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REVITALIZING EVANGELISM THROUGH APOLOGETICS
TRAINING AT FORESTPARK COMMUNITY CHURCH
IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

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Donald Raymond Bledsoe
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Donald Raymond Bledsoe

Read and Approved by:

Andrew T. Walker (Faculty Supervisor)

Bradley G. Green

Date _____

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PREFACE

I would like to thank my wife, Derema, for her love, patience, kindness, and editing skills throughout my seminary time. Without her guidance and feedback, I would never have made it. The love she shows constantly as I work through my studies is simply amazing. Seminary is a big commitment in time, money, and study, and she always encouraged me through the tough spots and celebrated my achievements. It takes a special kind of love and commitment for a seminary wife, and I am so blessed by God to have Derema.

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I greatly appreciate the feedback and comradery that I have received from my fellow doctoral students as we travel through this program together. It continues to be a unique experience to travel along this road with such a fine group of men and building relationships along the way. We all have different backgrounds and experiences that enable us to learn in a broader and more comprehensive way. There are pastors, teachers, church leaders, and others in our group and I am thankful for that diversity. I want to thank The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for allowing me in and molding me

into a leader for God's Word into the world and deeping my understanding of what Christian life is supposed to look like.

Finally, and foremost, I want to thank Jesus and His work on the cross that insured my salvation. I thank God for creating me, protecting me, and giving me a purpose in life. He has always held me in His arms and guided me to where He wants me, despite my efforts to the contrary. I want to thank the Holy Spirit that lives within me that keeps my convictions true and faithful. Without God, I can do nothing.

Don Bledsoe

Louisville, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Forestpark Community Church's mission statement is to reach lost and disconnected people in order to help them become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Forestpark Community Church (FPCC) seeks to connect these people to both God and other people to establish authentic and meaningful relationships. The church's slogan, "Faith and Fellowship," exemplifies this desire to bring people to God through the teaching and preaching of the Word and creating an atmosphere conducive to starting and building relationships with others. The pastor, Ronnie Caswell, is a committed teacher that fully believes the truth of the Bible and uses expository preaching to get messages across to the congregation. A number of small groups teach throughout the week as well. Topics include sessions on specific Bible books or general subjects such as marriage, church to culture relationships, and other theological subjects.

Context

Ronnie Caswell and his wife, Julie, founded FPCC in their Lyndon area apartment in 1992. The church had its start as a Bible study with a smattering of other Christ believers. As the ministry attracted more people, a larger facility was sought. FPCC began serving out of a hotel and continued to grow. Within one year, FPCC acquired its own church property in the Jeffersontown area section called Bluegrass Park. FPCC continued to thrive there until 2009, when it accepted the property donation from Watterson Trail Baptist Church. Presently, FPCC is situated in Fern Creek off Watterson Trail and Bardstown Road. There are family houses and apartments in short walking distance from the church, but few from those homes are church members.

FPCC has always been driven by serving the regional community and the city of Louisville with its various ministries. These events were typically family and friend gatherings on the FPCC campus, outreach booths at small-town fairs, food bank projects throughout the year (especially during the holidays), and prison ministries. Several members of the church are also involved in the Emmaus Community as well as FCA motocross. Further away from home, there were several annual mission trips to Central America organized by church leadership and a career missionary, named Terry Dupont, stationed in Honduras. These were thriving ministries and well organized by those involved. Over time, some of the events and outreach projects dwindled as membership in the church shifted. When the lay leaders that organized these programs left, there was no one trained to take their place and carry on the work. Many of the members that left departed abruptly and therefore created a vacuum in the ministry position they held. FPCC still maintains a number of its community service aspects, but the evangelistic and missionary efforts have taken the largest hit and are in need of revitalization.

The main factor leading to the decline of evangelistic outreach is education. No one is currently equipped to train others to organize and oversee evangelistic ministries. By properly training interested individuals and getting people out on missions and outreach, FPCC can again make an impact on the surrounding community and anywhere else members travel. Resources are plentiful to FPCC members in the logistics of ministry projects. Once a person has become motivated by the theological reasons behind evangelism and knows the procedures for the task, it is more likely that they will start a community or international mission project. Without that education, the person may not feel that they have the knowledge to lead a project or may be intimidated by the prospect.

This new set of training materials will be formulated with an emphasis on using apologetics in evangelistic encounters. Apologetics training makes for more effective evangelism because it gives reasonable answers to questions that the secular world poses. Apologetics helps make Christianity look reasonable and true to the skeptic, the agnostic,

atheist, and to people of other faiths. Secular people especially think religions are based on fairy dust and wishful thinking, but Christian apologetics shows reason behind the belief, and it is not blind. Apologetics can even help the Christian understand and grow in faith by appealing to the rational component of the mind. To enable FPCC to be a more effective tool for spreading God's Word, the first thing people need to be made aware of is the theological imperative to take the Word to all nations. This imperative should provide the motivation to act. Second, FPCC will provide the means to carry out the imperative with proper training in evangelism with its roots in apologetics to make a more effective impact on the non-believing community the church often encounters. Finally, to lessen the impact of departing lay leaders, the training will also emphasize the importance and practice of maintaining a plurality of individuals with the knowledge of apologetics-based evangelism. This three-tier plan should serve to revitalize the evangelistic efforts of FPCC now and in the future.

Rationale

As detailed in the previous section, there is a need to revitalize effective evangelistic efforts and increase education at FPCC. Education and increased evangelism is necessary for church growth and is mandated by Scripture. In Matthew 28, Jesus told the gathered disciples to teach all nations God's Word just as the disciples had been taught. Jesus predicts his disciples' fulfillment of this command in Acts 1:8. Christians have historically taken Matthew 28 as a clear order to spread God's Word to everyone in the world. The Great Commission passages also emphasize proper teaching of God's Word and to not make simple converts, but to make disciples. Presenting the Word to people and having them respond and convert is wonderful, but disciples tend to make more disciples and thereby further the aim of the Great Commission. The focus on discipleship would also serve to alleviate the problem of leadership vacuums when membership at FPCC changes.

Training disciples requires foundational knowledge of the Word and explanations of how the faith is to be understood. It is therefore important to have a congregation that understands theology to the point of being able to teach it to others well and answer the multitude of questions the recent convert will have. This deeper understanding of theology applies to the adult members as well as the youth. The youth are important because they are going to be confronted with the secular ideology as they enter high school and especially college.

Evangelism is biblically commanded by the Great Commission and apologetics is the natural companion to evangelism. Apologetics is also biblically supported in 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,” and in Paul’s sermon on the Areopagus. Paul, delivering his message in Acts 17 to the pagans assembled, used apologetic methods to find common ground with them as an inroad to the gospel. Peter’s proclamation in his first letter uses the Greek word *apologian* in an evangelistic sense. Peter wanted the gospel proclaimed to all, but also knew there would be questions asked about it; therefore, he advised people to be ready to answer inquiries of all types, coupled with the story of the life-changing impact of the gospel in their lives. The majority of Acts 17 focuses on Paul’s evangelism to the Greeks at Berea, Thessalonica, and Athens. In Thessalonica, Paul reasoned from the Scriptures with the Jews in the synagogue for three Sabbaths. He explained to them how Jesus was the Messiah they were waiting for. In Berea, after the Word was delivered, the people engaged the Scriptures to verify what Paul had said was true. It was in Athens when Paul spoke to Jews and Greeks about the faith. The philosophers there were intrigued by his words and longed for an explanation.

There seem to be two distinct types of apologetics in the Bible; the type that appeals to the intellect employed by Paul and the type that appeals to the personal or emotional side as shown by Peter. While there are these two types, it is clear both are tied directly to evangelistic efforts. Each one has its use based on context and the evangelistic

situation one may find himself in. The apologetic backbone of evangelistic training is aimed at teaching a person to respond to some of the most common questions that arise in theological discussions. Among these would be variations on the problem of evil and suffering, the exclusive claims of faith in Jesus as the only path to heaven, and others. One can also engage in an apologetic discussion with virtually no knowledge of the subject. The evangelist can simply ask the other person what they believe and then contrast it with his Christian beliefs. That is the basics of faith defense. The apologetics techniques taught will be aimed at supporting the efforts of evangelism at any level.

