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TEACHING PASTORS OF THE ATLANTIC DISTRICT OF  
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD TO  
UTILIZE APOLOGETIC ILLUSTRATIONS  
IN PREACHING

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

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Victor Henry Nelson, Jr.  
May 2021

**APPROVAL SHEET**

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## PREFACE

This project could only be completed with the support of many. First and foremost, I am thankful to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our Triune God granted me the gift of life, salvation, and faith. It is my desire to share this faith with others that inspires me to continue learning and to keep witnessing in word and deed.

I am thankful for the work and effort of my two faculty advisors on this project: Theodore Cabal and Andrew Walker. Their insights, guidance, and encouragement were most helpful.

I am very appreciative to the panelists, the Rev. Dr. David Schmitt, the Rev. Dr. John Rasmussen, and the Rev. Richard Elseroad, who all carefully reviewed a lengthy and detailed outline. Their suggestions and recommendations made a significant difference in the training and use of apologetic illustrations by the study participants.

I am indebted to the fifteen pastors of the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod who participated in this project. Each completed some sixteen sermon reports, took two surveys, and partook in an eight-hour seminar. These busy men selflessly gave of their time. My prayer is that they gained half as much as I did.

I am also thankful to Resurrection Lutheran Church for their prayers and support. I have been the senior pastor for 28 years at this vital congregation located in the Northern Catskills, New York. They have encouraged and challenged me to continue growing as I strive to help them also grow in faith.

My sainted mother, Patricia O'Brien Nelson, through her quiet Christian acts of mercy, has been an inspiration to many including me. My father, at 96 years old, is a great witness and encourager in the Lord. He is my biggest faith cheerleader.

Anyone who knows my wife knows that she is an incredible person and follower of Jesus. Marcia, my wife of 43 years, has been the greatest support of this project as well as my seeking of a Doctor of Ministry Degree. She patiently and lovingly endured countless hours where I read, researched, and wrote. She picked up most of the household chores, both inside and outside. Her labor of love freed up time for me to work on this project and degree. God has been most mercifully to me in giving me such a loving and godly woman, the mother of our four wonderful adult children.

It is my fervent prayer that, through this project, the participating pastors would more consistently employ apologetic illustrations in their preaching and teaching. My prayer is also that through the hearing of regular apologetic illustrations, the members of their churches would be strengthened in their faith and their witness.

Victor Nelson

Purling, New York

May 2021



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Christian faith is under attack from nearly every cultural center, including the journalism community, entertainment business, educational system, information technology industry, and in some cases, political powers. The church needs to defend the faith by giving reasoned explanations for what it believes. Lutheran pastors are generally not taught to present an apologetic illustration in sermons. Through this project I intend to inform Lutheran pastors of the importance presenting apologetic thoughts within a sermon. I also intend to teach Lutheran pastors how, from any text, to utilize apologetic illustrations in their preaching.

#### **Context**

I am a pastor of a congregation in the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LC-MS). The Atlantic District consists of 99 churches in the New York City region, Hudson Valley region, and Albany Capital District region. Some of the churches are thriving and some are maintaining, but the majority of churches are in severe decline. Numerous studies indicate that secular culture has a negative influence upon believers. The faithful have a spiritual need for apologetic answers to support their faith and to help them in faith conversations with others. However, pastors within the Atlantic District are not trained to include apologetic thoughts in preaching.

The Atlantic District is in a challenging faith environment. Barna Group and the American Bible Society's survey, "2017 Bible-Minded Cities," aimed to discover perspectives and use of the Bible. According to the study, the residents of 90 cities (out of 100) had greater Bible-mindedness than New York City residents. Albany Capital District

(Albany/Schenectady/Troy) ranked last as the least Bible-minded city of the 100 cities surveyed.<sup>1</sup> Both of these regions and the Hudson Valley that connects them comprise The Atlantic District. Barna Group did another 2017 survey entitled “Church Attendance Trends around the Country.” This survey found both that New York City and Albany Capital District were highly unchurched compared to other cities.<sup>2</sup> In 2019, Barna Group ranked Albany Capital District as the sixth most post-Christian city in America.<sup>3</sup> All three surveys indicate that the Atlantic District of the LC-MS is located in a post-Christian region of the nation that cares relatively little about the Bible and church involvement.

Research indicates that the post-Christian environment influences the faith of believers. Public Religion Research Institute found that the majority of people who reject their childhood faith do so because they no longer believe in their church’s teaching. A third of those who left their faith cite the churches’ response to gays and lesbians as why they abandoned their faith.<sup>4</sup> Both of these reasons are apologetic concerns. Use of apologetics in preaching can give reasonable responses to faith issues, as well as a biblical perspective on relating to gay and lesbian people.

Another significant finding from the Public Religion Research Institute study was the strong influence of doubting God’s existence. Over half of those unaffiliated with a religion sometimes doubt the existence of God, while approximately 15 percent of those affiliated sometimes doubt the existence of God. Many of the unaffiliated believe in God but have a much higher level of doubt than church attendees. Apologetics may demonstrate

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<sup>1</sup> Barna Group, “2017 Bible Minded Cities,” June 22, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/2017-bible-minded-cities/>.

<sup>2</sup> Barna Group, “Church Attendance Trends around the Country,” May 26, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/church-attendance-trends-around-country/>.

<sup>3</sup> Barna Group, “The Most Post-Christian Cities in America: 2019,” June 5, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/post-christian-cities-2019/>.

<sup>4</sup> Betsy Cooper et al., “Exodus: Why Americans Are Leaving Religion—and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” Public Religion Research Institute, September 22, 2016, <https://www.prii.org/research/prii-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>.

the reasonableness of faith to the believer and strengthen his or her faith. The believer may then be better equipped to strengthen the faith of the friend who has doubts.

Christians are influenced by new age beliefs. Pew Research examined belief in reincarnation, astrology, psychics, and spiritual energy in inanimate objects. They found that six out of ten Christians believe in at least one of the four new age beliefs studied.<sup>5</sup> Apologetics may help demonstrate the fallacies behind new age beliefs and reduce this syncretism.

A study on why young people left the Catholic church reports that one in five left because they no longer “believed in God or religion.” The researchers recorded reasons for departure from this group. Of the reasons most typical from those who left the church, Christian apologists can offer a rational response to each.<sup>6</sup> A regular sprinkling of apologetic thoughts may inoculate some from such unbelieving views.

In Pew Research’s survey “Why America’s ‘Nones’ Left Religion Behind,” findings indicate that the church is doing poorly in giving young people apologetic answers to their questions. Unanswered apologetic questions are implicated in driving many “nones” away. These questions revolve around “science,” “common sense,” “logic,” and “lack of evidence.” This survey implies that some of the formally churching “nones” (49 percent of the “nones”) may have disconnected from the church without receiving satisfactory apologetic answers.<sup>7</sup>

Recently, I asked a homiletics professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, a Lutheran seminary in Fort Wayne, if he taught seminarians to employ apologetics in their

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<sup>5</sup> Claire Gecewicz, “‘New Age’ Beliefs Common among Both Religious and Nonreligious Americans,” Pew Research, October 1, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/01/new-age-beliefs-common-among-both-religious-and-nonreligious-americans/>.

<sup>6</sup> Mark M. Gray, “Young People Are Leaving the Faith. Here’s Why,” OSV Newsweekly, August 27, 2016, <https://osvnews.com/2016/08/27/young-people-are-leaving-the-faith-heres-why/>.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Lipka, “Why America’s ‘Nones’ Left Religion Behind,” Pew Research, August 24, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/>.

preaching. The professor was positive about apologetic preaching but had no class time to include it in the curriculum. I have served as a pastor in the LC-MS for 38 years, of which 28 years were in the Atlantic District. Of the hundreds of workshops and various events I have attended, I can recall only one devoted to apologetics. Pastors are not challenged or encouraged to utilize apologetics in preaching.

Some Lutherans may be reticent to accept the use of apologetics because of some of Luther's quotes about the use of reason. Francisco cited Luther's colorful phrase calling reason "the devil's prostitute."<sup>8</sup> Luther wrote this note in the margin of a book written by Peter Lombard, a bishop and theologian of the twelfth century: "Arguments based on reason determine nothing, but because Holy Scripture says that it is true, it is true."<sup>9</sup>

However, Francisco emphasized that Luther engaged in apologetics with the Jews and the Muslims of his day. Luther has specific writings to address both these challenges to the European Christian faith.<sup>10</sup> Francisco sums up Luther's response to the challenges of the Jews and Muslims: "In his work addressing each on a variety of occasions, we see Luther the reformer of the Christian church operating as apologist for the faith."<sup>11</sup> Luther did not face a culture of unbelief nor the deconstruction of the Christian faith, but his response to the challenges of his day indicate that he would apologetically respond to the challenges of our day.<sup>12</sup>

The Atlantic District has 30,000 members, many who do not have reasonable answers to basic apologetic questions. Twelve million people live within the boundary of

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<sup>8</sup> Adam S. Francisco, "Luther's Use of Apologetics," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 and 4 (July/October, 2017): 249.

<sup>9</sup> Francisco, "Luther's Use of Apologetics," 251.

<sup>10</sup> Francisco, "Luther's Use of Apologetics," 251.

<sup>11</sup> Francisco, "Luther's Use of Apologetics," 252.

<sup>12</sup> Francisco, "Luther's Use of Apologetics," 252.

the Atlantic District, many of whom have unanswered apologetic questions. Unfortunately, Lutheran pastors in this region are not trained or encouraged to preach using apologetic illustrations.

### **Rationale**

In this secular climate, most people ask basic apologetic questions. These questions may include, Is there a God? How can there be a good God with so much suffering? Aren't all religions the same? Is the Bible reliable? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? How can a loving God send people to Hell? Lutheran pastors do not regularly answer or respond to these apologetic questions in their preaching, which is the most important and frequent form of communicating. Preaching is not a means by which Lutheran pastors prepare people to respond to apologetic questions.

The apostle Peter emphasizes the importance of being ready to give a reason for the hope of faith in Jesus: "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15). According to Peter, preparation is a key to answer the unbeliever who asks. That readiness includes knowing and being able to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sometimes apologetic issues act as a roadblock to serious consideration of the gospel. In broad terms, being able to respond to apologetic questions is a part of being ready to give a defense of the Christian hope.

In the book of Acts, the apostle Paul frequently addresses apologetic concerns as he shares the gospel. In his proclamation to the Athenians at the Areopagus, Paul cites an inscription on an altar to an "unknown god." He uses this as an opportunity to reveal to the Athenians the characteristics of the true living God. He gives a defense of the Christian faith as compared to the idolatry in that city. He concludes with the sharing of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 17:22-34).

In Corinth, Paul is described as reasoning with and testifying to both Jews and Greeks, seeking to persuade them to believe that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:1-5). Surely

this reasoning and testifying would have included giving a defense of the faith to both Jews and the Greeks.

For two years, Paul argued persuasively about the kingdom of God to both Jews and Greeks of Ephesus. Paul defended Christianity against the goddess, Artemis. One of the idol craftsmen bitterly complained about the effects of Paul's apologetic arguments because many people were persuaded to believe that idols are not gods. That craftsman also feared that Artemis and her temple would be rejected. In an effort to stop Paul's powerful apologetic arguments, many idol craftsmen rioted (Acts 19:25-29).

The book of Acts concludes with Paul under house arrest yet receiving many visitors. He shared the gospel of Jesus and the kingdom of God with those visitors. Paul employed the Old Testament Scriptures to make a defense of the Christian faith to his Jewish visitors (Acts 28:23, 24).

Timothy Keller writes of the significance of "apologetic sidebars." An apologetic sidebar is a preaching tool that can be employed to briefly respond to an apologetic concern raised in the text. Keller encourages pastors to briefly address that apologetic question. Thus, the preaching regularly responds to questions of doubters and skeptics.<sup>13</sup> According to Keller, the benefits of apologetic preaching are that non-believers may return, believers are strengthened in their faith, and believers are better prepared to address friends' apologetic questions. Believers, attending doubters, future attendees, and friends of believers are all beneficiaries of apologetic illustrations in preaching.<sup>14</sup>

Peter recommended being ready to give a defense of the Christian hope. Paul employed apologetic arguments and reasoning in much of his ministry. Keller, a well-known contemporary New York City pastor, recommends the use of apologetic preaching.

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<sup>13</sup> Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 111.

<sup>14</sup> Keller, *Preaching*, 114.

Yet, Lutheran pastors in the Atlantic District are not trained in using apologetic illustrations in preaching to people living in a highly secularized culture.

Lutherans in the Atlantic District need to hear apologetic arguments for the confirmation of their faith and to be better able to share their faith with unbelievers. For this to happen, Lutheran pastors of the Atlantic District need training and reinforcement to utilize apologetic illustrations in their preaching.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to train at least ten pastors of the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to regularly utilize apologetic illustrations in their preaching.

### **Goals**

Four goals were necessarily successive in the completion of this project.

Fifteen pastors participated in the project with each participating in the following goals:

1. The first goal was to assess participants' current preaching practice with regard to the use of apologetic illustrations in their sermons.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-hour seminar to teach the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching.
3. The third goal was to modify the pastors' attitudes toward the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching.
4. The fourth goal was to increase the utilization of apologetic illustrations in preaching.

Definitive research methodology measured when these four goals had been accomplished. The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.

### **Research Methodology**

Four goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess participants' current preaching practice with regard to the use of apologetic illustrations in their sermons. This goal was measured by administering a weekly self-

reporting evaluation of eight sermons during a three-month pre-training period.<sup>15</sup> The self-reporting form recorded any specific apologetic illustrations in the sermon. This goal was considered successfully met when at least ten pastors each submitted eight sermon reports and the reports were analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the current apologetic preaching practices.

The second goal was to develop an eight-hour seminar to teach the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching. This seminar taught apologetic worldviews, possible responses to common apologetic questions, the rationale for the use of apologetics in preaching, how to discover and respond to apologetic issues in the preaching text, and how to present apologetic illustrations. This goal was measured by a panel of three experts, an apologist, a homiletician, and a pastor, who utilized a rubric to assess the biblical accuracy, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability of the seminar content for its intended purpose.<sup>16</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to modify the pastors' attitude toward the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching. An eight-hour seminar taught apologetic preaching and discussed apologetic examples from the assigned readings of the lectionary. This goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey, which was used to measure the change in attitude toward apologetics and its value for preaching. The pre-survey was administered two months before the teaching sessions (four weeks, two hours per week), and the post-survey was administered two months after the teaching session.<sup>17</sup> This goal

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<sup>15</sup> See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

<sup>16</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>17</sup> See appendix 3.



was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

The fourth goal was to increase the utilization of apologetic preaching. Following the start of the apologetics seminar, over a three-month period, pastors were encouraged and coached toward implementing apologetic preaching in their next eight sermons. This goal was measured by a weekly self-reporting form to record the specific apologetic illustration in the sermons.<sup>18</sup> The pre-training use of apologetic arguments was utilized as the base number to which the increase was compared. This goal was considered successfully met when the reported apologetic illustrations had increased by a minimum of 25 percent.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definition of a key term are used in the ministry project:

*Apologetic illustration.* The term *apologetic illustration* was used to describe a relatively brief apologetic argument or thought derived from the text or context. An *apologetic illustration* is succinct and does not imply that an apologetic argument is the main focus of the sermon.

Two limitations applied to this project. Participants had to complete the eight-hour training. To encourage completion, fully trained participants received an apologetic book. Second, the participants had to self-report their use of an apologetic illustration in eight sermons from both the pre- and post-training period. To encourage self-reporting, participants received \$100 to purchase apologetic books when all reports were completed.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, participants had to be pastors, vicars, or deacons of the Atlantic District of the LC-MS who preached at least twice a month. A vicar is a pastor-in-training. A deacon is certified to preach by the Atlantic District. Second, if a participant did not self-report all eight sermons from both

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<sup>18</sup> See appendix 1.

the pre- and post-training period, then the percentage was calculated based upon the actual number of sermons reported.

### **Conclusion**

Apologetic illustrations in preaching are important to strengthen the faith of hearers and to prepare them to be stronger witnesses in today's culture. Yet, few Lutheran pastors are trained to utilize apologetic illustrations. In chapter 2, I will show the biblical basis for apologetic preaching. Chapter 3 will demonstrate how apologetic illustrations help the hearer faithfully navigate and witness in the secular culture. This project was intended to be a blessing to pastors, their flock, and thus the wider community.

