christianpersuasion/.

[110]Parry, "Open-Handed Communication."

[111]Jer 17:9-10; Ps 19:12; 1 Cor 4:1-5; 2 Pet 3:10.

[112]Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 206.

the phrase "building up" in *The End of Apologetics* as his primary definition of edification.[113] In the NT, edification is expressed by the Greek term οἰκοδομέω. This verb and its derivates appear in a handful of verses.[114] While the general thrust of the term harmonizes with Penner's definition, it refers more specifically to God's active influence upon a community of Christians or their impact upon one another. The concept applies to the corporate spiritual maturation of God's people.[115] As such, edification has no direct correlation to sharing the gospel with those who have not received the seal of the Spirit into the community of faith by trusting in Christ (Eph 1:13-14). These observations along with several additional factors advise against the view that edification is the primary framework in Scripture for Christian witness.

First, evidence from the life of Jesus casts doubt on viewing witness primarily through the lens of edification. Jesus employed candid verbal communication in many of his encounters. He challenged people to admit their sinfulness and repent using words that sometimes offended and other times produced new followers.[116] In the case of the rich man, Jesus' directness resulted in a sad outcome—the man departed unconverted and, as far as anyone knows, he never returned to follow Christ (Mark 10:21-22). What criteria does one use to judge whether Jesus' words were edifying in these circumstances?

Second, Jesus sometimes elected a more indirect approach. The parable of the sower is only an innocuous story if the audience fails to grasp its intent. When Jesus'

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[113]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 17, 80.

[114]See especially 1 Cor 14:5, 14:17; Col 2:7; 1 Tim 1:4; 1 Pet 2:5.

[115]When used in a literal sense, οἰκοδομέω refers to the construction of an edifice. It has corporate implications for those who self-identify with the body of Christ when used figuratively. Bauer, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 696; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2:677-78; James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1929), 441-42.

[116]Matt 15:12; Luke 11:45; John 4:17-18. The case of Nicodemus portrays Jesus harshly challenging a man who apparently responded favorably over the course of time (John 3:10, 7:50, 19:39).

disciples asked him why he spoke in parables, he told them he was withholding the secrets of the kingdom from some people so that they might "hear but never understand" (Matt 13:10-15). Strikingly, these examples imply that Jesus declined to use means of communication that otherwise might have had edifying potential for some of his hearers.

Third, in his extended discussion in *The End of Apologetics* regarding appeal, Penner states the importance of "identifying with the interests, cares, and concerns" of those to whom one witnesses.[117] In contrast, much of Jesus' proclamation happened in public space and was directed toward people whom neither he nor his disciples knew personally. He frequently challenged his inquirers to trust his words and turn to God in repentance without first listening to their stories, struggles, interests, or felt needs.[118] One might argue that Jesus was justified since he miraculously knew their hearts and minds (John 2:24-25), but Jesus' apostles carried on his practice of public proclamation throughout the NT.

The apostles' approach to evangelism constitutes a fourth reason to doubt *The End of Apologetics*' edification model: their words frequently incited violent reactions (Acts 14:5, 14:19; 17:1-9). They shared the gospel message in synagogues and in public forums without hesitation, regardless of how the hearers received their forthrightness (Acts 22:1, 26:1). The apostles were unashamed to defend their faith using historical facts to point to the resurrection in confirmation of their message (1 Cor 15; 1 Pet 3:15). One of the most conspicuous weaknesses in Penner's model is his omission of any significant

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[117]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 146. Penner sets up the context of the discussion as the "stance apostles and prophets take in the proclamation of the gospel" but proceeds to say that Paul appeals to the Corinthians "on the basis of the identify he shares with them in Jesus Christ" (146). He thereby obscures whether prophetic witness is directed toward those who have never professed faith in Christ or whether one should differentiate them from members of the Christian community.

[118]These facts also present a formidable challenge to Penner's claim that edification has a corporate dependency such that "the edification of an individual person necessarily takes place within a community of other persons who share (very nearly) the same commitments, values, and vocabularies." Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 111.

discussion of these matters and the related biblical examples presented in the preceding paragraphs of the present subsection.

Finally, Penner betrays the obscurity of his argument for edification as a model for witness when he reflects upon the fate of the OT prophets. He admits that a prophet's words and deeds may be edifying in content even if they do not edify in effect. Many hearers did not receive their messages as edifying, which illustrates that prophets "are not recognized as such in their own lifetime and are often persecuted and even killed."[119] Penner declares, "It is the children of those who killed and persecuted the prophets in Israel who recognize that they did in fact speak for God."[120] However, Jesus confronted the people of his generation for their unbelief, implying that they were never really edified by the prophets' words either. Otherwise, they would not kill their Messiah and be held accountable for the blood of the prophets (Luke 11:45-52).