Education in the knowledge of the Scriptures is emphasized in many passages of the Bible. The wisdom books, such as Proverbs, endlessly speak on the virtues of the knowledge of God. Luke 2:52 is an example from Jesus' early life about education: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Similarly, the act of teaching is also in profound quantity in the Bible. In the second Pauline epistle to Timothy, Paul says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). This passage illustrates the primacy of teaching from the Word. All disciples will receive training that is strictly founded in God's Word and not speculations. FPCC is a Bible-believing ministry that affirms biblical inerrancy, infallibility, and inspiration by the Holy Spirit to the human authors of the sixty-six books.

The desired end result of this training is to re-ignite evangelistic interests in FPCC and equip those with the desire to go forth. After this renewed zeal for evangelism, FPCC can return to its mission of reaching lost and disconnected people in order to help them become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. In addition, the emphasis on discipleship will lessen the impact of leadership departures on outreach ministries.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to effectively educate members of Forestpark Community Church in apologetics-based evangelism to better serve the kingdom through active outreach in Louisville, Kentucky.

Goals

The three goals were designed to increase the theological knowledge and evangelistic efforts among the members of Forestpark Community Church. These goals were as follows:

1. The first goal was to assess the current apologetic and evangelistic knowledge among members of FPCC.
2. The second goal was for the elders to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip adults and youth on how to properly use apologetics in evangelistic encounters.
3. The third goal was to equip FPCC members with apologetics for the purposes of evangelism.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the current apologetic and evangelistic knowledge among members of FPCC. This goal was measured by administering a written survey called the Bedrock of Christian Apologetics Assessment (BCAA).¹ The survey consisted of twenty apologetic statements based on the six-point Likert scale and was analyzed by a team of three elders using a rubric to find strengths and weaknesses of the current knowledge base. This goal was considered successfully met when twenty members completed the survey and the inventory had been analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the current apologetic knowledge among FPCC members.

The second goal was for two elders to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip adults and youth on how to properly use apologetics in evangelistic encounters.

¹ 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.

The curriculum covered the basics of theology, evangelism, several common apologetic arguments, how to work the arguments into evangelistic conversations, and how to research resources for further study. This goal was measured by the expert panel of two different FPCC elders who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.² 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 benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to equip FPCC members with apologetics for the purposes of evangelism. This goal was measured by administering the BCAA³ as a pre- and post-survey to measure FPCC members' level of knowledge, confidence, and motivation to share the gospel. Additionally, the elder team engaged the members with simulated evangelistic encounters of various types and assess the strong and weak points for further training before field experience. The elders determined the newly trained members level of competency utilizing an evaluation rubric. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. As well, this goal was successfully met when each student scores at the sufficient or above level on the evaluation rubric.

Definitions

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Creationism. *Creationism* is the term for the belief that God created the world as attested in the Bible. The Young Earth Creation view argues that God made the universe in six, twenty-four-hour days, 6,000 to 100,000 years ago. Old Earth Creationism

² See appendix 2.

³ See appendix 1.

contends that God created the earth 3.8 billion years ago and the days spoken of in Genesis are meant to have a range of time spans in their interpretation.

Theodicy. *Theodicy* are arguments asserting that God is wholly good despite the existence of evil in the world. The arguments typically aim to demonstrate that God has valid reasons for allowing evil to exist.

Conclusion

Apologetics provides another means of proclaiming God's Word in a rational manner, thus enforcing the idea that Christianity involves both one's head and heart, mind and soul, reason and faith. In the following chapters, the resources discussed will strengthen the Christian's ability and confidence to evangelize effectively through apologetic methods. Chapter 2 offers biblical justification for the use of apologetics as a foundation for evangelism. Chapter 3 shows the historical use of apologetics when Christians are faced with a hostile culture.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR
APOLOGETICS TO STRENGTHEN
EVANGELISM

Apologetics appeals to both rational knowledge and emotions in clarifying Christian beliefs. An exegesis of Acts 17:16-33 and 1 Peter 3:15 shows that the apologetic practice of combining rational knowledge with emotional appeal is more effective than using either aspect alone in reaching the non-believer. This combination shows that being in Christ gives hope, which is outwardly recognizable by others and causes believers to stand apart from non-believers.

Paul in Athens and at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-33)

During Paul's second missionary journey he ventured to Galatia, Thessalonica, Berea, and other cities before coming to Athens. In Athens he encountered the Greek philosophical systems. Acts 17:16-21 reads,

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean." (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

Paul's visit to Athens was significant, even though the city was no longer the great cultural epicenter it was four hundred years before Paul. Rome had obtained control of the known world at this time, yet Athens was able to retain its art, philosophy, and intellectual yearnings. It was on this ripe ground that Paul delivered his evangelistic

messages to the Greeks in ways they could relate to. In verse 16, Paul observed the fact that this city was full of statues and monuments dedicated to the pagan gods. He was repulsed by this pervasive display of idols. In his commentary on Acts, John Polhill states, “For Paul, Jew that he was with his strong monotheism and distaste for graven images, the scene was most unappealing. The NIV is too gentle in saying that he was ‘greatly distressed’ (v. 16). The Greek word Luke used is much stronger (ράροξύνω). We get our word “paroxysm” from it. Paul was ‘infuriated’ at the sight.”¹ Theologian F. F. Bruce, in his Acts commentary, agrees with Polhill: “Whatever Paul may have felt in the way of artistic appreciation—and his education had not fostered any capacity for this—the feeling that was uppermost in his mind as he walked here and there through the violet-crowned city was one of indignation: the city was full of idols, dedicated to the worship of gods that were no gods.”² Despite Paul’s feelings on the amount of pagan gods represented in Athens, he does not shy away from the challenge the Gentiles represent; rather, he uses the idols to his advantage to reach the Athenians. In verses 17 and 18, Paul reasons with the Jews and Gentiles at the marketplace and in the synagogue. It is mentioned that Greek philosophers are in attendance who are very interested in what he has to say.

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to discuss the Greek philosophical schools of Stoicism and Epicureanism so that one may see how different they are from Christian teaching. While the majority of the Athenian listeners were not moved to conversion, by verse 34, at least two, Dionysius and Demaris, were convicted and wanted to become Christian.

¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 21.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 180.

The Stoics and Epicureans were firmly invested in their belief system. The Stoics were more open to ideas about gods, especially the novel description of God that Paul had preached. The Epicureans were interested as well but were also materialists and did not believe in active gods nor life after death.

The Epicureans had an ethical philosophy based on the question about how one should live. Epicureans were avowed atheists. They were so dedicated to their orthodoxy that their version of atheism was more like religion than a denial of deity. The Epicureans encountered Paul in Athens and listened to him intently. Some even followed Paul afterward, abandoning their atheism in light of the gospel (Acts 17:34). Their whole worldview was influenced by the earlier Atomists. The Atomists believed everything was made up of smaller bits and these smaller bits were the essential, basic things. The Epicureans affirmed the Atomists and went so far as to say that if there was a god, whom they denied, then it was a material being made of atoms just like everything else. They believed that death was the very end; there was no afterlife and no god to be worried about. Their concept of god, if there was one, was such that god had no influence on human life, for the god was not supernatural. Their god also had nothing to do with the creation of the universe, for the universe was eternal.³

Christians pronounce that God made the universe and everything in it and this is evident by looking at the universe (Rom 1:19; Ps 19). Christians also state that God is in control of everything and that everything is directed by Him. This would have been difficult for Epicureans to overcome due to their strong investment in their beliefs. To Epicurus, if there were any divine beings, they were created beings and a part of the eternal universe. Epicurus put forth these ideas to liberate people from the fear of God and death. The fear of death was removed due to the Epicurean idea that when the body

³ Samuel Enoch Stumpf and James Fieser, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 94-97.

died, the person went with it. There was no afterlife; the “atoms” that made up the person broke up and were recycled into something else.

The Christian view of God and the afterlife is markedly different. Christians know that there is a good God that created them and the entire universe. The universe is not eternal; it was made. The Christian God does care, acts in the universe, and interacts with His human creations. Through common grace and general revelation, God has allowed many non-believers access to His truth. Many religions and belief systems get things right in minor ways, which is why there are some basic similarities in Christianity and all other religions.

The Epicurean ethical system was based on the idea of moderation. To Epicurus, the philosophy’s founder, the pursuit of pleasure was the main focus of life. By pleasure, he did not mean to be self-indulgent in food, sex, or other sensory experiences. He felt that some things were necessary pleasures, such as eating and drink. Some other pleasures, like sexual experiences, were not necessary, but desirable. His whole idea of pleasure was more like contentment. He measured pleasure by the absence of pain. When one eats, the pain of hunger is abated.