## CHAPTER 2

### PAUL'S USE OF APOLOGETICS IN ATHENS

“The Apologetics of the Apostles” is an apt subtitle for The Acts of the Apostles because it contains so many examples of the apostles defending various aspects of the early Christian faith. Some see the whole book of Acts as an apologetic for the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> Six out of the ten verbal forms of ἀπολογέομαι occur in Acts. Two of the eight uses of the noun ἀπολογία occur in Acts. The language of Acts is stunningly forensic with arrests, charges, countercharges, legal rights, courts, judges, trials, appeals, and imprisonments.<sup>2</sup> A review of Acts demonstrates at least twenty episodes of the apostles defending aspects of faith:

1. Peter defended the coming of the Spirit against accusations of drunkenness (2:13-21).<sup>3</sup>
2. Peter defended the resurrection of Jesus using Davidic psalms (2:22-34).
3. Peter defended the faith before the Sanhedrin (4:5-12).
4. Peter defended before the Sanhedrin the obligation to proclaim the gospel (5:27-32).
5. Stephen defended the Hebrew basis of faith in Jesus before the Sanhedrin (7:1-50).
6. Saul defended in Damascus that Jesus is the Son of God (9:19-22).
7. Peter defended to the Jewish Christians the baptism of Gentiles (10:47-11:18).
8. Paul defended the faith to Jews in Pisidian Antioch (13:14-41).
9. Paul defended the gospel of grace against the circumcision party (15:1-12).

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<sup>1</sup> Loveday Alexander, “The Acts of the Apostles as an Apologetic Text,” in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, Christians*, ed. M. J. Edwards et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander, “The Acts of the Apostles as an Apologetic Text,” 28.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

10. Paul defended his own rights as a Roman citizen (16:35-40).
11. Paul defended that Jesus is the Christ in Thessalonica (17:1-4).
12. Paul defended the faith against philosophers and idolaters in Athens (17:16-31).
13. Paul defended that Jesus is the Christ to Corinthian Jews (18:5-6).
14. Paul defended in Ephesus the Christian concept of the kingdom of God (19:8-9).
15. Paul defended his faith at the temple in Jerusalem (22:1-21).
16. Paul defended his faith before the Sanhedrin (23:1-10).
17. Paul defended himself before Governor Felix (24:10-21).
18. Paul defended himself before Governor Festus (25:8-12).
19. Paul defended the faith before King Agrippa and Governor Festus (26:1-29).
20. Paul defended the faith to the Jews in Rome (28:23-31).

These apologetic episodes, which are throughout Acts, show the importance of apologetics to the mission of the early Christian church.

The highpoint of these apologetic episodes occurred in the learned city of Athens, where Paul proclaimed and defended the faith before the city council, the Areopagus. Polhill states that the “centerpiece” of Acts is Paul’s visit and presentation in Athens.<sup>4</sup> Paul’s interactions in Athens demonstrated four important apologetic principles: respectful attitude, cultural awareness, theological argumentation, and gospel application. The remainder of this chapter shows Paul’s interwoven use of these four apologetic principles in his mission to Athens.

### **Paul Reasons with Jews and Gentiles in Athens**

#### **Cultural Awareness while Waiting (Acts 17:16)**

Paul previously preached in the Macedonian cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. In each of these cities, Paul experienced persecution of various degrees, and

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<sup>4</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 341.

he departed each city under this pressure. After Berea, Paul journeyed to Athens and waited for Timothy and Silas to join him. Athens was known as “the eye of Greece, the mother of arts and eloquence.”<sup>5</sup> Athens was the great city of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles, Euripides, Pericles, and Demosthenes. The peak of Athens is known as The Great Fifty Years, 479-431 BC. When Paul arrived in Athens around AD 50, the population had shrunk to 30,000.<sup>6</sup> Corinth was now the largest city and capital of the province of Achia, as well as the leading commercial city.<sup>7</sup> Although Athens was a smaller city than in the past, it remained a city where students came to study rhetoric and philosophy.<sup>8</sup> In the known world, it was among the top three university cities, which also included Alexandria in Egypt and Tarsus in Cilicia.<sup>9</sup> Athens was a part of the Roman Empire since 146 BC,<sup>10</sup> but it was considered a free city under the leadership of the city council, the Aeropagus.<sup>11</sup>

The word that Luke used to describe Paul’s reaction as he experienced Athens was *παρωζόνετο*. Lenski cites this verb as a durative imperfect tense—an emotion that persisted. He says that Luke does not usually record emotions, so the fact that Luke described Paul’s emotions in Athens adds even greater weight to Paul’s provoked spirit.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 707.

<sup>6</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 722.

<sup>7</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 707.

<sup>8</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 3:2566.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Copan and Kenneth Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul’s Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 28.

<sup>10</sup> David W. J. Gill and Conrad H Gempf, *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 431.

<sup>11</sup> Gill and Gempf, *The Book of Acts*, 441, 442.

<sup>12</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 709.

According to Polhill, “greatly distressed” is too weak of a phrase to define παρωζύνετο. He says “infuriated” is a better definition. He recalls that the root word of παρωζύνετο was transliterated into the English language. “Paroxysm” in English means a sudden attack or a violent expression of emotion.<sup>13</sup> This word is used only twice in the New Testament but is used about fifty times in the LXX, sometimes to demonstrate God’s righteous anger at idolatry.<sup>14</sup> The great number of idols and temples dedicated to false gods provoked or infuriated Paul.

A Roman author in Paul’s day, Petronius, satirically said that it is easier to find a god in Athens than it is to find a man.<sup>15</sup> Pausanias, a visitor to Athens a hundred years after Paul, described well over fifty temples and large idols that Paul would have seen as he walked around the city.<sup>16</sup> Pliny estimated that the city of Rhodes had some 73,000 statues, and added “with no fewer in Athens.”<sup>17</sup> Luke selects the word κατείδωλον to describe the city as “excessive as to idols”<sup>18</sup> or “overrun with idols.”<sup>19</sup> This verse is the only occurrence of κατείδωλον in the Bible. That fact alone testifies to the gross idolatry present in Athens.

As Paul is waiting, he observes and absorbs the enormity of the spiritual decadence of the city. He sees the culture and history, but more than that, he sees the great distance the Athenians are from God. He becomes fully alert and aware of the idolatrous Athenian culture.

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<sup>13</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 342.

<sup>14</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2574.

<sup>15</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 708.

<sup>16</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2575-78.

<sup>17</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 722.

<sup>18</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 709.

<sup>19</sup> J. B. Lightfoot and Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles, A Newly Discovered Commentary*, The Lightfoot Legacy Set 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 228.

### **Paul Employs Theological Argumentation in the Synagogue (Acts 17:17a)**

Jews had been dwelling in Athens since 400 BC.<sup>20</sup> As was Paul's customary pattern, his first stop was the synagogue. He reasoned, *διελέγετο*, with the Jews and the worshippers (Acts 17:17). Luke does not need to explain what Paul said in the Athenian synagogue, as Luke had just described how Paul reasoned in the synagogue in Thessalonica. Acts 17:2-3 reads, "And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned [*διελέξατο*] with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'"

Paul used the Old Testament Scriptures and sought to prove to the Jews that the Christ had to suffer, die, and rise. Perhaps drawing on Isaiah 53:5, Paul might have explained that it was for the sin of all that the Christ had to die. He then proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ. Paul employed biblical and theological arguments in his reasoning to the Jews.

### **Paul Applies the Gospel in the Agora (Acts 17:17b-18)**

The agora was the marketplace in Athens. The agora was also much more than a market, as it was a public place where people met and spoke. It was a place of business as well as a place for conversation and discussion.<sup>21</sup> In Paul's time, there were two marketplaces: the traditional Greek agora, but this was decreasing in popularity; and the newer Roman agora, which drew a larger crowd.<sup>22</sup> The passage may be referring to one of them or in a broader sense to both.

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<sup>20</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 722.

<sup>21</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 710-11.

<sup>22</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2579.

Day by day, Paul is at the agora talking (πρὸς τοὺς παρατυγχάνοντας) with those who happened to be there. Barrett notes that “the present participle, παρατυγχάνοντας, expresses better than the aorist that this was Paul’s habit.”<sup>23</sup> Paul encountered Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at the agora. Epicurus (340-272 BC) began the philosophy known by his name. Bock compares the Epicureans to the agnostic secularists of today. He summarizes their view of life with a quote from Diogenes, an Epicurean: “Nothing to fear in God; nothing to feel in death; Good [pleasure] can be attained; Evil [pain] can be avoided.”<sup>24</sup> Epicureans believed in the existence of the gods, but that the gods were far above in eternal bliss and separate from human existence. People need not be afraid of the gods because the gods do not care what happens to people.<sup>25</sup> Epicurus taught that pain was the highest evil and pleasure was the highest good. However, pleasure was not necessarily bodily pleasure, but reason and pleasure of the mind.<sup>26</sup> The body and soul were composed of small material particles that Epicurus called atoms. After death, the atoms of the body and soul disperse, and thus there is no afterlife.<sup>27</sup> Polhill sums up the Epicureans as “thoroughgoing materialists” with no help from any existing gods.<sup>28</sup>

Zeno (336-260 BC) taught philosophy at the Athenian Stoa (porch) and his philosophy became known as Stoicism. As the Epicureans thought of the world as

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<sup>23</sup> C. K. Barrett, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: Clark, 1998), 2:829.

<sup>24</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 561.

<sup>25</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2586-87.

<sup>26</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2585.

<sup>27</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2590-91.

<sup>28</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 343.



independent from the gods, the Stoics thought of the world as identical to god.<sup>29</sup> They were pantheists who believed that the “divine spark” was in all people and all of creation.<sup>30</sup> Since all people had the “divine spark” within them, there was a strong sense of universal brotherhood.<sup>31</sup> Lenski states that the Stoics “condemned the worship of images and the use of temples, and considered them only as ornaments of art.”<sup>32</sup> The best way to learn about god was through reason, the *logos*. However, a person could also learn about god through education, poets, and the arts.<sup>33</sup> Stoicism connected pleasure with vice and encouraged its disciples to endure pain.<sup>34</sup> At death, the soul was to be absorbed back into god.<sup>35</sup> In Paul’s day, Stoicism was the most accepted philosophy and had significant influence upon popular culture. It was especially strong among those in political leadership.<sup>36</sup>

Did Paul have formal training in Stoic and Epicurean philosophies? Keener suggests that it is unlikely that Paul had formal education in Stoicism, but that his life would have given him abundant interaction with Stoic ideas.<sup>37</sup> As brilliant as Paul was, he could have easily learned the current Athenian tenets of these philosophies in his discussions at the agora.

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<sup>29</sup> Lightfoot and Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 232.

<sup>30</sup> Mikeal Carl Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 243.

<sup>31</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 343.

<sup>32</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 713.

<sup>33</sup> Copan and Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2594.

<sup>35</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 713.

<sup>36</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2593.

<sup>37</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2569.

As Paul spoke with the philosophers in the agora, some responded, “What does this babblers wish to say?” The literal meaning of *σπερμολόγος* is “seed speaker.” The idea behind this meaning is of a bird who picks up seeds and puts them together in a nonsensical way.<sup>38</sup> Schnabel defines this word as “scavenger,” which is a person who picks up scraps and tidbits of information while wandering about the marketplace.<sup>39</sup> This was a popular derisive word used both in Athens and elsewhere. This word was also used of a person who takes thoughts from others and plagiarizes them.<sup>40</sup> Schnabel suggests that the Epicurean philosophers spoke these words. They were practical atheists and materialists and considered Paul’s words as nonsense.

The second response of the philosophers was that Paul was proclaiming “foreign deities” (*Ξένων δαιμονίων*). A foreign deity is a god or goddess that is not represented in Athens by an idol, altar, or with a temple.<sup>41</sup> This charge was similar to one of the charges brought against Socrates some 450 years earlier. Socrates was found guilty of this capital offense. Keener suggests that the mention of this similar charge against Socrates may have been an encouragement to Luke’s Hellenistic readers.<sup>42</sup> Some commentators believe that the plural in *Ξένων δαιμονίων* resulted from a misunderstanding. Paul was proclaiming Jesus and his resurrection (*ἀνάστασιν*). The word *ἀνάστασιν* is a woman’s name, and some might have thought that Paul was proclaiming a new goddess, *ἀνάστασιν*.<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>38</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 343.

<sup>39</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 725.

<sup>40</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2596.

<sup>41</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 726.

<sup>42</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2598.

<sup>43</sup> Lightfoot and Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 229-30.

Stoics, who were pantheists, may have been the ones who misunderstood Paul and made this comment.<sup>44</sup>

Paul was proclaiming (εὐηγγελίζετο) the good news of Jesus and the resurrection. This proclamation is the heart of the gospel. Although Luke does not record Paul's words, certainly he would have described the person and teaching of Jesus, and the meaning of his death and resurrection. The Epicureans and Stoics had no lasting hope. They had no personal God, no way to deal with guilt, and no way out of the power of death. Paul had the opportunity and the intense spiritual motivation to proclaim the whole gospel of Jesus.

### **Paul's Apologetic to the Areopagus**

#### **Paul's Respectful Attitude Leads to the Areopagus (Acts 17:19-21)**

There is considerable debate among commentators about ἐπιλαβόμενοι. All translate this word to mean something like "to take hold of." Pervo debates to himself whether this means a forceful arrest with a trial or a strong encouragement to give a speech to the governing body. Pervo concludes that Luke is indicating this is more a legal action with a trial.<sup>45</sup> Schnabel does not perceive this as a formal arrest; rather, he understands this as a "polite but forceful request for information and explanation."<sup>46</sup> Lenski asserts that there was no hostile intent in those who brought Paul to the Aeropagus, but it was purely out of curiosity that Paul was brought informally to the Council.<sup>47</sup> Keener postulates that the philosophers thought Paul was preaching "foreign deities." He might have needed

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<sup>44</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2596.

<sup>45</sup> Richard I. Pervo and Harold W. Attridge, *Acts*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 428.

<sup>46</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 728.

<sup>47</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 716.

permission from the official Athens body to continue speaking on this topic. It was not a trial, but a judgment on the permissibility of his teaching.<sup>48</sup>

There is no indication of force applied to Paul or any hesitancy on Paul's part to accompany the men to the Aeropagus. They politely request Paul to speak, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? . . . We wish to know therefore what these things mean" (Acts 17:20). When Paul's speech before the Aeropagus concluded, there was no permission granted or denied, and no verdict given. These are indicators that Paul's respectful and winsome attitude gained him the opportunity to present to the Council.

### **A Respectful Attitude toward the Aeropagus (Acts 17:22)**

The phrase Areopagus, Ἀρείου Πάγου, is sometimes translated as "Mars Hill." Ἀρείου means Mars and Πάγου means hill. There is some debate as to the precise understanding of the Ἀρείου Πάγου—was the Ἀρείου Πάγου a place, or was it a council? The best answer is that it was both a place as well as an official body. Parsons uses the contemporary illustration of Wall Street, which can mean the actual street or the stock exchange. Parsons and other commentators believe that the city council did not meet on the hill called the Areopagus, as it is a rather steep and rocky hill, unsuitable for regular meetings. However, the council met near the hill. Because of its proximity to the hill, it took on the same name for the hill, the Areopagus.<sup>49</sup> Most scholars believe that the Areopagus met in the *Stoa Basileios* that was near the agora.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2600-2604.

<sup>49</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 243-44.

<sup>50</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2600.

The Areopagus was the supreme administrative body for Athens as well as its chief court.<sup>51</sup> It had administrative, legislative, and judicial authority and responsibility. It was composed of approximately one hundred members, mostly from the wealthy and politically elite. Although the Areopagus was an important court, only the Roman court had the authority to try capital cases.<sup>52</sup> Barrett notes that Luke accurately used the correct local title for the official rulers in Athens, the Areopagus. He does the same in describing the rulers in Philippi (στρατηγοῖς), Thessalonica (πολιτάρχας), and Corinth (ἀνθυπάτου).<sup>53</sup>

Padilla describes various ancient Greek historians and their approach to recording speeches. Some would fabricate speeches to complement their narrative, while other historians strove diligently to report the speech accurately. He asserts that Luke was faithful to his readers in providing the essence of the speech.<sup>54</sup> Padilla believes that Luke was not prone to fabrication or embellishment in his reporting.<sup>55</sup>

Paul's speech before the Areopagus, as recorded by Luke, can be read in less than two minutes. Most certainly, Paul gave much more information and inspiration than Luke can record. Following the pattern of many Greek historians, Luke gives the gist of the speech rather than a lengthy word by word account.<sup>56</sup> However, Luke was not there, so how could he have known what Paul said? Keener emphasizes that even though Luke was not present for the speech, he may have been given an accurate thought by thought account. It is possible that Luke may have received a written report of the speech or that Paul might have told him what he said. Keener suggests that it may be best to recognize

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<sup>51</sup> Gill and Gempf, *The Book of Acts*, 447.

<sup>52</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2600-2601.

<sup>53</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:832.

<sup>54</sup> Osvaldo Padilla, *The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History, and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 135-38.

<sup>55</sup> Padilla, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 142-43.

