

# Theology and Apologetics

by Charles A. Clough

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# Theology and Apologetics

What is apologetics? How is it related to theology? These questions have concerned the greatest minds of the Church because apologetics is inescapable. It has been forced upon believers in every generation including ours. How should we in the twenty-first century reply to arguments against biblical faith that neighbors and fellow-workers read in prominent news magazines? How should Bible-believing students and faculty members answer hostile criticism within academic establishments that have become totally compromised by pagan ideas? How should we respond to apostles of political correctness when they accuse Christianity of *inherent* religious bigotry? How do Christians engage unbelief in their children, spouses, or parents? What should be our answer to Christ-denying claims by the many religions and cults? Today, more than ever, apologetics plays a vital role in Christian witness.

Thankfully, as Solomon wisely noted millennia ago, there is nothing new under the sun (Eccles. 1:9). Early Christians also faced intense political and social challenges to major truths of the faith. Unbelief, then as now, attacked the central Christian miracle of the resurrection (Matt. 28:12-15; Acts 17:32; 26:8). Then as now, pagan nature worship made the Creator-creature distinction almost inconceivable (Acts 14:8-18; 17:22-31). Ancient political leaders branded early Christianity an enemy of the state long before modern Communists, Muslims, and ACLU lawyers (John 11:48-53; Acts 4:13-22; 6:11-15; 17:5-9; 19:21-41; 21:27-31). Unbelieving family members questioned the faith of the earliest Christians (I Pet 3:15). Present-day unbelievers, in spite of their misplaced self-confidence, are no more intelligent than their pagan predecessors centuries ago. Thank God that He has preserved in Scripture sufficient revelation for us to manage each of these circumstances (II Tim. 3:16-17).

## The Meaning of, and Requirement for, Apologetics

Today, the English word apology in its everyday usage expresses regret for some wrong action as in “I apologize”. However, its earlier and specialized meaning is quite the opposite. Its specialized meaning comes from the Greek word, *apologia*, from which it was transliterated. A prominent example of ancient usage is the title of Plato’s dialog, *The Apology*, which presents the courtroom defense of Socrates against his accusers. Similar usage occurs in the New Testament (Acts 22:1; 25:16; Phil. 1:7,16; II Tim. 4:16). Far from meaning regret for a wrong action, these uses of *apologia* refer to *a carefully reasoned defense against questioning or wrongful accusation by recognized authorities*. The word can also refer to a more informal defense outside of the courtroom against personal questioning or accusation (I Cor. 9:3; II Cor. 7:11; I Pet. 3:15). The *intent* of an *apologia* is to win over the person being addressed, *to change his mind about what is true*.

Whether before an unbelieving family member or a political office holder, every Christian should be ready to give a defense (*apologia*) for his or her faith (I Pet. 3:15). Christian leaders, especially, are to be characterized by their apologetic ability to refute those who attack Christianity (Tit. 1:9). Why should we be any less skilled at thinking and communicating than unbelievers? Do we not seek to interpret our everyday experience in terms of the Word of God so that we can walk by faith? Do we really think that unbelieving reporters, lawyers, university lecturers, politicians, or neighbors engage in any deeper thinking on a daily basis about ordinary living? As a matter of fact, we ought to be encouraged because the Bible says that *no* unbeliever can *ever* successfully justify his unbelief (Rom. 1:20). It’s the unbelievers who have no answers--not the Christians! Following the prophets and apostles, therefore, we should not be afraid to reason about our faith.

To forsake all reasoning with inquirers or accusers is to engage in *fideism*---the idea that faith cannot be discussed in a rational manner or argued about fruitfully. Offering only autobiographical accounts of inner feelings and personal experience without justification for the gospel is fideism, not apologetics. Tragically,

fideism in practice is often a cover for weak faith. If we avoid reasoning with outside accusers, we probably are avoiding reasoning with our own internal temptations and doubts. We may be hiding spiritually, fearful that our biblical faith might not be true after all. A genuine and maturing relationship with God inevitably involves reasoning through His Word amid the challenges of daily life. Recall the intense reasoning of the psalmist with God over His ways and how he concludes with a deepened, restful, and worshipful faith in the Lord (e.g., Pss 2; 10; 13; 44; etc.). God created us, after all, to set our lives upon real truth that ultimately derives only from Him. To get to that faith rest, every believer has to engage in the same kind of thinking used in apologetics. *At the bottom line apologetics really is nothing more than a focused version of our responses to everyday temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.* No believer, therefore, should think apologetics to be a strange skill impossible to master.

One word of caution when studying apologetics: apologetics can attract people who are naturally argumentative and proud of their intellects. Unless it is done in submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit, it can easily degenerate to a carnal one-upmanship, a social game that witnesses not to the life of Christ but to plain arrogance. Peter warns us to give our apologetic “with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). The same humility toward the Lord that He requires in personal trials of faith must be present in apologetic activities, too.

## The Relationship of Apologetics and Theology

If theology concerns the doctrines of God, man, nature, and sin, and apologetics works with these areas, there ought to be some relationship between theology and apologetics. Church history shows the influence of apologetics upon theology. Apologetic challenges frequently advanced theological understanding of the Bible. When Paul was headed for his Roman trial, many believe that Luke researched and compiled his two-volume theological history (Luke-Acts) to aid in Paul’s defense (*apologia*). Later theological advances occurred during apologetic efforts to confront heretical views of Christology and soteriology. As we seek to answer questions and criticisms against our faith, we, too, can deepen our appreciation of God’s Word.

Unfortunately the Church has sometimes unwittingly adapted bad theology while trying to do apologetics. Out of a desire to minimize conflict, Christian apologists have sometimes tried to show that biblical faith fits peacefully into established non-Christian concepts. Well-known Church fathers such as Augustine and Aquinas, for example, along with their great positive contributions to Christian thought also distorted parts of biblical theology with concepts of Greek philosophy. In recent times the apologetic urge to fit the Bible into evolutionary schemes of natural history has seriously compromised literal interpretation and inerrancy of Scripture. We have to be very careful, therefore, how we answer those who challenge us.