Christianity and Epicurus have similar teachings in self-control or moderation. Several verses in the Bible, most especially in the Pauline work, attest to the need for self-control (Gal 5:22-24; 1 Tim 2:9, 3:2; 2 Tim 1:7; Titus 1:8, 2:2, 2:4-6, 2:12). This desire for self-control is similar to what Epicurus taught about not being overindulgent. To Paul, self-control was a matter of character and virtue; to Epicurus, it was simply an avoidance of pain. On the outset, this seems to be a moral principle that Epicurus was teaching; however, these ideas seemed to be focused on one’s self and not really concerned with others. The ideas are certainly not based on any religious system of morals because he denied the existence of God.

The Stoics, in contrast to the Epicureans, did believe in a god, but certainly not the God of Christianity. When Stoics talk about the universe, they mean that everything

has a portion of god's presence in it. Things behave as they do because they are an extension of god and his rational mind or reason. This is a type of pantheism and is definitely not Christian. Stoicism is based in hard determinism as a way to deal with the problems one encounters in life. Hard determinism is the belief that every event in one's life has already been determined and there is no free will, nor any power to change one's life from its determined path. Stoics believe happiness is seated within wisdom and control. They want to control what they can, and what they cannot, they just accept. This mindset can be summed up in a quote from Epictetus: "Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, be happy with the way events happen."⁴ Since Stoics believe that all life is determined, they reasoned out that anything other than acceptance would be a waste of emotional energy. Acts 17:22-31 reads,

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Paul's preaching of Jesus was very different from their pagan gods and traditions, and being that the Greeks had a fondness for new thoughts (v. 21), they asked Paul to deliver his ideas to the Areopagus. There is some debate on whether Paul was brought to the Areopagus geographical location to be heard by the learned of Athens, or he was brought before the formal council known as the Areopagus. The confusion lies in

⁴ Stumpf and Fieser, *Philosophy*, 98.

the fact that the Areopagus was both the location on a hill, and the name of the council that met to discuss legal matters and matters of the state. If Paul was being brought before a formal council, then it would have been for legalistic reasons and there would have been a formal trial. It is the opinion of F. F. Bruce that Paul was brought to the Areopagus council only to be heard by experts and to see what they had to say about his preaching.⁵ Barrett concurs that this was more likely a body of men and not the geographical location alone.⁶ This explanation seems reasonable, coupled with the curiosity of the philosophers and the fact that Paul was allowed to leave. Paul, as mentioned, used the pervasive idolatry of Athenian culture to try to win the hearts and minds of those gathered at the Areopagus.

The sermon at the Areopagus showed Paul's combination of evangelism and apologetic technique. He did not express his negative feelings about the overbearing abundance of pagan idols but instead used the idols to compliment the Athenians about their religiosity to make them more receptive to evangelism. He did not insult or condemn their beliefs but instead offered a correction to them that they may know the true God. The altar to the Unknown God was Paul's springboard. In Athenian religious thought, the gods controlled every aspect of the universe and had to be appeased. If the gods were unhappy, then they would unleash their wrath upon humanity. For example, if Demeter, the Greek goddess of the harvest, was displeased, then crops would be bad. The Athenians were worried that they did not know all the gods in existence and to safeguard against wrath, they dedicated the altar to the unknown god to ensure that whatever god they missed would not be displeased. Paul took this notion and explained the truth of the only God to the Athenians to correct their wrong faith. This is the bedrock of Christian apologetics. Paul discovered where they stood in their beliefs, gently corrected their notions, and then

⁵ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 181.

⁶ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 855.

explained why Paul's God was superior to their gods and why faith in Him is well placed. The God Paul spoke of created the entire world and everything in it. Paul appealed to the Greek knowledge of one of their poets, Aratus, in verse 28, stating that we are all God's children. Where Aratus was indicating that humanity springs from Zeus, Paul is correcting that idea in stating the God created all people and nations through one man, Adam.⁷ God was available to everyone everywhere and was not a wood, metal, or stone carving. This seems to tie into what Isaiah said in 44:15-20 about how the same wood for making a god is used to make a fire to bake bread, and therefore to worship this kind of god is folly. Paul beckoned the Athenians to repent and not worship idols, but to worship the true God that has shown His truth in Jesus Christ by His resurrection. This belief would lead to good judgment by God: "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17: 32-34).

The resurrection of Jesus was an alien idea to the Athenians, and they scoffed at the very thought. Greek philosophy, especially the Epicureans, did not have a belief that one could return from the dead. This concept was absurd to them, which is why the Athenians at the Areopagus dismissed Paul's claims and sent him on his way.⁸ However, his words did reach some men, and Luke specifically named Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus council, and a female named Damaris, when they decided to leave with Paul to learn more. Some would say that this was an unsuccessful evangelistic attempt because

⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 26.

⁸ N. T. Wright offers a thorough history of the concepts of the afterlife and resurrection in various cultures. He correctly asserts that Jesus' resurrection changed all conception on how resurrection could be thought of. Prior to Jesus, the idea of a bodily resurrection in a perfected, glorified body, was unheard of, even in Judaism. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, North American ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 32-84.

there was a handful of those willing to follow Paul, whereas many other instances in Acts record greater numbers of converts. Barrett mentions a scholar named Ludemann that supports the fact that Dionysius and Damaris were historical people, but could not have been Paul's first converts, for it is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:15 that Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus were the first converts, calling them the "first fruits of Achaea."⁹ However, the ancient region of Achaea was not geographically near Athens. So, it is likely that Dionysus and Damaris were indeed the first converts from Athens. Successful salvation has never been based on large numbers in the Bible (1 Cor 9:19; Matt 7:13-14). There are indications in the Old Testament that when Israel veered away from God, there was still a faithful remnant and it seemed to indicate that the remnant was a minority. For example, God chooses only eight people to survive the Genesis flood.

The Athenians said that Paul must leave, but to come back and speak on this new theology again. They were, without a doubt, dismissive about Paul's proclamations on God and the resurrection of Jesus, but they also seemed intrigued enough by the ideas to have Paul return to speak again.¹⁰ Perhaps the philosophers needed time to mull over the value of this information. It seems reasonable that if they thought these ideas were completely false, then Paul would have been dismissed, never to return. The Athenians apparently felt that there may be something to what Paul said and decided to mull it over and have him return to discuss it further. Conversely, it could have been that the Athenians needed to think about it only to form a good rebuttal to give Paul upon his return, but this does not seem as likely. In any regard, the Athenians were given things to think about, and how it would affect their lives was up to the urgings of the Holy Spirit. Paul performed well according to his calling and modeled apologetic and evangelistic approaches to hostile pagan communities for ages to come.

⁹ Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 855.

¹⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 612-13.

Paul Finding Common Ground to Reach Philosophers

While the Epicureans were largely living their lives in a reason driven fashion, and the Stoics were more emotionally driven, it is incorrect to say that either group was completely missing the other component. These philosophers are humans after all, and while they may pursue one aspect to figure out how to live their lives, they are, like everyone, composed of both rational and emotional facets. In evangelism, when talking to people with various problems of abuse, be it drugs, alcohol, or food, one could possibly use Epicurus to show that even atheists are against overindulgence and then one can bring in Paul's teachings to show the better way. This method of evangelism, of course, is dependent on the person and situation. It would probably work with non-believers to show that not all non-believers over-do substances. After bringing in the biblical perspective, one could talk about these Epicureans that heard Paul at the Areopagus and converted. It would show that Jesus can reach even the hardcore atheists, and therefore they could be reached and saved as well. As Paul did in preaching to the Epicureans, to reach the modern intellectual atheists one must find the bridge between head and heart to have any real chance of the person accepting the gospel. Strictly intellectual arguments would likely not be as effective.

While Stoicism is not generally practiced today, many elements of this philosophy have been "rebranded" in modern thought. The Stoic sense of determinism has been changed in the West from a god-based fate to a science-based one. Where the Stoics believed that everyone had a piece of god within them that determined their fate, the modern determinist proclaims it is the brain's biology and one's life experiences that actualizes destinies. The contemporary atheist cannot claim any god in any fashion to explain life and must turn to other avenues to satisfy their need for purpose in life. One of the ways that this purpose can be elucidated is by reasoning out that their life is plotted out by the chemical reactions in their brain that determine their action and thoughts. The brain's chemistry, coupled with a person's life experiences, will only allow for certain decisions to be made and therefore the person's fate is decided without their active choice.

