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EQUIPPING UNDERGRADUATES TO ENGAGE IN  
MISSIONAL APOLOGETICS AT BROADWAY  
BAPTIST CHURCH, MARYVILLE, TN

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by  
Timothy James Whitehead  
December 2021

**APPROVAL SHEET**

EQUIPPING UNDERGRADUATES TO ENGAGE IN  
MISSIONAL APOLOGETICS AT BROADWAY  
BAPTIST CHURCH, MARYVILLE, TN

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For my loving and faithful wife, the church of the Lord Jesus, and the Glory of God.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES.....  | viii |
| PREFACE.....   | ix   |
| Chapter  |      |
| 1. INTRODUCTION.....   | 1    |
| Context.....   | 1    |
| Rationale.....   | 3    |
| Purpose.....   | 6    |
| Goals.....   | 6    |
| Research Methodology.....  | 6    |
| Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations.....   | 8    |
| Conclusion.....  | 9    |
| 2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR EQUIPPING<br>UNDERGRADUATES TO ENGAGE IN MISSIONAL<br>APOLOGETICS..... | 10   |
| Introduction.....  | 10   |
| A New Testament Definition of Apologetics (1 Pet 3:8–17).....  | 10   |
| Context.....   | 11   |
| First Imperative: Do Not Fear Your Adversaries.....  | 14   |
| Second Imperative: Honor Christ the Lord as Holy.....  | 14   |
| Third Imperative: Always be Ready to Give a Defense.....   | 16   |
| Fourth Imperative: Christian Conduct.....  | 22   |
| Concluding Principles for Apologetics.....   | 23   |

| Chapter   | Page      |
|---|-----------|
| The Utility of Apologetics for Gospel Ministry (Col 1:23–2:8).....  | 26        |
| Context.....  | 27        |
| Paul’s Gospel Ministry of Warning.....  | 28        |
| Paul’s Gospel Ministry of Teaching.....   | 30        |
| Utility of Apologetics for Warning and Teaching.....  | 33        |
| Conclusion.....   | 35        |
| <b>3. HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL SUPPORT FOR EQUIPPING<br/>UNDERGRADUATES TO ENGAGE IN MISSIONAL<br/>APOLOGETICS.....</b> | <b>36</b> |
| Introduction.....   | 36        |
| Missional Apologetics in History.....   | 36        |
| The Letter to Diognetus.....  | 37        |
| Aquinas and the Order of Preachers.....   | 40        |
| Apologetics Methodology.....  | 45        |
| Classical Apologetics.....  | 45        |
| Evidentialist Apologetics.....  | 48        |
| Presuppositional Apologetics.....   | 52        |
| An Integrative Approach.....  | 57        |
| Conclusion.....   | 61        |
| <b>4. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION.....</b>  | <b>62</b> |
| Schedule.....   | 62        |
| Strategic Ministry Plan Development.....  | 63        |
| Preliminary Planning.....   | 63        |
| Partnership Proposal.....   | 65        |
| Cooperative Planning.....   | 65        |
| Goals of the Strategic Ministry Plan.....   | 65        |

| Chapter  | Page      |
|--|-----------|
| Apologetics Teaching Series Development .....          | 68        |
| Content Outline.....                                   | 69        |
| Pedagogical Techniques .....                           | 71        |
| Implementation of Apologetics Teaching Series .....    | 73        |
| Session 1 .....  | 73        |
| Session 2 .....  | 74        |
| Sessions 3-9 .....                                     | 74        |
| Session 10 .....                                       | 75        |
| Conclusion .....                                       | 75        |
| <b>5. RESULTS OF THE STUDY.....</b>                    | <b>76</b> |
| Introduction .....                                     | 76        |
| Evaluation of Project’s Purpose.....                   | 76        |
| Evaluation of the Project’s Goals.....                 | 77        |
| Goal 1.....  | 77        |
| Goal 2.....  | 78        |
| Goal 3.....  | 79        |
| Strengths of the Project .....                         | 82        |
| Weaknesses of the Project.....                         | 84        |
| Theological Reflections .....                          | 85        |
| Personal Reflections.....                              | 86        |
| Conclusion .....                                       | 87        |
| <b>Appendix</b>  |           |
| <b>1. STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION .....</b>     | <b>88</b> |
| <b>2. APOLOGETICS TEACHING SERIES EVALUATION .....</b> | <b>90</b> |
| <b>3. BASICS OF APOLOGETICS ASSESSMENT .....</b>       | <b>92</b> |
| <b>4. STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN .....</b>                | <b>98</b> |

| Appendix                            | Page |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| 5. SAMPLE APOLOGETICS TRAINING..... | 102  |
| 6. BAA LIKERT KEY .....             | 111  |
| 7. PERCENTAGE GROWTH.....           | 115  |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....                   | 116  |



## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

| Table  | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Pre- and post-survey results of each participant.....                 | 81   |
| 2. T-test: paired two-sample for means .....                             | 82   |
| 3. Percentage growth in orthodoxy calculated for each participant .....  | 83   |
| 4. Percentage growth in confidence calculated for each participant ..... | 83   |

| Figure  | Page |
|---|------|
| A1. Percentage growth in orthodoxy and confidence compared..... | 115  |

## PREFACE

The work of this project is possible because of those whom God has given to encourage and support me in my education and ministry. I thank the Lord for my loving family. Without their persistent encouragement, I would have given up long ago.

God has also blessed me with a church family that serves me far more than I deserve. It is truly a joy to gather with God's people every Sunday knowing that we stand in unity in faith and purpose. It is because of them that I have endeavored to perform this project. May it serve to bless them and advance the gospel. To my college/career students, for whom this project is intended—the excitement they express in knowing and serving Christ reminds me of the joy that I first found in him. May this project serve to grow their love for the Lord and the confidence they have in making him known to a dark world.

Fourth, to my patient and gracious wife, there are not enough words to express my gratitude. As my helpmate, she has always supported our ministry. Being her husband has been my greatest privilege. I pray the Lord gives me strength and holiness to lead our family in his way, that my speech will be gracious, and my love steadfast. To my son: may the knowledge gleaned from my studies serve in leading him to Jesus.

Also, I would like to thank the faculty, staff, and administration of SBTS for the discipleship that has been afforded to me. Much appreciation goes to my supervisor, Dr. Sam Emadi, for his labors in seeing my project to its end.

Timothy J. Whitehead

Maryville, Tennessee

December 2021

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

One of the primary goals of the Students and Families Ministry at Broadway Baptist Church (BBC) is to equip its college/career (CC) students to engage in missions and evangelism. Apologetics, rightly understood and applied, is an effective way to train students for evangelistic ministry, particularly on a campus that promotes unbiblical notions of God and his creation. Scripture provides clear biblical warrant and instruction for the church to equip believers for such outreach endeavors. For this reason, BBC seeks to equip undergraduate students to engage in missional apologetics.

#### **Context**

Broadway Baptist Church exists to bring glory to God by exalting Christ in worship, equipping Christians for ministry, and evangelizing its neighborhood and the nations. BBC supports three pastors to carry out this mission of the church. The Lead Pastor, the Associate Pastor of Discipleship and Missions, and the Associate Pastor of Students and Families all serve the local body of Christ at BBC.

As the Associate Pastor of Students and Families at BBC, it is my responsibility to give oversight to the nursery (newborns through prekindergarten), kids (kindergarten–6<sup>th</sup> grade), students (7<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade), and college/career ministries. The mission statement of the Students and Families Ministry is to partner with parents to disciple students to the glory of God. To fulfill this objective, seven ministry goals have been derived from Scripture which dictate our discipleship and ministry practices.

By the time students leave the student ministry, it is desired that they reach spiritual maturity and be equipped to make disciples of Jesus Christ by developing (Heb

5:11–6:3). The seven goals which dictate our ministry practices delineate our understanding of spiritual maturity: (1) A developed understanding of how all Scripture testifies about Christ, and where each story fits in God’s Redemptive Plan (Luke 24:44–49); (2) a disciplined life of prayer and Bible study (1 Tim 4:7; 1 Thess 5:16–18; Ps 1:2); (3) a biblical worldview (1 Cor 2:16; 10:31); (4) a sense of unity and fellowship in the church (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:1–6; Phil 2:1–4); (5) a passion for and engagement in evangelism and missions (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 4:13–31); (6) a biblically sound apologetic to defend the faith once delivered to the saints (1 Pet 3:14; Jude 3); and (7) a spirit of worship of the Triune God (Isa 25:1).

Our ministry practices are evaluated on the basis that they serve to meet one or more of these goals. Each of the four ministries (nursery, kids, students, CC) are heading in this same direction. The transition that kids experience in going from the nursery to the kids ministry, and from the kids ministry to the student ministry, is therefore unencumbered by the discipleship differences that arise from differing ministry approaches. The cumulative effect of a single coherent vision allows us to further the discipleship of our kids and students as they age and advance through the four ministries. One example of this is that we teach a catechism to our kids from preschool all the way through high school. As they advance through the ministries, the catechism questions get deeper and the answers longer. In this way, they are developing a biblical worldview (goal #3) and learning the faith once delivered to the saints (goal #6).

The Lord has also blessed BBC with faithful volunteers who have taken ownership of their ministries. The multitude of volunteers has provided students with more opportunities to build relationships with their leaders. Because of that, I am also able to make family ministry a priority and take initiatives to equip parents to disciple their children. Having leaders in place to minister to our students each week allows me the time to write family devotionals, plan family ministry events, and teach family discipleship classes.

Although there are obvious strengths to this ministry context, it nevertheless has its weaknesses. The primary way in which we determine such ministry deficiencies is by evaluating our ministries to see if any of the ministry goals are not being reached. A close examination of our ministries reveals that, of the seven goals, one in particular—goal number 5—is not being achieved by our CC ministry. This goal, students developing a passion for and engagement in missions and evangelism, is intended to be progressive. As students age through the ministries, they should be met with increased equipping and opportunity for outreach. The outreach component built into our kids ministry is a bus ministry to pick up and drop off kids for the midweek program. Students in the student ministry receive the opportunity to engage in local, state, and foreign missions. However, fulfilling our ministry goals necessitates leading our CC ministry towards greater outreach as well, which is the problem that the project at hand seeks to address. The way in which this deficiency will be rectified is by the equipping of undergraduate students in the CC ministry so that they will be prepared to engage their campuses with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Rationale**

It must be seen that biblical fidelity is the primary impetus for this initiative. The goals that we have set for our ministries are not arbitrary objectives; we believe them to be biblically mandated. Being engaged in evangelism and missions is non-negotiable for Christ-followers. One does not need to go any further than Jesus' command to make disciples to see this (Matt 28:20).

However, whether by ignorance of this calling or by disobedience, many Christians fail to engage in evangelism or missions. Some confuse the act of evangelism with promoting the social justice movement or promulgating an ethic of general

kindness.<sup>1</sup> Others are paralyzed by fear.<sup>2</sup> The post-truth college culture is notoriously intolerant of exclusive truth-claims.<sup>3</sup> Many college students who reflect on their calling to share the gospel feel overwhelmed and intimidated by such an environment—an environment their parents and churches are readily sending them into.

Furthermore, the non-biblical worldviews that are propagated on college campuses frequently infiltrate the culture and the churches in their sphere of influence. One such example can be seen in the impact that false teaching at Maryville College (MC) has had on churches in the Maryville area.<sup>4</sup> Since its founding, this campus has been known for “theological diversity.”<sup>5</sup> For example, the Center for Campus Ministry recommends explicitly non-Christian religious centers for their students to attend as their own congregation.<sup>6</sup> As their purpose statement suggests, they are more committed to religious pluralism than the true gospel: “The College believes that it must listen attentively to all human voices so that it may hear the call of God no matter how God may speak.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, the college’s religion department has embraced process theology. This heretical worldview has not been contained to the MC campus for the

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<sup>1</sup> Tracey Lewis, “Practicing the Story: Equipping Congregations for Evangelism,” *International Review of Missions* 105, no. 1 (July 2016): 54–58, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/irom.12129>.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy K. Beougher, *Overcoming Walls to Witnessing* (Charlotte, NC: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1993), 10–18.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce A. Little, “Evangelism in a Post-Christian Society,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 3–14, <https://www.southeasternreview.com/archives/>.

<sup>4</sup> Maryville College was founded in 1819 by the Presbyterian Synod of Tennessee under the leadership of progressive Presbyterian minister, Isaac Anderson, “Southern and Western Seminary” was later re-chartered by the state as “Maryville College” in 1842. Inside Maryville College, “Founding Story,” last modified 2017, <https://www.maryvillecollege.edu/about/inside/founding-story/>.

<sup>5</sup> Inside Maryville College, “Founding Story,” last modified 2017, <https://www.maryvillecollege.edu/about/inside/founding-story/>.

<sup>6</sup> Included in their list are Unitarian Universalist and Islamic congregations. Maryville College Spiritual Life, “Local Congregations,” last modified 2017, <https://www.maryvillecollege.edu/campus-life/spiritual-life/local-congregations/>.

<sup>7</sup> Maryville College Mission and Vision, “Statement of Purpose,” last modified 2017, <https://www.maryvillecollege.edu/about/mission-vision/purpose-statement/>.

pastor of a prominent local Southern Baptist Church in the Chilhowee Baptist Association has endorsed process theology literature produced by MC faculty.<sup>8</sup> The false teaching on college campuses not only deceives Christians on campus but has the tendency to spread beyond its physical borders.

It is foolish to send young believers into a culture that is potentially hostile toward their faith and the message we expect them to faithfully bear if we do not adequately equip them for such a task.<sup>9</sup> Do not be mistaken—they ought to go into these places. The need for Christ that unbelieving individuals have on college campuses demands we send our students to them with the gospel. The error which this project seeks to resolve is the church's failure to equip its students to engage their peers with the gospel. With proper training and by the grace of God, they can be prepared for the task of evangelism, they can have their fear give way to compassion for their lost neighbor, and they can find their confidence grounded in the power of the gospel which first saved them. To forsake equipping our CC students for such an enterprise is to neglect the church's calling (Eph 4:12), squander an opportunity, and rob them of the discipleship we ought to provide. To prepare them to engage their campuses with the gospel, the college students of BBC were equipped in missional apologetics to respond to common false teachings that characterize many college campuses today.

In addition, a ministry plan was also devised in this project to guide churches toward establishing partnerships with campus ministries to equip students in missional apologetics. This part of the project is motivated by three burdens. First, many churches have given up on college ministry, effectively handing over the discipleship of their high school graduates to campus ministries. It is God's vision for the church, not merely

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<sup>8</sup> D. Andrew Crain, *Science & Christianity: Past, Present, and Future* (Maryville, TN: Maryville College Press, 2019), 33–35.

<sup>9</sup> An example of intentional hostility on the part of college professors towards college-aged Christians is exemplified in Peter Boghossian, *A Manual for Creating Atheists* (Charlottesville, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2013).

parachurch organizations, to take ownership of the discipleship of Christians. Second, just because a church does not have college students does not mean they cannot be involved in the discipleship of college students. Third, many churches are looking for opportunities to engage local college campuses with the gospel. Partnering with campus ministries to equip students in missional apologetics gives local churches such an opportunity.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip undergraduate students to engage in missional apologetics on college campuses.

### **Goals**

The following three goals were established in order to guide the completion of the project.

1. The first goal was to develop a ministry plan for partnering with collegiate ministries to share the gospel on local college campuses.
2. The second goal was to develop a ten-session apologetics teaching series to equip students for prepared evangelism.
3. The third goal was to equip the students in a classroom or small group setting.

For the completion of this project, the three goals above were successfully administered. The research methodology below describes how each of these goals were measured and the benchmark that determined them to be successful.<sup>10</sup>

### **Research Methodology**

The first goal in this project was to devise a ministry plan to guide churches in

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<sup>10</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project will be performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.



developing a partnership with collegiate ministries with the aim of equipping their students in missional apologetics. This goal was measured by a panel of area pastors who reviewed the plan and graded it according to a rubric.<sup>11</sup> The rubric evaluates (1) the plan's purpose, whether there is a perceivable need for such a partnership; (2) the plan's action steps for comprehensiveness and achievability; and (3) the effectiveness of its training method. This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the rubric criterion reached the sufficiency level.

The second goal is to develop a ten-session apologetics teaching series. The training gives participants a biblical understanding of apologetics (see chapter 2), supplying them with a method for sharing the gospel, and equipping them with relevant apologetic material to prepare them for outreach on college campuses. This goal was measured by an expert panel who evaluated the curriculum according to a rubric. The rubric was used to evaluate the series' (1) biblical fidelity, (2) pedagogical utility, and (3) applicability.<sup>12</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the rubric criterion reached the sufficiency level.

Following the second, the third goal was to equip the participants with the apologetics training in a classroom or small group setting. This goal was measured by the Basics of Apologetics Assessment, a pre- and post-training survey where participants assessed their understanding and confidence in the practice of apologetics.<sup>13</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test of dependent samples returned positive statistical significance in the pre- and post-survey scores for 80 percent of the participants.

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<sup>11</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>12</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>13</sup> See appendix 3.

## Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

*Apologetics.* The definition of apologetics which is assumed in this project comes from John Frame: “The discipline that teaches Christians how to give a reason for their hope.”<sup>14</sup> A more general definition of apologetics might be preferred, and is helpfully captured by K. Scott Oliphint as “the application of biblical truth to unbelief.”<sup>15</sup> Apologetics is seen to be necessarily tied to gospel proclamation.

*Evangelism.* This project adopts the concise definition of evangelism, “to proclaim the gospel.”<sup>16</sup> The gospel is the message that God calls all to repent and believe in Christ in response to his redemptive work. Proclaiming this message is the duty of all Christians and is the specific task of evangelism.

*Missional.* As Van Sanders contends, the *missio Dei* ought to supply the meaning to the adjective “missional.” An individual or ministry is missional when it “intentionally pursues God’s mission for his glory among all peoples by following his patterns and his ways of expanding his kingdom.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the accepted definition of missional is the intent to “witness to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations.”<sup>18</sup> This definition reveals the nuances which distinguish missional from evangelism to be one of intention and practice, respectively. To be missional is to have the intent to carry out God’s mission, which involves evangelism.

There are two limitations to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-training surveys is dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest

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<sup>14</sup> John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 1.

<sup>15</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 29.

<sup>16</sup> Moisés Silva, ed, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 306.

<sup>17</sup> Van Sanders, “The Mission of God and the Local Church,” in *Pursuing the Mission of God in Church Planting*, ed. John M. Bailey (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2006), 25.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 26.

about their knowledge and understanding of apologetics. To mitigate this limitation, the respondents were assured that their answers will remain anonymous. Second, the effectiveness of the training is limited by the constancy of attendance. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of a training if participants are not present for the teaching sessions. To mitigate this limitation, participants who could not make 70 percent of the training sessions were removed from the analysis.

Two delimitations were also placed on the project. First, the training focuses on three apologetically relevant teachings to address typical challenges found on college campuses. The training focuses on the reliability of Scripture, the transcendence of God, and the exclusive salvific fitness of Jesus Christ. Second, the project was confined to a seventeen-week timeframe. This provided sufficient time to prepare and teach the ten-week training sessions and conduct the post-training survey.

### **Conclusion**

It is incumbent on the church to equip Christians to carry out God's call to engage in missions and evangelism. Apologetics prepares believers for such a purpose. Chapter two demonstrates that the New Testament's usage of *apologia* grounds the discipline of apologetics in the proclamation of the gospel. There, it will also be shown that it is the responsibility of the church to equip believers for such a ministry. Chapter three provides historical warrant for the missional nature of apologetics and supply an integrative apologetics method consistent with the historical and biblical exegesis.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR EQUIPPING UNDERGRADUATES TO ENGAGE IN MISSIONAL APOLOGETICS

#### **Introduction**

The thesis to be defended is that Scripture provides a clear mandate and instruction for the practice of apologetics. First, an exegesis of 1 Peter 3:15 will yield biblical principles which provide definition to the concept and practice of apologetics. Second, an exegesis of Colossians 1:23–2:8 will provide warrant for equipping undergraduates in the practice of apologetics by showing its utility in gospel ministry.

#### **A New Testament Definition of Apologetics (1 Pet 3:8–17)**

“Apologetics” is broadly defined from the Greco-Roman court scene, where to make a defense (απολογεομαι) was “to speak on one’s own behalf, in one’s defense” against an accusation.<sup>1</sup> As a discipline within theology, apologetics did not take its current shape until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Today, there are “apologists” representing virtually every major belief system, each of them with the task of defending their doctrines and practices. Apologetics as an evangelical discipline, however, ought not to be defined so broadly. Because evangelical theology is concerned with Christian faith and practice as revealed in the Bible,<sup>3</sup> and because the practice of giving a defense

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<sup>1</sup> Moises Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1:361.