### Guarding Theology During Apologetic Activity

Criticism of the Christian faith nearly always involves some sort of question. A question often contains a subtle viewpoint that can mislead us when we try to answer it. The Bible warns us that to answer a question before one really understands it, is “folly and shame” (Prov. 18:13). We all can remember trying to answer a test question in school that we didn’t understand and missing it by a mile. That’s why when we do biblical apologetics we must first understand the question. We may even have to clarify and reword it before we can give a clear biblical answer.

A critical question comes with its own interpretation of history, of what is possible and not possible, and of what is right and what is wrong. It brings its own agenda to the table about the basic building blocks of reality. If we try to answer it without perceiving this unbiblical baggage, we may unconsciously adopt its alien viewpoint. Paul warned the Church about being deceived by pagan notions of the fundamental categories of reality (Col. 2:8). These basic categories or *stoichea* in ancient times could be earth, fire, water, air, or other created things

that paganism falsely interpreted as cosmic sources and sustainers. Over against this pagan viewpoint Paul directs us to build upon the truths revealed in Christ. Christ, says Paul, created the entire cosmos, sustains every so-called natural process, and fully reveals God's Person (Col. 1:15-17). Verbal revelation, not human speculation, is the key to interpreting history, what is and is not possible, and what is right or wrong. In Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

Thus at Lystra Paul rejected adoration of the people because of the pagan notions of deity embedded in their interpretation of what had happened. It would have been folly and shame for him to have preached Christ without first clarifying Who God is. He immediately challenged their entire interpretation of his ministry. He replaced their perverted notions of deity with the biblical Creator-creature distinction. Only after that correction would Paul respond to their thankfulness by directing it toward the God of creation (Acts 14:8-18). Similarly, in Athens Paul went to great lengths to clarify the nature of God before introducing the gospel itself (Acts 17:22-31).

In the early centuries after Paul, when the Church responded to early heresies about our Lord, it had to reject the basic underlying ideas of deity that these heresies were grounded upon, not just the individual heresies themselves. Various versions of Monarchianism, for example, started with the false idea of solitary monotheism so they were unable to conceive of plurality in the Godhead. They kept insisting that Jesus couldn't be God and distinct from the Father at the same time. (This mistaken notion survives to this day in certain Christian cults, Unitarianism, post-biblical Judaism, Islam, and liberal theologies.) Thankfully, after exposing the underlying false notions of deity, the Church came to understand biblical revelation deeply enough to state the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation in a clear way.

The wisdom of not "buying the question" can be illustrated by everyday conversation. Suppose a wife says to her husband, "if you really loved me, you wouldn't want to go hunting." The overt issue appears to be the priorities of husband—to stay home to show love for his wife or go hunting. However, there is a covert meaning hidden inside the verb "want": real love is so dominating that it erases all other desires and interests in life (you wouldn't even *want* to go hunting). Unless this underlying notion is surfaced and dealt with, the argument over hunting today will re-emerge tomorrow in an argument over something else. Similarly, the apologetic response must be careful to unearth underlying deceptions or *stoichea* lest the questions return again and again. A hasty and shallow response leaves unbelievers unaware of just how deeply they must change their minds (repent) about what is true.

## **Requiring an Apologetic Strategy**

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To do apologetics carefully without harming theological doctrine requires a strategy. Strategy is not primarily concerned with specific tactical issues such as debates over the resurrection, inspiration of the Bible, the Genesis creation story, or one's lifestyle. Strategy is concerned with how to appeal to the non-Christian in such a way that biblical doctrine is not compromised in the process, regardless of the issue at hand. It focuses on how to understand biblically the true nature of unbelief.

Christians commonly use several different strategies in apologetic encounters. For purposes of discussion we can classify present day apologetic strategies by distinguishing the "common ground" that their advocates think exists between Christianity and unbelief. To have genuine communication with critics and accusers concerning their questions, there must be some common ground that offers a point of contact. What is the common ground? How should we use it to build our case?

## Three Apologetic Strategies

Three major ideas exist about what common ground exists between the Christian and the non-Christian. Upon each of these three ideas, modern evangelicals have fashioned distinct apologetic strategies. Although the following paragraphs treat each one in its pure theoretical form for clarity, in actual practice these strategies often become mixed together.

### Neutral Common Ground of Experience

One idea of common ground holds that all men share historical experience. All men experience good and evil. They all share in historical events. Not only do they have the facts in common, but this empirically-centered approach also holds that all men can reason correctly about these data with complete religious neutrality. Truthful interpretation of the facts in arithmetic, cooking, music, and science surely does not appear to require belief in the Bible. We can, it would seem, reason to the truths of Christianity from this neutral zone of shared facts. We can sit down with the unbeliever, suspend our faith, and “impartially” seek together how to interpret the common facts of our experience. In a culture impressed by the scientific method, this data-centered approach carries much credibility. Apologetics in this view *tries to operate prior to theology and thus maintain religious neutrality*.<sup>1</sup>

For the sake of discussion the believer agrees with the unbeliever that facts are objective and determine what is true. Isolated biblical facts, therefore, lead inevitably to the conclusion that the gospel story is true. The resurrection, for example, is a fact open to historical investigation. Impartial study of the biblical documents and the claims of the early church regarding resurrection make the case for Christianity evidentially compelling. Ancient Near Eastern archeological facts similarly support the Old Testament. Successful apologetics will utilize the alleged neutral common ground of facts so it behooves us to gather reference material on creation, archeology, and ancient history.<sup>2</sup>

Empirically-centered apologetic strategy rightfully reminds us that biblical revelation is historical revelation. God actually created the universe with a history external to Himself; He didn't just dream about it. His revelation to beings made in His image was not abstract theory divorced from everyday experience. Each created object, process, and sequence of happenings testify to the Creator (Job 38-39; Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20). His redemptive actions from the global flood of Noah's day to the Exodus to the miracles of Elijah lead to genuine knowledge of the Lord (Exodus 7:5; I Kings 18:37; Isa. 54:9). He became man and entered the realm of historical experience Himself! The facts constitute reference points for determining truth. Factual errors and mistaken historical witness were not tolerated by biblical authors (Deut. 4:3,11-12; 18:20-22; Luke 1:1-4; II Pet. 1:16-17). In spite of the modern misconception that ancients were indifferent to historical accuracy, biblical authors considered fabricated history to be a violation of the ninth commandment (I Cor. 15:14-15,32). Prophetic claims that turned out to be historically false could result in capital punishment (Deut. 18:20-22). Jesus went so far as to say if His historical witness were flawed then no one should believe His witness concerning heavenly things (John 3:12). When we speak of Christianity, therefore, we are speaking of something as real as any other fact or experience of our lives. The biblical record is historically correct.