Free will is illusory because the brain will only allow certain decisions to be made. For example, if one's psychological personality is such that one has an aversion to insects, then one will avoid situations that involve insects. Of course, it could be in one's psychology to override the fear of insects in certain situations, but that is determined also.

There is free will with God. God has made everything and knows what each person will do in their lives, and God created us with free will to be able to make free choices that we would be responsible for. God does not, except in certain circumstances such as pharaoh in Exodus 4:21, compel our choices, otherwise there would be no free will. This is a simplified overview of the doctrine of free will, but for the purposes of basic evangelism, it is sufficient. What is important for the fatalist to understand is that God does have a plan for their life, and they are free to make choices. Freedom is a need embedded in people—the religious and non-religious alike—and with belief in God comes many kinds of freedom. The feeling of freedom is largely emotional; however, it is also intellectual. One has a sense of joy knowing they are free, but one can also think philosophically that freedom is a good thing. The culture of the United States is that freedom is a positive thing that all people should have as a right. In reaching out evangelistically to a determinist, one should employ both intellectual and emotional appeals to be more effective. As stated, upon cursory examination, it appears that Paul largely relied on the intellectual means to reach the Athenians, but he also appealed to people's emotions. Granted, Luke only mentioned two converts by name from that event; there could have been more of them later, but that is only speculation. The importance here is not necessarily the numbers of new believers, but that people were reached and that Paul's technique was effective.

**Peter Speaking to Believers in Pontus, Galatia,
Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Pet 3:15)**

First Peter 3:15 is often quoted by theologians as one of the main biblical supports for using apologetics. While this interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15 is true, it is also

important to understand the context of what Peter was speaking about and to whom he was speaking. Therefore, a brief examination of the verses preceding and following 3:15 must be conducted. In the epistle's greeting section, Peter reveals he is addressing believers in Asia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, Galatia, and Pontus. His letter is one of reassurance and to bolster confidence in the believers' faith since they have been facing some trials (1:4-9). Peter offers reassurance through reminding them that their faith in Jesus Christ has brought them eternal salvation in heaven, which is more precious than gold because it is unperishable, and their faith can withstand the trials they are facing. He goes on to express his joy that they believe in Jesus even though they did not experience him directly and how that gives glory to Jesus. Verses 8-16 outline how to live the proper Christian life. The first few verses describe how to be in relation to others and grounds the teaching in the Old Testament Psalm 34. Next, Peter gives reassurance that if one lives according to these maxims, that even though people may face trials, they can rest in their righteousness. The final verse details how to explain to others why the Christian life is different from theirs and why believers show outward hope. In the end, it is desired that non-believers who see the distinction of the Christian community and want the hope they see in believers, wish to repent and become Christians. First Peter 3:8-12 reads,

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, Must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. "He must turn away from evil and do good; He must seek peace and pursue it. "For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, And His ears attend to their prayer, But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Verses 8-9 are Peter's instruction on how to live life as members of the Christian community, both toward each other and amongst themselves. This life is a calling away from the surrounding pagan world, but not a retreat from it. The Greek words Peter uses for *brotherly*, *sympathetic*, and *others* are uncommon in the New Testament, according to

Achtemeier.¹¹ These word forms are used to emphasize the character of the Christian community in ways that would separate it from the pagan world.¹² The culture that these new Christians found themselves in valued many of the virtues that Peter was calling them to adopt, but they also did not need to be the same as the culture. The Christians were to treat each other and the pagan world with love and compassion. Christians were to show the living example of Christ in word and act to demonstrate a better way for people to be. Christians were not to respond to their bad treatment by returning the evil to the inflictors but were to pray for them, as Christ taught in Matthew 5:44. To Peter, this is what Christians were called to do; to be both a blessing to each other and to outsiders so that they would receive the blessing of eternal life in heaven. Be that as it may, one should not take these acts of love and compassion as a works-related salvation. The process of submitting to Christ changes the person's heart and in becoming more aligned with Jesus, one tends to act in Christ-like fashions reflective of his conversion.

Peter appealed to Jewish tradition by quoting Psalm 34:12-16 in verses 10-12. This quotation served as a support and a reminder of the teaching he was expressing. The converted Jews would be familiar with the Psalm, but it would also captivate the Gentiles Peter was entreating. These verses were a call to repentance and to walk in the ways of the Lord. By living one's life in this way, God will hear one's prayers, answer them, and be blessed by Him. It is those believers that Peter speaks of in 3:15; their acts are in accordance with the way of Jesus Christ and the difference between them and others is noticeable. God turns His face from those who fail to repent. Peter is providing a clear distinction in the value of God's grace. By speaking on God's grace, Peter is able to flow naturally into the next section of reassurance for the faithful: "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of

¹¹ Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *I Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 222.

¹² Achtemeier and Epp, *I Peter*, 223.

righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled” (1 Pet 3:13-14). Peter offers reassurance to the Christians in that while there may be trials and suffering, their pains are nothing compared to the right standing with God they possess. Peter exalts them saying that suffering for what is right will not bring any eternal harm to them. As long as one stands with God and does what is right, he will be blessed, even through the trials one may face.

Christians come to understand that what they suffer in this life is only temporary, and the blessing of eternal life with Christ is far greater. This is akin to what Paul says in Romans 8:31 and what Jesus says in John 16:33; no permanent harm will come to the righteous, God will protect them during any suffering in this world. Paul reassured believers that if God is on one’s side, who could be against him? This does not mean to say that there will be no suffering, in fact, Jesus assured the faithful there indeed will be; however, the righteous will receive the reward of eternal life in heaven with Christ. Some scholars surmise this verse to mean the believer will escape major suffering and will only undergo minor torment. Schreiner notes that the view in which believers only suffer minimally is incorrect and should be disregarded.¹³

It is in this reassurance of well-placed faith and the commitment to one’s Christian beliefs that is visible to the outside world: “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame” (1 Pet 3:15-16). In verse 15 Peter’s appeals to emotions are seen clearly. Christ seeks the heart change in people. Those outside of Christianity will hopefully recognize that the Christian life is different from the surrounding culture. The countenance of the faithful is one of hope and joy, which is

¹³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 35.

typically different than what one encounters in the various ideologies in the world. In Peter's day this disposition of people was especially true as the Roman and Greek cultures were largely negative. This positive disposition should be attractive to others and the Christian needs to be able to explain Christ to whoever would ask. Jobes states that the hope Peter describes is more than hope within any single believer, it is the hope that is common to all Christians in that it defines and unifies them.¹⁴

Some scholars have suggested that the word *apologia*, that is rendered as "defense" in many translations, is to mean how Christians are to act within the context of a formal trial or legal proceeding.¹⁵ Peter was not speaking about these specific scenarios, but of the more common social encounters. The Christian is called to act this way in any given situation and Peter was speaking more broadly, not within a legal context that a person would only be confronted with occasionally, if ever.

Certainly, there are the bare facts of the faith, such as His atoning death for people's sins, and people need to know those things. The Christian should know and be able to articulate the basics of their faith in an understandable way to others. However, what Peter was also getting at was to tell what Christ has done for you personally as an explanation of your joy. The same is true in evangelism. Tell people that Christ is available for them and what He has done, but for people to connect on a more intimate level, one's personal testimony can play a large part in the conversation. People connect with other people and experiences. The approach that Peter advocated was an appeal to the heart. In the last part of verse 15, Peter advises relating these experiences in a gentle way. In other words, it is not helpful to be condescending, arrogant, or self-righteous when evangelizing. These attitudes are not only un-Christlike but also puts people on the

¹⁴ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 230.

¹⁵ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 37.

defensive and less receptive to what one is explaining. Goppelt speaks of verse 15 and a part of 16 in this way:

Everyone who inquires aggressively, out of curiosity, or with interest about the content of the Christian life is to be given information from a posture that is described from three perspectives. In relation to others, Christians are to be “gentle.” That is, they do not condemn others but seek to win them over to the grace in which they themselves have become participants. They encounter the other person in this way by conducting themselves in “fear” before God, i.e., in responsibility before God and in view of God's judgment. Second, the Christians' conduct must be consistent with their apologetics: They must have in relation to their own selves a “good conscience.” This is possible if, like Paul in I Cor. 4:1-4, they have the certainty of living by faith, without being perfect therein (Phil. 3:12-16; Rom. 12:3). In this context a “good conscience” would include, above all, *justitia civilis* and would thereby exclude suspicions. Third, and corresponding to the good conscience, is a “good manner of life,” one that contradicts the slanders mentioned in 2:12. One's manner of life, one's conduct, is “good” when it is carried out “in Christ.”¹⁶

Paul is again offering reassurance to the Christian in verse 16, but he also includes a reminder to remain faithful in mind and act. Those who do so are not to fear any repercussions from the world, for those who deal with believers harshly will be put to shame by God. Peter offers the assurance that justice will be served for those who mock or do damage to one's Christian reputation while carrying out Christ-like behavior. This can be easily seen in modern times as well when Christians are derided for acting within their beliefs, such as taking a stand against abortion or a myriad of other causes. Christians are scoffed at for what culture calls an outdated moralistic lifestyle. Peter counsels Christians not to worry about such things, but to explain their hope in a manner honoring to Christ.