These facts raise the question of how one knows whether edification is occurring when a Christian is bearing witness to the gospel. Tawa Anderson's review of *The End of Apologetics* draws Penner's dilemma to the fore:

> Penner's point with edification probably backfires on him. . . . Penner is very ambivalent about the nature of speech and edification, sometimes suggesting that prophetic speech can rebuke, and in the conclusion pointing out that truth, even edifying truth, can be traumatic. If we accept that claim, then all that Penner says in chapters 2 and 3 is undone—modern apologetics can be edifying (that is, concerned for the well-being of the other) even when the dialogue partner does not receive or interpret such speech as edifying for them.[121]

In sum, the Scriptures typically relate edification to the sanctification of believers. Conceptually, edification may be viewed as a *desired* outcome in apologetic encounters. The fact that God-revealed truth is not received as objectively true does not alter the fact that it is true nor exempt the hearer from answerability to its content. *The End of*

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[119]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 94n40.

[120]Penner, *The End of Apologetics*, 94n40.

[121]Anderson, review of *The End of Apologetics*, 245.

Apologetics leaves readers wondering whether the locus of edification lies in the motives of the witness, in the actual words and deeds of the witness, or in the final effect upon the hearer. In the final analysis, the biblical evidence mitigates against viewing edification as the primary conceptual framework for apologetics.

This thesis has already presented ample evidence that persuasion permeates Scripture and forms an integral component of Christian witness. Furthermore, Guinness' persuasion model accommodates the idea of edification as an ideal secondary goal. Even though edification terminology is not directly invoked in Scripture as a description of Christian witness, no *prima facie* reason exists to exclude the principle of edification from playing a formative role in apologetics activity. Penner's chief aim is to modify the mindset of apologists so that they think more seriously about how their words and actions might serve and benefit those to whom they speak rather than having a destructive impact. Scripture presents this posture as normative for believers. Passages long recognized as central to the apologetic task contain admonishments for Christians to live and speak in ways that build up their society and to avoid acting in ways that could be injurious to their neighbors who do not yet trust in Christ (1 Pet 2:13-17, 3:13-17). Persuasion is an integral component of Christian witness to be utilized as long as Christians do so with the intent to love their neighbors, defend God's honor as Creator, and exalt Jesus as the Savior.

Conclusion

The present chapter illustrated the versatility of the apologetics model presented in *Fool's Talk*. Guinness' model handles difficult issues concerning contemporary apologetics with a balance that eludes Penner's model in *The End of Apologetics*. In contrast to Penner, Guinness accurately represents historical trends and comprehensively incorporates the breadth of biblical texts and principles into his recommendations for improvements to apologetics practices. Finally, *Fool's Talk*

ultimately incorporates Penner's idea of edification without adopting it as the central framework for understanding the apologetic task. The fifth and final chapter that follows will summarize the overall findings of this thesis.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the apologetics models proposed in *Fool's Talk* by Os Guinness and in *The End of Apologetics* by Myron Bradley Penner. I have endeavored to present a comprehensive case for the biblical fidelity of Guinness' persuasion model in contrast to Penner's edification model. The first section below summarizes the findings of this study and presents conclusions that confirm the thesis originally posited in chapter 1. The second section considers some benefits and challenges of the comparative analysis format employed in this study. The third section highlights potential opportunities for future research that have surfaced as a result of this thesis.

Findings of the Comparative Analysis

The introductory chapter of this thesis demonstrated that tensions exist amongst those who study and engage in apologetics. Guinness and Penner agree that problems afflict the contemporary apologetics movement but diverge in terms of their proposed solutions. Chapter 2 provided brief biographical sketches of Penner and Guinness followed by initial analyses of *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* to expose the reader to primary concepts, terminology, and arguments in the two works. This preliminary orientation unearthed specific areas of agreement and disagreement between the two authors' perspectives. The chapter thereby set the stage to properly navigate foundational issues underlying each author's views.

Chapter 3 examined foundational issues that impact the models presented in *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk*. These issues included the authors' perspectives on postmodern thought, their epistemologies, their interpretation of historical sources,

and their employment of contemporary sources. Analysis of these issues set the stage for meaningful comparison of the two books in the subsequent chapter. Chapter 4 assessed the models proposed within *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk* by aligning and comparing their most essential overlapping themes. The research I have presented yields the following conclusions:

1. Penner provides insufficient justification for supplanting traditional approaches to Christian witness with postmodern paradigms. His writings give little consideration to the solutions offered by Christians who actively seek to address modernity's shortcomings without embracing postmodernism.