<sup>56</sup> Copan and Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas*, 65-67.

that elements of both Paul and Luke are in the recorded speech.<sup>57</sup> Keener also notes that many members of the Areopagus would have had formal training in rhetorical skills. Paul was under pressure not only to communicate the truth but to communicate it excellently so that the eminent members of the Areopagus could receive it.<sup>58</sup>

Paul employs the word δεισιδαιμονεστέρους to describe the people of Athens. This word can be considered an insult as it may mean “very superstitious.” However, it may also mean “very religious.” Paul is not going to begin his speech before this stately body with an insult, calling them “very superstitious in every way.” No, Paul begins with a rhetorical technique known as a *captatio benevolentiae* (Latin: “winning of goodwill”). Paul launches his speech by complimenting the people of Athens for being “very religious in every way.” Lenski comments that the people of Athens were not necessarily more religious than other peoples, they just had more divinities and idols beckoning their devotion.<sup>59</sup> Paul begins his presentation with a respectful attitude toward his listeners. He will save “his thunder” for later in the speech.

### **Paul Connects through His Cultural Awareness (Acts 17:23)**

As Paul walked about Athens, he saw σεβάσματα, that is, objects of worship. These σεβάσματα that Paul observed would include altars, statues, shrines, and temples, which the worshippers dedicated to gods and goddesses. The only other time σεβάσματα is referenced in the Bible is in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, where Paul states that the Man of Lawlessness “exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship.” Lightfoot

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<sup>57</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2624.

<sup>58</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2617.

<sup>59</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 722.

notes that Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians some months after Paul delivered his speech in Athens.<sup>60</sup>

Paul describes that he saw an altar with these words: to the unknown god. Pervo comments that Jerome (AD 347-420) sought to correct Paul when Jerome wrote, “In actuality, the altar inscription read ‘To the gods of Asia, Europe and Africa, to the unknown and foreign gods—and not as Paul would have it.’”<sup>61</sup> Polhill states that there were reports of altars dedicated to unknown gods. He stresses that Paul was accentuating “unknown,” and that Paul wanted to address God in the singular form.<sup>62</sup> Paul was aware of the need to connect to their culture, and he found the perfect object to make that connection.

For the Greeks as well as the Stoics, ignorance was a terrible wrong. There was nothing more important than seeking and finding the truth.<sup>63</sup> Knowledge of the gods was a major motivation for many Greek thinkers, and to be ignorant of the gods was considered a major vice.<sup>64</sup> Paul also connects to the culture by using two variations of the word “unknown” (ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ, ἀγνοοῦντες) in this verse. Paul desired to connect to the cultural aspiration to know the gods, as he was about to make known the unknown God.

Paul was also relating to his listeners by employing excellent rhetorical skills. He was “accused” of proclaiming foreign deities. He turns the “accusation” into a positive direction.<sup>65</sup> In essence, Paul said, “Some have accused me of proclaiming a foreign deity. I am not teaching a foreign deity. You have an altar to the God I am proclaiming. This God has been unknown for centuries. Today I am going to make him known to you.” It

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<sup>60</sup> Lightfoot and Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 231.

<sup>61</sup> Pervo and Attridge, *Acts*, 433.

<sup>62</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 346.

<sup>63</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 347.

<sup>64</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2635.

<sup>65</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 730.

would be no surprise that some in the audience might have been impressed by Paul's rhetorical transformation of the accusation and perhaps would have given his message a closer hearing.

### **Paul Employs Theological Argumentation to the Areopagus (Acts 17:24-27)**

The majority of the Greek people who listened to Paul would be unfamiliar with the Old Testament. Yet, he presented basic Old Testament theology in a manner that the Greeks might be able to comprehend. He does not avoid theological arguments in favor of philosophical arguments, but instead he boldly proclaims theological truths in a style that the Greek philosophers and leaders can understand.

He said, "The God (Θεός) who made (ποίησας) the world (κόσμον) and everything in it" (Acts 17:24). These three Greek words are a match to Genesis 1:1: "God created the heavens and the earth." Schnabel states that the heavens and the earth are equivalent to the κόσμον, which "denotes the universe, the sum total of everything that exists."<sup>66</sup> In his very first words to make the unknown God known, Paul relied on the most fundamental biblical teaching. However, to his Hellenistic audience, the thought that one God was the creator of all would have been foreign.<sup>67</sup>

Paul proceeded by saying that God, "being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man" (Acts 17:24). As Paul wandered around all the Athenian temples, his thoughts may have drifted back to the temple in Jerusalem. He may have thought of the dedication of the first temple in Jerusalem. At that dedication, Solomon prayed, "But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built" (2 Chron 6:18). Paul presented the same argument as Solomon did a thousand years prior: If God

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<sup>66</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 731.

<sup>67</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 347.



made all things, how can a temple contain him? Keener observes that Paul presented his case against temples in a place surrounded by temples. However, a part of the crowd would have cheered. Zeno, the founder of Epicureanism, also argued that temples were not necessary because human effort and work were not worthy of the gods.<sup>68</sup>

Contemporary Epicureans mocked the worship practices that occurred in temples, insisting that the gods do not live in temples built with human hands.<sup>69</sup> Paul was arguing against the temples with theological argumentation, while at the same time gaining common ground with his Epicurean listeners.

Paul turns the argument from where God lives to what God needs. Paul declared that God is not served by human hands, nor does God need anything from people. The service that Paul referenced was the sacrifices offered in the temples. The gods expected various types of sacrifices. The requirements (which animals to sacrifice, which wine or incense to use, etc.) of the expected sacrifices were inscribed on the walls on the temple.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps Paul thought of Psalm 50:10-12, where God said, “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.” Paul’s argument with the Greeks was the same one that God had with the Israelites: The God who made all does not need food, service, or sacrifices from people.<sup>71</sup> As Paul presented this theological argument, he continued to gain ground with the Epicureans, who also believed that the deities do not need service nor sacrifice from humans. The

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<sup>68</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2639.

<sup>69</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 732.

<sup>70</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 732-33.

<sup>71</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 733.

Stoics may have agreed as Seneca (4 BC–AD 65), a Roman Stoic philosopher, said, “Let us forbid men to offer morning salutation and to throng the doors of temples.”<sup>72</sup>

In Genesis 2, God breathes into Adam and gives him life. Paul certainly had this picture in mind when he proclaimed to the Areopagus, “Since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:25). Lenski agrees that the present active participle, *διδούς* (giving), is the proper verb to describe God, who continues to give to the present moment. He then proposes that the instant it is understood that God gives everything, then the whole idea of pagan sacrifice and service crumbles.<sup>73</sup> Because the Stoics believed that God gives the “divine spark” to all people, Paul’s theological argument that God gives life to all may have been acceptable then.<sup>74</sup>

Paul described the origin of all nations: “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). The word *ένος* means “one.” But *ένος* is genitive masculine singular, which implies “one man.” Scholars debate who this one man is. Some believe that this is a reference to Adam, as all people came from this one man. In the Gospel of Luke, the genealogy of Jesus goes back to Adam (Luke 3:38).<sup>75</sup> Other commentators believe that the “one man” is a reference to Noah. It says of Noah in Genesis 10:32, “These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.” The thought of “the nations spread abroad on the earth” after the flood is similar to the next part of this verse 26: “Every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.”<sup>76</sup> I believe that the “one man” is Adam because Paul wrote of Adam in

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<sup>72</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 733.

<sup>73</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 727.

<sup>74</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2641.

<sup>75</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2645.

<sup>76</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2647.

significant ways in his letters. In Romans 5:12, Paul calls Adam “one man” (ένος ανθρώπου) and in Romans 5:15 he refers to Adam “one” (ένος). Paul never mentioned Noah by name in his letters. The most fundamental question that every person asks is, “Where do I come from?” Paul presented the biblical answer to the Areopagus.

There are different understandings of this next phrase, “having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26). The issue involves the interpretation of two phrases: προστεταγμένους καιρούς (allotted periods) and όροθεσίας τής κατοικίας (boundaries of their dwelling place). Is this a reference to a theology of nature where God gives seasons and natural boundaries (mountains, rivers, deserts, seas)? Or is this a reference to God working in history and giving historical epochs and national boundaries?<sup>77</sup> Because Luke was a historian, Schnabel believes that it is more plausible that καιρούς represent periods of history and that όροθεσίας represents boundaries of nations.<sup>78</sup> Lenski says that Paul’s theological point is that “God allotted to each nation both its period and its geographical location according to the wisdom and beneficence of his providence.”<sup>79</sup>

God created humans, provided for humans, and has placed humans in certain nations at certain times. The natural question for Paul’s listeners would be, “Why? For what purpose has God done all this?” Paul answered this question, saying that God does this for humans “that they should seek God” (Acts 17:27). Lenski calls ζητεῖν “the infinitive of purpose,” indicating “for them to be seeking.”<sup>80</sup> Keener says it means “that

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<sup>77</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 348.

<sup>78</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 734-35.

<sup>79</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 729.

<sup>80</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 729.

they should seek.”<sup>81</sup> Seeking God was an Old Testament theme<sup>82</sup>: “Seek the LORD while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked man forsake his own way and the unrighteous man his own thoughts” (Isa 55:6,7).

Paul may have had this verse in mind as he similarly encouraged the Athenians to seek the Lord and to repent. Schnabel suggests that Paul’s use of ζητεῖν “implies that human beings do not know God and do not know how and where to find God, but it also implies that they desire to find him and have a relationship with him.”<sup>83</sup> The Stoic listeners might have agreed with Paul’s theological argument about seeking God as they desired to seek the divine principle, which they believed is found in nature and reason.<sup>84</sup>

Paul said that people are to seek God “and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him” (Acts 17:27). The word ψηλαφήσειαν means to “feel around” or “to look for something in an uncertain fashion.”<sup>85</sup> Keener reports that ψηλαφήσειαν is a rather negative picture word and was used in Greek literature and the LXX to describe a blind person stumbling in the dark.<sup>86</sup> A picture of this “feeling around” can be seen in Homer’s story of the blinded Cyclops, Polyphemus “feeling around” as he attempts to get hold of Odysseus and his men.<sup>87</sup> It is one thing to seek and feel around for God, and it is another thing to find (εὑροῖεν) him. This aorist active verb with the optative mood may be translated “might find him” or “if only they find him.” Keener believes that this is not an encouraging way to describe the search for God, as it indicates there may not be a positive

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<sup>81</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2651.

<sup>82</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:844.

<sup>83</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 735.

<sup>84</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 348.

<sup>85</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 735.

<sup>86</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2652.

<sup>87</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:845.

result.<sup>88</sup> Pervo states that Paul’s theological argument of seeking, feeling around, and perhaps finding God is one of the classic arguments for the existence of God, the *consensus gentium* (agreement of the people or common consent). Paul is implying that because all people are seeking and feeling for God (common consent), God must exist.<sup>89</sup> The followers of Epicurus would have readily dismissed all the arguments about seeking and finding God, as they believed that the gods were above and beyond human experience.

Paul again countered the Epicureans when he said of God, “Yet he is actually not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). However, the Stoics may have found agreement with Paul that God is not far, as they believed that God was in all of nature and his divine spark is in all people. A fundamental argument in the theology of the mission to the Gentiles is that God is “not far from each one of us” (οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου ἡμῶν) (Acts 17:27). There is not a divide between Jew and Gentile, as God is not far from any person, regardless of religion or ethnicity.<sup>90</sup> Paul also argued against the accusation that he was teaching “foreign deities.” God cannot be foreign if he is near to each person.<sup>91</sup>

### **Paul Demonstrates Cultural Awareness Before the Areopagus (Acts 17:28)**

Classic poets such as Homer carried enormous influence and authority in Greek speeches and literature.<sup>92</sup> Listeners expected educated speakers to present quotes of the classic poets to support the proofs of their arguments.<sup>93</sup> Paul quotes one or perhaps two poets.

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<sup>88</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2652.

<sup>89</sup> Pervo and Attridge, *Acts*, 436.

<sup>90</sup> Pervo and Attridge, *Acts*, 438.

<sup>91</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2651.

<sup>92</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2653-57.

<sup>93</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2653.

Paul's words, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), were possibly a quote from sixth-century Cretan poet Epimenides. Keener describes the very limited information and scant sources on the origin of this phrase. The deliberate or accidental conflation of quotes makes the search for the origin of this phrase even more difficult.<sup>94</sup> Whether this was a quote from Epimenides or directly from Paul, Stoic listeners with their pantheistic perspective would have appreciated this thought.<sup>95</sup>

The Stoics would have also been pleased with Paul's next quote, as it is from a Stoic poet. Behind the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Aratus's poem, "Phaenomena," was the third most widely known poem in the Hellenistic world. This poem was a didactic poem, used to teach about the relationship between stars, weather, agriculture, and navigation.<sup>96</sup> Aratus, 310-240 BC, was from the coastal town of Soli, Cilicia, and was a student of the Zeno, the founder of Stoicism.<sup>97</sup> The first seven lines of this poem follow:

From Zeus let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed;  
full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men;  
full is the sea and the havens thereof;  
always we all have need of Zeus.  
For we are also his offspring;  
and he in his kindness unto men giveth favourable signs  
and wakeneth the people to work, reminding them of livelihood.<sup>98</sup>

Paul quotes line 5 in his speech to the Aeropagus, "For we are indeed his offspring." As this poem was widely known, and that both Aratus and Paul were from the same province, Cilicia, there is a good chance that Paul was well acquainted with and

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<sup>94</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2657-59.

<sup>95</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 737.

<sup>96</sup> Aaron Poochigian, "Phaenomena," accessed February 21, 2020, <https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/title/phaenomena>.

<sup>97</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 732.

<sup>98</sup> Aratus, "Phaenomena," accessed February 21, 2020, <https://www.theoi.com/Text/AratusPhaenomena.html>.

strategically selected this poem.<sup>99</sup> Aristobulus was an earlier Hellenistic Jewish philosopher. He quoted the first six lines of Aratus' poem and related them to the Genesis creation account. He changed "Zeus" to "God" and Paul appeared to do the same in this speech.<sup>100</sup> In his use of poetry, Paul demonstrated sensitivity and awareness of the Athenian culture without compromising his mission.

### **Paul Argues against Idolatry (Acts 17:29)**

Amid a city filled with idols, Paul made a bold move to argue that idolatry was foolish. He stated the accepted premise that people are God's offspring and then stated the logical conclusion that the true God cannot be the product of human art or imagination. If God created humans, then humans could not have created God. If people live, move, and have being, then surely God must live, move, and have being. God cannot be an inanimate idol.<sup>101</sup> Paul did not need to state the obvious that idols do not live, move, or have being.

Paul's thoughts on idolatry were similar to what he expressed in Romans 1:22, 23<sup>102</sup>: "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." His description is a little harsher with the Romans than with the Athenians. As Luke recorded only have the gist of Paul's speech, perhaps Paul expounded upon the logic of Psalm 115:4-9, where the psalmist says of idols:

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;

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<sup>99</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2661.

<sup>100</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2660.

<sup>101</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 737.

<sup>102</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 720.

feet, but do not walk;  
and they do not make a sound in their throat.

Perhaps both the Stoics and the Epicureans would have agreed with Paul's argument against idols, as the Stoics believed that the divine spark was in everyone, and the Epicureans thought of the gods as far above humanity.<sup>103</sup>

### **Paul Brings the Gospel to the Areopagus (Acts 17:30, 31)**

Ancient teachers of rhetoric stressed that speakers should establish common ground before the presentation of a contentious topic. After establishing the common ground, the speaker should address the controversial topic.<sup>104</sup> Paul followed this pattern as he first established common ground with the Areopagus and any Epicureans and Stoics present. Then he addressed the contentious issues, which included ignorance, repentance, judgment, and the gospel of Jesus.

Paul spoke of times of ignorance, ἀγνοίας. Paul previously had addressed (v. 23) worship of the unknown God. Then Paul goes a step further, implying that those in the great city of education and philosophy were ignorant. Schnabel notes that Paul makes an audacious move as he equates Athens, with all its philosophical and scientific history, with ignorance.<sup>105</sup> However, Paul quickly moved to God's patience as he said that God overlooked, ὑπεριδὼν, those times of ignorance. Pelikan translated ὑπεριδὼν as "to take no notice of or to disregard."<sup>106</sup> To this definition, Block adds "to ignore or to scorn."<sup>107</sup> Paul presented a similar thought in Lystra when he encouraged the people to turn from idolatry to the living God. He then added, "In past generations he [God] allowed all the

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<sup>103</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 738.

<sup>104</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2668.

<sup>105</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 739.

<sup>106</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 198.

<sup>107</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 569.



nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16). “Allowing all nations to walk in their own ways” is comparable to “overlooking times of ignorance.” They both imply that God was aware of past idolatry and that God permitted it to happen, but now there needs to be a turning from false gods.

The turning away from false gods is μετανοεῖν, or repentance. Lenski states that Paul employed the present tense because God wants people “ever more” to repent.<sup>108</sup> Paul was not just conveying new information, but he was calling for a change of heart.<sup>109</sup> Repentance in Athens meant turning away from idolatry, pantheism, agnosticism, and spiritual decadence. Repentance meant turning to the one God, who made the heavens and earth, to receive mercy and forgiveness. Paul had previously witnessed this repentance in Thessalonica. In recalling that repentance, he described the “turning from” and the “turning to” of repentance. He wrote to them, “How you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” That was what Paul had hoped would happen in Athens. This call to repentance may have offended the philosophers and the members of the Areopagus because they already thought that they were on the right path and did not need converting.<sup>110</sup> But Paul said that it was a command, παραγγέλλει, a present-tense command for all time. Paul was emphasizing a new reality of God’s expectation.<sup>111</sup> God expects τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντα πανταχοῦ, “all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). This call to repent included the worshippers in the synagogues, the shoppers in the agora, the Greek philosophers in their schools, and the individual members of the Areopagus.<sup>112</sup> The

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<sup>108</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 736.