In verse 17, Peter seems to conclude with another assurance—that it is better to suffer for doing right rather than wrong. This verse appears to be an emphasis of verse 12, which in turn is from Psalm 34. Peter wants the faithful to know that just because they are suffering for what is good and according to God's will, it is a good thing they are doing and to not be troubled by it or think that the suffering is in vain. God considers the hardships

¹⁶ Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 244-45.

Christians face while being Christ-like to be a good thing in the end. While in the moment one may view the torment as purposeless, God always has a purpose even when one is not aware of it. As Schreiner has noted, Peter was aware that suffering occurs under God's will and for His purposes, like it is said in Romans 8:28, and no one can harm God's own without His divine permission.¹⁷ Peter was also aware of Satan's machinations in the world as well as the acts of evil men, but like in the book of Job, God allows these events to bring a good result, despite how it may seem at the time. God is always good in His objectives.

Applying Peter and Paul: Head and Heart

There is a tendency in apologetics to argue and a drive to have better arguments than the other person, which is helpful in discussing topics in academic situations or seminars. For example, Alvin Plantinga debated J. L. Mackie on the problem of evil and free will for a number of years with Mackie conceding the debate. Mackie did not seem to convert to Christianity on the force of Plantinga's argument, but he acquiesced based on the logic Plantinga employed. Plantinga demonstrated a great deal of grace and modeled how a Christian can debate these sorts of topics. College campuses and other academic settings are ripe for heated discussion on various moral, ethical, and theological propositions and much can be learned from the outcomes of these contests. While being a true academic argument, Plantinga's and Mackie's dialogue did address deep theological concerns over God's nature. In the end, Plantinga demonstrated that evil exists in the world, but God has a good reason for it, even though evil does not originate with Him. People in anguish do not understand why, if God is wholly good, He can allow so much suffering. Knowledge of these answers from academic debates can be explained to those seeking faith answers. Apologetics should not stop in solely academic institutions. The intellectual work of apologists can be distilled into a device for evangelism and therefore

¹⁷ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 35.

the classroom produces practical, real-world applications rather than thought problems for mental gymnasts. One does not need to, nor should one want to, figuratively beat the person over the head with the Bible, but instead should present the gospel with love. Speaking on intellectual matters requires care and love also. As mentioned, one should never neglect the whole person for the sake of the head. One can explain why God would allow suffering and evil in intellectual discourse, but it is important to make it personal for the other individual to better reach him. Intellectual matters must open the heart.

The gospel message can be understood by children and, as they grow in faith, more complexities and truths are fleshed out, thus making for a more robust understanding of the Scriptures. An example of this is the commandment to love others as oneself. This commandment seems very simple and a child can understand this. As adulthood approaches, the intellect, as well as the emotional dimension, grows in people. When one reaches adulthood, the idea of loving everyone can become more difficult as relationships are more complicated and varied. Loving one another for an adult means abandoning many negative emotions toward others, like hatred, envy, and the like, which can be difficult for some people. In man's fallen state, it seems natural to despise one's enemies, but Jesus said to love and pray for them. This concept is counterintuitive to most people due to man's fallen nature. All this to say what is a simple idea at its base level, grows more complex as people grow more complex. Apologetics is the same. When a child is asked if Jesus is the only way to heaven, his apologetic would be, "Yes, because Jesus said He is the only way, and I believe in Him." The adult response to the question would essentially be the same, but with more supporting details, such as the authority of the Scriptures, questionable tenants of other religions, evidence in other disciplines, or one's own witness and regeneration.

A primary thing to keep in mind when using apologetics in evangelistic encounters is that people are not just talking heads. Regardless of how emotionally detached one may seem, there is an emotional component in every human being. People

do not make decisions on thought alone. Ravi Zacharias made this point in one of his seminars at a university.¹⁸ He said to effectively reach a person, one may start with the mind, but must find the bridge to the heart as well. God created people with more than just intellect and to neglect this is to disregard the whole of the person. The intellectual aspect of the person works with the emotions and is rarely a separate process. Depending on how the person responds to conversations, the intellectual component may not mean as much as the human connection, which is why relationships are important in evangelism. Plantinga stated in *Warranted Christian Belief* that people can form a new belief without propositions or evidence that would require decision-making thought process. Humans sometimes respond with their “gut feeling.” This is not to say people do not enjoy intellectual debates, but the gospel is given to change the person’s heart. This goal is repeated many times throughout the Scriptures.

Apologetics can and should be used by anyone to explain one’s joy in life due to Christ’s work, just as Peter stated. It is not to be used primarily to one-up atheists in a debate or to demean another’s belief system. Apologetics and the Bible are not to be wielded as weapons. If a person sees apologetics as simply a way to win arguments, then he is missing the heart needed for caring evangelism. Apologetics is academic and also practical. Atheists and religious non-Christians need to know why Christians believe what they believe so strongly and their reasons for having faith. This is the main aim of apologetics-based evangelism. Academic debates do not have a great track record of bringing people to believe in Christ when compared to personal evangelism. Apologetics is the support system of evangelism. The Word brings people to faith, but apologetics explains the “whys.” The “whys” can be scholarly subjects, such as the creation’s fine-tuning with all the science that goes with it, and it can also be the evangelist’s personal experiences with God. Both types have been shown through the work of Peter and Paul.

¹⁸ Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, “Bridging the Heart and Mind,” accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.rzim.org/read/just-thinking-magazine/bridging-the-heart-and-mind>.

Paul engaged people in intellectual pursuits at the Areopagus, while Peter advocated explaining the joy of Christ and what He has done.

Following Peter's inspired word, one should not use apologetics to demean another's belief system. It is to be used in gentleness and love for others. Christians believe Jesus is the only way to heaven and all other religions, therefore, must be wrong. However, this does not give the apologist the right to simply dismiss and disrespect another person's belief system. Just as the Christian has a reason to believe what he believes, so does the Muslim, the Hindu, the Buddhist, and the rest of humanity. The Christian should speak of the gospel and why he believes it first. There may come a time to bring up the other person's religion as a talking point and to work through it with the gospel in mind, but never to point out how foolish and reckless the other's beliefs are. In those types of aggressive situations, the non-Christian would possibly become defensive and cease to respond to the gospel message, which is the opposite of the desired direction. The Christians should lead with love and relationship, not with a victory over the pagan in mind, asking people questions and getting them to think about what they believe, and using the head to get to the heart. In an average evangelistic encounter, one's own witness and testimony can be a powerful apologetic tool. One does not need to know the particulars about why secularism is unsustainable as a belief system or how karma fails to explain human activity. The knowledge of these other systems, their strengths, and weaknesses, can be an enriching experience for the individual and does serve to dispel worldly myths that have formed around evolution, universalism, and so forth, but nothing serves evangelism better than the apologetic of one's personal testimony. Just as Peter said in his first letter, explain your joy and people will respond (1 Pet 3:15). People may or may not be convinced of one's argument of dinosaurs being created on the fifth day, but when they see the change Jesus has made in one's life as an explanation of why the Christian has joy, it can move them toward the faith.

CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR
APOLOGETICS TO STRENGTHEN
EVANGELISM

An examination of early church history will show that early church leaders developed defenses and explanations of Christian beliefs when confronted with persecutions and pagan philosophies. These early defenses of the faith helped define the faith from without and within, enabling Christianity to be better understood by its practitioners as well as the surrounding culture. Gaining this understanding helped to spread the fledgling faith into the pagan world, bringing people to believe in Christ. The section on the early church will present an analysis of Origen's *Contra Celsum*, Augustine's free will defense, and theodicy. These men, along with many others, developed defenses of the faith that carry through to the twenty-first century. The second section of this chapter is an examination of modern apologetic techniques that have been employed to combat new challenges to the Christian faith. Among these challenges are secularism, scientism, naturalism, the new atheists, and the misapplication of Darwinian ideas outside of biology.