<sup>2</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, “Socrates or Christ: The Reformation of Christian Apologetics,” in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CO: Ross House, 1976), 191.

<sup>3</sup> Evangelical theology is defined at least by the belief that “the Bible is the truthful revelation of God and through it the life-giving voice of God speaks.” I. S. Rennie, “Evangelical Theology” in *New*

(απολογία) is prescribed in the Bible, a narrower definition of the term than its use in the larger context of the ancient world is called for. Therefore, for evangelical purposes, both the concept and application of apologetics should conform to the New Testament use of ΑΠΟΛΟΓΙΑ and its derivatives. Because 1 Peter 3:13–18 is the text *par excellence* for justifying and defining the discipline of apologetics, this passage will be the focus of the following exegetical analysis.

As Jobes rightly notes, when Peter employs ΑΠΟΛΟΓΙΑ in 1 Peter 3:15, “[he] did not have in mind the professional or academic field of Christian apologetics.”<sup>4</sup> This needs to be kept in mind in order to avoid unnecessary anachronisms. If the NT does not speak directly to a discipline called apologetics, a careful exegesis of this text and others must be made in order to establish guiding principles whereby a biblical discipline of apologetics can be developed. What will be discovered is that the Bible provides a clear biblical mandate and instructions for a practice that can be called “apologetics.”

### **Context**

The first thing which must be considered is the context in which this term occurs. The context of 1 Peter 3:8-14a can be summarized as follows: (1) dispersed Christians, who are experiencing suffering and persecution, (2) are charged by the Apostle not to respond in revenge but by actively blessing their persecutors, and (3) if they do so, they are promised to be blessed. These three contextual points are paralleled in verses 9 and 14. The two verses flank a quotation from Psalm 34 which will aid in the interpretation of the paralleled statements.

First, Peter is writing to dispersed Christians who are experiencing some level

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*Dictionary of Theology*, ed., Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 239.

<sup>4</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 230.

of persecution. While the intensity of the persecution is debated, the introduction to the epistle supports this conclusion.<sup>5</sup> The audience is comprised of “elect exiles” who are experiencing “various trials” (1:1, 6). In chapter three, Peter’s exhortation not to return evil for evil presupposes that the believers are experiencing evil treatment (v. 9). The parallel between verses 9 and 14 begins with this notion of persecution. Verse 9 presupposes ill treatment while verse 14 leads with, “even if you should suffer...”

Second, Peter challenges the *lex talionis* with the superior Christian ethic. In verse 9, he urges them to respond to their persecutors by blessing them: “Do not repay evil for evil [κακοῦ] or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless.” Likewise, in verse 14, Christians blessing their persecutors is seen in the phrase, “for righteousness’ sake” (διὰ δικαιοσύνην, lit. because of righteousness). This phrase is alluding to more than the general resolve to honor Christ; instead, Peter is reiterating his reference to Psalm 34:15: “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous [δικαίους]...”<sup>6</sup> The psalmist describes the righteous as one who keeps “his tongue from evil [κακοῦ]” (Ps 34:13; 1 Pet 3:10), and who turns away from evil (κακοῦ) in order to do good (Ps 34:14; 1 Pet 3:11). Peter’s allusion to the Psalm in verse 14 carries the same exhortation as verse 9 to pursue good and not evil in the midst of suffering.

Each of these verses end with a promise of receiving blessing if the readers exchange avenging themselves for blessing their persecutors (vv. 9, 14). Peter reminds his readers that this is the purpose for which the elect were called by God, which follows closely with Jesus’ teaching from Matthew 5:11-12: “You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven.” Jesus calls his disciples into

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<sup>5</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 228.

<sup>6</sup> Davids also points out that this is an echo of Jesus’ teaching from Matthew 5:10. Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 130.

Kingdom service and guarantees that they will experience tribulation (Matt 10:22). As they do, they will experience the blessing of his presence (John 16:7), and receive assurance that they belong to him (John 15:19). If Peter has in mind blessings outside of those mentioned in Christ's teaching, it is not clear.

Besides the three points derived from the parallel statements above, further encouragement for persecuted Christians is found in Peter's use of Psalm 34. The Psalm places men in two camps: those who do what is good and are found under the watch and care of God (Ps 34:15), and those who do what is evil and have the Lord's anger stirred up against them (Ps 34:16). Peter puts this matter into the perspective of eternity as the words "life" and "good days" from this quotation "take on an eschatological tone."<sup>7</sup> In other words, he is calling his readers to consider their suffering in light of eternity. It appears there is a dual purpose in Peter's usage of this Psalm. First, this helps to advance Peter's cause of steering his readers from retaliation. To retaliate is to "repay evil for evil" (v. 14), and to follow the evildoer down the path of wickedness when the Psalm calls God's people to "turn away from evil" (1 Pet 3:10). Furthermore, what can retaliation add to the judgement the unrighteous will receive in eternity? The suffering that the righteous experience by the hands of men is trivial compared to the suffering experienced by the unrighteous on the Last Day. Knowing the coming judgement, Christians can be content during temporary injustice.

Peter's other purpose is to encourage his readers to persevere in the midst of trials, to "suffer for righteousness' sake" (v. 14). This point is made explicit as the pericope concludes, "It is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (v. 17). It is better to experience temporary persecution but be counted as a righteous one (on whom are the eyes of the Lord) than to pursue evil and experience judgement. In light of this,

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<sup>7</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 128.

Peter’s rhetorical question in v. 13 can truly be appreciated: “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?” Or, as Paul would say it, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31).<sup>8</sup>

### **First Imperative: Do Not Fear Your Adversaries**

Having considered the context above, the imperatives that follow verse 14a can be seen as instructions to guide dispersed Christians in blessing their persecutors. The first imperative Peter gives is to “have no fear [of them], nor be troubled” (v. 14b). This negative instruction logically follows from Peter’s immediate charge to bless one’s adversaries. The path of blessing one’s persecutors begins by not fearing them. Peter draws this teaching from Isaiah 8:12, where Isaiah encourages Judah not to fear their opposition. However, Peter augments αὐτοῦ from the LXX to αὐτῶν. The effect of such a transition is to move the emphasis from not fearing what their opponents fear to not fearing the opponents themselves.<sup>9</sup> By using Isaiah in this way, Peter “reminds his readers that they are not the first of God’s people to experience threat.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in light of eternity, a Christian’s adversaries can only apply “light and momentary affliction” (2 Cor 4:17).

### **Second Imperative: Honor Christ the Lord as Holy**

A second imperative is put forward as Peter continues the quotation of Isaiah. The first was negative—to not fear one’s adversaries. This one is positive—only fear

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<sup>8</sup> Contending the encouragement is even more specific, Carson thinks Peter’s use of the Psalm is to communicate to his readers that “just as God delivered David from the dangers implicit in his sojourn among the Philistines, so also God will deliver Peter’s Christian readers from their sojourn among pagan communities.” D. A. Carson, “1 Peter” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1037.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1038.

<sup>10</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 228.



Jesus Christ. Isaiah 8:13 reads, “But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” A contrast is drawn between the Lord and a Christian’s adversaries. Instead of fearing one’s persecutors, God’s people are only to fear Him. Christ commanded his followers not to fear “those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). Again, in verse 15, Peter does not keep with Isaiah’s language. He modifies this quotation by replacing “himself” (αὐτὸν) with “Christ” (τὸν Χριστὸν) so that the imperative focuses on the Lord Christ (Κύριον τὸν Χριστὸν). This could be considered an indication of Christ’s divinity as suggested by the identification of Jesus as the Lord of Isaiah through the exchange of words. However, the intent of Peter is to center the Christian’s focus specifically on “the Lord Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the Christian is to ἀγιαῖσατε the Lord Christ (v. 15). This verb is interpreted as “to treat as holy” or “to give reverence to/to honor.”<sup>12</sup> Forbes explains that the aorist imperative in 1 Peter “should be taken as programmatic, by which a specific command sets a course of action to be followed habitually in the future.”<sup>13</sup> This verb is to stand in perpetuity. To honor Christ the Lord as holy is a day-by-day, moment-by-moment commitment of the heart to serve the Lord because of his intrinsic holiness. He is worthy of his people’s devotion, and his holiness is to motivate Peter’s audience to seek to please him rather than their persecutors.

The second modification to Isaiah 8:13 is the addition of the prepositional phrase, “in your hearts” (v. 15). The Christian ethic centers moral culpability on the

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<sup>11</sup> Following Jobes in preferring the appositional translation. Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 229.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. and trans. By William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Greg W. Forbes, *1 Peter*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 5, 115.

condition and disposition of the heart. In the Scriptures, “the heart is the center of our knowledge, feeling, will, the seat of our conscience.”<sup>14</sup> For Peter, it is the true essence of a person. The condition of the heart is what really matters, regardless of outward appearances (1 Pet 3:4). Therefore, honoring Christ the Lord as holy must be more than lip service. Peter desires more than a superficial devotion to Christ; worship must be genuine. So far, the first two imperatives have addressed the disposition of the Christian’s heart. The following two imperatives describe how one is to outwardly honor the Lord Christ as holy.<sup>15</sup>

### **Third Imperative: Always be Ready to Give a Defense**

The third and fourth imperatives revolve around an event anticipated by Peter, a defense (απολογία). When considering this event, several things need to be taken into consideration: the setting, the object, and the subject matter.

**The setting of a defense.** A defense in the ancient world was an occasion to respond to criticisms, questions, or charges. Defenses could be held in formal settings such as a court hearing (e.g. Acts 22:1; 2 Tim 4:16), or they may have been informal occasions (e.g. 2 Cor 7:11).<sup>16</sup> Two pieces of evidence suggest that Peter has at least the latter in view. First, the use of always (αει) and everyone (παντι) suggests that the opportunity to give a defense can arise at any moment at the request of anyone.<sup>17</sup> Second, the prior imperative commends an active, on-going action of honoring Christ in one’s

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<sup>14</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, vol. 1, *Created Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 88.

<sup>15</sup> Greg W. Forbes, *1 Peter*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 115.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. and trans. By William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 95.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

heart. If giving a defense is how one is to honor Christ, it follows that the command of readiness for a defense be programmatic as well. Hence, the urgency suggested by Peter's appeal for readiness (ἡετοιμο). Peter Davids agrees with this interpretation based on its connection with the rest of Peter's instruction: "Rather than fear the unbelievers around them, Christians, out of reverence to Christ, should be prepared to respond fully to their often hostile questions about the faith."<sup>18</sup> Even though this interpretation is preferred, Peter also assumes his readers will find themselves "accused" (v. 16). Such instances would likely involve a change of setting from informal to formal. Therefore, it must be concluded that Peter makes no attempt to restrict the setting in which a defense might be occasioned.

**The object of a defense.** The object of such a defense is the next concern. Many have pointed out that due to the use of ἀπολογία outside the New Testament, the Roman court scene is invoked whenever this term is used.<sup>19</sup> This is a legitimate background to the New Testament's use of the term. For example, ἀπολογιαν is used with respect to defending one's character or conduct (e.g. 1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 7:11). Furthermore, there are two instances in which ἀπολογίασ is used in reference to Paul standing before the bar of accusers (Acts 22:1; 25:16). The object of Paul's defense in such cases was his own innocence (Acts 25:8). The same is suggested by Paul when he states his defense (ἀπολογεῖσθαι, "to defend myself") before Agrippa (Acts 26:2). In this instance, he is speaking "for himself" (Acts 26:1), which indicates he is defending his own innocence (although it will be shown there is more to NT defenses than mere self-exoneration).<sup>20</sup> The defense against charges is not the limit to this idea, for this same term

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<sup>18</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 131–132.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 24–25.

<sup>20</sup> Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R

is used of Alexander, who stood as a prosecutor and sought to bring charges against Gaius and Aristarchus in Ephesus (Acts 19:33).

The brief lexical survey demonstrates that ἀπολογία and its derivatives were frequently employed judicially when one was required to exonerate himself or accuse another. The object of a defense can simply be personal. When considering Peter's instruction to his readers, this interpretation must not be prematurely ruled out. After all, Peter expects their current persecution to continue, and occasions will certainly arise when they will be accused (v. 16). Christ taught his followers to expect such occasions when they would be in defense (ἀπολογία) against the charges made by their accusers (Luke 12:11). Nevertheless, there is more than just a personal exoneration behind the New Testament's idea of defense. Even as Paul is anticipating his defense before Caesar, he considers his ministry to be one in "defense [ἀπολογία] and confirmation of the gospel" (Phil 1:7). In such instances, the gospel is the object of defense.

Paul's ministry illustrates how, in early Christian witness, the defense of the gospel took place in tandem with the defense of one's own innocence, character, or conduct. In Philippians, Paul states he was "appointed for the defense [ἀπολογία] of the gospel" (Phil 1:16). When Christ called Paul, he told him that he was his chosen instrument to take the gospel before "gentiles, kings, and Israelites" (Acts 9:15). Paul was taken before kings via imprisonment and hearings in which he was expected to give a defense against the charges brought against him. It was in these settings that Paul not only gave a defense for himself, but also for the gospel, thus fulfilling his calling. Paul's defense before Agrippa exemplifies how his defense is simultaneously to exonerate himself of guilt and also demonstrate the validity of the gospel (Acts 26:1–23). When considering the object of defense in 1 Peter, one does not have to reason whether Peter

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Publishing Company, 2011), 693.

has in mind the gospel only or also a Christian's own innocence. The first century situation for Christians often involved both. When a Christian's character or conduct was called into question, such questioning from his accusers provided an opportunity for the defense of the gospel.

**The subject matter of a defense.** Although the defense of oneself is likely assumed by Peter, it does not take center stage. As Peter offers his readers the subject matter for their defense, the focus is placed on the gospel. The content of the defense is to give “a reason for the hope” that is in the Christian, λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος (v. 15). Reason (λογον) is in the accusative case, making it the direct object of the phrase, and is limited by the phrase, “the hope that is in you.”

By this point in his epistle, Peter has already identified the hope that believers have in Christ so that the mere use of the phrase, “the hope that is in you,” would call attention to what he had previously described as their hope. In the opening of his letter, Peter praises the Father, saying, “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:3b–5). The “hope” (ἐλπίδα) is described as living (ζῶσαν), having been secured by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus for those who are born again (ἀναγεννήσας) by the efficacious work of the Father. A few exegetical comments will suggest this “hope” is anchored in the future resurrection of those in Christ, which Peter describes as being related to both the new birth and the resurrection of Christ.

First, in 1 Peter 1:21, Peter says that Christ came so that through him believers would put their faith and hope (ἐλπίδα) in God, “who raised him from the dead...” Hope is to be in the God of the resurrection. Second, the Apostle describes hope as an

inheritance (κληρονομίαν, v. 4).<sup>21</sup> He then states that this inheritance is “kept in heaven” and “ready to be revealed in the last time” (v. 5). He looks ahead to the “revelation of Christ,” when believers will receive the “outcome” of their faith (vv. 7, 9). Finally, the inheritance is described as “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (v. 4). These adjectives are similar to those used by the Apostle Paul in describing the quality of resurrected bodies where inheritance (verbs, κληρονομήσαι and κληρονομεῖ) is also linked to the future resurrection (1 Cor 15:50–54). Therefore, when Peter exhorts his readers to present the hope that is in them, he is speaking of their future inheritance in Christ, namely the resurrection of their bodies.

For Peter, hope is not wishful thinking; rather, it is an assured reality yet to be received. Such confidence in a future inheritance is due to the eschatological nature of the resurrection. The eschaton is referenced twice by Peter (1 Pet 1:5, 20). The first reference is to the future salvation (resurrection) that will be revealed in the last time (καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ). The second speaks of the revelation of Christ at his first coming, which Peter also identifies as being in the last time (ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων). Together, they give a sense that the eschaton began in the first coming of Christ and will culminate in his second coming (the already/not yet).<sup>22</sup> Christ’s resurrection at the beginning of the last days was the “first fruits” of a resurrection of the saints that will take place at the end of the eschaton (1 Cor 15:20).

Until the end, believers have been given hope that they will receive the rest of their inheritance in Christ and be part of the future resurrection. First, their inheritance is being guarded by the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead (1 Pet 1:5). Second, having received the new birth, believers receive the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of

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<sup>21</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 52.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 70.

their future inheritance (Eph 1:13–14). More than that, and third, the new birth is—in a very real sense—the beginning of the resurrected life. Again, Peter writes that God “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3). As G. K. Beale comments, “The direct link between ‘born again’ and Christ’s resurrection confirms that the verb [to be born again] conveys a resurrection idea, which, as we have seen, is new creation...”<sup>23</sup> Peter understands that there is coming a new heaven and a new earth, and that “the present heavens and earth are stored up for fire, being kept for the day of judgement...” (2 Pet 3:7). To escape the fate of the present heavens and earth, the only hope people have is to be made part of the new. Jesus’ resurrection makes possible those living in the present world to be born/created again (ἀναγεννήσας, 1 Pet 1:3), beginning with their spirit at regeneration and culminating with their bodies at the end-time resurrection. Christ’s resurrection inaugurated the new creation, and the first application of the resurrection to believers is the new birth experience. The moment one is born again, he becomes part of the new creation that God will bring to fulfillment in the culmination of the last days (2 Cor 5:17).

Jesus, too, explains the eschatological nature of the resurrection when he comforts Martha after the death of Lazarus with the promise of resurrection. Martha responds, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (John 6:24). Jesus, not denying the future resurrection, responds that the resurrection has begun in him and is given to those who believe: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die’” (Jhn 11:25–26).

As stated earlier, when Paul stood before his accusers, the gospel became the object of his defense. After his arrest by the Jews, the defenses he gave before the

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<sup>23</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 325.

Sanhedrin, Felix, and Agrippa each became opportunities for him to fulfill the calling for which he was appointed. Before the Sanhedrin, he declared, “It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial” (Acts 23:6). Paul explains to Felix, “It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day” (v. 24:21). And to Agrippa, Paul says that he stands “on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers” (v. 26:6). He then identifies this hope when he asks, “Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?” (v. 8). With each defense, the subject matter is the hope of the resurrection.

#### **Fourth Imperative: Christian Conduct**

The final imperative further explains how one is to defend the gospel: “yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (1 Pet 3:15b–16). This is Peter’s appeal for maintaining Christ-like conduct (“behavior in Christ”) while giving a defense. “Respect” is accepted as an accurate translation of *φρόβου*. As the context assumes, defenses will often be given in hostile settings. For his readers to give their defense with gentleness and respect is to obey his prior exhortation not to “repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling” (v. 9). Gentleness and respect towards one’s neighbor is “rooted in one’s attitude toward God,”<sup>24</sup> which David Helm notes is a point made by Psalm 34.<sup>25</sup> When obeyed, the outcome is that a Christian’s conscience will be clear, knowing he has not retaliated against his opponents. Then, if suffering does come, he will be blessed while his persecutor will be put to shame (v. 16), “For is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil” (1 Pet 3:17).

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<sup>24</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 231.

<sup>25</sup> David R. Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ’s Sufferings*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 115.



## Concluding Principles for Apologetics

Christian apologetics should not merely get its name from the New Testament; its intent and scope should also be derived from the Bible. From the exegetical analysis above, several principles can be elucidated to guide Christians in the practice of apologetics. Before considering a few of those principles, there is one question that must first be answered: how exclusive should one be in his apologetics method? Should one treat these principles as prescriptive and limit himself to only those principles that can be derived from the text? Or, should one treat them as merely descriptive and allow himself the option to exchange biblical principles for those that are not specifically derived from Scripture? Although this issue is ultimately determined by larger hermeneutical considerations,<sup>26</sup> two points make the case that these principles should carry prescriptive weight.

First, the genre of epistle is didactic in nature. Instructions are put forward in 1 Peter and are expected to be obeyed.<sup>27</sup> Second, the following principles are derived from imperatives found in the text. Since these principles are prescriptive, they are part of the essence of New Testament apologetics. Although there is more that could be derived from the New Testament defense-giving, if an apologetics method does not conform to the following principles then is not biblical apologetics.

**Preparation.** The first principle derived from 1 Peter 3:8–17 is the need to be prepared. The third imperative above emphasizes the readiness one ought to have for giving a defense (1 Pet 3:15). Therefore, apologetics entails that Christians be prepared. Preparation involved in apologetics is both devotional and theological. It is devotional because the command to give a defense is preceded by a challenge to the heart, to honor

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<sup>26</sup> John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and in Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996), 38.