<sup>109</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 740.

<sup>110</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2669.

<sup>111</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 740.

<sup>112</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 740.

Aeropagus now can understand the reason why Paul was in Athens—he went there to call them to repentance as this universal command of God was for them.<sup>113</sup>

Near the Areopagus was a temple devoted to the Erinyes. The Erinyes were three angry goddesses who came back to bring vengeance on the living. There was no way to escape this destiny. Paul gave hope as he said that there is a way to escape the coming judgment of God, and that way is to repent.<sup>114</sup>

Although repentance is a common Jewish and Christian concept, for the Greek, it implied a philosophical conversion and a change in thinking.<sup>115</sup> Paul certainly would have had to give further explanation. He probably told the Areopagus of the difference between a philosophical conversion and a conversion to Christ.

Lenski defines καθότι (because) as “in consideration of this” or “in accord with this reason,” linking the reason to repent with a coming day of judgment.<sup>116</sup> There is no changing this day of judgment. God has fixed (ἔστησεν) a day or has set a day or has specified contractually a day in which he will judge the world.<sup>117</sup> Paul is saying, “God has set the day, and it is vital for you to be set in repentance.” The coming judgment will come on all the world, οἰκουμένην, or the inhabited earth.<sup>118</sup> To judge, κρίνειν, means to pass judgment in a legal process.<sup>119</sup> The concept of divine judgment would have been familiar to most traditional Greek listeners as they expected judgment after death.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 736.

<sup>114</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 741.

<sup>115</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2667.

<sup>116</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 736.

<sup>117</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 740.

<sup>118</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 737.

<sup>119</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 740.

<sup>120</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2671.

However, the judgment will be in δικαιοσύνη, in righteousness, or with justice or in fairness.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps Paul had in mind the description of God’s judgment portrayed at the conclusion of Psalm 96: “For He is coming—He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness” (v. 12b). This God was not like Hermes, a cunning and trickster god, nor was he like the distant and uncaring gods of the Epicureans. The God that Paul proclaimed was just and fair.<sup>122</sup>

Keener observes that, in Acts, Luke rarely stresses the day of judgment. But Paul’s letters frequently contain references to judgment. Paul’s alluding to judgment may be a substantiation of Luke’s accurate report of Paul’s speech.<sup>123</sup>

The judge will be a man that God has appointed. God has not only selected the day for judgment, but he has also selected the judge.<sup>124</sup> It would be difficult for Paul’s listeners to believe that God appointed a man to be the judge, but God has provided proof, πίστιν. This word, πίστιν, always means faith in the New Testament, except here. This verse is the only biblical occurrence where πίστιν means proof, but other Greek writers, including Aristotle, often used it in that way.<sup>125</sup>

Also, what is the proof that God appointed this man as the judge? The proof to all is that God raised him from the dead. All people are to repent, as all will be judged by a man, and all were given proof of God’s selection of this man by his resurrection. Paul waits until the last section of his speech to present the resurrection as he knew that most Greek listeners would find the resurrection repulsive.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 741.

<sup>122</sup> Pervo and Attridge, *Acts*, 441.

<sup>123</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2672.

<sup>124</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:852.

<sup>125</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:853.

<sup>126</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2668.

The resurrection was repulsive for two reasons. First, the Greeks thought of the body as a tomb; thus, the body inhibits the soul from rising to its immortal home. There was even a phrase, “the body, the tomb.”<sup>127</sup> Paul’s hearers would have thought, “Why would anyone want to raise such a body and be entombed forever.” Second, the Greeks thought of death as a place of no return.<sup>128</sup> Aeschylus, the Greek poet, wrote, “Once a person has died . . . there is no return to life” (ἀναστήσις).<sup>129</sup> Death was nothingness or eternal sleep. Many ancient tombstones have been discovered with the Greek initials, “n.f.n.s.n.c.” engraved on them. These letters are an acronym for “I was not. I am not. I care not.”<sup>130</sup> The Stoics had no conceptual framework for the resurrection. They may have had absurd thoughts of it, such as the “magical revivification of long decomposed corpses.”<sup>131</sup>

How much did Paul expound upon the resurrection of Jesus? In the speech, Paul does not mention the name of Jesus. But Luke had previously reported (v. 18) that Paul was preaching at the agora about Jesus and the resurrection. Surely before the Areopagus, Paul also spoke about Jesus and his resurrection. If he spoke about Jesus’ resurrection, then he must have spoken about Jesus’ death. The crucifixion of Jesus would have been just as ludicrous to the Greeks as his resurrection. Paul wrote about the Jewish and Greek reaction toward the cross: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:22, 23). The cross was folly to the Greeks. Did Paul proclaim Christ crucified to the

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<sup>127</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2673.

<sup>128</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 741-42.

<sup>129</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2673.

<sup>130</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 742.

<sup>131</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2673.

Areopagus? It is difficult to imagine that he would have left out this essential truth. The cross was central in all of Paul's writings. It certainly was essential in Athens.

The best explanation for why Paul does not mention Jesus and the cross in the speech goes back to Luke's reporting of the speech. As previously stated, it takes less than two minutes to speak the written record of the speech. Luke merely gives the gist of the speech. The speech could actually have been fifteen minutes to an hour in length. There certainly was time and motive to discuss the cross and the resurrection. As Luke wrote the gist of the speech, he made logical assumptions about his readers. He assumed his readers would understand that when he mentioned the resurrection of Jesus, Paul also would have explained the death of Jesus. Luke assumed that his readers would know that Paul would have given greater details about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because Paul portrayed the death and resurrection of Jesus, he surely would have presented the spiritual implications of each. All of this may be an argument from silence, but Paul's letters are not silent. Paul's letters are very "loud" on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. One can confidently presume that before the Areopagus, he spoke loud and clear about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Perhaps the resurrection received the biggest rejection by the audience. After hearing of the resurrection, the speech came to an end. Keener speculates that at the preaching of the resurrection, the speech was interrupted by members of the Areopagus and that the speech came to a rather abrupt conclusion.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, Schnabel asserts that Paul had finished his speech and that it was not hastily concluded.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2674-75.

<sup>133</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 742.

## Responses and the Results of Paul's Speech

### The Responses to Paul's Speech (Acts 17:32-34)

There were three responses to Paul's speech. When they heard about the resurrection, some ἐχλεύαζον, that is mocked, sneered, or jested. The word ἐχλεύαζον may have originated from its root indicating "to throw out the lip." Lenski suggests that some in the audience may have laughed, saying, "If the judge before whom thou citest us is one risen from the dead, we little fear him!"<sup>134</sup> Some believe that the Epicureans were among the ones mocking Paul, as they would have the most difficulty comprehending the resurrection.<sup>135</sup>

Others were not mocking Paul. They said that they wanted to hear Paul again on this topic. They may have been politely dismissive of Paul or perhaps they had a sincere desire for further conversation.<sup>136</sup> The Stoics may have been the ones who sought additional discussions with Paul.<sup>137</sup> Barrett proposes that this modest response by some may indicate a measure of success.<sup>138</sup>

The third response was a sure indicator that the speech was successful in influencing a few lives. Some of those present joined Paul and ἐπίστευσαν, an aorist indicative active verb, implying that they continued to believe in Jesus. Two of these believers are named: Dionysius and Damaris. Dionysius was an Areopagite, that is a member of the city council. Pervo postulates that Luke "invented" Dionysius.<sup>139</sup> Keener counters that Luke frequently mentioned "high status" converts, so it is not a surprise that

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<sup>134</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 740.

<sup>135</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2676.

<sup>136</sup> Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 740.

<sup>137</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2676.

<sup>138</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:854.

<sup>139</sup> Pervo and Attridge, *Acts*, 442.

Luke mentioned this converted Areopagite.<sup>140</sup> Adding further insight, a second-century bishop of Corinth wrote that Dionysius became the first bishop of Athens.<sup>141</sup>

Luke gave the name of the woman convert, Damaris. The fact that Luke named her may indicate that Damaris was a prominent woman in Athens, or that she had become a known leader in the early Athenian church.<sup>142</sup>

In addition to Dionysius and Damaris, Luke writes that others joined in following Christ. Luke does not report how many were in that group. Certainly, every person brought to Jesus counts. The fact that Luke mentions names and others may indicate that a church formed in Athens, even though Athens was not central to Paul's work.<sup>143</sup>

Paul left the Areopagus with no restrictions. Paul's unimpeded departure underscores that there would be no official resistance to Paul or to his recent converts. Paul would be free in Athens to teach, preach, and proclaim.

### **The Success of Paul's Mission to Athens**

Paul worked hard in the synagogue and the agora. He had a major speech to the Areopagus. However, his efforts resulted in relatively few people who came to faith. Compared to some of the cities that Paul did missionary work, it may appear that Athens was less than successful.

Parsons defends Paul by saying that Paul did not fail, but those who did not repent were the ones who failed.<sup>144</sup> Keener believes that Paul's modest success looked

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<sup>140</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2678.

<sup>141</sup> Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:855.

<sup>142</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 743.

<sup>143</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2677-78.

<sup>144</sup> Parsons, *Acts*, 250.

like a major victory to Luke's original readers, who would understand the challenge of addressing the philosophical audience.<sup>145</sup>

Schnabel says that a part of Paul's success was not just the converts but the model that Paul presented for those who came after him. It is a model speech for contextualizing the gospel of Jesus.<sup>146</sup> Polhill agrees with that analysis. Paul sought to build bridges to the Athenian culture. Paul models the way to communicate to a different culture by using the language and poetry of his listeners.<sup>147</sup> Paul practiced what he preached: "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:22b). Paul also modeled boldness and persistence, precisely a model that was needed by missionaries succeeding Paul.

Keener concludes that Paul's missionary work in Athens was not a case of failure, but an example of a successful apologetic of the faith.<sup>148</sup> Paul demonstrates for all Christians how to defend the faith in an unwelcoming environment. Respectful attitude, cultural awareness, theological argumentation, and gospel application marked Paul's missionary work in Athens. Paul demonstrated a faithful model for all time.

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<sup>145</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2568.

<sup>146</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, 744.

<sup>147</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 351.

<sup>148</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:2677.



## CHAPTER 3

### PREACHING UTILIZING APOLOGETIC ILLUSTRATIONS: PRACTICAL AND CULTURAL CONCERNS

Lutheran pastors are traditionally taught to preach utilizing the Law-Gospel model. The Law must be proclaimed so that hearers see their own sins in the mirror of God's Word. Then, the hearers are ready to receive the sweetness of the gospel, the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. The culture has changed as America is now in a post-Christian era. The Law-Gospel model can include an apologetic "sidebar," which may be Law or Gospel. In this present hostile environment, believers need apologetic illustrations in sermons to help understand culture, to help in their personal faith, to help in learning apologetic arguments, and to help in their evangelism efforts.

#### **Apologetics Helps Believers Understand Culture**

James Sire authored *The Universe Next Door*, a classic book about worldviews. He wrote the book in the mid-1970s to help students understand "why they often felt so 'out of it' when their professors assumed the truth of ideas they deemed odd or even false."<sup>1</sup> Those students of the 1970s felt disconnected from what their professors were teaching. Today, those students from the 1970s and subsequent generations still feel "out of it" or disconnected from ideas that culture accepts and teaches. Many notions of culture seem odd or false to present-day Christians in America. Believers need to understand why their beliefs and their way of living are contrary to the norms of society. Preaching with the use of apologetics can help believers understand culture and how their faith relates to culture.

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 11.

The basic meaning of *apologetics* is to defend the faith. William Craig defines apologetics as “that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rationale or justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”<sup>2</sup> From what does the faith need to be defended? To whom and for what does the faith need to be justified? The answer to these questions varies depending upon the cultural context and the cultural antagonism toward the Christian faith. To engage the culture, Christians need to understand the culture. It is essential for a preacher to understand his culture and to help his listeners understand their culture. Alister McGrath says that the best apologist has “cultural empathy” and is one who knows the culture and can communicate in the ways that the culture can receive it.<sup>3</sup> Christians need to realize points of similarities and points of contrast. Apologetics has a distinctive style of formulating comparisons of worldviews. Worldviews help the Christian understand the message of the church and to be able to compare that message to the message of the surrounding culture. Sire defines *worldview* as “a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it.” The premises of a particular worldview may be so fixed inside that culture that they are assumed and unnoticed.<sup>4</sup> A person’s worldview may be so deeply embedded that he may be unaware that it is his cultural worldview. Yet, that worldview is the lens by which that person perceives and evaluates ideas and events.<sup>5</sup> Everyone has a worldview that has been culturally and experientially formed.

Vividly, Josh Chatraw describes how a worldview can be hidden from the person who holds that worldview. He tells of a visit to a church family who lived next to

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<sup>2</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics: Sharing the Relevance, Joy, and Wonder of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Josh Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 269.

a cow pasture. Of course, he noticed the stench of the cow smell right away. He asked the family, “How can you stand the smell?” and they replied, “What smell?” It took a few moments for the family to realize what he was referencing. The family got so used to the odor that they no longer sensed it.<sup>6</sup> People are conditioned and accommodate to a particular worldview. When a person’s worldview interacts with another worldview, that person may have the same experience as Chatraw. That person may recognize the different perspective and ask, “How can they possibly believe that? Don’t they see the problems with their belief? What is the matter with them?” Knowing how worldviews differ diminishes the “surprise” and enables understanding and conversation.

Worldviews give specific answers to basic questions of life. Sire lists eight questions that help differentiate worldviews:

1. What is prime reality—the really real?
2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person at death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?
8. What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?<sup>7</sup>

The responses to these questions help delineate particular worldviews and distinguish worldviews from one another. In preaching, pastors, knowingly or unknowingly, are regularly responding to these worldview questions. Every Christian sermon will certainly address one or more of these questions.

The first worldview question, “What is prime reality – the really real,” has the Christian answer in God. So often, Satan and the world tempt Christians to live their lives

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<sup>6</sup> Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 270.

<sup>7</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 22-23.

as if God does not exist and to forget the prime reality. Every Christian sermon addresses this reality in one way or another. The prime reality of the secularist or the Hindu is entirely different than that of the Christian. When a pastor expounds on sexual immorality, he is addressing the prime reality of the hedonist.

Where did the world come from? How do we connect to the world? Where is history headed? These questions are subsumed under this second question: “What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?” The first verse of the Bible and the first sentence of both the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed give a partial answer to this question. People derive responses to the world and react to events in the world from their own worldview.

Are human beings the result of a series of genetic mutations? Where does the worth of each person reside? How do people best relate to other people? The answer to third question, “What is a human being,” will describe a worldview’s perspective on humanity. It is a person’s actual worldview, not stated worldview, that determines how one interacts with others and their needs. The biblical response to this question has been the basis for many sermons.

A fundamental tenant of the Christian faith is addressed by question 4: “What happens to a person at death?” Indeed, Christianity addresses how a Christian is to live his life. However, with no hope for eternal life, Christianity is reduced to hopeless moralism. The sure hope of Christians originates in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Other worldviews have a very different answer to this question. Comparing worldviews on the afterlife is insightful for the Christian.

Question 5, “Why is it possible to know anything at all,” asks the source of knowledge, information, and intelligence and the reliability thereof. The answer to this question depends upon what a person believes is the source of human intelligence. Are people created in the image of God or did consciousness and intelligence develop through gradual evolution? As they step into the pulpit, pastors regularly assume the biblical

answer to this question. Christians also need to understand how different worldviews reply to this question.

The Bible is the basis for every Christian sermon. So, every Christian sermon connects to this question, “How do we know what is right and wrong?” Other worldviews have different answers to the source of morality. A secularist may answer, “There is no real right or wrong.” Explanation from different worldviews may enable the Christian to have a better understanding of God, himself, and others.

Is history cyclic or linear? Is there any purpose? Is there a destination? Question 7, “What is the meaning of human history,” includes responses to these mysteries. Each worldview has its nuanced understanding of the past and future. A person’s personal history is tethered to the responses his worldview gives. The Bible answers this question much differently than other worldviews.

A person’s worldview response is not merely an academic exercise, but the response affects the decisions, choices, and commitments that a person makes. Thus, the final question: “What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?” What an individual considers essential and valuable arises from his worldview. The individual clings to these crucial and valuable components. Every sermon will address essential truths to hold and trust. When a believer sees what others firmly hold, it can motivate him to connect Bible truths to his neighbor.