Origen's *Contra Celsum*

Origen's *Contra Celsum* contains a series of eight arguments against the claims made by Celsus in his work *The True Doctrine*. Celsus was a philosopher of obscure origins and all that is known about him was obtained through Origen's text.¹ This is not an unusual situation for ancient documents. There are many instances in which historical

¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), xxvi.

figures are only known by the surviving texts of others and not by their writings. An illustration of this is Socrates—there is no surviving Socratic writing by his hand, only the material Plato wrote down. A biblical correlation would be the prophet Elijah—he appears in 1 Kings and other biblical texts, but there is no material written by him in the canon.

Celsus argued the upstart religion of Christianity was intellectually low-brow and its followers uneducated. He also contended that the Bible could not be a divinely inspired book, as Origen believed it was. Origen was, as modern Christians would say, an inerrantist. He believed every word in the Bible was true and the events were historical. There was a movement in Hellenistic thought where texts could be interpreted allegorically for greater meaning. Accordingly, for a text to be of a divine origin, it must be able to be read allegorically. The Bible could not be read as an allegory, and therefore, according to Celsus, could not be a divine work.² Origen's idea of allegory was different from the Greek. He knew the Scriptures to be divinely inspired, hence had a spiritual meaning that could only be understood through the working of the Spirit in a person. Christians maintain this idea to this day by teaching that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a person allows the deeper meanings of the biblical text to be unlocked. The Bible becomes clearer when a person is Spirit-filled.

The Roman world misunderstood what Christianity was teaching. The Roman world thought Christians were incestuous because of their proclaimed love between brothers and sisters in Christ. Romans did not understand this was a sign of the unity between believers and spiritual fraternity, not a blood relation. Also, the pagan culture believed that Christians sacrificed and ate babies because of two snippets of Christian belief they had misheard. The first being Christ had been a baby and the second being the sacrament of communion, which the pagans mistook Christians eating the body and blood

² Michael A. G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 82.

of Christ. Somehow these erroneous ideas were incorporated and made the Christians look like horrible cultists. The Romans thought Christians killed babies and baked them into the communion bread they ate. The Romans had never looked at Christianity as a new thing, but as a radical offspring of Judaism, which they did not properly understand either. Monotheism was alien to the Roman mentality. Even though many Romans were not devout in their polytheistic religion, they still adhered to the plurality of gods because it was the tradition. The Roman government kept it going as well because the emperor was considered a god and received his worship in the form of monetary tribute. This tribute was in the greed of the emperor and his self-interest to keep the pantheon operating. It is not for certain, but the maintenance of polytheism against monotheism may have been a motivation behind Gaius Caligula's statue being placed in the Jewish temple. Assuredly, Gaius' main aim was to subjugate the Jews further, but to break with the Roman habit of non-interference with regional religions, Gaius may have had multiple motives. Origen's aim in his writings was to correct the misconceptions the Roman world had of Christianity by way of apologetic discourse. Although he employed philosophical techniques, his teaching was Bible-based and oriented to evangelizing the pagan Roman world.³

To better comprehend Origen's and Celsus' viewpoints, it would be instructive to look at the philosophical traditions dominant in the second century. During this period, the two prevalent schools of philosophical thought were the Stoics and the Platonists, also called the Academy. The Stoics were attempting to reinforce the traditional religion and the Academy was directly opposed to this notion. Celsus, writing many decades before Origen, tended to align with the Academy and Origen typically took up the opposite side from him. An example of this would be Celsus' argument against the Christian doctrine of creation; that the world was created primarily for mankind. He felt humankind held no centrality to the world any more than animals did. Origen took the counterpoint, which

³ Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers*, 80.

was in line with the Stoic argument for creation's purpose.⁴ It was Origen's adaptation of Greek philosophical thought that helped him defeat the affirmations of Celsus. Interestingly, this use of Greek philosophical models would also become a polemic of Christianity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Modern critics of Christianity would claim that the doctrines are not based in the Bible at all and were retellings of Greek philosophy. The critics are only partially correct in that Greek philosophical schools played a part in understanding biblical concepts. Biblical doctrine was not based in Greek philosophy, but the thought process behind the philosophical schools helped to inform the understanding of biblical teaching. Christianity was not a repackaged Greek philosophy, but the methodology the Greeks used to think about things such as divine providence helped people such as Origen think about how the Bible was presenting God's providential control.⁵ Origen also took from Judaic apologists who contested that Moses and the prophets predated Plato and the other main Greek philosophers and therefore Greek philosophy could be rooted in Judaism, not the other way around.⁶ The dating is proven true as Moses and the prophets presaged Plato by 900 years for Moses and around 100 years for the last of Israel's prophets. What is not clear is whether Israel had much cultural contact with Greece during that time. It is known without fail that Alexander III of Macedon spread Greek culture to Israel and beyond during his campaigns, but his time of influence was in the 300s BC, which by then, the Old Testament had been completed and Israel was in the intertestamental period.

In the days of Celsus, Greek philosophical theology had reached a point where polytheism somewhat merged with monotheism. The gods of old were considered the underlings of the supreme God and Celsus thought all the ancient gods, such as Zeus,

⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, x-xi.

⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, xii.

⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, ix.

Amoun, and the like, were in reality, the same god.⁷ There was also the firm conviction that for religions to be true, they needed to be rooted in the deep past. In this way, he did not fault the Jews for being monotheists as they were following the traditions of their forefathers. For Christians, however, Jesus was a newcomer to the world, so it is only natural that Celsus, given his bias, would deny Jesus' legitimacy.⁸

As an overview, a few points of each book will be covered—both of Celsus' accusations and Origen's reply. Given the fact that Celsus is dead, there is no response from him to Origen, but Origen's motive is to oust Celsus' claims to spread the gospel. Origen is not going out and preaching the Word as Peter, Paul, and John had done, but evangelizes through writing.

In book 1, Celsus makes the insinuation that Christians practice their gatherings in secret because they are illegal.⁹ In the Roman world, public gatherings are lawful, but secret societies are not, and since Christians gather in secret, often in different places, they must be doing so in secret for nefarious reasons. Origen agrees that gatherings to plot the assassination of a ruler or other criminal activity would be illegal, but Christians are not doing this. They are not anarchists that seek to overthrow the law or feel they are above the law. Christians want to dispel evil and dismantle the machinations of the devil, which is a good cause. Celsus distorted Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:18-19, which reads, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God." Celsus misrepresented this to mean Christians taught that foolishness is good and wisdom was bad. He holds intellect as a high virtue in man so he is attempting to use the Bible against Christians and claim they are irrational. Origen corrects Celsus' assertion

⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, xvii.

⁸ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, xxi.

⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7-65.

by providing the correct interpretation of the passage. Paul, speaking to the Corinthian church, was telling them not to rely on the wisdom of the world, but on God's wisdom, which surpasses worldly knowledge.

Book 2 has a Jewish character of Celsus' invention that asks the questions.¹⁰ This is an old tradition of philosophical dialogue like the Socratic dialogues where there are typically two characters talking about a philosophical issue to teach the proper answer. Celsus' Jew attempts a diversionary tactic by stating that there is an account of Jesus' life written by the disciples that reveal other details. The Jew makes the inference that there are unseemly details in this account that no one knows, but he cannot reveal. This insinuation by the Jew was seen by Origen as a clear attempt to raise doubt, but not offer any proof of Celsus' profession. Along the same lines, the Jew tried to question the reliability of the account of Judas betraying Jesus by proclaiming that no good leaders are ever betrayed by their followers, especially if it is a single follower. Origen pointed out this is a simple untruth. He also details Judas' character and how he was conflicted in his attitude toward Jesus but felt guilty to the point of suicide after betraying Jesus.

Book 3 touches on the subject of the origins of the Jewish people.¹¹ Celsus incorrectly claims Jews were Egyptians that grew tired of the Egyptian religious customs, so they fled the country. The problems with this idea were many, but Origen spoke on the factor of language. If the Jews were simply Egyptians, then it seems odd that they would construct a new language, both written and spoken, that had no resemblance to Egyptian or other regional tongues. Further, the new Hebrew language was fully formed from the outset. Origen points out that this is unlikely and the traditional understanding of the origins of Hebrew is correct.

¹⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 66-128.

¹¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 129-83.