<sup>27</sup> As Plummer describes the nature of epistles, they offer “authoritative instruction to the church in every age.” Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010), 279.

Christ the Lord as holy. Because the aorist imperative is programmatic, the heart's disposition requires constant preparation by devotion. Moreover, it is only when one's heart is honoring Christ as holy that one can be prepared to give a defense appropriately.

Additionally, theological preparedness is necessary for an effective apologetics ministry. The content of the defense is prescribed by the phrase, "the hope that is in you" (v. 15). Although every believer will know something of this hope given that gospel content must be believed in order to be saved, further theological preparation is desired to equip the believer to provide the questioner with specific reasons tailored to his specific questions. With no definite article associated with  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\nu$  in verse 15, variability is implied in the reasons that can be given. Christians who set out exploring the depths of their faith will find a countless number of reasons for the hope of the resurrection. Theological preparation can only aid in the discovery of those reasons, providing the Christian with a greater selection to meet the nuances of the questioner.

**Evangelistic.** Second, apologetics is by nature evangelistic. Although the defense is in response to a question, the question never becomes the center of the defense. Neither is reason ( $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\nu$ ) central to Peter's charge, even though it is the direct object of the sentence. This is because the reasons that are to be given are with respect to the hope possessed by believers. This is important when considering the nature of a defense. Although there are a variety of reasons that might be given to answer the various possible questions that might be raised, they are all to appeal to the same objective hope, the gospel.<sup>28</sup> What this implies about the practice of apologetics is that defenses are intended to be positive explications of the gospel.

Defensiveness is not necessary to a defense; neither is defensiveness Peter's

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<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Edwards shows the relationship between hope and faith in Scripture, and asserts that Peter's imperative is synonymous with "to give a reason, or declare the grounds, of your faith." Jonathan Edwards, "Notes on Scripture," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (London: Yale University Press, 1998) 15:241.

intention. Instead, Peter centers his imperative on a Christian's reason for his hope. B.B. Warfield emphatically agrees in his description of the nature of apologetics:

But apologetics does not derive its contents or take its form or borrow its value from the prevailing opposition; but preserves through all varying circumstances its essential character as a positive and constructive science which has to do with opposition only—like any other constructive science—as the refutation of opposing views becomes from time to time incident to construction.<sup>29</sup>

Neither the concept of apologetics nor its practice are defined by the questions raised; they are defined by the gospel. Therefore, when practicing apologetics, the question or accusation raised by the opponent must never supplant the Christian's hope as the object of the defense. If that happens, the Christian runs the risk of focusing solely on ancillary responses so that he fails to give a positive explanation of the gospel. If all one has achieved is the refuting of false worldviews, then biblical apologetics has not been practiced.<sup>30</sup> There is a place for destroying “arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:5), but the goal of apologetics is to share the gospel. Christians ought not to let arguments distract them from achieving that goal.

**Missional.** The next principle that can be drawn from this text is that apologetics should be missional in its intent. Hope in 1 Peter is an eschatologically-charged concept because it is rooted in the resurrection. The resurrected life has begun for believers. The hope Christians possess situates their longings in the future when they are promised to receive an inheritance that is almost indescribable. Although the Last Day will be one of unspeakable joy for Christians, that is not the case for those who remain in unbelief.

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<sup>29</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “Apologetics” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 9:4.

<sup>30</sup> This is where the distinction between negative and positive apologetics is unhelpful for it assumes one can complete his apologetics task by merely doing the former. Such a distinction is seen in Van Til's “restriction of the apologist to the exclusive use of negative arguments.” John Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 84. In the section below, apologetics is endorsed for the purpose of gospel ministry of warning. However, it is argued that warning alone is insufficient and must be accompanied by teaching.

The current overlap of the ages will not remain forever. The author of Hebrews makes the same point when he challenges his readers to encourage one another to persevere “while it is still called today” (Heb 3:13). One day it will no longer be “today,” and the opportunity of entering God’s rest will have passed. Those who remain in unbelief will not be able to enter God’s rest (Heb 3:19). The temporality of this age and the waning of the opportunity to repent ought to give Christians a sense of urgency. Therefore, Christians should not simply wait for the opportunity to arise to give a defense of the gospel; they should prayerfully and deliberately occasion the opportunity themselves. With this intentionality, apologetics takes on missional dimensions.<sup>31</sup>

**Conduct.** The final principle that will be considered is the need for a consistent Christian conduct. The final qualifier Peter gives to the making of a defense is that it should be done with “gentleness and respect” (v. 15). There is no room for hostility in gospel proclamation, even if the accusations are false and the treatment unjust. Reverence for Christ and compassion for one’s neighbor are to be the overriding motivations in apologetics. This needs to be kept in mind when one is preparing to engage in missional apologetics. Depending on the context, a Christian will likely encounter opposition. He must anticipate these encounters and have a prior resolve to bless his persecutors regardless of how he is treated. For, to deviate from Peter’s command for gentleness and respect would be to present a gospel of anger and retaliation.

### **The Utility of Apologetics for Gospel Ministry (Col 1:23–2:8)**

With biblical principles in place to define the concept and practice of

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<sup>31</sup> Missional, as defined above, is the intent to carry out the church’s mission to “witness to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations.” Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 26.

apologetics, what remains is to provide biblical warrant for equipping students to apologetically engage other worldviews with the gospel. This will be achieved by demonstrating the utility of apologetics for gospel ministry. An exegesis of Colossians 1:23–2:8 will support the thesis by expounding on Paul’s ministry of warning and teaching.

### **Context**

After an exposition of the gospel in Colossians 1:13–23, Paul begins to describe his apostolic ministry, declaring that he has become a servant (διάκονος) of the gospel. In verse 25, he then says that he is a servant (διάκονος) of the church. As a servant of the gospel and the church, God has charged him with the ministry of the Word, to declare mysteries which were once hidden but “now revealed to his saints” (v. 26).

There is a series of equivalencies present in this discourse. First, “the gospel” (εὐαγγελίου, v. 23) is equated with the “word of God” (λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ, v. 25).<sup>32</sup> The word of God is then defined as “the mystery” (τὸ μυστήριον, v. 26).<sup>33</sup> Paul identifies this mystery as “Christ in you” (Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν), which is further qualified as “the hope of glory” (ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης). As with 1 Peter, hope is an assured reality. Murray Harris explains, “The indwelling of the exalted Christ in individual believers is their assurance of coming glory... where the indwelling Spirit is called the pledge of inheritance.”<sup>34</sup>

The gospel, the word of God, the mystery now revealed, the reality of Christ’s indwelling presence, supplies believers with hope of attaining glory by the future

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<sup>32</sup> The equivalency is not merely contextual. In verse 23, Paul states that the gospel has been proclaimed in all creation. In verse 25, he says that God has given him the commission to make the word of God fully known. Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 61.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 155.

<sup>34</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 65.

resurrection. It is this very hope of the gospel (ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου) in which Paul desires his Colossian readers to persevere (v. 1:23). If they do, they are promised reconciliation with God as they will be made righteous (v. 22). The manner in which the Apostle encourages them to persevere will be the focus of the following exegesis. It is by “warning every man and teaching every man” (νουθετοῦντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον καὶ διδάσκοντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον, v. 28) that he carries out gospel ministry. As the exegete John Gill writes, “by these two words, warning and teaching, the several parts of the Gospel ministry are expressed...”<sup>35</sup>

### **Paul’s Gospel Ministry of Warning**

The warning aspect of Paul’s gospel ministry is brought to the fore in Colossians 2:4–8. In fact, warning his readers against false teaching is the very impetus for his exposition of the gospel in chapter 1. He writes, “I say this,” referring to his previous gospel exposition, “in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments” (v. 4). And so in verse 8 he warns them, “see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit...” False teaching has the ability to take believers captive and lead them astray from the “hope of the gospel” (v. 1:23). Because this is a matter of the perseverance of believers, the Apostle is not cavalier about his ministry of warning.

The false teaching in Colossae. The specific false teaching of which Paul is warning his readers is a modified Judaism. Although the ESV translates στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου as “elemental spirits of the world,” giving more credence to the interpretation that the Colossian heresy was primarily astrological,<sup>36</sup> the preferred translation is

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<sup>35</sup> John Gill, “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians” in *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, The Baptist Commentary Series (Paris, AK: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 181.

<sup>36</sup> William Barclay, *The All-Sufficient Christ: Studies in Paul’s Letter to the Colossians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 42-44.

“elemental teachings” or “elemental principles” of the world, referencing Jewish tradition and belief. This translation is preferred due to the context in which this phrase appears. Paul elevates the “circumcision of Christ” as far greater than the circumcision commanded to the Jews in the Law (vv. 11–12). This is because the things which the Law prescribed were elementary, merely “shadows” pointing to Christ and not the substance themselves (v. 17). Therefore, when one is united to Christ, he dies to the “principles of the world” (στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου, v. 20). The phrase “principles of the world” (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) also appears in Galatians 4:3, where Paul exhorts the Galatians not to return to the practices of the Law, for they have been redeemed from under the Law. Similar to Colossians 2:20, in Galatians 2:10, he declares that he “died to the Law.” The Colossian heresy is therefore similar to what the Galatians faced. It is a form of Judaizer teaching. What is more, this particular Jewish teaching had syncretized with Platonic philosophy, which leads Paul to warn them concerning the worship of angels (v. 18).<sup>37</sup>

Where the false teaching at Colossae went awry is at its epistemological foundation. It is a philosophy built upon faulty standards, namely “human tradition” and “elemental teaching” (v. 8). This is ultimately where the falsehood of every false teaching is rooted. Truth is determined by Christ alone, for he is the Creator of all things (v. 1:16). He is the absolute truth standard “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (v. 3). Therefore, a teaching that is not “according to Christ” (κατὰ Χριστόν) cannot hope to be truth (v. 8).

**The threat of false teaching.** The danger of false teaching is that it is both deceptive and potent. If false teaching could easily be recognized by believers, it would not pose a significant threat. However, that is not always the case. Those espousing false

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<sup>37</sup> John Davenant, *Colossians*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 2005), 498.

worldviews present “arguments that sound reasonable” (v. 4). Moreover, their practices give the “appearance of wisdom” (v. 23), but beneath the surface, man-made religion is unable to provide people with the power to deal with their greatest enemy. The potency of false worldviews is found in that “they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (v. 23). To be given over to such a worldview is to be disarmed of what is necessary to deal with sin. It is to be moved from the hope of the gospel, the powerful working of God whose defeat of sin was declared in the resurrection of Christ (v. 12).

Because of its threat to Christians, warning against false teaching was a major part of the apostolic ministry (e.g. Gal 3:1–3; 1 Tim 4:1–3; 2 Thess 2; 2 Pet 3; 1 John 2; Jude 18). A common theme in each of these warnings is the eschatological nature of false teaching. As Christ taught his disciples, deception within the church is characteristic of the end-time tribulation (Mark 13:22). Paul also understands false teaching eschatologically. The reason why it is present in the church is because the “latter times” (ὕστεροις καιροῖς) has been inaugurated (1 Tim 4:1).<sup>38</sup> Paul can also look ahead when false teaching will increase as the latter times culminate in the “last days” (ἔσχαταις ἡμέραις, 2 Tim 3:1).<sup>39</sup> In light of this larger Pauline eschatology, the zeal which the Apostle demonstrates in warning Christians can more fully be appreciated. End-time reality is meant to promote diligence and not laxity (Jas 5:1–11). Paul labors by the “energy that [God] powerfully works within [him]” so that his readers will not fall away but will persevere through the great deception that is at hand (Col 1:29).

### **Paul’s Gospel Ministry of Teaching**

Although warning is necessary, it is insufficient by itself. It must be

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<sup>38</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 93.

<sup>39</sup> Bauer interprets ὕστεροις καιροῖς in 1 Tim. 4:1 as “in the last times,” associating it closely with ἔσχαταις ἡμέραις of 2 Tim. 3:1. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. and trans. By William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 857.



accompanied by a ministry of teaching for it to achieve its purpose of encouraging Christians to persevere. Although there is a degree of overlap between the two, warning and teaching have their distinctives. Whereas a warning ministry demonstrates to believers (and non-believers) the falsity of other worldviews, teaching is best understood as a positive explication of the truth. Gill conveys the essence of a teaching ministry as follows:

Teaching every man in all wisdom; not natural, but spiritual and evangelical; the whole Gospel of Christ, the counsel of God, the wisdom of God in a mystery, and all the branches of it; teaching them to believe in Christ for salvation, to lay hold on his righteousness for justification, to deal with his blood for pardon, and with his sacrifice for the atonement of their sins; and to observe all things commanded by Christ, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly...<sup>40</sup>

Paul's teaching ministry is most clearly seen in his exposition of the gospel in Colossians 1. There are two primary reasons given for teaching the gospel to these believers whom he has never seen. First, a mature understanding of the gospel is a preemptive defense against false teaching. Second, growing in knowledge of the gospel is essential to perseverance.

**Teaching as a preemptive defense.** One of the reasons for expounding on the gospel in Colossians 1:13–23 is the false teaching that Paul warns his readers of in chapter 2. Teaching the gospel is a preemptive measure to guard his readers so that they will not be led astray whenever they encounter various worldviews. He states this purpose in chapter 2 where the first three verses are antecedent to the phrase, “I say this in order that no one may delude you...” (v. 2:4).<sup>41</sup> Yet, it is the gospel teaching of verses 1:13–23 which is effectively summarized by verses 2:2–3. Paul explains elements of the gospel to the Colossians for the expressed purpose of guarding them from false teaching.

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<sup>40</sup> John Gill, “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians” in *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, The Baptist Commentary Series (Paris, AK: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 181.

<sup>41</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 78.

If a believer does not understand why what he believes is true, he is likely to exchange it for something that is presented to him as more compelling. As the second chapter unfolds, further clarification of the gospel is given.

**Teaching for encouraging perseverance.** Paul demonstrates that the way to defend against false teaching is to be grounded in the truth of the gospel. By growing in Christ, one also perseveres, serving the other main purpose of Paul’s teaching ministry. Persevering in the “hope of the gospel” is proof of salvation (v. 1:23). Therefore, he encourages them, “as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (vv. 2:6–7).

The exhortations in verses 6–7 are similar to the contents of his prayer in verses 1:10–12.<sup>42</sup> Paul desires to see believers reach maturity (v. 1:28). This desire motivates him to labor at such lengths for he—as their teacher—takes responsibility for their maturity in Christ (v. 1:29). However, it is incumbent upon the one being taught to continue in the truth he has received. “Having been rooted” in Christ (ἑρριζωμένοι in the perfect tense), he must now continue “being built up” (ἔποικοδομούμενοι in the present tense, v. 2:7).<sup>43</sup> Because Paul also places responsibility for being established in the faith on the individual, a teaching ministry ought to have in mind equipping believers with the knowledge and wisdom to persist in growing in the faith. With words, the difference between merely teaching content and teaching to equip can seem insignificant, but it is very much the same as the difference between giving a man a fish and teaching a man to fish.

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<sup>42</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 179.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

## Utility of Apologetics for Warning and Teaching

A ministry of warning and teaching is not unique to the Apostles. Both are aspects of gospel ministry that are to be carried on by the leaders Christ appoints to serve his church. For example, Paul charges the Ephesian elders to protect the church from false teachers, appealing to his ministry of warning as an example for them to follow (Acts 20:28–31).<sup>44</sup> Likewise, in Ephesians 4, teaching to equip is a ministry entrusted to leaders in the church (Eph 4:11–12). Due to its nature, the discipline of apologetics is particularly suited for a gospel ministry of warning and teaching.

**Apologetics for a warning ministry.** Because apologetics involves giving reasons for the hope that is in believers, it is suitable for a gospel ministry of warning. First, it is able to equip believers to distinguish between the truth and false teaching. Apologetics does this effectively because reasons (in the context of 1 Peter) are definite propositions which describe the hope Christians have. They are present in the truth and absent in false worldviews, thus serving as distinguishing marks.

When Paul warns the Colossians of false teaching, many such reasons are put forward. The first one is epistemological—the truth is built upon the standard of Christ (v. 2:8). The second is ontological—Christ, who now fills believers, is the Deity incarnate (vv. 9–10). The third reason Paul gives to distinguish between the truth and the false teachers is ethical. False teachers are trying to deal with their sin by ineffectual religious practices, whereas Christ, the God-man, has erased the debt of sin finally and fully in the cross. By being united with Christ through faith, believers have their sins forgiven (vv. 11–15). What is further revealing is that the three reasons Paul gives are consistent with the kind of reasons to be given in the application of apologetics—they are directly related to the resurrection. Consider Paul’s epistemological reason that

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<sup>44</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 426–427.

distinguishes the truth from the false teachers. The resurrection is the vindication of Christ, proving him the worthy truth standard (1 Tim 3:16). In terms of ontology, the resurrection demonstrates Christ to be the Son of God (Rom 1:4). Finally, and ethically, the resurrection is God's approval of Christ's atoning sacrifice (Acts 2:16–24).<sup>45</sup> False teaching in the church is an end-time reality. It is only fitting that the eschatological threat of false teaching is met with a defense of the eschatological hope believers have in Christ. Apologetics is a suitable discipline to warn Christians of false teaching.

Second, apologetics is also sufficient to serve in a warning ministry to non-believers. In verse Colossians 1:28, Paul writes that his ministry involves “warning every man and teaching every man” (νουθετοῦντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον καὶ διδάσκοντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον). The emphasis placed on “every man” indicates that his ministry extended to all, both Jews and Gentiles,<sup>46</sup> but also to every person he encountered, believer and non-believer.<sup>47</sup> The reasons for the hope in a Christian are needs that the non-believer has. He ought to be warned of the passing of this heaven and earth and of his need to be made part of the new creation by being united to Christ through faith.

**Apologetics for a teaching ministry.** Apologetics is also useful for a teaching ministry. First, teaching Christians the gospel involves giving them reasons for the hope they already possess in Christ. Apologetics is fitting since its subject matter is a positive explication of the gospel. Second, the primary concern in a teaching ministry for believers is their perseverance. Apologetics is useful for this purpose as well because teaching them of their present resurrected life is motivation for persevering to reach the

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<sup>45</sup> G. K. Beale, “The Role of Resurrection in the Already-and-Not-Yet Phases of Justification,” in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 192–196.

<sup>46</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 65–66.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.2008), 160.

prize (Phil 3:14). Because those in Christ have been raised with him (Col 2:12), they have confidence of attaining their hope. Furthermore, apologetics meets the concern for a believer's ability to remind himself of the gospel. The Apostle tells the Colossians of their need to continue establishing themselves in the faith (Col 2:6–7). This axiomatically involves what amounts to devotional practices, which is a necessary component to the discipline of apologetics. By apologetics, Christians can be equipped devotionally and theologically to persevere in the faith.

The other concern in a teaching ministry to believers is to equip them for evangelism. Paul wants his readers to follow his evangelistic pursuits (Col 4:6). Furthermore, it has been argued above that a proper understanding of the eschatological context of 1 Peter leads to a missional intent for defense-giving. Therefore, to teach believers reasons for the hope they possess in Christ is not only a pastoral concern for their perseverance, it is also a missional concern as they are simultaneously being equipped to share the gospel.

### **Conclusion**

Since the practice of apologetics is expected of believers, it is incumbent upon pastors and leaders to equip the church, students included, in such a ministry (1 Pet 3:15). However, the practice of defense-giving ought to follow the parameters delineated from the text where: devotional and theological preparation is involved, the object of the defense is the gospel, the intent is missional, and Christian conduct is maintained. Such a practice has proven a useful companion to a gospel ministry of warning and teaching (Col 1:23-2:8). It is able to warn Christians of false worldviews and provide them with reasons for the truth of the gospel. As they are instructed, they will be equipped to apologetically engage other worldviews with the gospel.

CHAPTER 3  
HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL SUPPORT FOR  
EQUIPPING UNDERGRADUATES TO ENGAGE  
IN MISSIONAL APOLOGETICS

**Introduction**

The exegesis above has demonstrated how the Apostles conceived of and modeled apologetics. Their intention was missional—they deliberately used their occasioned defenses to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. This practice did not end with the Apostles; it has historically been the approach of Christians whose hope in Christ has been questioned. A look into two notable examples in the Patristic and Medieval eras will illustrate the continuity between the Apostles and later apologists. Following that, an analysis of various apologetic methods will yield an integrative method that best corresponds with the missional approach exemplified in Scripture and history.