However, we have to be careful how we think about the alleged neutral common ground of historical experience between believer and unbeliever. Since every experienced fact is part of a greater whole--the grand

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<sup>1</sup> A clear empirically-centered apologetic strategy appears in John Warwick Montgomery, *Where Is History Going?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1969) and in his exchange with the presuppositionalism of Cornelius Van Til, “Once Upon An Apriori,” in *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Examples of such reference materials would be Josh McDowell's writings such as his latest work, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999) which provides an extensive bibliography.

context of life itself—when men interpret a fact, they necessarily employ universal categories of reality. They speak of facts with concepts of natural law, chance, matter, spirit, etc. (None of us can say anything about anything without saying something about everything!) Universal categories contain religious and theological beliefs. These constitute the *stoicheia* of Paul's warning in Colossians 2:8. Believers and unbelievers do not share the same *stoicheia*. Neutrality disappears.

Sin affects ideas. We have to go no further than our everyday confrontation with lusts to see the principle in action. All temptations invite us to alter our theology. The fall of man profoundly illustrates the noetic affects of sin on interpretation of facts. Immediately after the fall Adam and his wife reinterpreted the facts of God's omnipresence and omniscience in thinking they could hide from Him. Their new worldview reinterpreted the fact of their sin so as to deny personal responsibility (Gen. 3:9-13). Sin alters worldviews. Paul tells us that our unregenerate minds have become vain and darkened (Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:18). We cannot, therefore, naively accept the unbelievers' notions of the sensing, meaning, and interpretation of facts.

Suppose a critic of the faith holds to an empiricist view of facts. Empiricism views facts as isolated and meaningless things distributed throughout a universe of chance ("brute facts"). All we know are the sensations we experience: sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. Any meaning is given from inside our heads. Even if we were to tie together this stream of sensations into some sort of generalization, it would be contingent upon the next so-called fact. Is this the kind of neutrality we—who know the Creator of man's mind and the things it senses—want to share in common with an unbeliever?

As apologists facing such an unbeliever, we would be left by this empirically-centered strategy standing not on neutral ground but upon unbelieving ground. We not only would inherit all the problems of empiricism, but we also would abandon any hope of challenging the unbeliever to repent of his overall unbelief. Suppose he responded to the resurrection claim by saying, "OK, you've convinced me that Christ's tomb became empty and an utterly strange thing happened. But you know in this world of chance, strange things do happen. It doesn't prove that your gospel is the truth." His unbelief would have absorbed the resurrection fact inside of itself like a giant amoeba. He would have strategically enveloped us. We would have won the battle over the isolated fact of the resurrection, but we would have lost the war over repentance from unbelief.

## The Neutral Common Ground of Reason

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The second idea of common ground is that all men share rationality. The law of contradiction—that a statement cannot be both true and false at the same time and in the same way—underlies all thinking. No one can think or communicate without it. Not only do all men have rationality in common, but this rationally-centered approach also holds that they apparently use it without any specific religious commitment. It appears to be a theory-neutral tool for Christian and non-Christian alike. With it, we seem to be able to sit down with an unbeliever in complete neutrality and seek to create a logically consistent view of life. Like the empirically-centered apologetic strategy, this strategy tries to *place the apologetic enterprise prior to theology*.<sup>3</sup>

In this approach the believer agrees with the unbeliever that by following the model of mathematical deductive logic they can determine truth with certainty. Reason can prove what is true. One can make the case for God's existence through deduction from grand concepts such as causality and design (e.g., God is the Uncaused Cause). Faithful attention to logical rigor will inevitably eliminate all false worldviews and verify the biblical

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<sup>3</sup> Classical illustrations of a rationally-centered apologetic include the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments for the existence of God developed by Thomas Aquinas and others. Mortimer J. Adler has updated this approach in his book, *How To Think About God: A Guide for the 20th-Century Pagan* (New York City: MacMillan, 1980). A clearly Protestant Reformed and biblically-refined example can be seen in the writings of Gordon H. Clark. See, for example, his *A Christian View of Men and Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952). Professor Ronald H. Nash edited a festschrift for Clark entitled *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968).

worldview or at least lead one to the door of faith. Successful apologetics will utilize the alleged neutral common ground of reason so we must strive to refine ever more sharply our concepts of causality and design. We must focus not upon sensory evidence and historical facts but upon deductive logic as the key to all knowledge.

Rationally-centered apologetic strategy correctly disciplines our argumentation. God is not a God of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). Logical consistency in the Bible identified false prophets for execution in ancient Israel (Deut. 13:1-5). Logic emanates from God's very nature (II Tim. 2:13). Jesus' replies to His critics always showed valid logic. Paul's arguments are tightly reasoned. This approach correctly notes that true knowledge must involve universal categories, not merely contingent sets of experiences. Historical facts cannot be understood without resorting to immaterial rational ideas (Rom. 1:20; Heb. 11:3). Since in logical deduction a term cannot appear in the conclusion unless it already occurs in the premise, we must be very careful about how we start our response to critical questions lest we show our shame and our folly.

Nevertheless, before approving the law of contradiction and deductive logic as *the* apologetic keys, we ought to be suspicious about differences in the way unbelievers and believers think. In discussing the Trinity do Jehovah's Witnesses logically deduce truths about God's nature from the concepts of "oneness" and "threeness" in the same way that orthodox theologians do? Do modern pagans logically resolve the tension between the "fate" of horoscopes and their personal responses as we would do in resolving divine sovereignty and human responsibility? How do biblical critics apply the law of contradiction to the tension between what they view as Abraham's attempted murder of Isaac and the moral demand not to murder? Is their use of the law of contradiction in this case the same as our use? If unbelievers utilize logic differently than believers, can we really say that reason is theologically neutral?<sup>4</sup>

The law of contradiction, standing by itself, is an empty calculating machine. Everyone must appeal to more than just the solitary law of contradiction. To use it in any discussion we need to load it with the two valid statements that are being compared. We need to spell out what is meant by "true" and "false." With each noun we necessarily import concepts with underlying categories. With each preposition we stipulate some sort of contextual relationship. Again we must return to Paul's warning about *stoichea* in Colossians 2:8. Our so-called neutral deductive logic turns out to be as vulnerable to theological effects as the empirically-centered approach.