Celsus tried to undermine the Great Commission as well. He said, “If all men wanted to be Christians, the Christians would no longer want them.”¹² Origen counters this idea by saying it is an outright lie. He stated the fact that many are out spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth, with no motive other than preaching the Word. Origen admitted that a few teachers wanted the prestige of being a Christian leader, but this line of pursuit was not extant at the beginning of the church, as it was dangerous to be publically Christian, not to mention being a leader as well. Origen denies the spread of the gospel for monetary gain as many men and women of wealth in the early church spoke the Word for the sake of their Christian convictions alone. What Celsus was attempting to do was correlate the failure of fallen people with the falseness of the gospel. Origen does not deny the early church’s problems but does separate those problems from the gospel. To this day, these sorts of problems exist. Christians continue to disagree on doctrinal points, and even some are in the faith for the prestige, power, and financial motives. Nothing has changed in that arena, and neither has the gospel.

Celsus, in book 4, questioned the truth of Christ’s walk on earth by noting arguments between Christians and Jews on the subject.¹³ He offered the fact that many Jews do not consider Jesus to be the Messiah, which is in disagreement with some Christians. Additionally, he posed the question as to why God would come to earth in the first place, following with another question about seeing what mankind was up to. Origen contested these by suggesting that Celsus’ should have quoted from the conflicting texts instead of being flippant and declaring no need to investigate further. To Origen, this attitude made Celsus’ argument weak. Origen disclosed there is disagreement with Jews and Christians on this matter, however, it is Celsus’ unwillingness or inability to engage the prophetic material in the Scriptures that is the deficiency in his dispute. Origen

¹² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 133.

¹³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 184-263.

pointed out Celsus only chose one possibly disputable bit of Scripture about Christ's advent when thousands affirm Jesus as the Messiah. Turning to Celsus' self-answering debate on why Christ came, Origen elucidated the Scripture on the Jewish Messiah and on how Jesus fulfilled those requirements. Celsus' pedestrian suggestion that God came to earth to check on what mankind was up to displayed his pagan understanding of god. Origen indicated the reason for Christ's coming to earth was to retrieve the lost sheep of Israel. The Jewish Messiah was to redeem His people and bring them into the kingdom of God. Christ also came to bring the gentiles into the kingdom. Writing from a pagan Greco-Roman theological perspective, it is natural for Celsus to question God coming to earth for humanity because their gods did not do such things. Celsus' gods typically have their agendas and routinely do not act in self-less ways toward humankind. God knows what humanity is up to, so His coming to earth to observe people does not hold up under scrutiny. Further, Origen points out the internal inconsistencies of Celsus' argument. Celsus believes in divine providence as a part of his philosophical school, and if that is the case then he should not have indicated that god knew nothing about mankind's actions unless he went to earth in person. God being ignorant of the state of man is contrary to what Celsus is alleged to believe.

Later in book 4, Celsus proceeded to challenge the immutability of God with the coming of Jesus. Celsus proposed either God had changed because He came to earth as Jesus, or that He did not actually change but only appeared to be a man. Origen replies,

Others may agree with Celsus that He does not change, but makes those who see Him think that He has changed. But we, who are persuaded that the advent of Jesus to men was not a mere appearance, but a reality and an indisputable fact, are unaffected by Celsus' criticism. Nevertheless we will reply thus: Do you not say, Celsus, that sometimes it is allowable to use deceit and lying as a medicine? Why, then, is it unthinkable that something of this sort occurred with the purpose of bringing salvation?¹⁴

¹⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 196.

What Origen has done is affirm Christ's humanity and divinity while pointing out the contradiction in Celsus' argument. Celsus said Jesus was only appearing to be a human as He walked on earth; He was being deceitful no matter the good reason behind the act. Origen stated that believing Christians would not be affected by Celsus' assertion for they knew better; Jesus was both God and man. The details of how the unity of God and man could be understood would be worked out theologically over time. Origen again remarked on the internal disagreement of what Celsus claimed and what he argued against. Celsus was judging Jesus as deceitful to accomplish the goal of salvation while also asserting that doctors can sometimes lie to the patient if, in the end, it cures them. Origen does not believe that Jesus only appeared to be a man and makes that clear, he only points to the problem in Celsus' argumentation.

Book 5 starts with the Jewish worship of heavenly bodies such as the moon, stars, and sun.¹⁵ Origen explained that Celsus has misunderstood what the Scriptures were talking about with the heavenly bodies. Celsus seems to be importing some philosophical ideas about the universe and misapplying them to Jewish religious practice. There is a philosophical notion called pantheism in which God is the total of the entire universe. Celsus was claiming the Jews believe this to be true by worshiping the stars. He also connected this to the passages in the Bible where it describes the light of the world, which did not mean the sun, as he was accusing. Origen spoke about the passages where God is compared to the radiance of the stars in the sky and Celsus either misinterpreted this to mean that God was the stars or purposely distorted it to advance his attack on Judeo-Christian belief. Neither Jew nor Christian ever subscribed to the idea of pantheism. Origen clarified this and stated there is no worship of other heavenly bodies besides God, who created all.

¹⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 264-315.

Celsus somehow ties this idea into the resurrection of the dead, both in Jewish custom and Christian. Celsus questioned how the long-dead could come back in the same bodies. Would they be all rotten and decrepit? Origen elucidated that, once again, Celsus was mistaken about what the Scripture was saying. Origen confirms there will be a resurrection of the dead when Jesus returns, but they will be changed and not corrupted as Celsus said. Origen quoted several passages from Paul and described the resurrection bodies will be like Christ's after His resurrection. The risen Jesus' body is a foreshadowing of what believers can expect after Jesus' return. Origen acknowledged that the resurrection of the dead is a difficult doctrine to understand, especially for non-believers, but this fact does not diminish its truth. He articulated the Stoic idea of the periodical restoration of the universe as a comparison. The differences, however, are great. In the Stoic idea, the world is reconstituted but essentially remains the same. Origen said the same people will be born again, such as Socrates, and will live the same lives as the previous incarnation. This is not true of the resurrection of the dead. Believers will come back in better bodies and will have a new heaven and new earth, not a rehashing of the old one. It will be a true restoration. In the rest of book 5, Origen refuted Celsus' accusation that the God of the Jews and Christians is not the same. He admits there is some thought about there being two Gods, nonetheless, Scripture affirms the God of the Jews is the same as the God of Christianity. Origen quotes Paul who spoke about the God of his forefathers as being the same God.

Celsus' thrust in book 6 was to disempower the Scriptures by affirming that the Greek philosophers had already said much of what the Bible has said and did so better without asserting divine assistance.¹⁶ Origen, at the outset, does not condemn Plato, for he was a great teller of truth and intellectual advancement, but had no power to save souls, regardless of the beauty of his words. By quoting much of the first twenty or so

¹⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 316-94.

verses of Paul's letter to the Romans, Origen pointed out that Plato was only given a glimpse of God's truth because he did not believe. This is an example of the common grace that God gives to all of humanity. Common grace allows one to catch sight of bits and pieces of God's truth but does not enable the person to see the whole. This is one of the defining aspects of the Christian faith. While some other religions and philosophical traditions can hit parts of the truth, the whole is only accessible to the Christian. Origen also remarks about the fact of Moses and the prophets pre-dating Plato and therefore could not have been repeating him.

Celsus revisits the argument of divine wisdom versus human wisdom. Origen made it known Celsus had already posed these types of questions previously but felt the need to engage him again. Early in the discussion, Origen employed sarcasm in his defense of wisdom. He said the uneducated of the Christians know better than to not worship man-made objects or to ascribe them divine powers, where the educated Greeks and Roman do worship these idols. He questions who is more foolish in this case. A large portion of this volume is Origen arguing against Celsus' gnostic claims about how the universe is made, the corrupt fleshy god, Gehenna, Paradise, and so forth. Without a thorough understanding of the gnostic doctrines of creation, it is difficult to follow Origen's apologia. During his time, the Gnostics and their beliefs were well known whereas they are not nowadays. It was important to refute gnostic ideas of Origen's time as they had both intellectual appeals and were falsely touted as the secret knowledge of Christ, which added to their intrigue.