**Missional Apologetics in History**

The tradition of the Apostles was handed down to the patristics.<sup>1</sup> This included the Apostles' teaching and approach to ministry.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, there is continuity in the apologetics method between the Apostles and subsequent apologists. For example, because the political situation of the second century was similar to that of the first for Christians, the church fathers, like their predecessors, employed apologetics in settings where they sought to exonerate Christians from unfair charges (e.g. Athenagoras to

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<sup>1</sup> D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition & Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 45.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the patristics adopted the typological interpretive method from the Apostles. Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 6–7.

Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Commodus).<sup>3</sup> Following the Apostles' lead, these settings presented the opportunity to not only defend their legal rights, but also their faith.

### **The Letter to Diognetus**

Apart from the often-hostile setting of a first-century court hearing, Christians also responded to those who civilly inquired about the faith. One such example is found in the *Letter to Diognetus* (2<sup>nd</sup> c.). Although the identity of the author is unknown, many have attempted to construct something of his identity based on textual details. For instance, the cultured Greek showcased in the letter indicates that the author was well-educated and was writing to someone capable of understanding his rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> As with most Greek apologists during the patristic era, the *Letter to Diognetus* is more philosophical and direct in contending for the truthfulness of the Christian faith than the Latin fathers.<sup>5</sup> The author claims to be a disciple of the Apostles.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, his letter illustrates how the missional apologetics of the apostles was handed down to the patristic apologists.

The author of the *Letter to Diognetus* responds to three questions raised by the recipient, Diognetus: “What sort of cult is Christianity to enable its adherents to spurn pagan gods and Jewish superstitions? What is the secret of the Christians’ affectionate love for one another? And why did the new religion come into existence so late in the world’s history?”<sup>7</sup> The response to the first question is an example of what is typically

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<sup>3</sup> Athenagoras, “A Plea for the Christians” in *Christian Apologetics Past & Present: A Primary Source Reader*, ed. William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 1:71.

<sup>4</sup> Michael A. G. Haykin, *In Defence of the Truth: Contending for the Truth Yesterday and Today* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), chap. 3, accessed February 3, 2021, [http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/2\\_ch03.htm](http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/2_ch03.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Mathetes, *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 35.

referred to as “offensive apologetics.”<sup>8</sup> Like Paul’s gospel ministry of warning (Col 1:28), the author begins his apologetic by admonishing Diognetus concerning the dangers of idolatry.

The severity with which the author warns Diognetus mimics that of the prophets.<sup>9</sup> He draws heavily from the Old Testament’s teaching on idolatry and challenges Diognetus, “These ye call gods; these ye serve; these ye worship; and ye become altogether like to them.”<sup>10</sup> This is a clear allusion to Psalm 115, in which the psalmist declares,

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them (Ps 115:4–8).

The author appears to be picking up on the biblical motif that “the idol worshiper becomes like or is closely identified with the idol worshiped.”<sup>11</sup> The implication of becoming like an idol who lacks sense is that the idolater is becoming senseless (Rom 1:21). Those who remain as such will endure the “eternal fire.”<sup>12</sup>

After a strong warning concerning idolatry, the author begins to teach Diognetus, supplying him with reasons why he has observed that Christians are so charitable. Christians “are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as

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<sup>8</sup> John M. Frame, *Apologetics, A Justification of Christian Belief*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Mathetes, *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 25.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 202.

<sup>12</sup> Mathetes, *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 29.



evil-doers.”<sup>13</sup> This description is reminiscent of Peter’s exhortation to return evil with good (1 Pet 3:9–17). The author appeals to this good conduct in Christ to beg the question why Christians respond to persecution in this manner. Ultimately, the reason Christians can bless their persecutors (and confess Christ while being “exposed to wild beasts”) is because they “dwell as sojourners in corruptible [bodies], looking for an incorruptible dwelling in the heavens.”<sup>14</sup> The point the author is making is that Christians possess the hope of the resurrection.

In response to the final inquiry, the author explains that Jesus is the Creator God who came into the world as king and savior.<sup>15</sup> He came into a world full of myths and idols, revealed Himself, and bestowed blessing upon his people.<sup>16</sup> The answer to Diognetus’s question as to why Christ came as late as he did in human history was because “He sought to form a mind conscious of righteousness, so that being convinced in that time of our unworthiness of attaining life through our own works, it should now, through the kindness of God, be vouchsafed to us; and having made it manifest that in ourselves we were unable to enter into the kingdom of God, we might through the power of God be made able.”<sup>17</sup> He goes on to say:

When our wickedness had reached its height, and it had been clearly shown that its reward, punishment and death, was impending over us; and when the time had come which God had before appointed for manifesting His own kindness and power, how the one love of God, through exceeding regard for men, did not regard us with hatred, nor thrust us away, nor remember our iniquity against us, but showed great long-suffering, and bore with us, He Himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities, He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the

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<sup>13</sup> Mathetes, *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 27.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–28.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for them that are mortal. For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than His righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God?<sup>18</sup>

The author was evidently prepared to answer the questions raised by Diognetus. The rhetorical strategy of this letter should not be missed. By responding to the first question, he warns Diognetus of the dangers of idolatry. After warning, he moves to teaching, responding to Diognetus's second question by introducing the hope of the resurrection. He takes advantage of Diognetus's third question by explaining the gospel, giving reasons for the hope Christians have. He moves directly from answering questions to a full explanation of the gospel, reflecting the evangelistic nature of the apostolic witness. In addition to being prepared and evangelistic, *The Letter to Diognetus* is also an example of the amiable Christian conduct that characterizes apostolic apologetics. The concern of the author for Diognetus is demonstrated by the stern warning, the desire for his reader to love God and receive the blessings which Christ bestows,<sup>19</sup> and by his prayer that God would grant Diognetus the ability to hear the truth.<sup>20</sup> This letter bears all the marks of missional apologetics.

### **Aquinas and the Order of Preachers**

There are many capable apologists in the Middle Ages. Some of the most notable come from the mendicant “Order of Preachers,” the Dominicans. The missional concern of Christ and the Apostles is evidenced in the very founding of this order. Having observed the failure of Catholics to genuinely convert heretical groups by force, Dominic of Osma (1171–1221) sought another method of conversion—preaching and teaching orthodoxy. After receiving approval by Innocent III in 1214 to found an order

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<sup>18</sup> Mathetes, *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

upon the Canons of Saint Augustine, Dominic began training monks to serve as missionary preachers.<sup>21</sup> The order was given permission to preach throughout Europe, and by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, they expanded their efforts into the East, witnessing to the Mongols.<sup>22</sup>

The Dominicans exhibit many of the characteristics of apologetics expounded on from 1 Peter 3. First, they prepared themselves for encountering various belief systems by theological education. Historian Justo González explains, “The Dominicans, in their task of refuting heresy, must be well armed intellectually, and for that reason their recruits received solid intellectual training.”<sup>23</sup> Second, their intention can rightly be described as missional, since they made the conversion of heretical groups their goal. Furthermore, in contrast to the standard method of converting heretics in their day, the Dominicans conducted themselves in a manner that was respectful to their unbelieving neighbor. Such characteristics exemplify the apostolic apologetic.

It is no surprise that this order generated well-educated Christians who made it their mission to share the gospel with the pagan world. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) stands among these men. This doctor of the church is one of the preeminent scholastic theologians. Although much could be said about his theological work, as a committed Dominican, Aquinas used his mind to contribute to the missionary causes of his order. This is arguably one of the primary purposes behind his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG).<sup>24</sup> What is suspected to be the original title of the work, *Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei*

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<sup>21</sup> Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power: The Middle Ages* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 2:346–347

<sup>22</sup> Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power: The Middle Ages* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 2:453.

<sup>23</sup> Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 1:361–362.

<sup>24</sup> Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 5 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), chap. 13, accessed February 16, 2021, [http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history5\\_ch13.htm](http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history5_ch13.htm).

*contra Errores Infidelium* (A book on the Truth of the Catholic Faith against the Errors of the Unbelievers) is more telling.<sup>25</sup> The SCG is a premier example of Medieval apologetics. As far as method is concerned, books 1–3 of the SCG are primarily comprised of arguments for the catholic faith from reason, whereas the final book emphasizes arguments from Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

Looking at books three and four together is particularly enlightening for the present work of observing missional apologetics in the church’s history. First, looking at the two books together exposes the interplay between Aquinas’s use of reason and Scripture as complementary authorities (even as reason is subservient to Scripture). Second, and more importantly, in these final two books, Aquinas develops the relationship between hope and resurrection, as was seen in the apostolic witness. One can begin tracing this relationship in chapter 147, where Aquinas introduces the divine assistance given to men to reach their “end.” This end is the “final beatitude.”<sup>27</sup> “Beatitude” is a divine experience of perfect happiness.<sup>28</sup> The state of beatitude is “above human nature,” that is, this state cannot be achieved by man alone.<sup>29</sup> Man is able to be brought into this blessed experience, but he is in need of God’s grace to enable him to reach this end.<sup>30</sup> This grace is not merited; it is received and works within (yet not contrary to) the will of man, causing him to love, believe and hope in God.<sup>31</sup> As Aquinas

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<sup>25</sup> Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 9.

<sup>26</sup> Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 5 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), chap. 13, accessed February 16, 2021, [http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history5\\_ch13.htm](http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history5_ch13.htm).

<sup>27</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Latin-English Opera Omnia*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, vol. 12 (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019), 295.

<sup>28</sup> Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 132–133.

<sup>29</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Latin-English Opera Omnia*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, vol. 12 (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019), 299.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 296–303.

explains this dynamic:

Now, faith, which originates from grace, affirms it to be possible for man to be united to God in perfect enjoyment, in which beatitude consists. Therefore, the desire of this enjoyment arises in man from his love of God. But the desire of a thing troubles the soul of the desirer unless he has the hope of obtaining it. Accordingly, as grace gives rise in man to the love of God and faith, it was fitting that it should also give rise to the hope of obtaining beatitude in the life to come.<sup>32</sup>

By grace, God supplies the Christian with hope, an assurance that he will reach beatitude, perfect enjoyment of God. Moving into book 4, Aquinas incorporates the resurrection into this relationship by first expounding on the significance of Christ's resurrection for the future bodily resurrection of the believer.<sup>33</sup> After responding to a series of arguments against a future bodily resurrection,<sup>34</sup> he then delineates several qualities of the resurrected body, defending the hope of the resurrection.<sup>35</sup> As he does so, he explains how the resurrection is the hope of reaching beatitude: "The soul that enjoys God will adhere to him most completely, and will participate in his goodness in the highest degree possible that is consistent with its mode of being."<sup>36</sup>

In the same vein as that of the Apostles, Aquinas supplies the Christian with reasons for hope in the resurrection. Adopting the Apostles' apologetic appears to be a deliberate move by Aquinas since, in the *Compendium of Theology*, he acknowledges the Bible's use of proofs to give Christians the hope of the resurrection.<sup>37</sup> Because His resurrection was a difficult reality for the Apostles to embrace, Aquinas points out, "Christ demonstrated the truth of his resurrection and the glory of his risen body by so

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<sup>32</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Latin-English Opera Omnia*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, vol. 12 (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019), 303–304.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 518–519.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 520–526

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 526–541

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

<sup>37</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, in *Latin-English Opera Omnia*, trans. Cyril Vollert, vol. 55, *Opuscula I Treatises* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 200–206.

many proofs.”<sup>38</sup> However, the post-Resurrection appearances by Christ were not just for the Apostles’ faith, but for all who would receive the gospel. Aquinas argues that these proofs, made explicit by the Evangelists, serve to “bolster up our hope of our own resurrection.”<sup>39</sup> Christians can read the Gospel accounts, observe the nature of Christ’s resurrection, and find hope for the future resurrection of the saints. Because he is intentional to follow the apostolic example in apologetics, it is no surprise to find Aquinas offering several proofs of the resurrection and the attainment of eternal blessedness in the presence of God.

Assuming this is a work written to equip the Dominican missionary, Aquinas’s use of reason and Scripture to demonstrate resurrection hope models for the apologist how he can begin his apologetic by first appealing to general revelation, which the pagan can accept.<sup>40</sup> After the initial appeal to general revelation, the subsequent use of arguments from Scripture shows that special revelation is in accord with truth acquired through reason and is the authoritative explanation of the shared experience.<sup>41</sup> The proposition that man is oriented to the end of happiness/beatitude is a general observation that serves as the common experience between the apologist and the pagan. Appealing then to the biblical witness, Aquinas explains that beatitude is found in the perfect enjoyment of God and that the resurrection of Christ provides hope of our future resurrection and the attainment of beatitude.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, in *Latin-English Opera Omnia*, trans. Cyril Vollert, vol. 55, *Opuscula I Treatises* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 203.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>40</sup> Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 1:376.

<sup>41</sup> Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>42</sup> For Aquinas, this interplay of faith and reason is possible because the truth gained via reason is not in opposition to that from revelation. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Latin-English Opera Omnia*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, vol. 11 (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019), 10.

## **Apologetics Methodology**

The setting of an apologetic involves responding to questions raised by the nonbeliever (1 Pet 3:15).<sup>43</sup> An acceptable apologetics method is able to navigate from the questions raised to an explanation of the gospel, while conforming to the principles derived from the exegesis of 1 Peter 3.<sup>44</sup> Various apologetics methods will be analyzed below based on their ability to conform to the aforementioned principles. The analysis will be limited to the following methods: classical apologetics, evidentialist apologetics, and presuppositional apologetics. Because each of these practices presents strengths and weaknesses, the most cogent and biblically faithful arguments will be incorporated into an integrative approach that both conforms to the exegesis above and is reflected in history. Mitigations will also be suggested to address any potential weaknesses.

### **Classical Apologetics**

The first method that will be analyzed is classical apologetics. This method is rooted in the Thomistic distinction between general and special revelation.<sup>45</sup> The approach of classical apologetics relies on the use of theistic proofs. For that reason, many see that this method's origin comes from the Apostolic and patristic eras because of the use of such proofs.<sup>46</sup>

**Description and strengths.** Although a practice with many variations, classical apologetics—broadly speaking—is a two-step approach that seeks to establish (1) theism by logical arguments and (2) the veracity of biblical Christianity by

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<sup>43</sup> An intentional apologist will also take the initiative to pose questions to the nonbeliever to initiate the engagement.

<sup>44</sup> As was so aptly demonstrated in the *Letter to Diognetus*.

<sup>45</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 120.

<sup>46</sup> Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 50.

evidences.<sup>47</sup> This task requires the classical apologist to familiarize himself with a variety of arguments to justify any truth of Christianity that is brought into question. The broadness of this approach is reflected in the following definitions. Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsey define apologetics as the “reasoned defence of the Christian religion.”<sup>48</sup> William Lane Craig explains that apologetics “is that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”<sup>49</sup> Due to its comprehensive approach, classical apologetics is acclaimed for its preparedness, a necessary component of apologetics (see chapter 2). As a result, classical apologists tend to be formidable defenders of the faith, able to deal with arguments in areas ranging from cosmology to the reliability of the apostolic witness.<sup>50</sup>

**Critique of classical apologetics.** However commendable this may be, the strength of this approach can potentially be its shortcoming. Mounting a defense on all fronts can distract the apologist from fulfilling the biblical task of explaining the gospel to the questioner. This is not to say that an engagement with a nonbeliever can only count as “apologetics” if it involves a full gospel exposition. What is being criticized is the tendency of the classical approach to be content with a mere logical defense of theism or “proving” God’s existence.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, such an apologetic would fit both Sproul’s

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<sup>47</sup> Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 71.

<sup>48</sup> R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defence of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 13.

<sup>49</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15.

<sup>50</sup> The late Norman Geisler is remarkable for his familiarity with a wide range of arguments. Norman L. Geisler, and Ronald Brooks. *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> This criticism has been raised by others who are concerned about the limited value of such arguments. Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 133–134.



and Craig's definitions, which allow one to conclude they have performed the task of an apologist if they have merely defended one tenet of Christianity. To temper this tendency, the apologist ought to first keep in mind that his task as defined by Scripture is to explain the gospel of the resurrected Christ by warning and teaching. More than that, a refined theological anthropology would correct potentially erring assumptions and thus guard the apologist from confusing polemics and apologetics.<sup>52</sup> This will be the focus of the remainder of the critique.

The primary criticism raised against classical apologetics is that the first step of establishing theism is unnecessary. For example, reformed epistemologists claim that theistic arguments are unnecessary because such truths are properly basic due to the *sensus divinitatus*.<sup>53</sup> Certain presuppositional apologists go as far as to suggest that the existence of God must be presupposed by the apologist and not argued for.<sup>54</sup> To them, classical arguments are inappropriate. Although—as will be explained later—it is not suggested here that theistic arguments are illegitimate, but that there are good anthropological reasons why one should question their necessity.

The critique offered by reformed epistemologists that such arguments are unnecessary is based on the *sensus divinitatus* which comes from Calvin where in his *Institutes* he claims that “there exists in the human minds and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of the deity.”<sup>55</sup> The inherent knowledge of God is fundamental to the *Imago Dei* and not overcome by the noetic effects of sin. The unbelief represented among

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<sup>52</sup> See B. B. Warfield for a discussion on the relationship of the polemics and apologetics in theology. It is argued here that, though related, the two are distinct such that one does not necessarily involve the other. Benjamin B. Warfield, “Apologetics,” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 9:5–6.

<sup>53</sup> Brian K. Morley, *Mapping Apologetics: Comparing Contemporary Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 126.

<sup>54</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1998), 534–537.

<sup>55</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 9.

image-bearers is not an example of total ignorance; rather, unbelief is the result of sinners suppressing the true knowledge of God of which they are cognizant and against which they rebel.<sup>56</sup> The Apostle Paul explains this situation of the unbeliever, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21). The classical apologist rightly acknowledges general revelation, but tends to forget that the nonbeliever already possesses knowledge of certain theistic truths (Rom 1:18–20). The rebel suppresses the knowledge of God, not wanting to be accountable for his sin. Therefore, atheism is nothing more than self-deception. It is the conclusion, “there’s no accountability since there’s no God” (Ps 10:4, CSB). Although the nonbeliever has deceived himself, the apologist must not fall prey to such deception and forget who they are dealing with—an image-bearer who was made to know God, who knows truths about God, but who is rebelling against them.

Furthermore, the efficacy of theistic knowledge must also be considered when questioning the necessity of classical arguments for God’s existence. The Apostle James was thoroughly unimpressed with those who would simply acknowledge God’s existence saying, “even the demons believe” (Jas 2:19). Clearly, knowledge of God’s deity and certain attributes—which is revealed to, understood, and suppressed by all people—is not salvific. Salvation comes to those who believe in the gospel. Therefore, a prepared and cogent articulation of the gospel marks the primary task of the apologist (Rom 10:13–17). Theistic arguments do serve a purpose, however, not the ultimate purpose. The synthesis below of the three methods will propose a niche for these arguments to fill.

### **Evidentialist Apologetics**

The next method to be examined is evidentialist apologetics. As a subtype of

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<sup>56</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 14.

classical apologetics, the two share a common history.<sup>57</sup> This method splinters off from classical apologetics due to its different perspective of natural theology. Whereas the classical apologist believes it necessary to provide theistic proofs, the evidentialist disagrees. Some have traced the history of this persuasion back to the early Middle Ages.<sup>58</sup>

**Description and strengths.** Evidentialist apologetics, like the classical approach, has many representatives. What differentiates these two broad practices is that whereas classical apologetics is a two-step approach, evidentialist apologetics only has one step.<sup>59</sup> The evidentialist argues that the first step of classical apologetics is unnecessary for the evidences themselves “provide retrospective confirmation of God’s existence...”<sup>60</sup> Whereas the classical apologist might not get to his “step 2,” the evidentialist begins his defense by offering a historical account of the life of Christ with reasons for the veracity thereof. Such an account can naturally be part of a gospel presentation to the nonbeliever. Thus, the strength of this approach is that it is evangelistic, one of the principles of apologetics derived from 1 Peter 3. Another benefit to this approach is its emphasis on history, which cuts through modern empirical elitism. It offers a sober reminder of man’s dependence on history for knowledge.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 139.

<sup>58</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 356.

<sup>59</sup> Contrary to this distinction, Feinberg incorporates classical apologetics and the cumulative case approach into the evidentialist category. John S. Feinberg, *Can You Believe It’s True?: Christian Apologetics in a Modern & Postmodern Era* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 321.

<sup>60</sup> Gary R. Habermas, *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan and Stanley N. Grundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 58.

<sup>61</sup> Just because something cannot be empirically verified does not mean it is not evidence. Licona explains how empiricist notions are naïve, that every individual is often forced to embrace truth that cannot be empirically verified. Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 82, 103.