Preaching utilizing apologetics not only gives the biblical answer to these worldview questions, but also discusses how and why other worldviews give different answers. The pastor can explain the implications of various worldview answers. The listener would gain greater awareness of why he believes what he believes. He would also gain a greater understanding of the answers given by other worldviews. He might receive a more in-depth understanding as to why his children, his neighbor, or his coworker think so differently on particular worldview questions. Sire states, “I am

convinced that for any of us to be fully conscious intellectually we should not only be able to detect the worldviews of others but be aware of our own”<sup>8</sup>

At various times in Christian history, believers have retreated from culture. “The Benedict Option” is a contemporary proposal that Christians withdraw from culture. Preaching with apologetics can foster Christians to engage the culture rather than retreat from or discount culture.<sup>9</sup> With greater cultural mindfulness, Christians may be more likely to engage the culture and to witness faithfully, even in a climate that is indifferent or resistant to the gospel.

Paul was confronted with various worldviews. He was raised with a worldview of a Jew outside of Judah. He was trained as a Pharisee in Judah. He ministered to various Hellenistic and Roman cultures. Paul describes his *modus operandi*:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. (1 Cor 9:19-22)

Paul is not saying that he changes the gospel depending upon the culture. He is saying that he seeks to identify with the culture so that he may communicate the gospel to that culture. He seeks to communicate so that those in that culture can hear the gospel, understand it, and possibly believe it. Paul does not change the gospel message to accommodate various worldviews. He does change the way he communicates the gospel to accommodate the needs of the culture. As an excellent apologist, Paul builds bridges between the world of faith and the world of a particular culture.<sup>10</sup> He desires that the gospel

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<sup>8</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Allister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 11.

<sup>10</sup> McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 29.

will gain a hearing from that particular audience. Chatraw and Allen record a quote from Lesslie Newbigin: “The gospel provides the stance from which all culture is to be evaluated; but the gospel always embodies in some cultural form.”<sup>11</sup>

On the first Pentecost Sunday (Acts 2), the Holy Spirit enabled the gathered people to hear the gospel of Jesus in their own language. Ever since, Christians have translated the gospel into the language of thousands of cultures. Preaching utilizing apologetics helps believers comprehend their own culture and understand different cultures so that they may best translate the gospel to people of that culture.<sup>12</sup>

### **Apologetics Helps Believers in Their Personal Faith**

Craig lists three roles of apologetics: “1. Shaping Culture, 2. Strengthening Believers, 3. Evangelizing Unbelievers.”<sup>13</sup> Apologetics does not cause faith. Convincing a person that God exists or that the Bible is reliable does not bring that person to a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul writes, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Only the gospel, the good news of Jesus’s death and resurrection, can bring a person to faith in God. “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3b). The inner working of the Holy Spirit enables anyone to know the truthfulness of Christianity. The work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God enables unbelievers to come to faith and to believe apologetic reasons for the faith.<sup>14</sup>

Although apologetics cannot cause faith, it can be a tool to confirm people in their faith. Apologetics is designed to respond to external criticisms of the Christian faith. It functions to defend Christian truths by giving a reasoned response to the culture’s

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<sup>11</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, quoted in Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 257.

<sup>12</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 16-23.

<sup>14</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 28.

position. In addition, apologetics is a useful tool to support, buildup, and encourage the faith of Christians.<sup>15</sup> Apologetics can point out reasons for God's existence that were never considered before by the believer, thus buttressing the believer's faith. Evidence of Jesus' resurrection alone will not convince a person to trust in Jesus but will support the believer in their trust of Jesus. As a believer sees historical reasons why the gospels are reliable, they may be strengthened to rely upon Jesus's salvation and his teaching. An understanding of how Jesus is acquainted with and works through suffering can help the believer be prepared for the possible eventuality of suffering. Apologetics will not make people believe that Jesus is their Savior, but it can help believers see the weaknesses of other pathways and support believers in their faith walk. Although a person may not come to faith through the Cosmological Argument, that argument may be a tool to support a tottering faith.

Apologetics often gives a reasoned explanation to a certain part of the faith. That explanation can help a person understand the faith better. I was twenty-three years old working my first real job as a physical therapist in the nation's premier cancer hospital. I could not fathom why God would permit the suffering of a child or a teenager. But a Bible class that I attended discussed various aspects of suffering from an apologetic perspective (although I did not know a thing about apologetics). While that class was rather rudimentary, it was helpful for me to be able to resolve some of the "faith tension" suffering causes. Not all questions were answered, but I had some insight into suffering and the Christian faith. That understanding enabled my faith life to continue to grow, despite dealing daily with the horrendous suffering of others. Apologetics helps Christians more deeply understand various aspects of the faith, which enables the faith relationship with God to continue to grow. On the other hand, a lack of apologetic understanding and answers can certainly weaken faith. Austin Farrer describes the essential role of

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<sup>15</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 11.



apologetics to the Christian faith: “What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.”<sup>16</sup>

Satan created the first doubt in Adam and Eve. He asked Eve, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1) That doubt led to the first sin. Now, every Christian has doubts in aspects of the faith. Those doubts emanate from one’s own questions, from conversations with others, from concerns proposed by the world, and from the inquiries from Satan. Believers have personal doubts such as, Does God love me? Does God forgive me? Will God provide for me? Will God see me through this problem? Christians also have theological doubts that are more broadly experienced. Some standard theological doubts revolve around the existence of God, the historicity and the resurrection of Jesus, the reliability of the Bible, certain biblical prohibitions, and the problem of suffering. Apologetics is valuable in confronting theological doubts. When a pastor gives an apologetic response to an issue, it communicates to the doubter that the pastor recognizes that there are doubts on that issue. It conveys to the doubter that the pastor has examined those doubts and has a reasoned response to them.

Today’s culture has certain propositions that are extensively believed to be true, yet these propositions are generally unexamined. Timothy Keller describes five such unquestioned narratives believed to be true in the post-modern world:

The rationality narrative—the natural world is the only reality and all problems can be solved by human reason. “Keep your religious views private.”

The history narrative—human life is progressively getting better as it moves through time. Slogan: “You don’t want to be on the wrong side of history”

The society narrative—moral individualism, let everyone live as they desire, as long as they cause no harm. Slogan: “I am free to do what I wish as long as I don’t hurt anyone else.”

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<sup>16</sup> Austin Farrer, quoted in McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 37-38.

The morality or justice narrative—humans choose what is right or wrong. Slogan: “What right do you have to tell anyone else what is right or wrong for them?”

The identity narrative—our personal identity comes from looking inside and being ourselves. Slogan: “You have to be yourself and not care what anyone else says.”<sup>17</sup>

Many people, including Christians, believe these “self-evident” truths. Preaching with apologetics in mind can help believers recognize the fallacy of these “cultural truths.” More importantly, preaching with apologetics may help Christians understand and apply the appropriate Christian perspectives concerning these narratives.

The rationality narrative tells the generally believed tale that science and human ingenuity can solve all problems. On June 17, 2020, Anthony Fauci, lead physician in the battle against COVID-19, said in an interview, “When they see someone up in the White House, which has an air of authority to it, who’s talking about science, that there are some people who just don’t believe that—and that’s unfortunate because, you know, science is truth.”<sup>18</sup> Most people would agree that science seeks the truth about nature. However, the rationality narrative is on full display with the phrase, “science is truth.” This statement implies that science can discover all truth, and what scientists say is the truth. A pastor can respond to this narrative by first acknowledging the many blessings that science has given humanity. Then the pastor needs to refute the statement, “science is truth.” He can refute this statement by showing some of the contradictory statements that science has proclaimed in the battle against COVID-19. He can also emphasize that Christians should be the first ones to proclaim the importance of studying all that God has made. However, if a person believes that science has all the answers or will soon have the answers, then they may conclude that there is no need for God or faith. Pastors must give the apologetic

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<sup>17</sup> Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 129-33.

<sup>18</sup> Sarah Al-Archani, “Fauci Calls ‘Anti-Science Bias’ in the US Problematic,” *Business Insider*, June 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/fauci-says-anti-science-bias-in-the-us-is-problematic-2020-6> Accessed July 2, 2020.

that confirms the intent of science but then shows the fallibility and limited nature of science.

C. S. Lewis observed the absurdity of the rationality narrative by reminding readers that God is not inside the purview of science and, therefore, cannot be studied by science:

But why anything comes to be there at all, and whether there is anything behind the things science observes—something of a different kind—this is not a scientific question. If there is “Something Behind,” then either it will have to remain altogether unknown to men or else make itself known in some different way. The statement that there is any such thing, and the statement that there is no such thing, are neither of them statements that science can make. And real scientists do not usually make them. It is usually the journalists and popular novelists who have picked up a few odds and ends of half-baked science from textbooks who go in for them. After all, it is really a matter of common sense. Supposing science ever became complete so that it knew every single thing in the whole universe. Is it not plain that the questions, “Why is there a universe?” “Why does it go on as it does?” “Has it any meaning?” would remain just as they were?<sup>19</sup>

Lewis correctly points out that “Something Behind” is outside the purview of science.

Lewis was right that, even to this day, many still proclaim that science can answer many questions but cannot discover the truth to some of life’s most important questions. Pastors need to counter the rationality narrative for the faith of Christians as well as for opening possibilities for non-Christians. The preacher can emphasize that science is most helpful as it shows how things work, that is the function of things. However, science cannot show the meaning of things, why they are, and the ultimate connection to one’s life.<sup>20</sup>

In 1992, political scientist Francis Fukuyama authored *The End of History and the Last Man*. Fukuyama proposed that through liberal democracy, the world, although there will be setbacks, will continue the march of improvement. This is illustrative of the historical narrative, that as history proceeds, things will get better. Many people believe this narrative that life for the human race will progress and advance. If things will

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<sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics (New York: Harper One, 2002), 20-21.

<sup>20</sup> McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 164.

continue to progress, then people can make a name for themselves by building a tower to heaven and nothing will be impossible for them (Gen 11:1-9). With the historical narrative, there is no need for God or faith; just place trust in the human race. This narrative ignores the sinfulness of all people. McGrath writes, “Advances in science and technology are driven by selfish and corrupting human agendas, often aimed at securing domination over potential enemies.”<sup>21</sup> For certain, some things will get better, but other things will get worse. Pastors need to affirm political, social, and technological paths of improvement. However, pastors need to demonstrate that despite many wonderful improvements, there has not been any improvement in the human heart. Here are a few historical events that counter Fukuyama’s argument and the historical narrative: September 11, 2001 and the subsequent Islamic and Western world tensions, the rise and control of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the rollback of freedoms in China. Using apologetics, pastors can proclaim the countercultural truth of Psalm 146:3-6: “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth.” Pastors need to assert that the believer’s confidence is not in frail, fallible humans or human institutions. Pastors need to oppose the works righteousness of the history narrative by helping people place their confidence and faith in the Lord who made the heavens and the earth.

The society narrative is the fictional idea that there is no right or wrong and that a person needs to do what makes them happy, as long as they do not hurt anyone. The philosophy of doing what makes one happy has led to a lot of unhappiness. The narrative that a person can do whatever he wants as long as he does not hurt anyone has led to a lot of people being hurt. Every pastor knows a tragic story where a person left their spouse for someone else that would make them happier: “I just wanted to be happy, what’s

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<sup>21</sup> McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 100.

wrong with that?” What is wrong is that as they pursue happiness, they hurt their spouse, and their children. They probably motivated another person who also feels, “I just want to be happy,” to take a shortcut toward “happiness.” Pastors can apologetically counter the society narrative by showing the hurt that others experience from a person selfishly seeking “happiness.” Pastors can show that if there is no God, then life has no meaning. Pastors can demonstrate that it is often vital to give up the lesser freedom of self-seeking happiness to gain true freedom that Christ offers.<sup>22</sup> As Christians believe the society narrative, both their faith and their life can unravel. Pastors must defend Christians against this all too common destructive belief.

Toward the end of June 2020, the City Council of Somerville, Massachusetts, unanimously approved health insurance rights for any polyamorous group of city workers. The lawyer who crafted the law, Lance Davis, said at the council meeting, “I don’t think it’s the place of the government to tell people what is or is not a family. Defining family is something that historically we’ve gotten quite wrong as a society, and we ought not to continue to try and undertake to do so.”<sup>23</sup> Davis and the Somerville City Council would agree with the morality/justice narrative that says there is no absolute right or wrong. The morality/justice narrative is a philosophy that says individuals choose what is right and wrong. But if people decide what is right or wrong, then the Lawgiver (God) is excluded. Here are a few questions for Lance to answer: If there is no right or wrong, then how can it be wrong for the government to define family? If there is no right or wrong, then how can you say that the historical definition of family is “quite wrong?” If there is no right or wrong, then why are you giving public approval to polyamorous relationships? Christians hear the voice of their culture. If they do not hear the other side of the argument, then they

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<sup>22</sup> Keller, *Preaching*, 140-46.

<sup>23</sup> Ellen Barry, “A Massachusetts City Decides to Recognize Polyamorous Relationships,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/us/somerville-polyamorous-domestic-partnership.html>.

will assume that there is no valid response to the morality narrative. Pastors must help Christians see the absurdity and destructiveness of the contemporary idea that there is no right or wrong.

Every child in America hears the identity narrative when a well-meaning adult says, “be yourself,” “follow your dreams,” or “trust your feelings.” This identity narrative has brought heartache into people’s lives because we are all sinful, dreams can lead the wrong way, and feelings are not designed to lead. A person cannot receive his worth or value from his own self. Value and worth must come outside the self. A person cannot really tell himself, “I don’t care that everyone I know thinks I’m a monster. I love myself and that is all that matters.”<sup>24</sup> Pastors must contend against the identity myth with the truth that value and worth come from the Creator. God creates in His image, and He loves enough to save by giving His Son. Pastors can defend the faith against this narrative by identifying the narrative, showing its weakness, and pointing to the gospel, where true worth is found.

When a doubting heart is bolstered, when a faith concept is understood, or when belief is strengthened, these become times of celebratory worship of God. Apologetics can be the cause of celebratory worship of the living God. McGrath writes, “Apologetics celebrates and proclaims the intellectual solidity, the imaginative richness, and the spiritual depth of the gospel.”<sup>25</sup>

Most Christians experience frequent attacks on their faith. William Craig writes, “It seems that for many, if not most, people, rational argument and evidence will be indispensable to the sustenance of their faith.”<sup>26</sup> Regular exposure to apologetic thought can be a tool of the Holy Spirit to support people in their faith. Even though apologetics

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<sup>24</sup> Keller, *Preaching*, 136.

<sup>25</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> William Lane Craig, “Classical Apologetics,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 33.

cannot “prove” faith, it can support the value of Christianity as compared to other religions and secularism.<sup>27</sup>

### **Apologetics Helps Believers in Learning Apologetic Arguments**

Believers frequently see and hear arguments against the faith in the classroom, in the workplace, in conversations with friends, in reading material, in news articles, in internet posts, and in film. These arguments often relate to God’s existence, the historicity of Jesus, suffering, and evolution. Many assume that Christians have no response to these concerns, as an apologetic answer is rarely given. If the believer wants an apologetic answer, then he must seek it. Preaching sermons that often include apologetic arguments helps the believer in learning apologetic arguments and explanations.

When a believer hears criticism of the faith, he often feels his faith has a weakness, and as that happens repeatedly, the believer begins to doubt his faith. The believer does not know that great thinkers have wrestled with the same questions and doubts and have found reassuring and convincing counter arguments. When a believer hears an apologetic argument answering a doubt, he discovers that there is a reasoned response to his doubt. As he hears other apologetic arguments, he grasps that his faith has historical and logical grounding. He begins to realize that there exists a body of apologetic arguments.

As a Christian sees suffering, the question is often asked, “How can an all-powerful and good God allow suffering?” That line of thought can move further toward the classical argument: “Either God is all good and not all powerful or God is all powerful and not good.” This argument appears to undermine the existence of the Christian God, who is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent. When a believer hears this argument, his faith can waver, thinking there is not a good answer to this attack on the faith. When he

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<sup>27</sup> Mark Mattes, “A Lutheran Case for Apologetics,” *Logia* 24 (2015): 25-32.

hears a reasoned and sensitive theodicy dealing with suffering and evil, he experiences a significant relief and joy. It is analogous to a best friend accused of a serious crime. You have known your friend most of your life, and he has been such a help to you. You cannot imagine that your friend would be guilty of such a crime. When the evidence comes forth that your friend is innocent, great relief and joy arise in your heart. A well-crafted apologetic argument “vindicates” the Christian faith, and relief and joy arise in the believer’s heart.

As the preacher regularly addresses apologetic concerns raised in the preaching texts, over time, the believer sees the broadness of apologetic argumentations. The believer begins to realize that there may be a reasoned response to every doubt. He may not know a particular apologetic argument, but he can now presume that there is a reasoned answer to any doubt-implying question. A preacher is also wise to occasionally explore in-depth a concerning issue. When he gives a detailed apologetic response, the believer begins to comprehend that there is depth to apologetic arguments. Again, the Christian feels comforted knowing that others with intellectual heft have examined that particular concern.