Deductive logic is much more complicated than it appears. Starting axioms by definition cannot be proved, only chosen after the manner of fideism. One must begin with whatever—Koran, Descartes, or Bible—in a purely unjustified, arbitrary fashion. Self-consistent chains of logically-derived propositions there from are not necessarily true in the normal sense of the term.<sup>5</sup> Deductive logic also possesses severe theoretical limitations in its capability to form a complete system.<sup>6</sup> No one, including the most logical of mathematicians, learns everything he knows from proofs. To analyze a worldview deductively takes omniscience. God, therefore, doesn't reveal Himself and His will to finite man by means of a formal deductive system.

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<sup>4</sup> That even mathematics is not philosophically and theologically neutral in such areas as number theory, standards for proof, and existence of mathematical entities such as imaginary numbers, infinitesimals, and transfinite numbers is shown in a fascinating presentation by Vern S. Poythress, "A Biblical View of Mathematics," *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1976), pp. 159-167.

<sup>5</sup> Within the past two centuries at least three self-consistent geometries have been developed disagreeing on the sum of the angles of a triangle. Obviously either one or none of them can be true. Morris Kline calls the development of non-Euclidean geometries as profound as evolution in revolutionizing man's intellectual development in *Mathematics for the Non-mathematician* (New York City: Dover, 1985), p. 452.

<sup>6</sup> See discussion of Kurt Goedel's very important Incompleteness Theorem in Earnest Nagel and J. R. Newman, "Goedel's Proof," *The World of Mathematics*, ed. J. R. Newman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), III, 1669.

As apologists, we are left by this rationally-centered strategy without the straight-forward neutral objectivity we had hoped for. We inherit all the weaknesses of rationalism: the arbitrariness of axiom selection, the incompleteness of logical rigor, the vulnerability to sneaked-in unbelieving concepts, and the problem of how ideas are related to the external world of historical experience. Brilliant insanity can produce totally coherent worldviews. Additionally, while focusing upon the intellectual issue of logical consistency, we disregard the ethical issue of repentance from unbelief. As our Creator, God rightfully can specify how we ought to think. There are wrong and right intellectual behaviors. The scholar, no less than the thief and prostitute, sins in his own way. By exalting logical consistency above the Word of God, this approach leaves the non-Christian with the idea of the sufficiency of the law of contradiction that can be used prior to any theological commitment. If he is won over, he will live under the delusion that Christianity is merely the truest position so far shown by his skillful use of logic. If he isn't won over, he will merely assume that further study will expose an unanswerable contradiction in the Christian faith. In either case, rationalism has enveloped the authority of Scripture.

## The Non-Neutral Common Ground of God's Revelation

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In one form or another the first two apologetic strategies have characterized most of Church history since the second century. Broadly speaking, they are the "classic" or "traditional" apologetic approaches.<sup>7</sup> During the last century or two, however, they have become less effective. Since the so-called "Copernican revolution" of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), non-Christian systematic thought has been more and more openly grounded in man. Copernicus had revolutionized mankind's concept of the universe by substituting a heliocentric point of reference for the old geocentric one. Kant revolutionized philosophy by substituting a new starting point (man's mind), for the old starting point (the external world). According to Kant all apparent order and logic are produced by man's mind. To account for the unity of experience, there must be a transcendental ego. The world itself outside of this transcendental ego really has no order or logic. *Man can know nothing of the world or God or anything else "out there" beyond his own mind.* Christian claims, therefore, are wholly encapsulated within man's mental experiences and cannot contain truth of the world outside man's head. Enemies of the Christian faith have employed this subjective relativism in one form or another to envelop and neutralize the gospel ever since Kant.

A third apologetic strategy has developed over the last century within Dutch Calvinist circles culminating in the life and work of Cornelius Van Til and his disciples, most notably Greg L. Bahnsen, R. J. Rushdoony, Vern S. Poythress, and John M. Frame.<sup>8</sup> Van Til countered Kant's revolutionary method of argumentation with an equally revolutionary method based upon Scripture. Instead of making man's mind the source of order and logic, Van Til made God's mind the source of the order and logic. Kant had said that unless man's mind is the source of order and logic, there can be no knowledge whatsoever. Van Til said that there can be no knowledge whatsoever unless God's mind is the source of order and logic. Whereas Kant had made a transcendental argument for the existence of a knowledge-supplying ego, Van Til made a transcendental argument for the existence of the knowledge-supplying Triune God of the Bible.<sup>9</sup> Apart from the Trinity there is no source for

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion and defense of classical apologetics see R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984). This work critiques presuppositional apologetics to be discussed in this section.

<sup>8</sup> A good introduction to Van Til is his work, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 3rd, ed., 1967). His festschrift, cited in footnote 1 above, includes his many responses to classical apologists' objections to his presuppositional approach. Popular level expositions of Greg L. Bahnsen's and John M. Frame's extensions of Van Til's thought are, respectively, *Always Ready*, ed. Robert R. Booth (Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Foundation, 1996) and *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994). Of the two, Bahnsen is the closest to Van Til.

<sup>9</sup> Van Til argued transcendently for the specific Triune God of the Bible, not for a generic "God." In contrast to Kant's "knowledge" that is limited to only that sensible by the human mind, Van Til's "knowledge" is omniscience itself that justifies universal claims by finite human minds.

uniformity in nature, for ethical authority, or for rules of logic and classification. Unlike previous empirically-centered and rationally-centered methodologies, this new method subjected the interpretation of facts and exercise of logic to biblical authority explicitly at the starting point. It *requires theology to precede apologetics and inform it at every point*. Only by so doing, it argues, will theology be protected from compromise when Christians respond to critics' questions.