**Critique of evidentialist apologetics.** A major criticism of this approach is that it does not always offer the most persuasive arguments. By limiting itself to historical evidence, the evidentialist rests his case on minimal authority.<sup>62</sup> There are two ways in which the evidentialist tends to limit himself. First, by treating the biblical record as a common case of journalism, the Scriptures are stripped of their unique authority.<sup>63</sup> Although following good historical techniques will conclude that the testimony of the biblical authors is reliable, the Scriptures must also be presented in a category altogether different from the rest of historical literature if appealing to them will carry authority of greater weight than that of mere eyewitness testimony.<sup>64</sup> The Scriptures are God-breathed (1 Tim 3:16). It is important to maintain the dual authorship of Scripture from beginning to end. Because they are from man, they are historically verifiable. Because they are from God, they carry unique authority.

Second, the evidentialist limits his claim to authority by neglecting classical arguments. Historical evidence does not carry the same conclusive weight as deductions from a classical argumentation. This is due to the nature of the evidence. Although it is inevitable to rely upon knowledge gleaned from history, history is nevertheless inherently dependent upon interpretation and cannot offer the degree of certainty that logical proofs can.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Minimal authority is not to be confused with Habermas's "minimal facts" approach. The approach of Habermas is to demonstrate the historicity of the Resurrection by using only the number of facts from the NT that skeptics even accept as historical. Although it is not necessarily the case, evidentialist apologetics rest on minimal authority when they present Scripture only as historical literature and not as inspired literature. As an evidentialist, the minimal facts used by Habermas are of minimal authority. Minimal authority is a matter of quality, not quantity of the facts. Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 40–45.

<sup>63</sup> For example, see Lee Strobel, *The Case for Easter: A Journalist Investigates the Evidence for the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 60–82.

<sup>64</sup> There are those in scholarship like Richard Bauckham who respond to the quest for the historical Jesus by giving an entirely historiographical treatment of Scripture. Such work is a necessary response to the bifurcation of Jesus and is not being criticized here. The criticism lays in the method unnecessarily restricting itself to the use of evidences that are presented as mere historical literature. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 5.

<sup>65</sup> By nature, inductive arguments are probabilistic and not certain. Kenneth D. Boa and Robert

Such an authority-impoverished apologetic is hardly convincing. To mitigate this problem, the apologist should begin with God as a presupposition and be unabashed about the divine nature of Scripture. This remedy not only applies to the use of evidences but also the use of theistic arguments. For example, it is entirely consistent to argue for the existence of God based on general revelation while presupposing the existence of God.<sup>66</sup> John Frame explains,

For theistic proofs will not, any more than historical evidences, accomplish their purpose without the presupposition of a biblical worldview... without the biblical God there is no reason to suppose that there is a rational, causal order leading to a first cause. So even a proof of God must presuppose him.<sup>67</sup>

Frame's rationale is significant, and it models how the apologist can and ought to be forthright about his beliefs while laying out his argument.

In the use of historical evidence, the apologist should put forward his evidence from the disclosed position of Scripture's authority. Once he has finished his task of demonstrating the historical veracity of Scripture, the conclusion will not merely be that the human author is trustworthy, for it conjointly supports the position that the Scriptures were inspired by God. Merely trusting the human author's testimony is sufficient to infer that a man from Nazareth performed miracles which have been accurately recorded and transmitted. However, historical reliability is only penultimate to the greater conclusion that the Scriptures are also the product of God and are expectedly found to be inerrant, a conclusion which the historical evidence also supports if that position is put forth. This conclusion is necessary in order to believe many of the claims that are central to the gospel—that God became man and endured his own wrath against human sin, and

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M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 159.

<sup>66</sup> John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 91.

<sup>67</sup> John Frame, *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan and Stanley N. Grundy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 133.

commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).<sup>68</sup> These theological teachings, although historical, transcend history and depend on one's belief in the divine origin of Scripture.

### **Presuppositional Apologetics**

Coming out of the Reformed tradition, presuppositional apologetics is indebted to the work of Cornelius Van Til. Van Til, steeped in the work of Dutch Reformed theologians such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, methodically developed what he called the “transcendental” method. Later, he exchanged this terminology for “presuppositionalism.”<sup>69</sup>

**Description and strengths.** Those who hold to presuppositional apologetics are likely convinced of this method due to their theological commitment to the superiority of Christ and his Word. Presuppositionalism is careful to obey Peter's command to “in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy” (1 Pet 3:15).<sup>70</sup> In addition to the strong sense of biblical fidelity, presuppositional apologetics is informed by a typical Augustinian view of man. Because sinful man is the target audience of a defense, one's doctrine of sin will ultimately govern his apologetic approach.<sup>71</sup> By constructing this method around a sound hamartiology, another strength of this approach emerged—it is theologically consistent.

Original sin, in the Augustinian view, maintains that every human is born “in

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<sup>68</sup> This is among many consequences of not embracing Scripture as authoritative, divine revelation. Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 263.

<sup>69</sup> *Christian Apologetics Past & Present: A Primary Source Reader*, ed. William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 2:456.

<sup>70</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 75.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas H. McCall, *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 204–205.

Adam” and therefore with a sin nature that is both guilty and corrupt.<sup>72</sup> Original corruption is the most significant part of hamartiology when considering apologetics methodology. Sin has corrupted every faculty of man—mind, emotion, will, and body.<sup>73</sup> As a result, apart from the Spirit, fallen man is unable to comprehend spiritual truth and is by nature hostile to God (1 Cor 2:14; Rom 8:7). These are the noetic effects of the Fall.<sup>74</sup> As such, the nonbeliever does not approach spiritual truth the same way as one with the Spirit. The one with the Spirit is able to understand spiritual things (1 Cor 2:12). It is in light of this view of man that presuppositional apologetics emerges. Frame explains,

Van Til argues that part of [the image of God] is knowledge of God, which, though repressed (Rom. 1), still exists at some level of man’s thinking. That is the point of contact to which the apologist appeals. He does not appeal merely to the unbeliever’s reason and will, for his will is bound by sin and his reason seeks to distort, not affirm the truth. We do not ask the unbeliever to evaluate Christianity through his reason, for he seeks to operate his reason autonomously and thus is deep in error from the outset. Rather, says Van Til, we appeal to the knowledge of God that he has (Rom. 1:21) but suppresses.<sup>75</sup>

Applying this theology to apologetics presents a conundrum. It begs the question how one is to engage with a nonbeliever without inviting him to investigate Christianity with his corrupted reasoning faculty. In the strict Van Tillian method, the apologist is left with only the transcendental argument. The argument can be rendered, “Without God, there is no meaning (truth, rationality, etc.); therefore, God exists.”<sup>76</sup> The transcendental argument focuses on the relationship between the nonbeliever’s

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<sup>72</sup> Hoekema refers to corruption as “pollution.” Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 149.

<sup>73</sup> For a tripartite view of the soul, see Jonathan Edwards, “A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 1:6–8.

<sup>74</sup> Snell has done work showing the consistency between Aquinas’s view of man and the noetic effects of sin. R. J. Snell, “Thomism and Noetic Sin, Transposed: A Response to Neo-Calvinist Objections,” *Philosophia Christi* 12, no. 1 (2010): 7, <https://doi.org/10.5840/pc20101212>.

<sup>75</sup> John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 63.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

presuppositions and conclusions. After identifying something true from the world that the believer and nonbeliever agree on (the point of contact), the apologist can conclude (by his anthropology) that the nonbeliever has drawn correct conclusions from the world, because somewhere he has presupposed something from the biblical worldview.<sup>77</sup> The apologist can then demonstrate to the nonbeliever the inconsistency within his own worldview because such biblical presuppositions—which are necessary to embrace for the truth observed—are foreign to his worldview, which was constructed out of the suppression of truth. The apologist can then challenge his suppression of the truth and explain to the nonbeliever his sin and the gospel.

The sum of what has been represented above is consistent with the form of presuppositional apologetics that will be used later in the synthesis.<sup>78</sup> The strict Van Tillian presuppositionalism, however, believes the transcendental argument is the only legitimate argument a Christian ought to make for the existence of God. Criticisms have been raised against this dogmatic persuasion by others with greater detail than what will be attempted here.<sup>79</sup> The critique below does not pretend to be an exhaustive dispute of the Van Tillian perspective; rather, the critique seeks to ameliorate a problem within Van Til's perspective by introducing a categorical distinction between general and special revelation.

**Critique of presuppositional apologetics.** Some of Van Til's more extreme claims regarding sinful man suggest that he is unable to perceive any truth: "man cannot, unless the scales be removed from his eyes, know anything truly about God or anything

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<sup>77</sup> An example of this was used by Greg Bahnsen in his debate against Gordon Stein. Greg Bahnsen, "A Transcendental Argument for God's Existence" in *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 163.

<sup>78</sup> John Frame is a notable example of this.

<sup>79</sup> J.V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), xii.



else.”<sup>80</sup> There are those who follow this perspective and, like Van Til, protest to the use of logical inference and evidences to justify the Christian worldview.<sup>81</sup> They contend that a Christian ought not assume the nonbeliever can reason from a realm of neutrality since he is living out of a worldview of suppressing the truth.<sup>82</sup> The fear is that the apologist would presuppose non-Christian principles as a starting point for his apologetic. Indeed, the apologist should not sacrifice biblical presuppositions in order to meet nonbelievers where they are. That would be denying what he knows to be true for the sake of debate. It would be starting from a suppressed worldview instead of a biblical worldview. The other contention is that it is futile to invite a nonbeliever to assess the Christian worldview according to his mind which is averse to the truth.

If this were all to the situation, one could sympathize with the cause of the Van Tillian exclusivists. However, such apologists fail to assess the situation as it really is. What is assumed is that nonbelievers live solely out of the worldview that they have constructed in their suppression of the truth. To them, the image of God has been so marred by the Fall that the nonbeliever is unable to know anything truly, but such a view of fallen man is not supported by Scripture. An epistemology of fallen man must take into account the categories of both general and spiritual truth.<sup>83</sup> If the distinction between general and special revelation does not receive its due emphasis, then the two can be conflated. Fallen man is able to know general truths about God from creation (Rom 1:21).

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<sup>80</sup> Cornelius Van Til, “A Survey of Christian Epistemology” in *In Defense of the Faith* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 2:95.

<sup>81</sup> The quote by Van Til gives a different impression of him than what Frame presents in his description of Van Til’s presuppositionalism above. Many have noted the confusing and often contradictory statements by Van Til. Some follow his milder sentiments while others the more extreme. The result is two different forms of presuppositionalism where one is rather dogmatic regarding the use of arguments. Keith A. Mathison, “Christianity and Van Tillianism,” *Table Talk Magazine*, August 21, 2019, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/christianity-and-van-tillianism-2019-08/>.

<sup>82</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 100.

<sup>83</sup> Dulles notes this distinction being fundamental to Aquinas’s apologetic. Avery Cardinal Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 120.

What man cannot know without the Spirit is spiritual truth (1 Cor 2:14). Because Van Tillian presuppositionalism conflates these two kinds of truth, it suggests that fallen man cannot know truly.

Nonbelievers do not live solely out of the worldview they espouse; it is impossible to do so.<sup>84</sup> Even in their suppression of truth, there is not a total abandonment of it. Nonbelievers live in the world God created, and there are certain aspects of this world that cannot be denied without abandoning reality altogether. Herman Bavinck's description of the pagan world illustrates this much:

No one escapes the power of general revelation. Religion belongs to the essence of a human. The idea and existence of God, the spiritual independence and eternal destiny of the world, the moral world order and its ultimate triumph—all these are problems that never cease to engage the human mind. Metaphysical need cannot be suppressed. Philosophy perennially seeks to satisfy that need. It is general revelation that keeps that need alive. It keeps human beings from degrading themselves into animals. It binds them to a supersensible world. It maintains in them the awareness that they have been created in God's image and can only find rest in God. General revelation preserves humankind in order that it can be found and healed by Christ...<sup>85</sup>

Although the nonbeliever's constructed worldview might not support the notions of morality, natural law, etc., he nevertheless affirms such things by necessity in order to live in this world. Even the transcendental argument is based on the assumption that the nonbeliever has grasped truth—that he has presupposed something from the Christian worldview to conclude a particular truth. Therefore, truths which fall into the category of general revelation can be understood truly by the nonbeliever. If the distinction is made between general and special revelation, the apologist can appeal to general truths (the laws of logic, nature, morality, etc.) with confidence that the nonbeliever can have knowledge of such things. The apologist's conscience can also rest

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<sup>84</sup> John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 24.

<sup>85</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 322.

knowing he has not had to abandon biblical presuppositions to find neutral ground, because both the believer and the nonbeliever live in the realm of reality. Appealing to such things is not appealing to them as the nonbeliever sees them from their suppressed worldview; it is appealing to them as they are in the world God created.

The extreme form of presuppositionalism must therefore be rejected. Maintaining the distinction between general and special revelation upholds the image of God, and allows the apologist and the nonbeliever epistemological common ground due to the commonality they share as image-bearers. With this distinction in place, presuppositional apologetics can be situated for a synthesis with other methods.

### **An Integrative Approach**

The integrative method proposed below begins with a comparison of worldviews: the biblical compared to the particular non-biblical worldview espoused by the nonbeliever.<sup>86</sup> Laying out the biblical worldview up front mitigates the authority problem most often associated with a purely evidentialist method. Once a comparison between the worldviews has begun, the points of difference can be analyzed according to the two major theories of truth.

**Apologetics according to the correspondence theory.** First, using the correspondence theory, the worldviews will act as hypotheses to be tested against the backdrop of reality.<sup>87</sup> The tactic of the apologist is to demonstrate that the biblical worldview corresponds with accepted truths attainable by general revelation.<sup>88</sup> This does

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<sup>86</sup> Ideally, the apologist will first draw out the beliefs of the nonbeliever before laying out his own using the first steps commended by Greg Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 70–71.

<sup>87</sup> John S. Feinberg, *Can You Believe It's True?: Christian Apologetics in a Modern & Postmodern Era* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 48–49.

<sup>88</sup> This was the approach of Aquinas in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* who began by using arguments from nature and reason before primarily using arguments from Scripture: “And while we are occupied in the inquiry about a particular truth, we shall show what errors are excluded thereby, and how demonstrable truth is in agreement with the faith of the Christian religion.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*

not mean that general revelation (truth revealed in creation) is the standard by which special revelation (God’s Word) is measured; for it can be shown that both attest to the same truth (Rom 1:18–20; Ps 19:1). Reality and the biblical worldview should not be seen as two separate spheres but rather as one and the same, for reality encompasses both the truth revealed in nature and Scripture. Moreover, general and special revelation frequently assume and testify to each other.<sup>89</sup>

Demonstrating the homology between the biblical worldview and its corresponding truth in general revelation can be done by employing classical arguments and evidences.<sup>90</sup> Theistic arguments are appeals to fallen man’s knowledge gleaned from general revelation. These arguments should be made with the understanding that the apologist is not trying to convince the nonbeliever of anything they do not already know; instead, such arguments take away the intellectual wall that the nonbeliever is hiding behind. The nonbeliever is living in self-deception and needs to come to terms with the fact that they are being held accountable for their sin by a holy God (this is where Paul’s gospel ministry of warning fits into the apologetic, Col 1:28). Apologists should also acknowledge that these arguments are not the final goal. The task is not complete even with the most comprehensive case for the existence of God. Such knowledge—that the unbeliever already possesses—will not save them. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ saves. While also free to use such arguments and evidences to support the historicity of the

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*Contra Gentiles*, in *Latin-English Opera Omnia*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, vol. 11 (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019), 3.

<sup>89</sup> For an example of Scripture presupposing a truth revealed in nature, consider the first verse of Genesis which presupposes a beginning. The proposition that the universe had a beginning is attainable through general revelation. One can rationally conclude a necessary beginning by experience of causation and the impossibility of an infinite regress. A beginning is also concluded by empirical research. Truth in nature uncovered by Big Bang cosmology suggests a singularity event—a literal beginning to the universe. Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose, *The Nature of Space and Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 20.

<sup>90</sup> Again, Aquinas models this in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. He sets out to note “ways in which what reason tells us about God harmonizes with what revelation teaches.” Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13.

faith, the apologist ought to move towards an exposition of the gospel.

**Apologetics according to the coherence theory.** The coherence theory is the other manner which worldviews can be compared.<sup>91</sup> Because the nonbeliever lives in God's world, he must presuppose certain truths (which are borrowed from the Christian worldview, the exact exposition of reality) even as he is suppressing certain truths. As a result, his worldview will be internally inconsistent in more places than one. The immediate task of the apologist becomes exposing the internal inconsistencies in the non-biblical worldview. (Positively, he will counter by offering the Christian worldview as the only coherent worldview.) The inconsistencies in the non-biblical worldview come about in two ways: either the nonbeliever has drawn a true or a false conclusion about the world around him. In terms of formal logic, his logic will prove to be invalid.<sup>92</sup>

If he has drawn a true conclusion, there must be in his worldview a presupposition that he has embraced as an image-bearer that fits the biblical worldview and not his worldview constructed out of a suppression of truth. The apologist can argue transcendently to expose that presupposition—which is necessary for maintaining the truth observed from the world—belongs to the Christian worldview. In this way, the Christian worldview is shown to be necessary to account for observable truth as the non-biblical worldview is shown to be deficient.

For example, consider the nonbeliever's use of logic, mathematics, or natural law. Oftentimes, naturalists assume their worldview is the basis for rationality and natural law. However, a world in which physicalism rules can never produce metaphysical constructs such as the laws observed in logic and nature. These laws cannot be

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<sup>91</sup> Coherence theory is being used here as a criterion of truth. L. Jonathan Cohen, "The Coherence Theory of Truth," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 34, no. 4 (November 1978): 351, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4319261>.

<sup>92</sup> A faulty reasoning capacity is to be expected given the hamartiology confessed above. Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 48.

empirically proved; they can only be assumed. In addition, naturalism does not provide the necessary presuppositions for the very truths it embraces from reality. In a world deprived of intent, design, or a Mind, randomness and chaos rule.<sup>93</sup> The non-biblical worldview cannot account for the presuppositions that are embraced when one reasons. It is only when one adopts a biblical worldview that he can begin to coherently explain the existence of the realities naturalism can only assume.<sup>94</sup>

An inconsistency might also arise when a nonbeliever draws a false conclusion about the world even when it can be traced to a true assumption.<sup>95</sup> For example, consider the “problem of evil” argument that skeptics often make. Their conclusion is inherently unbiblical—either God is maleficent or he is not omnipotent—yet their argument presupposes a biblical truth, an objective moral standard.<sup>96</sup>

How does such an argument arise? The nonbeliever, living in God’s world and made in God’s image, though suppressing the truth, nevertheless has not suppressed all truth. In order to live in God’s world, he must presuppose certain truths, the existence of goodness being one of them. This comes from the nonbeliever’s awareness of God (Rom 1:20), and the work of the law being written on his heart (Rom 2:15).<sup>97</sup> But the apologist should be aware of the nonbeliever’s presuppositions already. The apologist is taught from the book of Romans that the nonbeliever is both aware of and presupposes God’s

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<sup>93</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *Chance and the Sovereignty of God: A God-Centered Approach to Probability and Random Events* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 176.

<sup>94</sup> For a list of philosophical presuppositions in science, see J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1997), 147.

<sup>95</sup> The situation where one draws a non-biblical conclusion from a non-biblical premise is not a matter of inconsistency for he consistently reasoned from a false premise to a false conclusion. Thus, such a scenario can be dealt with by comparing faulty claims against the backdrop of reality (correspondence theory). For example, the Darwinist conclusion concerning the origin of man is follows the presuppositions of methodological naturalism. The apologist begins addressing this falsity by showing such ideas do not correspond to reality as found in nature or Scripture.

<sup>96</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 13.

<sup>97</sup> This is where Calvin’s concept of the *sensus divinitatis* is most practical in apologetics.

existence and his moral law. That is why the nonbeliever recognizes evil (the deviation from good), even if his constructed worldview does not support the notion.<sup>98</sup> His presuppositions are biblical and true, but his conclusions are not.

As Van Til famously illustrated, “The ultimate source of truth in any field rests in [Christ]. The world may discover much truth without owning Christ as Truth. Christ upholds even those who ignore, deny, and oppose him. A little child may slap his father in the face, but it can do so only because the father holds it on his knee.”<sup>99</sup> The apologist shows the nonbeliever this inconsistency and offers to him the gospel of Jesus Christ, the true worldview which both provides the necessary presuppositions for concepts such as goodness and evil. He is to warn him concerning the just wrath of a holy God against all sin and teach him God’s plan of vindication and redemption (Col 1:28).