As the believer hears apologetic illustrations, he begins to learn some of the argumentation. He begins to think apologetically. Preaching is one of the least helpful methods of learning information. However, preaching is still a learning method. If preaching is enhanced with a printed outline or a PowerPoint presentation, then it is possible that a motivated listener may learn an apologetic argument. At the very least, the listener learns that the apologetic response exists. The believer may not fully remember the argument but may receive motivation to study the argument further. The inspired listener may further study through a Bible class or by reading a book or doing an internet search. Because he wants to resolve the answer for himself or share the answer with someone else, he may be motivated to learn the apologetic answer to the particular question.



## **Apologetics Helps Believers in Their Evangelistic Efforts**

Christians are called to share their faith with others, that is to be witnesses. When Jesus began gathering disciples to follow him, he told the first ones, Peter and Andrew, “From now on you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10). Jesus said his final words to his disciples at his ascension, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:28). The only way that people come to faith is that they hear or read the Word of God, and that Word is, in some fashion, transmitted by believers. Through the centuries, Christians have shared their faith with unbelievers, and God has worked to bring people to faith. On account of this sharing, Christianity has grown (since the first Pentecost Sunday) from about fifty people to over two billion people. As stated, people cannot come to faith in Jesus through apologetics. However, apologetics is a valuable pre-evangelism and post-evangelism tool.

Non-believers may have theological obstacles that prevent them from even considering the faith. Philosopher Charles Taylor asks, “How did we move from a condition where, in Christendom, people lived naively within a theistic construal, to one in which we all shunt between two stances, in which everyone’s construal shows up as such; in which moreover, unbelief has become for many the major default option?”<sup>28</sup> A person cannot even find it plausible to consider the existence of God if that person believes that science has disproved God’s existence. A non-believer cannot even consider Jesus as Savior if that person believes the history of Jesus is as reliable as the history of Santa Claus. An agnostic cannot ponder an all-loving God as he observes a world of suffering and evil.

The Christian evangelist is quickly moving into a similar position as a Krishna devotee. If a Hare Krishna were witnessing on the street, most Americans would think of it as being strange or amusing. They would not seriously consider conversion as there are

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<sup>28</sup> James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 19.

too many obstacles in the path for belief in Krishna.<sup>29</sup> As secularization of culture advances, more and more obstacles are placed in the pathway of serious consideration of the Christian faith. Christians know some of those obstacles as they are impediments in their own faith life. Without an adequate apologetic for countering these obstacles, many Christians hesitate to share their faith; they feel defeated before they start.

Sociologist and theologian Peter L. Berger used the phrase “plausibility structure” to describe if a belief was reasonable and acceptable to that culture. Cultural plausibility structures are defined as “beliefs we deem plausible because the people around us support them.”<sup>30</sup> For example, polytheism is generally outside the plausibility structure of belief for most Americans. However, due to its Hindu majority, polytheism is within the plausibility structure of India. Plausibility structures are “pre-reflective” and are understood as true without conscious examination. Chatraw and Allen give these examples of statements based upon plausibility structures: “Of course my sexual impulses are trustworthy. Of course, there are multiple ways to God. Of course, a loving God would not condemn. Of course, miracles can’t happen. Of course, science has disproved religion.”<sup>31</sup> Some Christian truths are more plausible than others in today’s culture. “Love the Lord your God” is less plausible in the West today than “Love your neighbor.”

If the Christian is aware of some of the obstacles to the plausibility of faith, he can then be ready for them. Readiness is a part of Peter’s injunction of “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). If a Christian is prepared for common objections to the faith, he can respond to those objections with an apologetic answer. An apologetic response is best

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<sup>29</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 270.

<sup>31</sup> Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 271-72.

when it is connected to the heart of the gospel. If the Christian has these apologetic arguments ready, he is more confident in giving a witness to Jesus. McGrath suggests that apologetics “equips both individual Christians and the Christian community to deal with the questions about faith that are being raised by those around them.”<sup>32</sup>

Philosopher Charles Taylor coined the phrase “immanent frame” to describe Western culture. Smith describes Taylor’s immanent frame is a “social space that frames our lives entirely within a natural (rather than supernatural) order. It is the circumscribed space of the modern social imaginary that precludes transcendence.”<sup>33</sup> However, it is Taylor’s belief, according to Smith, that even though culture has locked out transcendence, it continues to break into people’s immanent frame through the search for meaning, a lack of “fullness,” the mystery of time, and the power of death.<sup>34</sup> Christians may never have heard the phrase immanent frame, but they are aware that God knocks on the door of people’s hearts at critical times in life: a time of meaninglessness, a time of emptiness, a time of celebration of life’s markers, a time where death shows up. These are times when Christians, equipped with love and compassion, having an apologetic understanding and a desire to share the gospel, can be most effective.

Equipped with apologetic arguments, Christians can share that apologetic argument when the opportunity arises. Thus, they can help remove obstacles to faith. They have helped the unbeliever to “doubt his doubts.” This removal of roadblocks and barriers to faith does not help the unbeliever to believe, but it does make belief plausible. A solid apologetic argument gives the gospel a clearer path. If only apologetic arguments were given, then the witness would fall woefully short. It is the Holy Spirit working through the gospel who can give faith.

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<sup>32</sup> McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 30.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 141.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 122-37.

## Conclusion

I frequently say that I was born in a foreign country. I was born in the USA, but this country has changed so much; I am an immigrant and a pilgrim in my homeland. Preaching with apologetics can be helpful for immigrants and pilgrims to understand their own ever-shifting culture. The pastor becomes an interpreter as he connects Scripture to the cultural milieu. In the present cultural environment, doubts regularly assault Christians. Solid apologetic arguments can relieve many of these doubts. Utilizing apologetics in preaching can help strengthen the faith of listeners. As believers frequently hear apologetic presentations, they begin to understand the argumentation. They learn that there are reasoned answers to their faith concerns, and they can acquire apologetic arguments. As they learn apologetic reasoning, they become more confident in their witness and faith discussions. Previous “defeaters” now become springboards for a witness to the gospel. When pastors regularly include apologetic insights in sermons and Bible studies, believers learn apologetic approaches. They are inspired and emboldened to engage others in faith conversations.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 32.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to train at least ten pastors of the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to regularly utilize apologetic illustrations in preaching. This chapter will describe the implementation of the project. It will also present the results of the project and compare them to the goals. The first goal was to assess participants' current preaching practice with regard to the use of apologetic illustrations in their sermons. The second goal was to develop an eight-hour seminar to teach the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching. The third goal was to modify the pastors' attitudes toward the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching. The fourth goal was to increase the utilization of apologetic illustrations in preaching. The project began on August 10, 2020, and was completed when the last participant submitted the post-start seminar survey on January 11, 2020.

#### **Project Promotion**

A vital part of the project was to recruit at least ten pastors and vicars (pastors-in-training assigned to a church) serving in the Atlantic District. On August 10, 2020, I emailed the Bishop of the Atlantic District, asking his permission to conduct the study with pastors and vicars within the Atlantic District. I clearly explained the project and the rationale for the project within the Atlantic District. The Bishop gave full support to the project and sent out an email encouraging pastors and vicars to participate. He also gave me names of pastors and vicars that he thought would be helped through the project. He permitted me to send out two recruitment emails to pastors and vicars. On August 17 and 26, emails were sent to the District pastors and vicars describing the project and inviting

them to participate. The participants' responsibility was explained: completing two brief surveys, sixteen total brief sermon reports, and an eight-hour seminar. The requirement for participants was that they preached at least twice a month in an Atlantic District congregation. Through the promotion efforts, seventeen vicars and pastors signed up to participate. The participants were not an independently selected sample of the approximate 100 pastors and vicars of the Atlantic District. The volunteer participants may have included some who were inclined toward the use of apologetic illustrations. In other words, the volunteer participants many have included some with pre-existing bias toward apologetic illustrations. A pastor who was disinclined toward apologetics probably would not have volunteered to participate.

### **Approvals for Using Human Subjects in Research**

The request for approval of the use of human subjects in research was submitted to my project supervisor on August 10, 2020. After his approval, he forwarded the request form to the Research Ethics Committee of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. On August 24, 2020, the committee gave approval for the project, deeming it a low risk to the participants.

### **Development of Seminar Curriculum**

During August and September of 2020, I developed the curriculum for the eight-hour seminar. The curriculum was developed using class information, papers I had written, books, and my own insight and experience. An expert panel of three reviewed the curriculum according to an evaluation rubric.<sup>1</sup> With their recommendations (as described later under “Goal 2 Results”), the curriculum was amended and improved.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 2.

## **Participation**

Of the seventeen men who signed up, one dropped out without completing any requirements. Another attended the seminar but did not complete any sermon reports. The remaining fifteen completed the initial survey, the eight pre-seminar sermon reports, and the eight-hour seminar. Twelve completed all eight post-start seminar sermon reports, and three completed six post-start seminar sermon reports. Three participants completed six post-start seminar reports. These three preach twice monthly, so they could not complete all reports within the allotted time. All fifteen completed the concluding survey.

## **Project Process**

Participants were required to participate in five parts. The first part was to complete a fifteen-question apologetics and apologetic illustration survey. The second part was to complete eight brief sermon reports indicating their use of apologetic illustrations. The third part was to complete the eight-hour apologetic illustration seminar, given in two-hour increments over four weeks. The fourth part was to complete eight more brief sermon reports indicating their use of apologetic illustrations. The fifth and last part was to complete the same initial survey on apologetics and apologetic illustrations. As an incentive for completing all five parts, participants received \$100 to purchase apologetic books (a recommended book list was given).

### **Surveys: Parts 1 and 5**

To measure the change in attitude toward apologetics and the use of apologetic illustrations, participants completed a survey at the beginning of the project as their first step. That same survey was conducted again as the last step of the project, some four to five months after the first survey. The survey was presented and submitted electronically on a “form builder,” which simplified the response.

### **Sermon Reports: Parts 2 and 4**

Each Monday morning, participants were emailed a link to the “form builder” sermon report. Participants completed a simple sermon report if they had preached. The first question of the sermon report asked if they had used an apologetic illustration in their sermon. If their answer was “no,” then the report was completed and submitted. If the answer was “yes,” then they would describe the apologetic illustration with two or three sentences. When complete, the participants needed only to press “submit.” For the initial eight reports, participants who preached two times monthly were given permission, if necessary, to use sermons preached the prior month. Participants began submitting the final eight reports on the Sunday following the first two-hour session of the seminar. I also sent emails to encourage participants to continue with the reports. If a participant seemed to be slipping, I sent an encouraging email, and all responded positively.

### **Eight-Hour Seminar: Part 3**

The eight-hour Zoom seminar was conducted in two-hour increments for four weeks beginning October 27, 2020. Participants attended one of two Zoom classes offered during the week. The two options accommodated various schedules. Classes were also recorded for a few participants who missed a session or could not be present for the entire two-hour session.

### **Summary of Project Goals**

Four goals were necessarily successive for the completion of this project.

Fifteen pastors participated in the project with the following goals:

1. The first goal was to assess participants’ current preaching practice with regard to the use of apologetic illustrations in their sermons.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-hour seminar to teach the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching.
3. The third goal was to modify the pastors’ attitudes toward the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching.
4. The fourth goal was to increase the utilization of apologetic illustrations in preaching.



## **Goal 1 Results**

The first goal was to assess participants' use of apologetic illustrations in sermons before the seminar. All participants were asked to complete a brief sermon report each time they preached, before the seminar.<sup>2</sup> The pre-seminar sermon reports submitted by the fifteen participants totaled 120. According to these self-reports, of these 120 sermons, 47 included apologetic illustrations. As stated in percentage, 39 percent of the 120 pre-seminar sermons had an apologetic illustration. Goal 1 was successfully met.

## **Goal 2 Results**

The second goal was to develop an eight-hour seminar to teach the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching. This seminar taught apologetic worldviews, possible responses to common apologetic questions, the rationale for the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching, how to discover and respond to apologetic issues in the preaching text, and how to present apologetic illustrations. This goal was measured by a panel of three experts, an apologist, a homiletician, and a pastor. The panelists utilized a rubric to assess the biblical accuracy, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability of the seminar content for its intended purpose.<sup>3</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent was not initially met, then the material was to be revised until it met the standard.

During August and September of 2020, I developed the curriculum for the eight-hour seminar. The curriculum was developed using class information, papers I had written, books, and my own insight and experience. The eight hours were divided into twelve teaching lessons:

### **1. Introduction to Apologetics**

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> See appendix 2.

2. Apologetics in the New Testament
3. The Rationale for Use of Apologetic Illustrations
4. Worldviews and Apologetic Illustrations
5. Narrative and Apologetic Illustrations
6. The Existence of God and Apologetic Illustrations
7. Suffering and Evil and Apologetic Illustrations
8. The Resurrection of Jesus and Apologetic Illustrations
9. The Reliability of the New Testament and Apologetic Illustrations
10. Absolute Morality and Apologetic Illustrations
11. Sexuality and Apologetic Illustrations
12. The Lectionary and Apologetic Illustrations

Each lesson was designed to last approximately forty minutes.<sup>4</sup> The lessons contained more printed information than could be covered in a limited time. Participants were encouraged to read what I could not present. A least 25 percent of the lesson time was designated for the participants to practice creating apologetic illustrations based upon particular biblical texts.

The curriculum review panel consisted of three evaluators: a homiletician an apologist and a pastor. The homiletician was David Schmitt, homiletics professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The apologist was John Rasmussen, a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod pastor who received his DMin in apologetics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Richard Elseroad, pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, was the pastor on the panel.

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix 4 for basic outline of lesson plans.

<sup>5</sup> A point of interest: In a recent conversation with Rasmussen, I discovered that he attended a best practice conference that I organized in 2015. It was at this conference that he was inspired to pursue an advanced degree in apologetics!

On October 3, 2020, the panelists received the nearly 100-page detailed curriculum. The panel used a rubric to evaluate and make recommendations.<sup>6</sup> According to the rubric, the panelists evaluated the curriculum for biblical accuracy, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability. For biblical accuracy, the panelists evaluated if each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture and was faithful to the theology of the Bible. For scope, panelists evaluated if the curriculum content sufficiently covered each issue it was designed to address, and if the curriculum sufficiently covered apologetic illustrations. For teaching methodology, the panelists evaluated if each lesson was clear, containing a big idea about apologetic illustrations and provided opportunities for participant interaction with the material. For applicability, the panelists evaluated if the curriculum clearly detailed how to discover and respond to the apologetic issues in the text and context and if, at the end of the course, participants would be able to utilize apologetic illustrations.

Table 1. Original evaluation rubric results

Criteria	Insufficient	Requires Attention	Sufficient	Exemplary
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.	0	0	0	3
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.	0	1	0	2
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.	0	0	0	3
The curriculum sufficiently covers apologetic illustrations.	0	0	2	1
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea about apologetic illustrations.	0	0	1	2
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.	0	0	2	1
The curriculum clearly details how to discover and respond to the apologetic issues in the text and context.	0	1	0	2
At the end of the course, participants will be able to utilize apologetic illustrations.	0	0	3	0

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 2.

The panelists evaluated the curriculum by these levels: Insufficient, Requires Attention, Sufficient, Exemplary. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. This goal was achieved as 92 percent of the original curriculum met the sufficient or exemplary level. The 8 percent that required attention was significantly modified and improved.

All the panelists gave constructive criticism, recommendations, and encouragement, and I changed the curriculum accordingly. I am particularly indebted to David Schmitt, who encouraged me to develop a heuristic to help the participants think through the development and presentation of an apologetic illustration. With his help, we developed the following heuristic that the participants repeatedly used during the practice of apologetic illustration development: “They say,” “Scriptures Say,” “I say”

1. They say: name the opposing argument and give a fair description of the view
2. Scriptures say: start with the text and lead to the apologetic argument
3. I say: name and apply apologetic argument for listeners

Here is an illustration of employing this heuristic based upon Romans 8:18-27:

1. They say: Nonbelievers say that with all the suffering in the world, a good and loving God does not exist.
2. Scriptures say: There is much suffering in the world, but God exists and gives rich resources for the sufferer, including His Son and His death on the cross. Paul, one who has experienced much suffering, brings to our attention some powerful and rich Christian resources in the text.
3. I say: Atheism offers no resources to help with suffering. Let's see some of those God-given resources to help us when we suffer. . . . Then discuss four resources from Romans 8:18, 23, 24-25, 26-27.

Participants reported that this heuristic was most beneficial in their development of apologetic illustrations. That this heuristic, which was not in the initially evaluated curriculum, helped enable the participants to develop, utilize, and present apologetic illustrations effectively. Goal 2 was successfully met.

### Goal 3 Results

The third goal was to modify the pastors' attitude toward the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching. This goal was measured by administering a pre-and post-survey, which assessed the change in attitude toward apologetics and apologetic illustrations. The pre-survey was administered two months before the teaching sessions (sessions were for four weeks, two hours per week), and the post-survey was administered two months after the teaching session. Through awareness, teaching and practice, the goal was to modify the participants' attitude toward the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching. This goal was considered successfully met when the  $t$ -test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the pre-and post-survey scores.