This third strategy centers upon the totality of biblical revelation and contrasts it with the totality of unbelief. Belief and unbelief appear as two opposing *total systems*. This strategy surrounds biblical miracles such as the resurrection with the whole biblical story from creation to consummation. It refuses to extract historical miracles out of their biblical context to be neutrally analyzed as isolated evidential pieces. Nor does this strategy attempt to present biblical faith as a hypothesis subject to a neutral, rational verification or as an axiom arbitrarily chosen. This emphasis upon systematized belief and unbelief leads to a special meaning of terms like "presupposition" and "reference point." These terms refer to the most basic convictions advocates of each system have regarding existence, how knowledge should be acquired, and what is right and wrong. Moreover, these basic convictions or presuppositions are seen as a coordinated group that forms a network which defines a person's worldview. Thus this strategy is often called a presuppositional strategy.

Because the presuppositional strategy emphasizes people's most basic convictions, it confronts head-on the problem of every finite intellect. Non-omniscient minds must necessarily confine all reasoning within a circle. A finite mind cannot engage in an infinite chain of reasoning. All arguments, therefore, ultimately are circular because the person's presuppositional network of basic beliefs controls the very notions of experience and logic required by his argumentation. The problem with other apologetic strategies, in this view, is that by failing to acknowledge ultimate circularity, they present the illusion of neutrality.

An illustration will help show the difference between presuppositional and classical apologetics. Imagine that someone wants to remodel and redecorate his house. He seeks the best remodeler and interior designer he can find. Finally, the day comes for the contractor to arrive and begin work. But as he arrives, alas! Instead of showing up with carpenter tools, paint, and wallpaper, he drives up in a powerful bulldozer! He's going to start by demolishing the entire house. Rather than remodel and redecorate it, he is going to bulldoze the old one and build a new one. That is a picture of Van Tillian presuppositional apologetics. The entire structure of unbelief is attacked and replaced with biblical categories, biblical reasoning, biblically-interpreted historical facts, and biblically-based ethics. Christianity is not presented as an "add on", as a supplement to the notions of an unregenerate mind at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7). The God of Scripture is not added to all the other gods and goddesses in the pantheon of one's heart; instead all such other authorities must bow down to Him alone (cf. I Sam. 5). Only after the Triune God becomes the final authority that informs all else, can there be genuine knowledge and truth (Prov. 1:7).

Presuppositional apologetics, however, must answer some questions. If belief and unbelief are such antithetical systems, where can there be common ground for communication? If genuine knowledge only derives from biblical presuppositions, how can unbelievers know truths about life, history, science, and art—truths which they not only know but often brilliantly expound? Advocates of this strategy answer that unbelievers in the depths of their heart constantly know and cannot help but use biblical presuppositions in all their endeavors. Because all men are made in God's image and their environment is God's handiwork, they are enveloped with revelation everywhere and always that is sufficient to refute all claims of innocent ignorance (Job 38-42; Pss.19:1-4; 139:7-8; Isa. 40:21,26; John 1:9; Acts 17:24-29; Rom.1:18-23,32). Thus in daily living all men utilize empirical perception, logic, language, and moral judgments that make no sense whatsoever unless the biblical worldview is correct. Science relies upon a view of logic and observations that has no meaning apart from the Bible.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See the recent narration of Christianity's role in the rise of modern science in Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994).

Public discourse requires more than ideas inside individual minds. Human rights cannot emerge from protoplasm alone. At bottom unbelievers cannot live consistently with unbelief but must utilize biblical notions to get along in life.<sup>11</sup> Because they do so, in spite of their protestations to the contrary, unbelievers discover truths in all areas of life and thus carry out part of the cultural mandate given to Adam (Gen. 1:26-28).

How do presuppositional apologists find common ground, then, to respond to unbelief? The common ground consists of all creation since both believer and unbeliever are creatures living inside God's created environment. Thus believer and unbeliever share an enormously large common ground with each detail radiating God's glory. However, *although they share common ground, they do not share a neutral view of it*. The essence of unbelief is foolish suppression of God's claim at every point (Ps. 14:1-3; Prov. 18:2; Rom. 1:18). Unbelief, following Adam and Eve, reinterprets reality in a vain attempt to make an existence free of responsibility to the Creator—a new world that is safe for sinners. Unbelief derails and perverts the primary goal of the cultural mandate into a global campaign to reinvent truth. Following Satan, unbelieving man tries to become what he knows he never can be—a god who can remake the world.

Belief, on the other hand, seeks to think God's thoughts after Him in every area. It seeks to discover the truth of His design and intent in each detail. It must destroy every vain imagination and God-hating thought starting with those in the believer's own heart (II Cor. 10:5). Apologetically, belief must interpret all unbelief according to the Word of God rather than accept its own self-interpretation. Belief must surround unbelief and confront it. Pagan challenges require a biblical worldview analysis prior to any response. Apologists must point out the self-contradictory nature of unbelief—its inability to interpret data correctly, to utilize logic coherently, to ground ethical judgments properly, and to work in everyday life consistently. Additionally, their dialog cannot avoid eventually exposing the ethical agenda behind the surface objections. They must urge repentance from rebellious suppression of His ubiquitous and clear revelation.

While sharing common ground, therefore, belief and unbelief are in a war of maneuver. No demilitarized zones exist. The presuppositional strategy requires the apologist to remember the totality surrounding whatever specific issue he might be facing. It keeps him from being out maneuvered and enveloped by unbelief. He knows that the target person at his deepest level is aware of his own responsibility before God, whether admitted or not, and that, to whatever degree God's restraining grace has worked in his life, he cannot make his false worldview work out consistently. Such a person, if he comes to faith, will know from the beginning that God's Word is the final authority in every area of life. If he doesn't come to faith, he will at least become aware of the chasm between belief and unbelief and the corresponding need to repent.

## **Biblical Examples of Apologetics in Action**

Having in mind the three apologetic strategies developed by Christian teachers, we turn to the Scripture to observe how God and his spokesmen actually responded to critics and objections to biblical faith. Were their defenses carefully reasoned counter arguments, or did they ignore the challenges? Did they use historical facts? If so, how? What common ground or point of contact did they use? How far and how deeply did they push the issue of underlying obedience or rebellion?