### **Conclusion**

Each of the methods represented in the integrative approach focuses on a necessary component of biblical apologetics. The emphasis of classical apologetics is preparedness to respond to various questions. The use of evidences provides an easy segue to the gospel, making evidentialist apologetics evangelistic. Presuppositionalism is an attempt to honor Christ in one’s method. An integrative approach embraces the best of each method in the hope of submitting to the principles derived from the exegesis of 1 Peter 3. The intention behind developing such an apologetic is to warn the nonbeliever of his fallen state and the wrath to come (Eph 5:6), and to provide a positive explication of the gospel of Jesus who alone can save (Acts 4:12). In other words, the intent of the proposed apologetic is missional.

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<sup>98</sup> Evil as a deviation from good is the failure of something to maintain the standard of goodness determined by God. It is a moral evaluation. This is not a reflection of the privation theory which is an ontological discussion. John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 284.

<sup>99</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Case for Calvinism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1979), 147–148.

CHAPTER 4  
DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

**Schedule**

The project was implemented according to the schedule below which contains the dates that each of the three elements of the project were implemented.

- A. Four-week ministry plan development (April 4 – May 1, 2021).
  - 1. During week one, the author developed the first half of the strategic ministry plan.
  - 2. During week two, the author developed the second half of the strategic plan.
  - 3. During week three, the author presented the strategic plan to the panel for evaluation and approval.<sup>1</sup>
  
- B. Eight-week apologetics teaching series development (April 18 – June 12, 2021).
  - 1. During week three, the author developed lessons one and two.
  - 2. During week four, the author developed lessons three and four.
  - 3. During week five, the author developed lessons five and six.
  - 4. During week six, the author developed lessons seven and eight.
  - 5. During week seven, the author developed lessons nine and ten.
  - 6. During week eight, the author presented the teaching series to the expert panel for evaluation and approval.<sup>2</sup>
  
- C. Ten-week implementation of teaching series (May 23 – July 31, 2021).
  - 1. During week eight, the author administered the Basics of Apologetics Assessment (BAA) to training participants and taught lesson one of the apologetics teaching series.<sup>3</sup>
  - 2. During week nine, the author taught lesson two.
  - 3. During week ten, the author taught lesson three.
  - 4. During week eleven, the author taught lesson four.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> See appendix 3.



5. During week twelve, the author taught lesson five.
6. During week thirteen, the author taught lesson six.
7. During week fourteen, the author taught lesson seven.
8. During week fifteen, the author taught lesson eight.
9. During week sixteen, the author taught lesson nine.
10. During week seventeen, the author taught lesson ten and administered the BAA to all training participants. He then compared the results of the pre- and post-training surveys by conducting a t-test for dependent samples.<sup>4</sup>

### **Strategic Ministry Plan Development**

The purpose of this project is to equip undergraduate students to engage in missional apologetics. Detailed below is a description and rationale for the strategic ministry plan (see appendix 4) for churches to establish partnerships with campus ministries and begin training students to engage in missional apologetics. The details in the description below also serve to provide further information on how to implement the strategic plan of appendix 4, culminating in the formation of a self-sustaining apologetics ministry. The development of this plan took place during the first two weeks of project implementation, beginning the week of April 4, 2021.

Before a church sets out to equip college students in missional apologetics, several decisions need to be made prior to implementing the goals outlined in the strategic ministry plan. First, preliminary decisions need to be made. The strategic ministry plan recommends two strategic decisions. Second, a campus ministry partner needs to be identified. Below are suggested guidelines for selecting partners. Finally, cooperative planning should take place to ensure the nuances of the strategic ministry plan will accommodate the needs of both the campus ministry.

### **Preliminary Planning**

For a church to engage a campus with the gospel of Jesus Christ, two strategic

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix 3.

decisions need to be made prior to initiating a partnership with a campus ministry. First, it has to be decided which pool of students the church should equip for this task. The second decision is with respect to church involvement. The commentary that follows describes the decisions reflected in the strategic ministry plan.

**Selecting students to equip.** If a church is burdened to engage a college campus with the gospel, it must decide which pool of students to equip—students from their own college ministry or students associated with a campus ministry. It is more prudent to form a partnership with a campus ministry and equip its students. Although a church should also intend to equip the students of its college ministry (if they have such a ministry), to effectively reach students and faculty on a college campus, there are definite benefits to equipping students of that campus by working with campus ministries. One of the primary benefits is that campus ministry students are all in the same context whereas the students in a church’s college ministry may attend different colleges. Therefore, certain aspects of apologetics training are able to be tailored to the specific challenges of the target context.

Second, to engage a campus by missional apologetics apart from equipping its Christian students would necessitate forming campus outreach teams and scheduling outreach initiatives. We anticipated that approach would have less of an impact than the tactic proposed in the ministry plan.<sup>5</sup> It is easier to encourage apologetics engagements on a campus if its own students are being equipped to engage the ideas of that campus as they go about their studies and responsibilities.

**Securing church support.** Because establishing a partnership with a campus ministry is more involved than merely equipping its own students, it is necessary for a

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<sup>5</sup> The primary reason for this suspicion is because the tactic proposed in the ministry plan is more along the lines of incarnational missions versus sending outreach teams from a local church to a college campus.

pastor/leader to secure the support of the rest of the church. This is advised for the sake of a healthy partnership and for logistic reasons. A pastor/leader seeking to establish such a partnership needs the support of the congregation in order to secure (1) volunteers, (2) finances (if necessary), (3) prayer support, etc.

### **Partnership Proposal**

Once the leadership of the church embraces the vision for partnering with a campus ministry, potential campus ministry partners need to be identified. Those that qualify as potential partners are those in similar doctrinal alignment; have a desire for outreach on their campus; are in need of equipping; and that meet the approval of the local church. After the potential partner ministry is identified, the proposal should be made to the director of the campus ministry (the mission, vision, goals, and objectives outlined in appendix 4 constitute the proposal). The strategic ministry plan of appendix 4 gives the example of a partnership between Broadway Baptist Church and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes ministry at Maryville College.

### **Cooperative Planning**

Once the partnership is established, programming can commence. Details that need to be worked out with the campus ministry director include meeting times and scheduled training sessions during the calendar year. One of the primary benefits of cooperative planning is the insight that a campus minister can provide to the particularities of the college campus. Cooperative planning also ensures investment in the partnership by both parties. Furthermore, planning allows the campus minister to direct the implementation of the plan to best suit the ministry's needs.

### **Goals of the Strategic Ministry Plan**

Once these preliminary decisions have been made, the strategic ministry plan can be implemented as outlined in appendix 4. What follows is a brief description of the

goals of the strategic ministry plan, providing rationale and detail to the plan. The goals of this plan were designed to follow the logic of the apologetics training curriculum.<sup>6</sup>

**Goal 1.** The first goal of the strategic ministry plan is to communicate the need for students to be equipped in missional apologetics. This involves both the campus ministry director and campus ministry students embracing the mission and vision of the plan. Once the campus ministry director has embraced the vision, he should seek to inspire in his students the desire to engage their campus with the gospel (objective 1). Once students share the burden to engage their peers with the gospel, meeting times should be established so that the leader/pastor from the local church can connect with the campus ministry students (objectives 2–3). After introductions, a preview of apologetics training should be given to students to help them see the need for training (objective 4).

**Goal 2.** The second goal is to teach students the nature and purpose of apologetics. A regular time for meeting with and training students should be worked out with the campus ministry director (objective 1). He should also advertise the training to his students at least a week prior to the beginning of training (objective 2). In the first session, students should be given an introduction to the nature and purpose of apologetics (objective 3). As the following sessions are developed, special attention should be given to ensure they reinforce the missional nature of apologetics as taught in session 1 (objective 4).

**Goal 3.** The third goal is to train the students in an apologetics method. The rationale behind this goal is that it is better to give students a plan of action than a mere set of proofs. This session should involve a comparison of various apologetics methods with an emphasis on the integrative method proposed in chapter 3 (objectives 1–3).

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<sup>6</sup> See implementation of training curriculum below for suggested session outline and content.

Students should be taught how to use various arguments and evidences to compare the biblical and non-biblical worldviews according to the two theories of truth (objective 4). As the following sessions are developed, special attention should be given to ensure the following sessions train students to engage other worldviews according to this integrative method (objective 5).

**Goal 4.** The fourth goal is to prepare for the particular ideological challenges associated with the college’s context (objective 1). This can be done by inquiring of students or by searching publications made by faculty and staff of the institution. Once that has taken place, effective apologetic responses to these ideologies should be investigated (objective 2) so that the following training sessions will provide students with well-informed responses to non-biblical worldviews associated with their context (objective 3). The apologetics training curriculum described below models how to design a curriculum to address three common challenges to the Christian faith.

**Goal 5.** The fifth goal is to lead students in a missional apologetics training model that will encourage regular engagements with nonbelievers. The developed curriculum model to teach sessions 3–10 of the apologetics training curriculum follows the acronym, “TRAIN:” teach, research, apply, investigate, and navigate.<sup>7</sup> After the session is taught (T), materials will be provided for small group and individual research (R) to further study the non-biblical worldview discussed in that month’s session. Students will then be challenged to apply (A) missional apologetics before the next month’s meeting. Debriefing sessions will then be held at the beginning of the next month’s meeting where students will investigate (I) each other’s apologetics engagements and navigate (N) ways to improve their missional apologetics.

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<sup>7</sup> This acronym is similar but different to that which is employed by Wallace in Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know: Preparing Young Christians for a Challenging World* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2019), 121.

This model was created so that the teaching series would be part of a larger curriculum that thoroughly trained students. (See the next section for various pedagogical techniques employed in the curriculum.) The curriculum's emphasis on application directs this training towards achieving the mission of students engaging their campus in missional apologetics.

**Goal 6.** The final goal is to appoint an apologetics ministry student leader to lead the group in further missional apologetics ministry. After the students have been equipped to engage major worldviews on their campus, the ministry director will assist in establishing a self-sustaining apologetics ministry (objective 1). First, the need for further apologetics training will be communicated to the students (objective 2). If at least half the students show a favorable response to the plan (objective 3), then a willing and competent student will be appointed to help lead the apologetics ministry (objective 4).

The student leader will be provided with a year of apologetics material for his personal edification (objective 5), sample debriefing sessions (objective 6), and curriculum samples so that he can assist in leading the TRAIN sessions during monthly meetings (objective 7). Although the church will continue to meet with and train students, the need for direct involvement will decrease as the equipping of the student leader and ministry director increases.

### **Apologetics Teaching Series Development**

The apologetics teaching series is not intended to be a stand-alone series; rather, it is part of the larger TRAIN curriculum described above. Furthermore, the content is contextualized to the typical college context and designed to prepare students for the challenges associated with the denial of biblical inerrancy, Darwinism, and universalism. Below is an outline of curricular content and pedagogical techniques.

## Content Outline

The first two sessions are prolegomena. Session 1 introduces the missional nature of apologetics while session 2 supplies students with an apologetics method. Sessions 3–10 are integrated into the TRAIN curriculum which includes group interaction, individual study, and application. These sessions are described below.

**Sessions 3–6.** The first worldview challenge we sought to prepare students for was the denial of biblical inerrancy considering this doctrine is the epistemological assumption of the biblical worldview. Sessions 3–6 are broken down into two parts: defending the reliable transmission of the apostolic witness (sessions 3–5) and defending the veracity of the apostolic witness (session 6).

Session 3 describes the first phase of the transmission process. Before we could have access to the events of Jesus' life, the Apostles had to first recall their experiences with Christ. Recent developments made by popular form critics seek to undermine the Apostles' ability to accurately remember the life and ministry of Jesus;<sup>8</sup> therefore, it is necessary for students to have an apologetic to prepare for such criticism. The biblical and non-biblical hypotheses are then tested by the coherence and correspondence theories.

Once the Apostles recalled their experiences, they orally shared them. This oral period—the time between the life of Christ and the writing of the Gospels—has been a target of form critics for decades. Oral transmission represents the second phase in the transmission of the Gospels. Therefore, session 4 focuses on presenting a case for a controlled oral tradition in contrast to the hypothesis that the oral period was loose and the Jesus tradition evolving. These views are then compared against historical data (correspondence theory).

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<sup>8</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers), 100.

Session 5 describes the final stage of the transmission process, transcription. Students typically know very little about the transcription of the autograph into the rich New Testament (NT) manuscript tradition. With such lack of knowledge, it only takes a few statistics to produce doubt in the reliability of the NT. However, in light of the rich manuscript tradition, these statistics do not hold as much weight as skeptics would have students to believe. Therefore, students study the accurate transcription of the NT and its manuscript tradition compared to the manuscripts of other works of the ancient world (correspondence theory). They also learn the double-standard typically applied by skeptics to ancient manuscript traditions (coherence theory). Considered together, sessions 3–5 teach students how the NT material went from eyewitness accounts to the 21<sup>st</sup> century bookshelf.

Session 6 focuses on the veracity of the apostolic witness. Explaining that the NT documents are eyewitness accounts is not enough to justify their reliability, for an eyewitness could have lied or fabricated the truth. Therefore, this session provides an apologetic for the veracity of the eyewitnesses in response to many prevailing theories amongst skeptics. Historical evidence is used to support the biblical witness against contemporary skeptics (correspondence theory). In addition, historiographical questions are raised to expose the inconsistencies within such skepticism (coherence theory).

**Sessions 7–8.** The next two sessions deal with the second worldview challenge found in most college contexts, the Darwinian worldview. There are many implications of this theology on the gospel, making it an unorthodox system.<sup>9</sup> Session 7 explores various cosmologies and introduces the theistic implications of contemporary philosophical and scientific findings. These implications posit a God who is transcendent,

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 19.



necessary, and determinant. The data considered supports classical theism against open theism (correspondence theory).

Session 8 compares the biblical model with other worldviews concerning the origin of life. This session explores how contemporary scientific findings question the Darwinist commitments of many in college contexts today (correspondence theory). Philosophical and theological questions are also raised to expose how this worldview fails to be consistent (coherence theory).

**Sessions 9–10.** The final two sessions provide students with an apologetic against universalism. Universalism is a direct affront to the gospel, making the work of Christ null and void. Because the gospel is God’s solution to the antecedent problem introduced by sin, session 9 provides philosophical and existential support for an objective moral standard—the standard of a holy God. Related issues such as the problem of evil are also treated in this session.

Session 10 is an apologetic for the exclusive salvific fitness of Jesus. This session provides theological justification for the person and work of Jesus. Jesus’ personhood as truly God and truly man makes him uniquely suited to be mankind’s savior. Together with his work (life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return), the gospel of Jesus is posited as the solution to how a just God can justify sinful man.

As an apologetic for the exclusivity of Christ, the messiahs and gospels of other faiths are compared with the gospel of Christ. Moral reasoning is used as the evidence by which the biblical and non-biblical worldviews are compared. Other worldviews are shown to be either morally deficient or incapable of solving their own moral dilemmas. In contrast, the biblical worldview is shown to correspond with the moral law, and to cohere with its own solution.

### **Pedagogical Techniques**

The content of the teaching sessions was assembled with certain pedagogical

techniques of the TRAIN method in mind. The first technique involves the concept of inoculation.<sup>10</sup> This theory has been studied since the 1960s with many convincing discoveries. Students who are exposed to ideas earlier in life in a controlled environment are less likely to be swayed by that idea than if they encountered it later in life and not in a controlled environment. This theory has also found proponents amongst apologetics educators.<sup>11</sup>

The controlled exposure happens at the beginning of each session where students are asked how they would respond to someone who raised a particular objection to the Christian faith. The teacher then plays the part of an objector and allow the students to ponder a response. Students soon realize their need to know the content of the training session to construct an adequate response. In addition, as they learn how robust the Christian worldview is, confidence in their faith grows. Because they have been inoculated to that idea, it will have less of an impact on them if they encounter it again.

A second technique that is emphasized is repetition. The comparative analysis approach to the integrative method is repeated throughout the series. This repetition of method is to instill in the students a plan of action when encountering a non-biblical idea.

Third, three different teaching styles are incorporated into this method. The “T” represents a traditional lecture environment where there is a master teacher imparting information. The “R” and “A” are examples of individual study where the students are challenged to further their knowledge and apply their knowledge individually. Finally, group exploration takes place through debriefing sessions represented by “I” and “N.” Each person’s experience presents a different scenario that students collectively

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<sup>10</sup> Inoculation theory has grown as a technique in psychology and communications. Josh Compton, Ben Jackson, and James A. Dimmock, “Persuading Other to Avoid Persuasion: Inoculation Theory and Resistant Health Attitudes,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 7, no. 122 (Feb 9, 2016), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4746429/>.

<sup>11</sup> Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know: Preparing Young Christians for a Challenging World* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2019), 121.

investigate. Together, they then navigate toward a solution to improve their apologetics engagements.<sup>12</sup> The debriefing sessions simultaneously allow the group to build on knowledge gleaned from individual experiences.<sup>13</sup>

### **Implementation of Apologetics Teaching Series**

The college students of BBC were equipped to engage their campuses with the gospel by the teaching of the apologetics training curriculum. This took place during the BBC college/career (CC) Sunday School hour. The implementation of the curriculum began on May 23<sup>rd</sup> and was completed on July 25<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Session 1**

Prior to May 23<sup>rd</sup>, fourteen of the CC students took a digital form of the Basics of Apologetics Assessment (BAA) survey.<sup>14</sup> Those who did not take the survey digitally did so in class on May 23<sup>rd</sup> prior to the teaching time. Six students took the survey in person, making a total of 20 participants in the study at the beginning. In addition to the participants, others attended the class who chose not to participate or were outside of the age range of the study.

At the commencement of the session, students were given an introduction to the series and an explanation of the significance of apologetics for being equipped to engage other worldviews with the gospel. They were also handed a student guide to assist them throughout the study. As the session progressed, students interacted with the Scriptures related to apologetics, and were guided toward a biblical definition of

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<sup>12</sup> James Estep, Roger White, and Karen Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 112–119.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Husbands and Joe Pierce, “What Makes Great Pedagogy? Nine Claims from Research,” in *National College for School Leadership*, Autumn, 2012, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Appendix 3.

apologetics as outlined in the session.<sup>15</sup> Students were left with the application challenge to evaluate different definitions of apologetics according to the biblical definition.

## **Session 2**

The attendance of session 2 increased by three. These students were asked to take the BAA prior to the beginning of the teaching time. They were permitted in the study because they were able to sit through the review of session 1 at the beginning of the teaching time. This made the total number of participants 23.

During the review of session 1, students were asked to recall what they had learned from the last session.<sup>16</sup> This session received more group interaction as students were introduced to a biblical epistemology. They were given the opportunity to come up with examples of absolute truths, and even challenged to break them. These exercises helped them discover these realities which are a central difference between biblical and non-biblical worldviews. At the end of the session, students were given the application challenge to meditate on the phrase, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 1:7).

## **Sessions 3-9**

The attendance in sessions 3–9 averaged at 20 attendees. The teaching of these sessions was also accompanied by PowerPoint presentations. Each session followed a similar format. First, there was a review time held at the beginning of each session which serves as a summary for what was taught the previous week. Second, the lesson was taught with questions prompting periodic group discussion. Finally, the sessions ended with an application challenge. Participants who were not in attendance during one of the

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<sup>15</sup> See appendix 5 for a sample of the apologetics training leader’s guide.

<sup>16</sup> This practice of retrieving is endorsed by James M Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 37.

sessions were contacted with instructions to review the session in their student guide.

### **Session 10**

In the final session, participants compared the biblical worldview and the other major religions against the moral law. They also considered whether each system's proposed solution to evil and injustice were coherent or not. This session was more casual and interactive as it was accompanied by a potluck breakfast to celebrate their completion of the training course. After the session, participants were asked to take the BAA as a post-apologetics training assessment.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation of the project took place as described over the course of seventeen weeks. The teaching of the apologetics training curriculum took place during the final ten weeks. After the end of the seventeen weeks of implementation, the evaluations and surveys that participants completed were gathered for analysis. The results of this analysis are discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

#### **Introduction**

The implementation of the project to equip undergraduates in missional apologetics at Broadway Baptist Church (BBC) in Maryville, TN was carried out over the summer of 2021. Both the purpose and the goals of the project are evaluated below, followed by theological and personal reflection. The evaluation reveals that the purpose of this project was fulfilled, and that the goals were successfully met according to the standards outlined in chapter 1 above.