The mean of the post-survey showed a slight increase over the mean of the pre-survey. The  $t$ -stat value (1.74553) is slightly higher than the  $t$ -critical one tale value (1.76131). However, the  $p$  one-tail value (0.051395) is higher than .05, indicating that the  $t$ -test did not show a statistically significant change in attitude in the participants for the use of apologetics in preaching ( $t_{(14)} = -1.74553, p < .051395$ ). Goal 3 was not successfully met.

Table 2.  $t$ -Test: paired two sample for means

	Pre-Survey	Post- Survey
Mean	61	63.73333
Variance	46	26.6381
Observations	15	15
Pearson Correlation	0.512171	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	14	
t Stat	-1.74553	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.051395	
t Critical one-tail	1.76131	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.102791	
t Critical two-tail	2.144787	

## Goal 4 Results

The fourth goal was to increase the utilization of apologetic illustrations in preaching. After the start of the apologetics seminar, pastors were encouraged and coached toward implementing apologetic illustrations in their preaching. Participants were also encouraged to use the heuristic, *They say, Scriptures say, I say*, to describe apologetic illustrations in their sermon reports. This goal was measured by weekly self-reporting forms to record the specific apologetic illustration in the sermons. The pre-training use of apologetic illustrations was utilized as the baseline to which the increase was compared. This goal was considered successfully met when the reported apologetic illustrations had increased by a minimum of 25 percent.

According to the 120 pre-seminar self-reports, 47 included an apologetic sermon illustration. Stated in percentages, 39 percent of the 120 pre-seminar sermons included an apologetic sermon illustration. For the 114 self-reports submitted post-start of the seminar, 75 included an apologetic illustration. As stated in percentage, 66 percent of the 114 sermons after the seminar's start included an apologetic illustration. The percentage increase from 39 percent pre-seminar apologetic illustrations to 66 percent post-start of seminar was 69 percent [formula:  $(\text{final value} - \text{starting value}) \div (\text{starting value}) \times 100 = \text{percent increase}$ ]. Goal 4 required a minimum of 25 percent increase in apologetic illustrations from pre-seminar reports to post-start seminar reports. With a 69 percent increase, goal 4 was successfully met. It should be noted that by regularly writing sermon reports, the participants were regularly reminded of apologetic illustrations. This may have positively influenced the number of apologetic illustrations. This project was not able to eliminate this awareness of apologetic illustrations. One way that this awareness could be minimized would be through an objective person listening to each sermon.

Table 3. Comparison of pre- and post-seminar apologetic illustrations

	Total Sermon Reports	Total Apologetic Illustrations	% of Sermons with Apologetic Illustrations	% increase in Apologetic Illustrations
Pre- Seminar	120	47	39%	---
Post-Start of Seminar	114	75	66%	69%

### Conclusion

The first goal was to assess participants' current preaching practice regarding the use of apologetic illustrations in their sermons, and this goal was successfully met with 39 percent of the 120 sermons having an apologetic illustration. The second goal was to develop an eight-hour seminar to teach the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching and this goal was successfully met as 92 percent of the initial curriculum met the sufficient or exemplary level. The third goal was to modify the pastors' attitude toward the use of apologetic illustrations in preaching, and this goal was not successfully met as a *t*-test determined that there was no statistically significant change in the pre- and post- survey results. The fourth goal was to increase the utilization of apologetic illustrations in preaching, and this goal was successfully met as there was a 69 percent increase in apologetic illustrations from the 120 pre-seminar reports to the 114 post-start seminar reports.

## CHAPTER 5

### MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

In this chapter I will evaluate the purpose of the project and the project's goals. I will also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the project and what I would do differently. I will conclude by reflecting upon what I experienced theologically and personally.

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

The project's purpose, to train pastors to use apologetic illustrations in sermons, is very important for those who hear sermons. After the project's completion, I was more convinced of this purpose than before the project's implementation. People need to hear apologetic reasoning. The one place where the pastor has the most contact with the congregation is in preaching. Preaching is an excellent place to share apologetic thoughts regularly. As listeners hear apologetic thoughts, they are strengthened in faith and supported to share their faith. They become more prepared, as Peter encourages, "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15).

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

The project's purpose determined the project goals. The first goal was to assess participants' current preaching practice with regard to the use of apologetic arguments in their sermons. This goal was necessary to establish a baseline of the use of apologetic illustrations in the participants' preaching. The completed goal was successful for fostering the project's purpose.



The second goal was to develop an eight-hour seminar to teach apologetic use in preaching. This goal was necessary to equip and encourage participants to use apologetic illustrations. I am appreciative of the curriculum evaluation by the panelists. The homiletician on the panel gave in-depth constructive criticism of the curriculum. He marked two areas as “Requires Attention.” One suggestion was to create and use a heuristic. We corresponded on this until both of us were pleased with a heuristic. After I made other suggested changes to the curriculum, he was unable to give further review. But this goal was successful in that the curriculum created advanced the project’s purpose.

The third goal was to modify the pastors’ attitude toward apologetic preaching. Change in attitude is difficult to measure. True attitudinal changes lead to changes in action. Said another way, changes in action indicate changes in attitude. Although the third goal as measured by the surveys was unsuccessful, the change in attitude was evidenced in the increase of apologetic illustrations. The third goal was not successful because of two significant problems with the survey. First, the survey was not specific enough to the development and use of apologetic illustrations. Second, I did not anticipate that the participants would answer “agree” or “strongly agree” to the majority of the pre-test survey questions. The scores of the pre-test surveys were so high that there was little room to grow on the post-survey. The pre-survey and the post-survey answers had very little room for variance. Arguably, the third goal was not necessary for the project’s purpose because the fourth goal tells more about attitude.

The fourth goal was to increase the utilization of apologetic sermon illustrations in preaching by 25 percent. The fourth goal, which demonstrated an increase in apologetic illustrations, is a greater indicator of a change in attitude than the survey results portray. This goal was vital to determine that the project’s purpose was fulfilled. This last goal indicates the overall success of the project.

## Strengths of the Project

A significant strength of the project was the purpose. Pastors need training in how to incorporate apologetic illustrations within sermons. Other pastors must also believe this as they signed up for the project and completed their role. This project was a small pilot study involving fifteen pastors. This project strengthened most participants in their utilization of apologetic illustrations. Expansion of this project is possible by either a written article or a seminar presentation to teach more pastors to utilize apologetics in sermons.

Another strength of the project was the use of the heuristic, *They say, The Scriptures say, I say*. This heuristic, developed in consultation with the homiletics professor on the panel, David Schmitt, gave the participants a way of thinking about apologetic illustrations. It gave participants a framework to discover apologetic illustrations and to clearly present them. The participants employed this heuristic and gave it positive feedback.

For five months, the participants at the least thought about including an apologetic illustration in their sermons. Participants were not just learning but were thinking and doing. This sustained length of time may have a long-term influence over some of the participants' preaching. A longitudinal study, if possible, might give more significant evidence of success. It would be interesting to see if a year or two years from now, at what frequency the participants have been incorporating apologetic illustrations.

Simplicity and frequent encouragement were two essential strengths for the completion of this project. Pastors are busy people, and none are looking for more work. I tried to make it as simple as possible to complete a sermon report. I sent out weekly emails asking for just two minutes to complete the report. The email contained a link so that participants would only have to press "submit" when they completed the report. I would often encourage them in the emails with examples of apologetic illustrations for use in future sermons. If I had complicated steps to report or had given no encouragement, I am sure that I would have had a much lower return rate of sermon reports. As it was, I had an

incredibly high return rate of 100 percent from each participant (in consideration that three participants preach twice a month).

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

Initially, I planned for an in-person, eight-hour, one-day seminar. However, with COVID-19 raging throughout the country, an in-person seminar was impossible. The Zoom meeting platform worked well. However, I could not do an eight-hour Zoom meeting. Thus, the seminar was divided into two-hour increments. There was some loss in continuity, and naturally some participants could not stay for the whole two hours. Also, discussions and attention spans on Zoom are different than in person. An in-person presentation would have been more effective for both the presenter and the participants. On the other hand, an in-person presentation would have changed the participation rate, as some would not have wanted to travel. It is undoubtedly easier to attend a meeting if participants are able to remain in their offices.

Another weakness was in the curriculum. I attempted to give a lot of information about apologetics so that participants would have material to use for illustrations. Apologetic topics consumed about two-thirds of the time and one-third of the time remained for discussing and practicing apologetic illustrations. A fifty-fifty split of the time between apologetics and illustrations would have given more time for illustration development.

The self-reporting of the apologetic illustrations has some flaws in methodology. If I could listen to 234 sermons, there certainly would be more accuracy and consistency in judging the illustrations. For the pre-seminar sermons, some participants were unsure as to what defined an apologetic illustration. Still, others thought they knew what an apologetic illustration was but had a different understanding than the project. At the beginning of the project, I did not give much information about apologetic illustrations because it could have prematurely influenced their preaching. So, with little instruction, I accepted their self-reports for my data. For the post-start of the seminar sermon reports, I

accepted their self-reports of the illustrations. This methodology's weakness could be lessened by more detailed reporting or by listening to all 234 sermons. These choices would require a much greater effort from the participants and me.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

I had an internal debate concerning the start of the post-seminar sermon reports. In a typical study, the pre-seminar reports would be submitted to establish the baseline data, then the seminar would take place, and lastly, the post-seminar reports would be submitted. Because the seminar was stretched out over four weeks, following this typical pattern would have made reporting more challenging. The participants were in the habit of submitting sermon reports. To pause that habit for one month would make it more difficult to restart. Also, I was teaching them to use apologetic illustrations from the first week of the seminar. It was helpful to reinforce the teaching by encouraging participants to submit reports. Furthermore, if I delayed until the seminar sessions were complete, I would have had difficulty getting the pastors back in the habit of reporting during one of the year's busiest times: Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas. I assuredly would have lost considerable participation in submitting sermon reports if I paused them during the seminar month. Therefore, I decided to start the second batch of sermon reports after the first session of the seminar. Perhaps some would criticize this decision, but it was beneficial for teaching, reinforcement purposes, and continual reception of sermon reports.

I would modify the survey so that it was more focused on apologetic illustrations. Much of the survey was focused on apologetics in general. I would at least alter some questions to focus more on including apologetics within sermons.

As stated previously, I would have preferred an in-person seminar. I would have had to work hard to get at least ten pastors together in one room for the eight-hour seminar. If successful, great, but if not, Zoom could have been a standby option. As it was, there was no in-person possibility, so by default, Zoom was the only possible choice.

Perhaps I could have one of the panelists present for an hour. For example, the homiletics professor could have brought tremendous insight from his experience. I thought that I had to be the only presenter because I was thinking of an in-person seminar. However, with Zoom, the professor could have presented or shared insight from his Concordia Seminary office in St. Louis. I believe that I missed an opportunity by not including him.

### **Theological Reflections**

In the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as defending the faith. In parables and other teachings, one sees Jesus using apologetic reasoning. Paul also effectively uses apologetics as described in Acts, as well as in his letters. In today's secular culture, pastors must use apologetics to reinforce believers' faith and help them be prepared to respond to questions asked of them. If they do not know that there are apologetic responses to common questions, then they will feel defeated before speaking of their faith. Perhaps the best place for apologetics to be utilized is in the pulpit. Preaching reaches the broadest population of the congregation. The use of apologetics in preaching does not need to exclude apologetics teaching in Bible study. Bible studies on apologetics are also essential, but in most cases, there is a smaller audience. This project shows that pastors can be encouraged and taught to utilize apologetic illustrations in their sermons. Sometimes sermons can be fully apologetic in orientation. This project did not address that homiletical issue.

### **Personal Reflections**

I have listened to many sermons by Tim Keller, author and former pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. I have been personally encouraged and inspired by his regular use of apologetics in preaching. In *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, Keller refers to preaching with apologetic "sidebars." The following are his words about apologetic illustrations that encouraged me:

If you sprinkle your preaching with these interesting, concise, yet penetrating asides, you will not only encourage secular listeners to return but also motivate Christians to bring their more secular friends to hear you, and you will also be giving believers a set of mini courses in how to handle their own doubts and answer friends' questions about their faith.<sup>1</sup>

Keller's encouragement to include these apologetic asides made sense to me, so I tried it. As I studied apologetics in my DMin courses, I was able to present more apologetic illustrations in my sermons. Listeners reported that the illustrations were helpful for their faith. Some reported that they had witness conversations with others based upon the apologetic illustrations. This feedback inspired me to continue to develop the use of apologetic illustrations. When I had to choose a topic for the project, it made sense for me to share this thinking with fellow pastors. In the Atlantic District, I have directed some pastoral continuing education programs; thus, it was natural for me to desire and be able to teach my fellow pastors. In the process, I improved my ability to develop illustrations and helped other pastors present apologetic illustrations in their preaching. I give thanks to the Holy Spirit for bringing various strands of my life together that provided the necessary opportunities, encouragement, and tools to lead this project. If God wills, this project may prove beneficial for listeners in congregations for years to come. I am thankful to the Lord for my role and feel that I could not have selected a better project.

### **Conclusion**

This project succeeded in its stated purpose: to train at least ten pastors of the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to regularly utilize apologetic preaching. Goal 3, a change in participants' attitude, did not succeed because of weaknesses in the survey. However, the post-start seminar reports show an increase of 69 percent in apologetic illustrations above the pre-seminar reports. Furthermore, the pastors' unsolicited comments were full of thanks for the project and described the helpfulness in their thinking about sermon development. This study was not only helpful to the

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 114.

participants but also for their listeners, hopefully for years to come. In addition, the project was beneficial to my preaching. I am a pastor in the Atlantic District, and this project undoubtedly improved my use of apologetics in preaching. I pray that anyone who reads or uses any part of this project may also benefit from it.

## APPENDIX 1

### WEEKLY SERMON APOLOGETIC EVALUATION

This appendix was a weekly self-report to describe the individual pastor's use of apologetic preaching in the sermon.



## WEEKLY SERMON EVALUATION FORM

Name:

Date of Sermon:

Check one:     I used an apologetic illustration  
                   I did not use an apologetic illustration

If you used an apologetic illustration, please describe in two or three sentences:

Please press “submit” when complete.

THANK YOU!!!

## APPENDIX 2

### TEACHING APOLOGETIC PREACHING EVALUATION RUBRIC

The curriculum evaluation rubric assessed the biblical accuracy, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability of the seminar content for its intended purpose teaching and encouraging apologetic preaching.

TEACHING APOLOGETIC PREACHING  
EVALUATION RUBRIC

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Teaching Apologetic Preaching Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical Accuracy</b>					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
<b>Scope</b>					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers apologetic preaching.					
<b>Teaching Methodology</b>					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
<b>Applicability</b>					
The curriculum clearly details how to discover and respond to the apologetic issues in the text and context.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to utilize apologetic preaching.					

Other Comments:

## APPENDIX 3

### APOLOGETIC PREACHING SURVEY

The following instrument is the Apologetics Preaching Survey of pastors. It consists of statements to be answered via a five-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose was to assess participants' knowledge and perspective toward apologetics and apologetic preaching. This survey was given twice to participating pastors, before they began their first eight sermon reports and when they completed their last eight sermon reports, about a five-month interval.

## SURVEY ON APOLOGETICS AND USE IN PREACHING

### Agreement to Participate

This research is being conducted by Victor Nelson for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Directions:** Please give your opinion on the statements by circling your agreement using the following scale:

SD = Strongly Disagree

D = Disagree

U = Undecided

A = Agree

SA = Strongly Agree

- |   |    |   |   |   |    |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. I analyze the worldviews of news and events to inform my preaching.                                | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 2. I often seek to discover the apologetic thought within the preaching text or context.              | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 3. Apologetic illustrations are helpful for the faith of parishioners.                                | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 4. I enjoy reading apologetic books.  | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 5. I seek to understand various worldviews.   | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 6. In preaching, it is helpful to contrast the Christian worldview with other worldviews.             | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 7. Apologetic illustrations will help parishioners in their witness conversations.                    | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 8. The church does not have to explain its position on homosexuality.                                 | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 9. I would welcome additional training in apologetics.  | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 10. I am prepared to give an explanation to a member who believes in same-sex marriage.               | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 11. I am prepared to give an explanation to a member who believes in living together before marriage. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

- |   |    |   |   |   |    |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 12. I am prepared to give historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus to a doubting adult.                                | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 13. I am prepared to give evidence for God's existence to a doubting science major.   | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 14. I am prepared to give a response to a person who says they cannot believe in God because of all the suffering in the world. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 15. I desire to grow in my ability to express apologetic arguments in preaching.  | SD | D | U | A | SA |

APPENDIX 4  
UTILIZING APOLOGETICS IN PREACHING  
SEMINAR: BASIC OUTLINES

**Part 1: Introduction to Apologetics**

**1. What is Apologetics?**

Apologetics – Greek: ἀπολογία – to make a defense of a person or an idea, to make a reasoned response to an objection.