### **Response to Adam and Eve's Rejection of God's Authority (Gen. 3)**

The first sinners challenged the authority of the Word of God, doubted that God was good, and disbelieved His control over history. God's strategy in responding to this crisis is a model of apologetics. Although the fall had

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<sup>11</sup> Francis Schaeffer repeatedly used this approach in his ministry although he did not follow Van Til's presuppositionalism consistently. See his work, *The God Who Is There* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1968).

occurred, God continued His policy of periodic visitation to the human couple. Sin and its consequences absolutely failed to alter His control of the situation. It also failed to blot out God-consciousness in the couple. Both were so conscious of His existence that they planned and executed an attempted retreat from any contact with Him. Thus there remained common ground before and after the fall. The point of contact between God and man continued.

Nevertheless, the common ground was anything but neutral. The fallen couple immediately began a total reinterpretation of the created environment. Not only had they started to exercise the cultural mandate of subduing and naming the world perversely, they over-extended the mandate to subduing and naming their own god. They accorded the Creator's threat (Gen. 2:17) with no more authority than words of a creature (3:4).<sup>12</sup> They reinvented the attributes of God so as to have a god that was non-threatening to sinners. The new god of their apostate imagination could not carry out his death threat in the physical cosmos. Nor could he know everything and be present everywhere. Most importantly, their idolatrous, invented god despised mankind and fell below a proper standard of justice. The point of contact continued but had now become transformed from love and friendship to fear and enmity.

God's response was a gracious one. He initiated the communication. He began with a question rather than answering their challenge immediately. The question, "where are you?" (3:9), demanded a certain amount of self-reflection and put the unbelieving couple on the defensive. In their reply they used their new false theology that viewed God as unjustly threatening and that denied their responsibility (3:10,12-13). God kept pushing them back with more questions that eventually exposed the ethical agenda underlying their false theology—freely chosen rebellion against God.

God next demonstrated the truthfulness of His Word. His death threat would not only be literally carried out, but it would be carried out in a vastly enlarged scale that would define the nature of mortal history for man, nature, and angel. It would shape the individual destinies of both the man and the woman. It would ultimately triumph over all evil. It would even work out so as to provide salvation for man through the death of the woman's seed (Gen. 3:14-19). God's Word strategically enveloped the challenge of the fall.

Happily, the couple were saved by this apologetic encounter. Apologetics and evangelism have thus been inseparable from the beginning. God drew His two critics by offering a substitutionary sacrifice alongside His judgment for sin. Grace and truth were both present. While God engaged in rational argumentation that involved the historical facts of the situation, He didn't adopt the couple's perverted notions of reality in an attempt to be "objective" and "neutral." Instead, He imposed His authoritative interpretation of the events upon their God-consciousness as the point of contact.

## **Response to Job's Demand for the Right to Evaluate the Cause of His Suffering (Job 38-42)**

Job and his counselors are the most famous sponsors of "the problem of evil" discussion. They had engaged in wide ranging arguments over how evil could be rationally and ethically justified. God's response to their complaints gives another example of apologetics in action. As in the case of Adam, God utilizes the question approach to force unbelief to rethink its case. He focuses upon creation and providence, natural history, biology, geophysics, astronomy—"facts" surrounding Job on every side (38-41). Over and over again, God challenges Job to think anew about them, not to provide an immediate answer to the "evil problem" but to re-center Job's thinking at a deeper level upon the Creator-creature distinction. The argument is an indirect one: if God is Creator and Job the creature, it follows that creature knowledge has limits which God's knowledge doesn't.

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<sup>12</sup> Note how Eve tried to be "neutral" between God's threat and Satan's denial and in so doing placed both statements on the same level of authority thereby implicitly denying the final authority of the Word of God. She tried to devise a truth test whereby the Word of God would be judged by an empirical standard. Only after that grand act would she believe.

There can be reasons that ethically justify the existence of evil even if the creature does not know and cannot evaluate them.

The argument re-interprets the problem of evil from being a matter of “I-want-to-know-the- justification-so-I-can-judge-for myself” to a matter of “I-know-adequate-justification-exists-but-I-have-to-trust-God-with-it”. In the end Job has changed his whole reference point from one that centers on his thoughts and reasoning as the standard of truth to one that yields to God’s thoughts and reasoning as the standard of truth. Job admits his creature status. He confesses that a man-centered viewpoint only produces words “without knowledge” (42:2-3). He repents of trying to do what centuries of unbelieving thought has always tried to do: attain a virtual omniscience so as to become like God, a new lord and judge.

Notice that in successfully winning over Job, God did not “buy the question” as it originally was worded. He first redefined the question by correcting it theologically. Then and only then did He answer it. Critics of this argument still insist Job never got an answer. What they really mean to say is that the answer Job received requires a bowing of the knee which, as God-haters, they are unwilling to do. Logically valid arguments may not persuade hardened hearts.

### **Response to Israel’s Historical Rejection of Yahweh (Deut. 32)**

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Moses’ song in Deuteronomy provides a third example of biblical apologetics in action. About to die, Moses leaves the nation he had help found with a prophetic outline of their future history. This vision of Israel’s future revealed that the nation would rebel against God. Moses’ song depicts God’s response to that defection. His response takes the form of a prosecution against legal violations. Israel had been founded upon the Law as a sort of treaty between itself and Yahweh God. Any violations of the treaty would be challenged by God in the form of a lawsuit. Deuteronomy 32 is the first occurrence in the Bible of this God-against-Israel lawsuit format. The form is repeated in the writings of later Old Testament prophets (cf. Deut. 32:1; Isa. 1:2; Mic. 6:1-2). Old Testament prophets followed the apologetic approach of their founder as prosecutors sent from God who pressed the law against the God-consciousness of the Israelites.

This lawsuit rationale requires both historical accuracy and a Law-based interpretation of the facts for the prosecution’s rationale. The Old Testament prophetic writings, therefore, never argue for the existence of God. Rather, the logic argues that defection from the God of Israel leads to destruction, national catastrophe, and death. It exposes the self-destructive nature of unbelief and establishes the claim of Old Testament wisdom literature that such unbelief and disobedience is folly.<sup>13</sup> The logic also carries out the implication of Deuteronomy 32:43 that God’s plan for human history through Israel will succeed. His way is the way of consistent and verifiable wisdom

This apologetic example turns apologetic defense into an assault against unbelief, contrasting its doomed self-destructive nature with the triumphant security of the Word of God. The confrontation of Elijah, for example, with the state-sponsored religion of the Northern Kingdom climaxes in I Kings 18. Elijah completes his miraculous ministry in refuting Baalism. Elijah’s miracles, whether involving food, rain, or lightning, were targeted against the false claims that Baal provided these. Unbelieving Baalism simply failed in actual history to deliver on its promises. Biblical apologetics, therefore, doesn’t merely defend the faith; it refutes the unbelieving foundation behind the accusations and objections that calls them forth.