#### **Evaluation of Project's Purpose**

The purpose of the project as stated in chapter 1 is to equip undergraduate students to engage in missional apologetics on local college campuses. This project was successful in fulfilling its purpose in the context of BBC, as the evaluation of the goals below suggests. To implement this project in another context, two potential problems are identified that could prevent it from fulfilling this purpose. One of the primary concerns at the outset was the feasibility of the project given the 17-week timeframe. The duration of implementation proved to be realistic; however, this is only advisable for pastors/leaders who are able to spend the time in research and preparation for teaching college students. If one's ministry context does not already include teaching college students, the time required to execute this project would likely exceed 17 weeks.

Another concern is generating enough interest in college students to be equipped for engaging their campus in apologetics. What was discovered was that the BBC college students retained great interest in the study. If adequate time is allotted, and

enough interest in apologetics is generated, a thoughtful execution of the project's goals should produce similar results in another context.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

Each of the project's three goals are evaluated below according to the standards set in chapter 1.

#### **Goal 1**

The first goal that guided the completion of the project was to develop a ministry plan for churches to partner with collegiate ministries to share the gospel on local college campuses. This goal was to be measured by a panel of five area church pastors using the evaluation rubric in appendix 1. One pastor on the panel did not return the evaluation form, leaving four evaluators on the panel.

These evaluators were chosen based on their experiences with student and college ministry. The first evaluator was chosen because he is the longest tenured youth pastor in the area and has experience with campus ministry. The second evaluator is also the headmaster of a local Christian high school. The third evaluator is currently a college ministry pastor. The fourth evaluator is a pastor with fifteen years of prior experience ministering to youth and college students.

The evaluations were overwhelmingly positive. Criterion line 1 received 3 scores of exemplary and one of sufficient.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, line 2 received 3 scores of exemplary and one of sufficient. Lines 3 and 4 received four exemplary scores. Line 5 received 2 scores of sufficient and 2 of exemplary. Line 6 received 3 scores of exemplary and 1 of sufficient. The final line received 3 scores of exemplary and 1 "requires attention."

Only one criterion from one of the evaluators did not meet the sufficiency

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1 to see the line items.

level. His comment stated, “I think you do a good job of saying what you are going to do, but not much is said of how. It is hard to evaluate the potential effectiveness without knowing the ‘how.’” Given the nature and scope of the ministry plan, that it is not intended to be an exhaustive detailing of how the described objectives are to be carried out, no revisions were considered necessary given his comments. Nevertheless, the point from this evaluator is noted that a church would be benefited by additional details not provided in the general plan in order to implement the strategy as described in chapter 4. Therefore, for the purpose of implementing this project in another context, the church should consult chapter 4 of this project in addition to the strategic ministry plan.

The standard of success set for this goal was that 90 percent of the rubric criterion would reach the sufficiency level. Each of the 7 criteria were evaluated 4 times, resulting in a total 28 criterion evaluations. Only one 1 of 28 (3.57 percent) did not reach the sufficiency level. Therefore, this goal is considered to have been successfully met.

## **Goal 2**

The second goal was to develop a ten-session apologetics teaching series to equip students for missional apologetics. This goal was measured by a panel of five experts: 3 area church pastors, one BBC pastor, and one seminary professor using the evaluation rubric in appendix 2. The three area church pastors and the seminary professor each gave a 100 percent exemplary evaluation on all rubric criteria. Some of the comments included requests of permission to employ the curriculum in their own contexts (to which permission was granted). The fifth evaluation, by the BBC pastor, contained exemplary scores on all but 3 criteria. Lines 3, 5, and 6 of his evaluation were scored at sufficiency.<sup>2</sup>

The standard of success set for this goal was that 90 percent of the rubric

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2.



criterion would reach the sufficiency level. Each of the 7 criteria were evaluated 5 times, resulting in a total of 35 criterion evaluations. Each of the marks met or succeeded the sufficiency level. Therefore, this goal is considered to have been successfully met.

### **Goal 3**

The final goal was to equip the students in a classroom or small group setting. The CC students at BBC were equipped in a classroom setting through the teaching of the apologetics curriculum. This goal was measured by the participants taking pre- and post-training surveys using the Basics of Apologetics Assessment (BAA) in appendix 3.

Although 23 individuals took the BAA as a pre-survey, only participants who attended at least 70 percent of the training sessions were eligible to take the post-survey for this study. This is because those who did not receive at least 70 percent of the training were considered unable to reflect the training. Of the 23 who took the pre-survey, 16 remained eligible for the post-survey. Participant number four's pretest answers were so high that there was not enough room for growth for a positive significant difference to be established between his pre-training test and post-training test scores. Therefore, his tests were removed from the analysis. Participants 13 and 14 never turned in their post-training survey, leaving a total number of 13 participants whose survey results are analyzed below.

The first series of questions on the BAA provide qualitative data on the participants. The responses of the pre-test survey prompt to describe the gospel included responses such as, "Salvation from the punishment of sin via the acceptance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Also, "God sent his son Jesus to walk amongst sinners to live a life on earth showing God and what perfection is. He then followed His Father's plan and died on the cross to save sinners from eternal suffering." The students' understanding of the gospel from the pre-survey was mostly good; however, the post-survey articulations of the gospel were even more articulate. For example, one participant

responded that the gospel is “The good news that, though we are under God’s wrath because of our sin, Jesus died to take the wrath we deserve. In trusting Christ and repenting of our sin, his righteousness is imputed to us and our sin imputed to him.”

The students’ definition of apologetics also became more precise through the study. One participant responded to the prompt to define apologetics in the pre-survey with, “Defending the gospel to others.” His post-survey response was, “A defense for the belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as means of eternal salvation.” What is reflected in his post-survey response is an association of apologetics with (1) the resurrection of Christ and (2) the future salvation for God’s people. This increased precision is evident in many of the participants.

The quantitative evaluation is with respect to the 30-item Likert survey within the BAA. The purpose of the BAA is to assess two different competencies in the participant: orthodoxy and confidence. The Likert scale in each of the items were assigned value in ascending or descending order depending on the statement.<sup>3</sup> Notice, for example, that the Likert scale in item 12, “God’s highest priority is man’s happiness,” is valued in descending order. This is because “SD” is the most orthodox answer and is therefore assigned the highest value. In contrast, the Likert scale in item 14, “God is in complete control of the universe,” is valued in ascending order. This is because “SA” is the most orthodox answer and is therefore assigned the highest value. The values for each of the items are the same for every participant and were unbeknownst to them.

The standard of success for this goal was set that a t-test of dependent samples returns positive statistical significance in the pre- and post-training survey scores for 80

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<sup>3</sup> The answer key in appendix 6 shows how the surveys were graded. The number 6 corresponds to the answer that demonstrated the highest degree of orthodoxy or confidence whereas the number 1 corresponds to the answer that demonstrated the lowest degree of orthodoxy or confidence. The benefit of each item being in either ascending or descending order versus a static 1–6 scale is that this method not only enables the evaluator to discern whether the study made a discernable and statistically significant difference; it is also able to show that there was either progress towards or regress from orthodoxy or confidence.

percent of the participants.<sup>4</sup> As shown in table 1 below, positive statistical significance was achieved by 11 out of 13 of the participants. Because the t-test demonstrated a positive and statistically significant change in 84.6 percent of the participants, the goal of equipping students in missional apologetics through the apologetics training sessions has been successfully met.

Table 1. Pre- and post-survey results of each participant

| Participant | Pre Sum | Post Sum | p-value     |
|-------------|---------|----------|-------------|
| 1           | 162     | 175      | 0.020878    |
| 2           | 139     | 156      | 0.014558    |
| 3           | 140     | 170      | 0.000014    |
| 5           | 136     | 153      | 0.041458    |
| 6           | 137     | 163      | 0.0000569   |
| 7           | 147     | 160      | 0.01789     |
| 8           | 144     | 169      | 0.00000302  |
| 9           | 148     | 168      | 0.00446     |
| 10          | 145     | 157      | 0.049749    |
| 11          | 137     | 176      | 0.000000359 |
| 12          | 130     | 138      | 0.029925    |
| 15          | 157     | 166      | 0.107011    |
| 16          | 131     | 141      | 0.201786    |

A t-test was also run using the sums of each of the participant's pre- and post-surveys to see if the training produced a positive and statistically significant change in the overall population of the participants considered. The detailed results of the t-test are published in table 2 below. The p-value (two-tail) suggests that the training produced a positive and significant change in the 13 participants whose pre- and post-training survey results were considered.

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<sup>4</sup> The p-value was determined by running a t-test (paired, two sample for means) on the pre- and post-survey scores of all 30 Likert items.

Table 2. T-test: paired two-sample for means

|                                 | Pre-Training<br>Total | Post-Training<br>Total |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Mean                            | 142.5385              | 160.9231               |
| Variance                        | 88.26923              | 139.9103               |
| Observations                    | 13                    | 13                     |
| Pearson<br>Correlation          | 0.639298              |                        |
| Hypothesized<br>Mean Difference | 0                     |                        |
| df                              | 12                    |                        |
| t Stat                          | -7.14415              |                        |
| P(T<=t) one-tail                | 5.87E-06              |                        |
| t Critical one-tail             | 1.782288              |                        |
| P(T<=t) two-tail                | 1.17E-05              |                        |
| t Critical two-tail             | 2.178813              |                        |

### Strengths of the Project

Analyzing the results of the study reveals that its primary strength is the apologetics curriculum as an equipping resource. There is a notable increase in confidence levels among participants who attended the apologetics training. Because the BAA survey tests both orthodoxy and confidence, the percentage growth in each of the two competencies can be determined by evaluating the survey questions that test one competency independent from the other. The survey questions which test the participant's orthodoxy are questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, and 28. The questions which test the participant's confidence are questions, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, and 30. The sum scores in each category were calculated for each participant and are published in tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3. Percentage growth in orthodoxy calculated for each participant<sup>5</sup>

| Participant | Pre-Training Sum Orthodoxy Scores | Post-Training Sum Orthodoxy Scores | %Growth |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|
| 1           | 84                                | 88                                 | 4.762   |
| 2           | 77                                | 81                                 | 5.195   |
| 3           | 79                                | 85                                 | 7.595   |
| 5           | 65                                | 81                                 | 24.615  |
| 6           | 84                                | 88                                 | 4.762   |
| 7           | 78                                | 87                                 | 11.538  |
| 8           | 76                                | 86                                 | 13.158  |
| 9           | 77                                | 83                                 | 7.792   |
| 10          | 73                                | 77                                 | 5.479   |
| 11          | 76                                | 87                                 | 14.474  |
| 12          | 77                                | 80                                 | 3.896   |
| 15          | 79                                | 83                                 | 5.063   |
| 16          | 80                                | 76                                 | -5      |

Table 4. Percentage growth in confidence calculated for each participant

| Participant | Pre-Training Sum Confidence Scores | Post-Training Sum Confidence Scores | %Growth |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 1           | 78                                 | 87                                  | 11.538  |
| 2           | 62                                 | 75                                  | 20.968  |
| 3           | 61                                 | 85                                  | 39.344  |
| 5           | 71                                 | 72                                  | 1.408   |
| 6           | 53                                 | 75                                  | 41.509  |
| 7           | 69                                 | 73                                  | 5.797   |
| 8           | 68                                 | 83                                  | 22.059  |
| 9           | 71                                 | 85                                  | 19.718  |
| 10          | 72                                 | 80                                  | 11.111  |
| 11          | 61                                 | 89                                  | 45.902  |
| 12          | 53                                 | 58                                  | 9.434   |
| 15          | 78                                 | 83                                  | 6.410   |
| 16          | 51                                 | 65                                  | 27.451  |

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<sup>5</sup> Percentage growth is calculated by dividing the pre- and post-survey score difference by the pre-survey score.

Comparing the percentage growth in orthodoxy to that of confidence reveals the strength of this project.<sup>6</sup> Although there is growth in orthodoxy in all but one of the participants, most of the growth is found in the participants' reported confidence levels. By their own assessment, they feel more confident in demonstrating their doctrinal beliefs and sharing the gospel after having taken the training. The utility of apologetics for gospel ministry of warning and teaching was argued in chapter 2 from an exegesis of parts of Colossians 1 and 2. This project has shown that apologetics is useful for teaching doctrine, but its real strength is found in using this discipline as an equipping method.

Some of the pedagogical techniques utilized in this project most likely contributed to this growth in confidence as well. The exegesis of 1 Peter 3 revealed that apologetics entails preparedness. Providing students with literature and videos to further study the session topics enabled them to bolster their understanding of the subjects. The more thorough one's knowledge of a subject is, the more confidence is to be expected. Chapter 2 also revealed that apologetics was a missional endeavor for the Apostles. By providing the participants with application challenges, they were able to immediately implement their knowledge gained and begin missional apologetics. The more students practice apologetics, the more confident they will become. Therefore, these two elements of the training which are essential to the TRAIN method, are suspected to be major contributors to the increase in confidence reported.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

Although there are many areas that could receive improvements, if there is any aspect of this project that could be further developed, it is the strategic ministry plan. The plan was developed to be a broad outline of steps for churches to establish partnerships with campus ministries with the end goal of launching a missional apologetics ministry.

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 7 for the graph comparing the percent growth of orthodoxy and confidence.

However, it would be a better resource if it came in a more detailed format with commentary, descriptions, and examples of the steps being applied in a particular context.

Another weakness is that some of the questions in the survey may have been vague for the participants. For example, the question which performed the worst was question 3. The average post-training survey score for this question was 3.78, a net decrease of 3.63 percent in the average score from the pre-training results. The question reads, “Apologetics is separate from evangelism.” This could be changed to read, “Apologetics is altogether separate from evangelism.” The revised statement more clearly emphasizes the point being questioned, whether one can separate evangelism from the work of the apologist. Another question that could have been phrased better is question 20, “God suffers with his creation.” A couple participants made a note in the margin that they were confused by the way it was phrased. Although the word “suffers” in the statement is intended to convey a kind of patripassianism that open theism affirms, it could be interpreted in terms of sympathy. The statement could have been qualified to exclude the latter interpretation.

### **Theological Reflections**

A few theological comments can be made from the lessons learned while researching for and implementing the project. First, the importance of theology for apologetics cannot be overstated. The research in chapters 2 and 3 revealed that God has not only commanded the practice of apologetics but has also provided his people with clear instructions on how apologetics is to be practiced. (Survey results revealed that after teaching the CC students, they too came to realize that this is the case.) The specific content that Christians are to share with nonbelievers as they engage in apologetics is inherently theological. To carry out the apologetics mandate the way the Apostles prescribed and modeled, apologetists need to be ready to teach many theological loci such

as theological anthropology, the doctrines of sin, salvation in Christ, and ultimately the Resurrection. Continued theological preparation is most necessary for an effective apologetics ministry.

Not only should the apologist prepare himself by theological study, as the apologist teaches the church, his instruction serves to promote the orthodoxy of the believers. The exegesis of and implications from Colossians 1 in chapter 2 revealed that apologetics is useful for a ministry of warning and teaching. Apologetics has historically been exercised to protect and promote the orthodoxy of the church. This was also demonstrated in the CC students. Their orthodoxy grew significantly after taking the apologetics training.

### **Personal Reflections**

Apologetics is of great interest amongst college-aged Christians. Many in this age demographic appreciate and feel the need for deep theological reflection and apologetic application. Many factors seem to be contributing to this. To begin with, their post-truth culture leaves many starving for truth. They frequently communicate their exhaustion with the emotionally laden and intellectually impoverished ideas that their friends and professors espouse. Thankfully, they are finding satisfaction in the historic Christian faith.

Another reason it appears college students are drawn towards theology and apologetics is that these studies are on the level which many are being held to at the university. They hear their secular teachers' lofty orations and are intimidated. Many young Christians simply want to know that their faith can intellectually compete. Educating college Christians in theology and apologetics provides them the reassurance that their faith is cogent and sound. The biblical faith not only is able to stand toe-to-toe against secular ideas; it supplants all other worldviews as the most coherent and faithful exposition of reality.



A final reason for the interest in apologetics has to do with maturity. Many college-age Christians came to faith when they were in Middle School. By this time, they have matured in the faith to a level where they are wanting to know God's truth more. The Spirit sanctifying them has guided them in truth (Jhn 16:13). The CC students appeared to have been spiritually primed for the training.

Going forward, it is the intent of the CC ministry at BBC to apply the strategic ministry plan to develop a partnership with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) ministry at Maryville College. This partnership would provide the opportunity to equip Maryville College students to engage their campus with gospel by preparing them for the ideological challenges associated with that context.

### **Conclusion**

It is an awesome responsibility to carry out an apostolic ministry of teaching, seeking to intentionally stand in the Christian tradition of apologetics in the hopes of strengthening the faith of believers and preparing them to engage college campuses with the gospel. The apologetics training developed proved to be an effective equipping tool for college-aged Christians. If God wills, BBC will continue to establish a partnership with the FCA ministry at Maryville College and see its students through the entirety of the training and the objectives in the ministry plan. By God's grace college students impacted by this study will continue to grow in their orthodoxy and confidence and embrace the calling to share the hope of the gospel on their campus.

## APPENDIX 1

### STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION

The following evaluation will be sent to a panel of five area pastors. The panel will evaluate the strategic ministry plan's purpose, action steps, and training methods.

| <b>Strategic Ministry Plan Evaluation</b>   |   |   |   |   |          |
|---|---|---|---|---|----------|
| <b>1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary</b>                                      |   |   |   |   |          |
| Criteria  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Comments |
| <b>Purpose</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
| There is a perceivable need for church-collegiate ministry partnership for equipping undergraduates in apologetics. |   |   |   |   |          |
| The purpose of this plan addresses this need.   |   |   |   |   |          |
| <b>Action Steps</b>   |   |   |   |   |          |
| The project has clear steps of action.  |   |   |   |   |          |
| The action steps are achievable.  |   |   |   |   |          |
| The project takes into consideration church limitations.  |   |   |   |   |          |
| <b>Training Methods</b>   |   |   |   |   |          |
| The training methods outlined in this plan are effective for teaching participants content.                         |   |   |   |   |          |
| The training methods outlined in this plan are effective for equipping participants for practice.                   |   |   |   |   |          |

Please include any additional comments regarding the strategic ministry plan below:

## APPENDIX 2

### APOLOGETICS TEACHING SERIES EVALUATION

The following evaluation will be sent to an expert panel of one BBC pastor, one seminary professor in apologetics, and three area church pastors. This panel will evaluate the teaching series to ensure it is biblically faithful, pedagogically useful, and applicable.

Name of evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

| <b>Apologetics Teaching Series Evaluation</b>   |   |   |   |   |          |
|---|---|---|---|---|----------|
| <b>1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
| Criteria  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Comments |
| <b>Biblical Fidelity</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
| The content of the curriculum is hermeneutically sound. All Scripture is properly interpreted, explained, and applied.      |   |   |   |   |          |
| The content of the curriculum is theologically sound.   |   |   |   |   |          |
| <b>Pedagogical Utility</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
| The content of the curriculum is understandable.  |   |   |   |   |          |
| The curriculum's structure is logical.  |   |   |   |   |          |
| The curriculum makes use of various learning approaches such as lecture, discussion, case studies, role play, and homework. |   |   |   |   |          |
| <b>Applicability</b>  |   |   |   |   |          |
| The curriculum includes opportunities to practice apologetics applications.   |   |   |   |   |          |
| At the end of the course, participants will be able to practice apologetics.  |   |   |   |   |          |

Please include any additional comments regarding the curriculum below:

## APPENDIX 3

### BASICS OF APOLOGETICS ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is the Basics of Apologetics Assessment (BAA). Following general assessment questions is a six-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose is to assess each members' present level of understanding and confidence in the practice of apologetics.