2. Guinness' epistemology is well-defined and aligns with historical perspectives on truth, while liabilities afflict Penner's epistemological views—both in terms of their internal consistency and the extent of their departure from established understandings sustained by Christians throughout history.

3. Guinness interprets and applies the work of historical authors harmoniously and in accordance with his objectives. Penner's interpretations of historical authors are strained, and he overextends the applicability of their works to justify his model.

4. Penner misrepresents the stated purposes and positions of prominent contemporary apologists when making his most critical contentions. Guinness, on the other hand, applauds some of these same apologists for their valid contributions and views their efforts as a continuation of the chain of historical Christian witness.

5. *The End of Apologetics* misinterprets or misapplies many biblical passages. Penner incorporates portions of the biblical testimony that are convenient to his proposed model but often omits discussion of passages that would contradict it. *Fool's Talk* amasses a broad range of biblical testimony and thoughtfully synthesizes Scripture to arrive at its overall conclusions.

6. The contemporary apologetics movement exhibits remarkable signs of growth in the very areas of witness in which Penner desires to see change. *The End of Apologetics* fails to sufficiently highlight current trends that call into question the necessity of Penner's model. Guinness assumes the positive trajectory of the movement and wishes to further stimulate its health by promoting persuasion as a holistic framework which captures the essence of the apologetic task.

Based on the above conclusions, the thesis proposed in chapter 1 has been successfully demonstrated. Penner's edification model of apologetics as presented in *The End of Apologetics* departs from the biblical principles and historical understandings of

Christian witness. His evaluation of the present state of the apologetics movement does not necessitate its overhaul. Os Guinness' persuasion-based approach maintains fidelity with Scripture and effectively addresses Penner's most prominent concerns about gospel witness for the contemporary situation. *Fool's Talk* also honors the continuum of church history while providing a hopeful vision for how the contemporary apologetics movement may strive to remain faithful to God and his Word in years to come. Encouraging trends already infuse the philosophy and practices of apologetics today, but with contributions like Guinness' persuasion model and the Lord's blessing, the contemporary apologetics movement is poised to adapt with even greater versatility to the rapid social changes within Western culture.

Benefits and Challenges of the Comparative Analysis

The overlapping themes, vocabulary, and use of shared sources within *Fool's Talk* and *The End of Apologetics* facilitated comparison of the two works. Meaningful analysis was possible, in part, because Guinness and Penner agree that specific problems impact the contemporary apologetics movement. The degree to which the authors disagreed beckoned in-depth analysis of the problems they identified and the solutions they offered.

The differing styles and purposes of the authors made it difficult at times to critique their utilization of sources. In the case of Guinness, he frequently cites a source simply to supplement or illustrate a point. He often quotes historical apologists in *Fool's Talk* without explaining the context or central arguments of his source, leaving his readers to assume he respects the original context. While a full-fledged examination of the source's context may not always be necessary, the validity of the research may be compromised by overlooking an author's misuse of a source, even though it may have been accidental. In some cases, the authors adopted an entire framework or broad theory developed by another source. For example, Penner utilized the genius-apostle distinction

developed in Kierkegaard's treatise *The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle* to indict modern apologetics.[1] A full reading of the treatise and related commentaries was necessary to ascertain whether he had respected the historical context and bridged it successfully to the present circumstances. Future studies conducted based on the comparative analysis format of this thesis would do well to take these caveats into consideration.

Opportunities for Further Research

This comparative analysis has surfaced possibilities for future study. Further examination of several issues could prove beneficial for Christian thought and praxis. First, Penner's brief account of the phenomenon of fragmentation beckons further attention within the discipline of apologetics.[2] He overstates the current conditions by likening them to *Alice and Wonderland*—this comparison is too extreme and pessimistic. As a missionary, I have had the privilege of working through difficult barriers to communication and seeing others do so effectively with the Spirit's blessing and superintendence. I concur with Guinness that, in principle, "*there is no one anywhere and at any time to whom we cannot speak constructively*."[3] However, Penner rightly observes that communication about moral and religious matters is often disrupted due to late modernity's progressive departure from "traditional conceptual structures and social practices."[4] Moreover, the idea that concepts and practices lose their original significance over time is an important consideration for apologists who seek to relate traditional

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[1]Søren Kierkegaard, "Addendum II: The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle," in *The Book on Adler*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[2]Myron Bradley Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 4-6.

[3]Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 26-27.

[4]Penner, *The End of Apologetics,* 4.

understandings of Christianity to rapidly changing contemporary language and culture. How can apologists recognize when fragmentation is impeding communication and mutual understanding? What positive steps can be taken to reduce the impact of fragmentation? The apologetics movement could benefit tremendously from a study focused on specific apologetics practices that account for fragmentation. Attention to this phenomenon could open communication channels and prevent potential hindrances to Christian witness.