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<sup>13</sup> Old Testament history refutes popular ideas such as the belief that a body politic is inherently good (Judges) or that centralized bureaucracy is the key to social justice (Samuel, Kings). Perfect society requires the ethically-perfected people and leaders of the Messianic Kingdom yet to come. Fascist, Marxist, and Islamic imitations of the Messianic Kingdom inevitably fail because they cannot overcome sin.

## Response to Israel's Rejection of Jesus Christ (Gospels)

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All four gospels report the apparent “failure” of Jesus Christ to win national recognition of His Messiahship. Many objections and criticisms are given to his claims. NT authors repeatedly answer these objections by pointing to substantiating historical facts of Jesus’ campaign (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; Acts 1:1-3; 26:26; I Cor. 15:5-8; II Pet. 1:16-18; I John 1:1-3). All of these evidences, however, derive their apologetic force from the prior Old Testament framework which outlined the saving work of Yahweh in specific forms that Jesus fulfilled. For example, Yahweh alone reigned over the seas (Pss. 29:3,10; 65:7; 89:9; 93:3-4; 107:29) and rebuked the waters with His voice or wind (Exod. 14:21; cf. Pss. 104:7-9; 106:9; Job 26:10; 38:10-11). Thus when Jesus did this very thing (Matt. 8:26-27), the rationale establishes the divine Messiahship of Jesus with a logic built upon the prior revelation. Numerous other examples of this line of reasoning could be cited including how Jesus himself set his resurrection into the Old Testament context (cf. Matt. 21:23-33). He made no attempt to argue His case from any basis other than a biblical one.

Jesus insisted that the real reason why unbelieving men of his generation were not convinced by these historic evidences was that they had rebelled against the prior revelation: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31; cf. John 5:45-47). Rejection of previous revelation established a pattern of thinking that automatically perverted further revelation. The unbelievers of Jesus’ day were not people in neutral ignorance to whom Jesus’ testimony wasn’t clear. They sought to reinterpret the evidences of the greatest Life ever lived so they would not have to believe. Unbelief sought to surround and absorb belief.

Interpreting the evidence perversely cannot successfully stop the God it tries to deny. Jesus attributed both the positive and negative response patterns to the Father’s control of history: “I thank thee, O Father, . . .that you hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25-26; cf. 13:10-17; John 6:44-45). The best apologetic effort, even when it apparently fails, succeeds for it divides unbelief from belief.

## Response to Pagan Opposition to the Gospel (Acts 17)

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The last example of a biblical apologetic shows how Paul responded to a pagan society like the one ours is rapidly becoming. Athens easily ranked as one of the chief intellectual centers of the ancient world. Athens was filled with pagan attempts to construct total worldviews or idolatries (17:16,22). Like pagan intellectuals throughout history, Athenians could not suppress the upwelling of God-consciousness in their literature, art, and science. Paul knew their artistic and literary works and was ready to give an answer when called to a public hearing (17:16-21,23,28).

The presentation question centered upon the resurrection (17:18-19). Paul knew that their pagan viewpoint made the resurrection unintelligible so his apologetic began, not with a direct answer to their question, but with a critique of their entire viewpoint. Utilizing Old Testament revelation extensively, he contrasted the biblical worldview with the pagan worldview point by point. He challenged the pagan belief in the Continuity of Being with Isaiah’s and the Psalmist’s Creator-creature distinction (17:24-25 cf. Isa. 42:5; Pss. 42:5; 50:9-12).<sup>14</sup> He denied paganism’s deification of man’s intellect with Solomon’s confession of the incomprehensibility of God (17:24; cf. I Kings 8:27). Over against Athenian racism Paul presented Moses’ account of the unity of the human race (17:26; cf. Gen. 1,9; Deut. 32:8), his account of the paganization of civilization (17:30; cf. Deut. 4:19), and the Psalmists’

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<sup>14</sup> Unbelief always denies the Creator-creature distinction so it has to posit a unified reality in which the gods, man, animals, plants, and matter form a blended spectrum of being that is ultimately impersonal and unintelligible. Documentation of this Continuity of Being concept from Old Testament times through modern Darwinian evolution may be found in Henry M. Morris, *The Long War Against God* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1989).

subordination of national existence to God's decreed doxological purpose in human history (17:27; cf. Ps. 74:7). Paul then uses Greek literature to show that underneath their paganism they really do know of God and their responsibility to think according to His standards (17:28-29). Not only does the gospel belong to a totally different worldview, but paganism is beset with internal contradiction between what it says and what it at bottom knows is true.

After this thorough analysis of Athenian culture, Paul can answer the original resurrection question without theological compromise. Instead of tolerating some sort of cyclical Greek view of history, he explains the resurrection within the presuppositions of the Old Testament view of history. The resurrection's meaning is that it constitutes the final step in a progression toward final judgment (17:31). The response to his apologetic recalls the response to Jesus' own ministry: belief and unbelief become clearly divided (17:32).

These biblical examples of apologetics in action repeatedly demonstrate an uncompromising adherence to biblical theology. In each case the one doing apologetics avoids any attempt to find common ground in unbelievers' notions of the meaning of facts or in an abstract use of logic. Instead, unbelieving worldviews are contrasted with the Word of God and shown to be self-contradictory and self-destructive manifestations of sin.<sup>15</sup> Unbelievers in each case are thus held accountable for their suppressed knowledge of God. They are left with a clear challenge to repent.

## Practical Apologetics

Biblical-based apologetics whether in everyday situations or at the more academic level ought to follow certain overall strategic principles as well as specific tactical techniques.

### Strategic Principles

First, perfectly sound arguments will not necessarily persuade. Jesus gave the clearest manifestation of truth by word and deed that the world could ever see but succeeded only in persuading a minority while the majority hardened their unbelief.