## BASICS OF APOLOGETICS ASSESSMENT

### Agreement to Participate

The proclamation of the gospel is God's call upon every believer and is the message this world desperately needs to hear. Apologetics provides the church with an opportunity to prepare students for evangelism on college campuses. The research in which you are about to participate is designed to participants assess their understanding and confidence with the practice of apologetics before and after receiving apologetics training. This research is being conducted by Timothy Whitehead for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will respond to basic questions related to apologetics. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this assessment, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**4 digit code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age** \_\_\_\_\_

### General Questions:

1. How many years have you professed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many years have you been a member in a Bible-believing church? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you currently intentional in evangelizing others?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

4. How many hours a week do you practice evangelism? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Is memorizing Scripture a present practice of yours?

a. Yes

b. No

6. Briefly describe the gospel:

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7. Briefly define apologetics:

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**Directions:** Please mark the appropriate answer using the following scale:

- SD = strongly disagree
- D = disagree
- DS = disagree somewhat
- AS = agree somewhat
- A = agree
- SA = strongly agree

**Apologetics & Evangelism**

- |    |   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. | The Bible commands Christians to practice apologetics.                          | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. | The Bible describes how apologetics is to be practiced.                         | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. | Apologetics is separate from evangelism.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. | I am confident that I know how to practice apologetics as the Bible defines it. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. | I am confident that I can clearly articulate the gospel to an unbeliever.       | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

**The Reliability of the Bible**

- |    |  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 6. | I am confident that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God.                        | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. | I am confident that I can demonstrate that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. | I am confident that I know where the Bible came from.                                  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. | I am confident that I can demonstrate where the Bible came from.                       | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

**God and His Creation**

|     |  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|-----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 10. | God is distinct from his creation.                     | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. | God's highest priority is man's happiness.             | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. | God is in complete control of the universe.            | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. | God depends upon man for the outcome of future events. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. | God experiences change.                                | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. | God suffers with his creation.                         | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 21. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 22. | Mankind was made in God's image as a special creation. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 23. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

### **Jesus and Salvation**

|     |  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|-----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 24. | Jesus is God.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 25. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

|     |  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|-----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 26. | Jesus is man.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 27. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above.                                   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 28. | Man can only come to God through the Person and work of Jesus.                           | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 29. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above.                                   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 30. | I feel that I need more apologetics training to be able to share the gospel confidently. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

## APPENDIX 4

### STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN

The following is a strategic ministry plan that outlines the mission, vision, objectives, and goals of the college/career ministry of BBC to equip undergraduates in missional apologetics. In addition, this ministry plan can be further used to assist churches in establishing partnerships with campus ministries.

## STRATEGIC MINISTRY PLAN

### **Mission**

To equip undergraduates that they may be prepared to engage their campus in missional apologetics.

### **Vision**

The college/career ministry of BBC seeks to partner with and support the FCA ministry at Maryville College by providing their students with training and resources to regularly engage in missional apologetics.

### **Goals**

The following goals will enable the BBC-FCA partnership to accomplish its mission and vision.

1. Communicate the need for students to be equipped in missional apologetics.
2. Teach students the nature and purpose of apologetics.
3. Train students in an apologetics method.
4. Prepare for the particular ideological challenges associated with the collegiate context.
5. Lead students in a missional apologetics training model (TRAIN) that will encourage regular engagements with nonbelievers.
6. Appoint an apologetics ministry student leader to lead the group in further missional apologetics ministry.

### **Objectives**

The following are concrete objectives that serve to meet the above ministry goals.

#### **Objectives for Accomplishing Goal 1**

1. Communicate the need for apologetics training to campus minister.
2. Secure regular time to meet with campus ministry students.
3. Encourage a trusting environment by developing relationships with the students.
4. Reveal to the students their need for apologetics training by exposing them to various worldview ideas they are likely to encounter.

### **Objectives for Accomplishing Goal 2**

1. Work with the campus minister to schedule a date to begin an apologetics training series with the students.
2. Advertise the training to other believing students on campus.
3. Begin apologetics training with a session that teaches the concept of missional apologetics from 1 Pet 3 and apostolic examples.
4. Write the subsequent training sessions in such a way that each reinforce the nature and purpose of apologetics.

### **Objectives for Accomplishing Goal 3**

1. Teach students various apologetics methods.
2. Teach the benefits and detriments to each method.
3. Introduce students to an integrative method that is mindful of the benefits and detriments of the other methods.
4. Teach students how to use this method according to the coherence theory and correspondence theory.
5. Write the subsequent training sessions in such a way that trains students to engage other worldview according to this method.

### **Objectives for Accomplishing Goal 4**

1. Identify common ideological challenges associated with the college.
2. Research effective apologetic responses to the identified ideologies.
3. Develop training sessions that introduce the identified ideologies and corresponding apologetic responses.

### **Objectives for Accomplishing Goal 5**

1. Plan monthly apologetics ministry meetings with a format that follows the acronym (TRAIN): teach, research, apply, investigate, and navigate.
2. Teach (T) apologetics training sessions at the monthly meeting.
3. Provide students with materials for group and personal research (R) after the teaching session.
4. Challenge students to apply (A) missional apologetics at least once between the monthly meetings.
5. At the beginning of the following month's meeting, host debriefing sessions to investigate (I) each student's engagement in missional apologetics and navigate (N) ways to improve students' apologetics engagements.

### **Objectives for Accomplishing Goal 6**

1. Work with campus minister to establish a self-sustaining apologetics ministry.
2. Introduce the need for students to continue in apologetics trainings.
3. Propose a continued apologetics ministry with a favorable response of at least 50 percent of the ministry students.

4. Identify and appoint a competent student with leadership abilities to help lead the group's apologetics ministry.
5. Provide the student leader with at least one year of additional apologetics material for his personal edification.
6. Provide student leader with sample debriefing sessions.
7. Provide student leader with curricular ideas to lead teaching sessions.

## APPENDIX 5

### SAMPLE APOLOGETICS TRAINING

The following is a sample of the apologetics training developed for equipping undergraduates in missional apologetics. This teaching series is the one that was taught to Broadway Baptist CC students for the BAA and evaluated by an expert panel according to the rubric in appendix 2.



## SAMPLE APOLOGETICS TRAINING

### Session 3: The Memory of the Eyewitnesses

#### **Investigate and Navigate**

[Have students divide into even-numbered groups and discuss their application responses and any opportunities they had to engage with nonbelievers. Once conversations die down, have them discuss ways they can more faithfully or more strategically engage with nonbelievers next week.]

#### **Transmission of the Gospels**

[Have students resume to regular seating.]

As Christ-followers, the Bible is our ultimate standard of truth. It is true in the absolute sense. Therefore, the Bible has no contradictions and does not conflict with any truth in the real world. But, how do we know which books should be in the Bible and which ones should not? We will give a fuller treatment to this later; but we can content ourselves to say that our Bible is centered on Jesus. Jesus affirmed the authority of the OT (Lk 24:27) and commissioned his Apostles to be authoritative witnesses of him, thus assuring the authority of the NT Scriptures (Acts 1:8).

All of this is centered on the reliability of the Gospels, which record for us the Resurrection of Christ who claims the authority of these Texts. Our Bible is centered on the Resurrected Christ—our hope of the Resurrection informs our canon.

So, to trust any of the Bible, we must have confidence that the Gospels are telling the truth for that is where we learn of the Resurrection. That is where we learn of Jesus saying the OT is authoritative. So, we must show that the Gospel accounts are reliable and true. We will begin by answering the question of how we received the Gospels:

**Phase 1: From mind to mouth.** First, the disciples, eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and teachings verbally shared their experiences with Jesus. Read the book of Acts and see for yourself the Apostles' sermons. For our Gospel accounts to be reliable, the Apostles had to accurately recall their experiences—the Jesus tradition had to go from their minds to their mouths.

**Phase 2: From mouth to pen.** There was some period of time—probably 2 or 3 decades—between the life of Jesus and the writing of the first Gospel by Mark. During that time, Christian communities, led by the Apostles, were sharing the message of Christ far and wide by mouth. We call this the oral period.

**Phase 3: From pen to scribe.** When Mark wrote down his Gospel, maybe he edited it a couple times before he sent it out. We call the final work that left the writer's hand as he dispatched it to his audience the *autograph*. (The Apostle Peter and the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture maintains that it was the author of these Texts—the autographs—which were inspired.) We do not have any of the autographs; they are lost to history; however, the church recognized the authority of the disciples and copied their works by hand, producing thousands of manuscripts. A manuscript is a hand-written copy of an autograph or another manuscript.

### **Challenges to the Reliability of the Bible**

Skeptics might say, "Let's say Jesus is God as the Bible says. I am prepared to concede that any writing from God is authoritative and true. However, the Bible is not from God; it is solely the product of man. Furthermore, we now know that the Gospels that supposedly record for us the life of Jesus cannot be trusted."

Skeptics challenge each phase of Gospel transmission:

1. They claim that the Apostle and eyewitnesses couldn't have accurately recalled the life of Jesus, therefore errors took place during the first phase of transmission.

2. They claim that the communities who told and retold these stories distorted them (intentionally and unintentionally) so that by the time someone wrote them down they had changed significantly.
3. They claim that the scribes who copied the autographs made so many changes (intentionally and unintentionally) that there is no way to know what the original writings said.

In this session, we will respond to claims skeptics make regarding the first phase of the Jesus tradition transmission.

For a time, demonstrating the Gospel accounts being based on eyewitness testimony was sufficient work for an apologist to convince one to take seriously the claims that are being made in the Gospels. That is no longer the case. Many skeptics today are not satisfied that the Gospel accounts are products of eyewitnesses—they have found a new way to try and undermine the trustworthiness of these accounts by claiming they have been detrimentally and irrevocably affected by distorted memories.

Bart Ehrman, for example, in his *Jesus Before the Gospels*, demonstrates this skepticism saying, “What then about the Gospels of the New Testament? If they are based on eyewitnesses are they necessarily accurate? Do they in every instance represent accurate memories?... They are not *necessarily* reliable.”<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to say that the stories in the Gospels can be historically evaluated to determine if they are accurate or distorted memories. How does one do this without blatant bias against the NT record? There are two ways Ehrman outlines: 1, By showing internal contradictions in the stories, and 2, by pointing out the sheer implausibility of something taking place that the Gospels testify as having happened.<sup>2</sup> Not only does he fail to provide a single example of an irreconcilable contradiction in the Gospels, there

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<sup>1</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers), 100.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

are problems with fundamental assumptions behind his hypothesis that need to be addressed.

### **Skeptical Assumptions**

Because Ehrman has presupposed a naturalistic worldview, he has—in a typical Humean fashion—already secured his conclusion prior to any historical investigation.<sup>3</sup> Because the naturalist automatically relegates any miracle to the realm of fabrication and implausibility, there is nothing in the life of Jesus that is significant enough to warrant accurate recall. If Jesus were just your friendly neighborhood Galilean, how would anything in his life make a significant enough an impact to be remembered? Therefore, he speaks of the memories of the Apostles as though the memories of any given event in the life of Jesus could be treated like a typical, mundane memory such as what you ate for breakfast on the third Sunday of last November. It is no wonder Ehrman has no confidence in the memory of the eyewitness if there is nothing inherently special to what they experienced.

However, that understanding of the Gospels does not do them justice. They are not to be treated as though they were a reality T.V. show of perpetually insignificant events following the life of an average Jew. No, they tell of a man from God who did and said marvelous things to the shock and awe of thousands. Jesus preached with an authority the people never heard before (Mk 1:22; Mt 9:8; Jhn 7:46). He demonstrated authority over sickness (Mk 1:34), nature (Mk 4:35ff), demons (Mk 1:27), and death itself (Mk 5:21ff). To seriously interact with the Gospels, one must interact with them according to how they present themselves. It is a complete dismissal of their genre and

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<sup>3</sup> Hume contends that no wise person would believe in miracles because they are—by his own definition—rare events. However, no event is exactly the same as another. Therefore, to what degree does an event have to differ from another to be categorized as a “miracle”? In this way Hume secures his conclusion by his definition. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 86.

testimony to treat them as the product of distorted memories as though there were no weight or significance to what they are communicating.

### **Why Jesus Would Have Been Remembered**

In addition to the marvelous works of Jesus, New Testament scholar, Michael Bird, identifies several reasons why the life and teachings of Jesus would have been remembered by the Christian community:

**Jesus is the bedrock of group and self identity.** Bird says,

We should take into account that the sayings and deeds of Jesus comprised the bedrock for the self-understanding of the early Christian communities. We are not dealing with forgettable and trivial details of general knowledge. The faith, ethics, symbols, and praxis of early Christian communities were all defined and oriented around the impact that Jesus had upon them, an impact that was embodied in memories about Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

[Have students read the life of the early church in Acts 2. Have them consider how important Jesus was to the early church for them to reorient their life and society around him and his teaching.]

**Networks of eyewitnesses.** Moreover, these experiences were not in isolation; the stories they recalled did not remain in the minds of individuals for years only to be accessed later when one of the eyewitnesses decided to write it down. These were group experiences. They were stories told and retold immediately. This took place in the context of eyewitnesses, providing—what we will later unpack more in the second phase—a checks and balances, a control to the stories, ensuring no one would veer from what really happened.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 109.

**Repetition of Jesus’ teaching and works.** In addition to that, we know he did things more than once – casting out demons, healings, etc. If you saw Jesus multiply loaves and fishes on two separate occasions, how likely are you to forget it? “During his own lifetime [Jesus] taught and said the same things in multiple instances, in various locations, over the course of three years.”<sup>5</sup>

**Pedagogical & rhetorical devices.** A final thing to consider is that, in Jesus’ teaching, he employed many devices so that His disciples would not forget His message. In fact, some scholars estimate that 80 percent of Jesus’ teaching recorded in the Gospels use such rhetorical techniques.<sup>6</sup>

It is simply not the case, as Ehrman would have us believe, that the memories of the eyewitnesses were remote, isolated, and insignificant. On the contrary, these memories were grounded in history, and the eyewitnesses were able to recall specific details about the life and ministry of Jesus with verifiable accuracy. For example, the details surrounding Jesus’ execution such as time, place, and governing authorities are all supported by extrabiblical evidence: “Their name comes from Christ, who during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Demonstrating the Truth**

From the method outlined in Session 2, we will now work out how to defend the ability of Jesus’ eyewitnesses to recall their experiences, and show how Ehrman’s claim is not supported by the data.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 110.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, 87. These techniques were popular in the ancient world, especially in Judaism where a large body of tradition was memorized (c.f. 2 Mac. 2.25).

<sup>7</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44 from Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 243.

**Step 1: Compare worldviews.** We first begin by outlining the biblical and non-biblical views. The non-biblical view is represented in the claim that the eyewitnesses of Jesus could not accurately remember his life and teaching. The biblical view is the contrary—the eyewitnesses of Jesus did accurately remember his life and teaching.

**Step 2: Use the correspondence theory.** [Ask students what they could appeal to when using the correspondence theory.] When we look at the data above (Jesus’ social impact, the pedagogical devices in his teaching, the networks of eyewitnesses, etc.), ask which hypothesis best fits the data? Is it more likely that Jesus’ disciples remembered or forgot their experiences?

Do not forget to also look at his assumptions. Does Ehrman’s representation of the Gospels fit the historical data (i.e. how the Gospels are written)?

**Step 3: Use the coherence theory.** Ask if this skeptical claim is coherent. Can someone 2000 years removed have a better idea of the events of Jesus’ life than an eyewitness? How can that person claim the eyewitnesses misremembered Jesus if he does not have anything to go off of other than the eyewitness accounts? In other words, the skeptic assumes his own conclusion. Based on naturalism, he “knows” that Jesus could not have done any miracles. Therefore, the disciples who seem very genuine in what they record must have misremembered their experiences.

## **Conclusion**

The claim that the disciples could not have remembered their experiences with Jesus may remain an opinion to some skeptics, but it cannot be demonstrated as true. While they cannot appeal to evidence, the biblical worldview has evidence to appeal to. Therefore, it is the standing hypothesis.

[Ask for questions and clarification.]

## **Research and Apply**

TRAIN (Teach, Research, Apply, Investigate, Navigate): You have been taught how to defend the reliability of the eyewitnesses of Jesus. Now, it's time for you to research and apply what you have learned.

**Research.** For further study, read *Miracles* by Craig Keener.

**Apply.** Read 1 John 1:1-4 followed by the Gospel of John. What details in these Texts support the notion that the Apostles remembered Jesus?

Pray and seek for opportunities to engage with nonbelievers.

When we resume the next session, we will investigate each other's application responses and engagements with nonbelievers. We will then navigate ways to better engage with nonbelievers.



APPENDIX 6  
BAA LIKERT KEY

The following instrument is the Basics of Apologetics Assessment (BAA) value key used in the evaluation of the BAA participants. The Likert questions from appendix 3, all in the order of SD, D, DS, AS, A, SA, are assigned numeric value in either ascending or descending order depending on which answer demonstrates the highest degree of orthodoxy or confidence, with 6 being the highest value and 1 being the lowest.

## LIKERT KEY

### **Apologetics & Evangelism**

|    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | The Bible commands Christians to practice apologetics.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. | The Bible describes how apologetics is to be practiced.                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. | Apologetics is separate from evangelism.  | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. | I am confident that I know how to practice apologetics as the Bible defines it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. | I am confident that I can clearly articulate the gospel to an unbeliever.       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

### **The Reliability of the Bible**

|    |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | I am confident that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God.                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. | I am confident that I can demonstrate that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. | I am confident that I know where the Bible came from.                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. | I am confident that I can demonstrate where the Bible came from.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

### **God and His Creation**

|     |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. | God is distinct from his creation.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

|     |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. | God's highest priority is man's happiness.             | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 14. | God is in complete control of the universe.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 15. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 16. | God depends upon man for the outcome of future events. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 17. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 18. | God experiences change.                                | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 19. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 20. | God suffers with his creation.                         | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 21. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 22. | Mankind was made in God's image as a special creation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 23. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

**Jesus and Salvation**

|     |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24. | Jesus is God.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 25. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 26. | Jesus is man.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 27. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

|     |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28. | Man can only come to God through the Person and work of Jesus.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 29. | I am confident that I can demonstrate my answer above.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 30. | I feel that I need more apologetics training to be able to share the gospel confidently. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

APPENDIX 7  
PERCENTAGE GROWTH

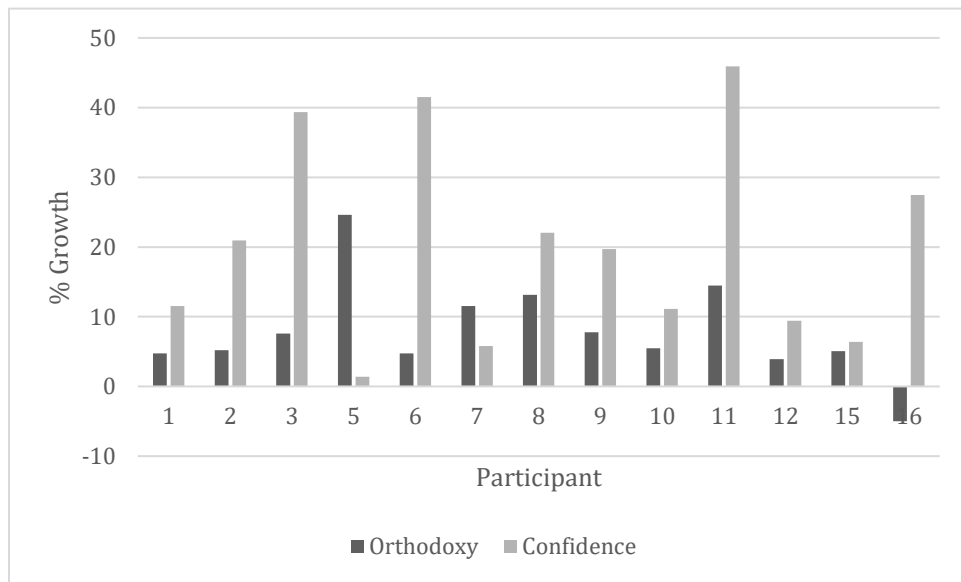


Figure A1. Percentage growth in orthodoxy and confidence compared

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING UNDERGRADUATES TO ENGAGE IN MISSIONAL APOLOGETICS AT BROADWAY BAPTIST CHURCH, MARYVILLE, TN

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This project is intended to equip undergraduates to engage in missional apologetics at Broadway Baptist Church in Maryville, TN. This is accomplished by implementing a strategic ministry plan to partner with campus ministries and equip their students through apologetics training. Chapter 1 describes both the context and the rationale for this project in detail.

Chapters 2 and 3 contain exegetical, historical, and methodological warrant for the project. In chapter 2, the exegesis of 1 Peter 3:15 yields biblical principles which provide definition to the concept and practice of apologetics. The exegesis of Colossians 1:23–2:8 provides warrant for equipping undergraduates in the practice of apologetics. Chapter 3 is comprised of both the historical and methodological support for the project. First, the Apostolic model of apologetics described in chapter 2 is shown to have continued into later ages of the church's history. Following that, an integrative method of apologetics that corresponds with the missional approach exemplified in Scripture and history is put forward.

Chapter 4 details the implementation of the project's ministry plan and curriculum. Chapter 5 is an analysis of the data gathered during the weeks of implementation.

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