Biblical examples of words with the root of ἀπολογία:

**2. What are the Purposes of Apologetics?**

Craig describes three purposes<sup>1</sup>:

Shaping Culture

Strengthening Believers

Evangelizing Unbelievers

**3. Apologetics and Evangelism**

**4. Pre-Evangelism Apologetics**

Cultural Plausibility Structures

**5. Post –Evangelism Apologetics**

**6. Law – Gospel and Apologetic Illustrations**

**7. Six Approaches or Methods of Apologetics**

The Classical Method

The Evidential Method

The Cumulative Method

The Reformed Epistemological Method

The Presuppositional Method

The Fideist Method

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<sup>1</sup> William Lane Craig. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15-23.

## **Part 2: Apologetics in the New Testament**

### **1. How did Jesus use an apologetic argument in each of the following situations?**

John 3:1-15, Mark 2:1-12, Matthew 22:41-46

### **2. How did Luke use an apologetic argument in each of the following passages?**

Luke 1:1-4, Luke 3:1-2

### **3. Apologetics in the Acts of the Apostles**

Peter defended the coming of the Spirit against accusations of drunkenness (2:13-21).

Peter defended the resurrection of Jesus using Davidic psalms (2:22-34).

Peter defended the faith before the Sanhedrin (4:5-12).

Peter defended before the Sanhedrin the obligation to proclaim the gospel (5:27-32).

Stephen defended the Hebrew basis of faith in Jesus before the Sanhedrin (7:1-50).

Saul defended in Damascus that Jesus is the Son of God (9:19-22).

Peter defended to the Jewish Christians the baptism of Gentiles (10:47-11:18).

Paul defended the faith to Jews in Pisidian Antioch (13:14-41).

Paul defended the gospel of grace against the circumcision party (15:1-12).

Paul defended his own rights as a Roman citizen (16:35-40).

Paul defended that Jesus is the Christ in Thessalonica (17:1-4).

Paul defended the faith against philosophers and idolaters in Athens (17:16-31).

Paul defended that Jesus is the Christ to Corinthian Jews (18:5-6).

Paul defended in Ephesus the Christian concept of the kingdom of God (19:8-9).

Paul defended his faith at the temple in Jerusalem (22:1-21).

Paul defended his faith before the Sanhedrin (23:1-10).

Paul defended himself before Governor Felix (24:10-21).

Paul defended himself before Governor Festus (25:8-12).

Paul defended the faith before King Agrippa and Governor Festus (26:1-29).

Paul defended the faith to the Jews in Rome (28:23-31).

### **4. Paul's Apologetic Presentation in Athens - The Centerpiece of Acts**

Cultural Awareness While Waiting

Paul Employs Theological Argumentation in the Synagogue (Acts 17:17a)

Paul Applies the Gospel in the Agora (Acts 17:17b-18)

Paul's Respectful Attitude Leads to the Areopagus (Acts 17:19-21)

A Respectful Attitude toward the Areopagus (Acts 17:22)

Paul Connects through His Cultural Awareness (Acts 17:23)

Paul Employs Theological Argumentation to the Areopagus (Acts 17:24-27)

Paul Demonstrates Cultural Awareness Before the Areopagus (Acts 17:28)

Paul Argues against Idolatry (Acts 17:29)

Paul Brings the Gospel to the Areopagus (Acts 17:30, 31)

The Responses to Paul's Speech (Acts 17:32-34)



## **Part 3: The Rationale for Use of Apologetic Illustrations**

### **1. What is an Apologetic Illustration?**

By apologetic illustration, I do not mean a story that enlightens a concept. An apologetic illustration is a relatively brief defense of a Christian teaching or a defense of a dynamic of the Christian worldview. Sometimes it compares the Christian perspective with a secular thought or another religious teaching. An apologetic illustration may compare a Christian worldview with the secular worldview or another religion's worldview. Sometimes an apologetic illustration may compare the Christian narrative with another narrative. Tim Keller uses the phrase: "apologetic sidebar" to describe a brief halt to the flow of the sermon. During this brief halt, the preacher interjects an apologetic thought related to the text. This thought gives a defense of a Christian doctrine. After the brief thought, the normal flow of the sermon continues.

### **2. Designing an apologetic illustration by using: *They say, Scriptures say, I say***

*They say* – name the opposing argument and give fair description

*Scriptures say* - start with the text and lead to the apologetic argument

*I say* - name and apply apologetic argument for listeners

Discussion on Employing Design - Luke 4:1-13, Isaiah 1:16-18, Romans 8:18-27, Luke 20:27-39

### **3. Exercises:** Employ *They say, Scriptures say, I say* for Mark 1:16-20

### **4. Apologetics Helps Believers Understand Culture**

### **5. Apologetics Helps Believers in Their Personal Faith**

Apologetics can Strengthen Faith

Apologetics can Relieve Doubts

Apologetics can Respond to Secular Narratives

### **6. Apologetics Helps Believers in Learning Apologetic Arguments**

Apologetics Informs Listeners that Reasoned Answers Exist

The Listener Learns Apologetic Arguments

### **7. Apologetics Helps Believers in their Evangelistic Efforts**

Obstacles Discourage Evangelism -

Christians are to be Ready - (1 Pet 3:15)

God Breaks Through Immanent Frame

**8. Exercise:** Write down at least 5 transitional phases to interject an apologetic illustration or sidebar: (Examples: By the way... Don't miss this assumption... In contrast, many people around us believe...)

## Part 4: Worldviews and Apologetic Illustrations

### 1. Definitions of Worldview

Example: Tinted glasses

Sire: A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Worldview and Christology

### 3. Questions That Help in Understanding a Worldview

Sire:

1. What is the prime reality – the really real?
2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person at death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right or wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?
8. What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this

worldview?<sup>3</sup>

Cabal:

1. Where do I come from?
2. What's wrong with life?
3. What's the solution?
4. What happens when I die?<sup>4</sup>

### 4. Comparison of Worldviews – Worldview chart

### 5. Paul Witnessed to Those with Different Worldviews

### 6. How Worldviews Help People in Faith and Witness

### 7. Incorporating Worldviews Into Preaching

**8. Exercise:** Employ *They say, Scriptures say, I say* to find and describe two worldview illustrations from Matthew 6:25-33.

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<sup>2</sup> James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Theodore Cabal, Apologetics Class, January 15, 2019.

## Part 5 Narrative and Apologetic Illustrations

### 1. What is Narrative Apologetics?

### 2. What is the Difference between Worldview and Narrative Apologetics?

### 3. Narrative Apologetics and Christology

#### 4. Three Metanarratives

The pessimistic secular story

The optimistic secular story

The story of pluralistic and moral therapeutic spirituality<sup>5</sup>

#### 5. Five narratives culturally assumed to be true

The rationality narrative

The history narrative

The society narrative

The morality or justice narrative

The identity narrative<sup>6</sup>

#### 6. Smaller Stories

The story of consumerism.

The story of achievement.

The story of romance.<sup>7</sup>

#### 7. Discovering and Creating Stories

#### 8. Entering and sharing the greatest story

#### 9. Countering dominate secular metanarratives with stories

#### 10. Using Parables as apologetic stories

#### 11. Exercises:

Discover two possible stories from each texts: John 15:12-17, John 1:43-47

Find two stories can you counter with this parable: Luke 18:9-14

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<sup>5</sup> Joshua D. Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk about God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 57-59.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 129-33.

<sup>7</sup> Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 60.

## Part 6: The Existence of God and Apologetic Illustrations

*God has provided enough evidence in this life to convince anyone willing to believe, yet he has also left some ambiguity so as not to compel the unwilling.* Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek in: *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*

1. The Choice of a Lifetime
2. Look at the Big Things!
3. Look at the Little Things!
4. Look in Your Mind!
5. Look in Your Soul!
6. Look in the Bible and see the Savior!
7. Look at Anything!

Anthropic Principle (Fine Tuning)

### 7. Apologetic Illustrations for God's Existence

Science News Articles  
Every preaching text  
Respond to An Atheist Perspective

### 8. Exercise:

Prepare a brief apologetic illustration on God's existence connected to each of these four texts: Zephaniah 1:7-16, Psalm 90:1-12, 1 Thess. 5:1-11, Matt. 25:14-30. For each, use the following formula:

*They Say...*

*Scriptures Say...*

*I Say...*

## **Part 7: Suffering and Evil and Apologetic Illustrations**

(A Major Resource for this Presentation: Walking with God through Pain and Suffering, by Tim Keller)

All concerns about suffering must be handled with the utmost sensitivity, with love, and with truth.

### **1. Causes of Suffering**

### **2. Faith resources for the Christian sufferer**

- A. A Sure Hope
- B. Scriptures
- C. Prayers
- D. Examples to Follow
- E. Christian Fellowship
- F. Transformation
- G. The suffering of Christ

### **3. The Path for the Suffering Christian**

### **4. Results of Suffering for the Christian**

### **5. Resolution of Suffering for the Christian**

### **6. The Bible knows Suffering**

**7. Jesus Knows Suffering** – The suffering and death of Jesus is at the center of the Christian faith

### **8. Exercise:**

Two people with quadriplegia from accidents

Atheist – list of non-medical resources to help:

Christian – list of non-medical resources to help:

### **9. Other Worldviews of Suffering - chart**

### **10. Philosophical Perspective on Suffering and Evil**

**11. Exercise:** Write one apologetic illustration about suffering or evil in relationship to the following texts: Genesis 50:15, 1 Peter 2:21-25, Luke 13:1-5. For each, use the following formula: *They Say...Scriptures Say...I Say...*

## Part 8 The Resurrection of Jesus and Apologetic Illustrations

### 1. Did Jesus exist or is he a myth like Santa and the Easter Bunny?

The New Testament  
Josephus  
Tacitus  
Other early sources

### 2. Did Jesus die on the cross?

### 3. Did Jesus rise from the dead?

### 4. Twelve historical results of the resurrection of Jesus

The Empty Tomb  
The Missing Body  
Women as the First Witnesses  
The Transformation of the Disciples  
The Suffering and Death of the Disciples  
The Eyewitness Accounts  
The Early Reports  
The Dramatic Transformation of Paul  
The Explosive growth of the Church in Jerusalem  
The Rapid Spread of the Church throughout the Mediterranean Region  
The Abrupt Cultural Changes  
The Blessings Experienced Today

The cumulative effect of the evidence

**5. Exercise:** Write one apologetic illustration about the existence, death, or resurrection of Jesus in relationship to the texts below. For each, use the following formula: *They Say...Scriptures Say...I Say...*

Matthew 16:21  
Luke 4:16, 17  
Mark 16:1-8

## **Part 9 The Reliability of the New Testament and Apologetic Illustrations**

### **1. The Dating – Were the Gospels written 40-65 years after the events described?**

Arguments and Counter-Arguments

### **2. The Memories – Were the memories and stories changed during this long period of oral transmission?**

Arguments and Counter-Arguments

### **3. The Eyewitnesses - Did eyewitnesses die without recording their experiences?**

Arguments and Counter-Arguments

### **4. The Disciples – Were the twelve disciples illiterate peasants who could not have written the Gospels?**

Arguments and Counter-Arguments

### **5. The Writers – Did the Gospel writers live in other lands and never meet eyewitnesses?**

Arguments and Counter-Arguments

### **6. The Message – Do the Gospels tell more about the particular early church communities than the events in Jesus' life?**

Arguments and Counter-Arguments

### **7. Conclusion of arguments**

**8. Exercise:** Write one apologetic illustration about the Gospels in relation to the texts below. For each, use the following formula: *They Say...Scriptures Say...I Say...*

Matthew 13:3-9

Mark 8:31-33

Luke 19:1-10

## Part 10 Absolute Morality and Apologetic Illustrations

Questions to be considered: Isn't right and wrong situational? Doesn't right and wrong depend upon what the culture says and the circumstance? Can something be right for one person and wrong for another? Is there absolute truth? Most younger people were trained to believe that there is no real right or wrong – are they right or wrong?

### 1. Some say morality is situational

### 2. Some say morality is an evolutionary development.

### 3. Implications of believing there is no absolute morality

### 4. Truths about Truth<sup>8</sup>

Truth is discovered, not invented.

Truth is transcultural.

Truth is unchanging even though our beliefs about truth change.

Beliefs cannot change a fact, no matter how sincerely they are held.

Truth is not affected by the attitude of the one professing it.

All truths are absolute truths.

### 5. Eight Reasons that we know the Moral Law Exists<sup>9</sup>

### 6. The Moral Law is written on every heart

### 7. If there is a Moral Law, God exists!

1. Every law has a law giver.
2. There is a Moral Law.
3. Therefore, there is a Moral Law Giver.

### 8. The question to ask to those who deny the Moral Law

**9. Exercise:** Write one apologetic illustration the Moral Law or morality in relation to the texts below. For each, use the following formula: *They Say...Scriptures Say...I Say...*

Matthew 7:12, Mark 7:1-8, Romans 3:21-26

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<sup>8</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 37.

<sup>9</sup> Geisler and Turek: *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 172.



## Part 11 Sexuality and Apologetic Illustrations

### Introduction

#### 1. The Church is under siege in the sexual area.

I believe that the church needs a newer and better defense of God's plan for sex to take place within marriage between one man and one woman. This presentation is not the apologetic that is needed but does include apologetic thoughts on this topic. As is said, a good marriage is perhaps the best apologetic for today. How do we preach about sexual issues? Very carefully!!! **It is almost impossible to make a quick apologetic reference to sexuality.** The sin of the church against those with same-sex attraction may need to be acknowledged.

#### 2. A Passage to reference: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

In verse 9 and 10, there is a warning against all types of sin, including sexual immorality, adultery, and the practice of homosexuality. The stark warning is that those who do such unrighteous deeds will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul reminds his past and present readers that some of them were among this group. But they were washed in the waters of baptism, they were made holy (sanctified) in the blood of Jesus, and they were made right with God (justified) through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This is God's very kind invitation to all struggling sinners, gay or straight. Let Jesus wash away your sin, let Him make you holy, and let Him make you right with God.

#### 3. Heterosexual Sins

#### 4. The Tragic Results of Extramarital Sex

#### 5. Adultery is relative?

#### 6. The Churches' response to heterosexual sin

#### 7. Is happiness as justification of same-sex sexual relationships?

#### 8. Why does the God of the Bible condemn homosexual behavior?

Homosexual acts risk the health of the participants.  
Homosexual acts are against God's creation.  
Homosexual acts, by their very nature, reject procreation.  
Homosexual acts are never "one flesh" intercourse.  
Homosexual acts cannot represent oneness with God.  
Homosexual Relationships Cannot Symbolize God and His People.

#### 9. Won't Jesus accept homosexual relationships?

#### 10. The Bible is clear.

#### 11. The Christian Path Forward for Any Desiring A Relationship With the Living God

## Part 12 The Lectionary and Apologetic Illustrations

### 1. The Lectionary is designed to bring Christ to His people

### 2. What are the main apologetics topics?

Any area of Christian teaching can be in need of an apologetic response. Here is a list of the common areas that need defending in our world (not in any particular order):

1. Worldview
2. The Existence of God
3. Suffering and Evil
4. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus
5. The reliability of the Scriptures
6. Absolute Truth
7. The Moral Law
8. Various Narratives
9. Sex and Marriage
10. Science and Christianity
11. Evolution
12. Judgement and Hell
13. Exclusiveness of Christianity
14. The Present-Day and Historic Oppression of Christianity
15. Hypocrisy of Christians
16. Are there Miracles?
17. The Trinity
18. What is a Human Being?

### 3. Exercise: For each of the 17 upcoming lectionary texts below, record (using the numbers 1-18, in the chart above) at least two apologetic issues connected to the text.

Last Sunday of Church Year, Nov. 22: I Cor. 15:20–28, Matt. 25:31–46

Thanksgiving Day Phil. 4:6–20, Luke 17:11–19

Advent 1, Nov. 29: 1 Cor. 1:3–9, Mark 11:1–10 (Or Mark 13:24–37)

Advent 2, Dec. 6, 2 Peter 3:8–14, Mark 1:1–8

Advent 3, Dec. 13, 1 Thess. 5:16–24, John 1:6–8, 19–28

Advent 4, Dec. 20, Rom. 16:25–27, Luke 1:26–38

Christmas Eve, 1 John 4:7–16, Matt. 1:18–25

Christmas Day, Titus 2:11–14, Luke 2:1–14

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## ABSTRACT

### TEACHING PASTORS OF THE ATLANTIC DISTRICT OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD TO UTILIZE APOLOGETIC ILLUSTRATIONS IN PREACHING

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This project sought to train pastors of the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod to use apologetic illustrations in their sermons. Chapter 1 presents the need for apologetics within the region of the Atlantic District, and the lack of pastoral training in using apologetics within the sermon and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides an exegesis of Acts 17:16-34, where Paul employs apologetic arguments in Athens. Chapter 3 presents the blessings given to the listeners through apologetic illustrations in preaching. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals. This project sought to train pastors to regularly employ apologetic illustrations in their sermons so that their listeners are strengthened in faith and witness.

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