Second, to use again the military metaphor, we must strategically envelop unbelief by our life. Apologetic encounters in the Bible arose as a natural result of a living manifestation of God's character; they weren't artificially set up. Godly living manifests the rational consistency of Christianity as much as a scholarly treatise. From God walking in the garden, through all the heroic lives of faith (Heb. 11; Joseph; Daniel) to myriads of Christians since the first century, unbelief has felt the pressure of their life witness and has reacted again and again to defend itself by critical questioning and other forms of pressure.

Third, we must strategically envelop unbelief also in how we address it. C. S. Lewis put the matter this way:

"We can make people often attend to the Christian point of view for half an hour or so; but the moment they have gone away from our lecture or laid down our article, they are plunged back into a world where the opposite position is taken for granted. . . . It is not books on Christianity that will really trouble

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<sup>15</sup> Bahnsen, insightfully notes that presuppositional apologetics follows the two parts of Proverbs 26:4-5 in critiquing unbelief's failures ("answering a fool according to his folly") and in avoiding compromise with unbelieving ideas ("not answering a fool according to his folly"), *ibid.*, p. 61.

[the modern man]. But he would be troubled if, whenever he wanted a cheap popular introduction to some science, the best work on the market was always by a Christian.”<sup>16</sup>

Consider how in everyday conversation unbelievers use the strategy against us. When an acquaintance becomes a Christian, you will sometimes here a response like this: “Oh, you have to realize that Mary always had a lot of fears and phobias. Christianity offers her a crutch so I understand her new interest in religion. It probably won’t last.” Mary is analyzed within an unbelieving type of psychology in order to explain her newfound faith. Instead of miraculous calling, illumination, and regeneration, it is a mere psychological ploy, goes the line of thought. Unbelief has encircled the situation and dominates the conversation.

What would happen if we did the reverse when we encountered someone who heard the gospel and rejected? “Oh, you have to understand what is going on here. Fred knows full well after our discussion that he is eternally responsible to a holy God. This scares him like it scared Adam and Eve. He’s just hiding in the bushes like they did. I can understand that, but I’m continuing to pray that God will open his eyes to the only hope of salvation through Christ.” Fred is analyzed within a biblical frame of reference in order to explain his unbelief. Instead of an act of intellectual freedom and courage, Fred’s foolish response is labeled for what it is—an old-fashioned sin reaction in his God-consciousness to the gospel. Here, biblical doctrine has encircled the situation and controls the conversation.

Whichever viewpoint convincingly explains the other is the one that has succeeded in strategic envelopment. Here is why today aggressive Christ-hating educators and lawyers insist upon top-down management of education and public policy. To prevent the gospel from retaking a foothold in America, they have to ensure that Christianity is everywhere interpreted in terms of their relativism as an “outmoded religious bigotry unsuitable for a modern pluralistic society” and “a threat to abortion and gay rights”. We need to swallow up their unbelief by constantly interpreting it in terms of our biblical faith. We might respond, “I can understand their anxiety. Pagan Caesars always fear Christ because they don’t want to be held accountable to an ethical standard not of their own making.” Or, “Abortion and homosexuality have always marked a pagan society so it’s easy to see why those who want to paganize America push these particular acts.” This envelopment strategy can be applied tactically to any situation.

## **Tactical Techniques**

First, the apologist must be a good listener and student of the critic. There are several reasons for doing so. In most cases the questioner hasn’t thought through his own position, leave alone the biblical position. He’s just throwing out the question like the woman at the well (John 4:9-20) to express his emotional reaction to something you have said or done. Moreover, making him mull over his question may make him more conscious of the inner battle between his God-consciousness and his campaign of suppressing the truth. Questioning a critic, if done graciously, honors him as a valued creature made in God’s image. Recall how often God used the questioning approach in the Bible. Taking this time to listen also gives you extra time to prayerfully formulate an answer.

Second, the apologist should be able to recall Scriptural precedents for the specific area at issue. Modern objections are not new. They are merely recent variants on age-old unbelief. Skepticism over miracles occurred in biblical history from the Exodus generation to Thomas the apostle. The problem of evil was discussed and argued about from Job, through the Psalms, to the prophets. Essentially the same naturalism that infects

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<sup>16</sup> C. S. Lewis, “On Moving With the Times,” *Christianity Today*, XV (March, 12, 1971), 537. Early Christians actually accomplished what Lewis suggests so successfully that Julian the Apostate made a decree forbidding Christians to study heathen learning. See John Milton, “Aeropagetica,” *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), XXXII, 388.

modern scientific reconstructions of universal history had to be addressed by both Paul (Colossians) and Peter (II Peter). Scripture offers the best and sufficient guidance in these matters (cf. II Tim. 3:16).

Third, the apologist should take advantage of the fine material that Bible-believing scholars and apologists have produced in recent years. In addition to the materials cited in the footnotes of this article, many other sources offer numerous books, audio tapes, videos, and internet courses that cover the creation/evolution debate, archeological research, defenses against higher criticism of the Bible, philosophical studies of the implications of biblical doctrines, accurate views of Church history, comparative religious studies, and present-day cultural issues. Searching the Internet, consulting a faithful pastor or teacher, and browsing a reliable Christian bookstore will quickly uncover the latest materials.

Fourth, for the bold who wish to prepare for intense apologetic encounters listening to tapes, or making tapes real time, of actual public debates involving skilled Christian spokesmen will pay great dividends. By analyzing the strong and weak points of the various strategies used, one can discover an approach that builds soundly upon Scripture and which fits his personal style. Christian university students have been known to keep files of lecture notes, graded papers, and journals of classroom life under particularly God-hating and Christian-bashing faculty members. Learning from such files, believing students in successive classes can turn their classroom experience into a profitable training opportunity.

## Summary

As Christians, we will find ourselves giving answers to challenging questions both informally in everyday situations and occasionally in more formal situations. To do this apologetic work in a way that doesn't undermine our faith requires a strategy of enveloping all parts of the discussion with the authority and insights of the Word of God. By observing biblical examples we can learn how to do apologetics in a logically-consistent way that makes use of the abundant historical evidence available. By preparing ahead of time with the rich amount of present-day, biblically-honoring materials on virtually every topic of debate, we will be ready to give an answer to everyone that asks us a reason for our faith (II Pet. 3:15). In the end, we will find our faith strengthened, our victory over everyday temptations easier, and our worship deepened.