Second, Guinness reflects, "We can learn a great deal from excellent conversation partners, such as the classical tradition of the art of rhetoric and its grand practitioners such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes and Cicero."[5] He says classic Greek rhetoric offers Christians "a thousand tips for being more effective communicators."[6] However, he adds that due to the modern infatuation with techniques and tactics, it would be "a bad a mistake to shape apologetics solely according to the criteria of classical rhetoric."[7] Guinness offers few insights for how some of those thousand tips might be incorporated into contemporary apologetics so as to be effective and maintain biblical fidelity. Can Christians justifiably resurrect and use specific ancient modes of persuasion that do not necessarily appear in Scripture? Which of the ancient practices conform to biblical principles and steer clear of manipulation? A thoughtful analysis of classical rhetoric practices alongside *Fool's Talk*'s main principles of persuasion could benefit apologists.[8]

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[5]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 30.

[6]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 44.

[7]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 39.

[8]Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 39. One reviewer of *Fool's Talk*, Matthew Boedy, highlights tensions within Christian scholarship regarding the use of classical rhetoric. Guinness and other Christians who wish to resurrect the use of rhetoric struggle with adopting the practices of rhetoric wholesale. They fear that doing so might sacrifice truthful speech for persuasive speech in many cases. Matthew Boedy, review of *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, by Os Guinness, *Journal of Communication and Religion* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 99-102.

Finally, Guinness acknowledges the important role of academically and scientifically-minded Christians in apologetics. However, he does little to show how their logical disposition fits under the persuasion framework. What specific adjustments might they make to incorporate persuasive methods when communicating with unbelievers about intricate scientific support for Christian truths? Many Christians today would appreciate further advice on how to combine scientific arguments, logic, and rhetoric with persuasive skill while maximizing their sensitivity to the subjective factors that influence unbelievers' reception of apologetic efforts.

Closing Thoughts

To commence chapter 2 of this thesis, I noted that both Myron Penner and Os Guinness have served God's church and his world in ways that require dedication and perseverance. I wish to express my gratitude to them for *The End of Apologetics* and *Fool's Talk*. Both works have deeply formed my perspectives and convictions concerning apologetics. Even though I have disagreed with many of Penner's conclusions, I value his determination to confront weaknesses in the church's witness. Christians should appreciate the challenges he issues and welcome the opportunity for refinement of their ideas and practices. I will always be grateful for Guinness' keen ability to diagnose how the spiritual battles of the times are manifested in social contexts. He provides God's people with sound advice and his aptitude in these matters transcends the capacity of most authors.

I pray that my work aids many readers during this demanding era of history when Christian witnesses must navigate a host of philosophical and real-life issues. May God grant his church the wisdom to harness apologetics to honor him and challenge people of all persuasions to see the greatness of the gospel. May the apologetics movement foster genuine faith and flourishing as God's people eagerly await the day of Christ's appearing (Titus 2:11-14).

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ABSTRACT

EDIFICATION OR PERSUASION? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE APOLOGETICS PHILOSOPHIES OF MYRON B. PENNER AND OS GUINNESS

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The contemporary Christian apologetics movement appears to be thriving, but two recent books serve as particularly lucid representations of opposing mindsets concerning apologetics practice. *The End of Apologetics* by Myron Bradley Penner and *Fool's Talk* by Os Guinness both received *Christianity Today* Book Awards in the Apologetics-Evangelism category. Penner argues that the approaches of apologists such as William Lane Craig, J. P. Moreland, and Douglas Groothuis are hopelessly hindered by their purported commitment to modern rationalism. To effectively navigate postmodern circumstances, he proposes an overhaul of the apologetics enterprise and its replacement with an edification-based approach. Guinness shares many of Penner's concerns but contends that Christians must revive the art of persuasion as the best corrective to the deficiencies of contemporary apologetics.

This thesis compares these two works to determine which of the authors' models faithfully represents biblical prophetic witness. Chapter 1 identifies trends within contemporary apologetics that indicate the value comparing Guinness' and Penner's perspectives. Chapter 2 provides synopses of their works to orient the reader to their main arguments. Chapter 3 is dedicated to foundational issues that undergird the two author's views—including their respective epistemologies and their treatment of historical sources such as Augustine, Chesterton, and Kierkegaard. Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that

Penner's edification model of apologetics departs from the biblical principles and historical understandings of Christian witness. Conversely, Os Guinness' persuasion-based approach maintains fidelity with Scripture, promotes continuity with church history, and effectively addresses Penner's most prominent concerns. Finally, the thesis recurrently highlights positive trends within the contemporary apologetics movement which indicate its strong propensity to adapt to cultural changes without sacrificing time-tested biblical principles.

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