Book 7 opened with Celsus calling into question whether the prophets of Israel wrote about Jesus' coming or not.¹⁷ He also doubts that the prophets could have predicted Christ's coming at all. Origen defends this by offering the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as a means of foretelling His coming. Origen made it plain there is no comparison

¹⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 395-453.

between the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the oracles of pagan belief. Celsus was still maintaining that learned men are the only ones capable of wisdom. The prophets of Israel were not always the best and brightest. It seems that God often chose his prophets from what the world would label as unworthy. It would have made sense to Celsus if Jesus had been born an actual earthly king, but He was not. Celsus' bias restricted him to only believing in wisdom, power, and good things that came from the educated or those who deserved it. God of Israel does not work that way. Celsus also refuted the prophecies of Jesus' coming when they presaged His suffering. The reasoning behind this was if Jesus was God's son, then he would not be subject to suffering. It would not affect Him as He was a deity, or it would affect Him because He was not a deity. As mentioned previously, Celsus was incapable of understanding the fully god, fully man essence of Christ. It was Celsus' understanding that any kind of suffering would have been too shameful for an actual deity. Interestingly enough, this shamefulness objection is used by Muslim apologists to deny the deity of Christ. Celsus found difficulty in reconciling the Law of Moses and what Jesus taught, as, at times, they seemed to be contradictory and therefore called into question who was correct. Despite voicing concerns about this, Origen pointed out that Celsus never offered evidence or comparison between the words of the prophets and the proclamations of Jesus to show how they were antithetical. This type of technique was employed throughout the ages in efforts to discredit the Christian faith. David Hume, in denying miraculous acts, offered a nebulous argument effectively saying the only testimony required was his refutation alone. Richard Dawkins mounted similar disagreements many times based on a simple denial of religious belief. Book 7 revisited some previously stated debates over worshiping idols and gnostic ideas, in which Origen recapped his earlier defenses.

The final book is number 8.¹⁸ Origen mentioned Celsus had earlier contested the biblical assertion of Jesus when He said one cannot serve two masters. Celsus argued no harm would come from serving several masters. His reasoning is God cannot be harmed and typically serving several people does not cause problems, so Celsus sees no value in Jesus' statement. Origen cleared up Celsus' attestation by acknowledging that man cannot harm God, but in the service of two masters, the service to God is always lessened and therefore would hurt the man, and not God. Jesus' teaching was to point out man's priority to serve God only. Nothing else is worthy of being before Him or instead of Him. Celsus does not grasp this and sees no harm in worshiping lesser gods, heroes, or daemons. As a point of clarity, what Celsus is advocating when he speaks of daemons are of the gnostic variety and not the fallen angels opposed to God and are evil. Gnostic daemons would be lesser gods in the pantheon, like the muses or akin. Origen maintained appeals to lesser gods still directs one's heart away from the one true God and can harm the person's relationship with God. Not serving several masters is teaching against idolatry, and is a commandment.

Following his line of logic, Celsus spoke on the benefits of eating food sacrificed to idols. He maintained the earlier argument of not being able to hurt God and this one God does not envy or have any human failings as such, thereby eating "his" food is acceptable. Celsus adds to this that if these sacrifices are being made to lesser gods, they are under the one God, so it must be acceptable because the sacrifice is actually for God, through the lesser god. Origen opposed this suggested practice on a few fronts. First, he went back to the biblical teaching of not serving two masters. Despite Celsus' attempts to downgrade the importance of Jesus' teaching, Origen held firm to the idea and expanded the implication to say it would be difficult to tell if one was eating from the

¹⁸ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 454-511.

table of the Lord or the table of idols. Given this, it is better to know one is always eating from the Lord's table.

Celsus' continued his self-serving exaltation of daemons with a list of positive things they had done for mankind through oracles and otherwise. Origen asserted the Christian understanding of daemons to be evil spirits and their nature to be wholly evil, which Celsus does not seem to believe.¹⁹ At times, it seems like Celsus and Origen are speaking on different things, but using the same words. Lesser Greco-Roman gods and the evil spirits that possessed people in the biblical texts are different types of beings. This book was shorter than Origen's other treatises and some of it covered the same ground as before and included a conclusion to Ambrose, to whom the work was dedicated.

Many of the defenses Origen had to formulate to counter Celsus do not carry well into history. By way of example, no one is arguing over meat sacrificed to idols in contemporary society. Origen as the apologist had to contend with the matters that were of concern in his society. While many of the defenses he had to formulate were against things in his time period, it is the idea that defensive techniques were developed. The way he countered Celsus is as important as the specific details. As was described previously, several of Origen's opposing disputes simply pointed out logical flaws or lack of solid evidence on the part of Celsus. One may not be able to use the details of the apologia, such as the debate over sacrificial meat, but one could learn from how Origen handled it by citing the Bible and moral traditions. Many of the ancient debates between Christians and non-Christians had been solved in their period or possibly decades later. In the next section on Augustine, the free will defense he devised for what is called "the problem of evil" was argued well into the twentieth century until it was settled by Alvin Plantinga.

¹⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 461.

Augustine of Hippo

Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis was a church father in the fourth and fifth centuries. He was a prolific writer and produced a vast amount of influential works such as *Confessions* and *City of God*. His contributions to the body of church doctrine cannot be understated. They range from the understanding of original sin to codifying the requirements for a just war. Possibly his greatest contribution to theological understanding and apologetics was the problem of evil and its companion, the free will defense. To illustrate how profound Augustine's impact was, his apology on why there is evil in the world is still employed today and remains the best argument for God's reasoning to allow evil events to take place. There are three basic approaches to the problem of evil: logical, evidential, and pastoral. The logical problem of evil was solved in the 1970s by Alvin Plantinga.²⁰ He did so by using Augustine's free will defense and extending it out logically thereby defeating J. L. Mackie's assertion about evil and God's relationship to it.²¹ Augustine's formulation will be examined in this section and Plantinga's use of it will be described briefly in section on the problem of evil. Understanding free will is the natural precursor to unraveling the problem of evil.

Augustine's Conception of Free Will

Free will can be a complicated conception and has historically been categorized into two groups: compatibilism and libertarian freedom. The difficulty in ascertaining Augustine's actual view is due to imposing modern philosophical thought on freedom on Augustine's texts and thereby interpreting the texts through either compatibilist or libertarian lenses. For the Christian, a working rationale for compatibilism would be that the events of the world are pre-determined by God; however, the person making free moral decisions is still responsible for those decisions and their outcome. This can be

²⁰ Alvin Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense," in *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael L. Peterson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 95-129.

²¹ J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in Peterson, *The Problem of Evil*, 81-94.

tricky to understand as it gets into concepts of the active and passive will of God. Put simply, God is omniscient and knows all outcomes of all actions from eternity, but He does not impose His will on people and therefore the decisions they make are free and they are held morally responsible for them. There are biblical cases in which God does impose His will to facilitate action. The most obvious one was the hardening of the pharaoh's heart in Exodus. Libertarian freedom is defined by largely two parameters. The first is that the choices a person makes are considered free if there are other equally viable options to choose from. The second being the choice is free if there are no influences outside of the person that force a particular decision. Eleonore Stump, in her article from *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, suggests a third way of viewing freedom in which compatibilism and the libertarian facet of freely choosing other options are dismissed.²²

Augustine's view can be difficult to define succinctly because it was a work in progress through his writings. There would be changes over time as he thought more about it, but in essence, he seemed to believe in libertarian free will in that the choices a human makes are indeed free as long as there are other viable choices he could freely make. To illustrate this in a mundane way, Jimmy is choosing to eat some ice cream. He desires to have it, but he must choose a flavor. He has options of vanilla, rocky road, butter pecan, and chocolate chip cookie dough. After due consideration, Jimmy chooses butter pecan because it is the one he most wants, and there was no difference in pricing or any other factors pushing Jimmy to one flavor over another, it was all equal.

Augustine felt that humanity is so corrupted by the Fall, that people cannot not sin. This can be seen in scripture in Romans 3:12—"There is none who does good, there is not even one"—which is quoting Psalm 14:3—"There is no one who does good, not even one." An additional verse is Mark 10:18: "And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call

²² Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 125.

Me good? No one is good except God alone.” No one is capable of good without God’s grace being bestowed on him. That in itself is also an act of free will. Humans are in the position to accept grace, reject grace, or do nothing. If one accepts grace, then he can do good as God has granted his request. The gift of grace is available to all, but it is a free choice, like any other. Free will conveys the moral responsibility of the decisions made to the agent. God is not culpable for the choices the agent has made because while God knew the choice that would be made, He did nothing to influence that decision. One could question the freedom involved when God creates situations or opportunities for a person to come to Him in faith. This is a situation where a person could say, “Jesus pursued me.” Certainly, God being omnipotent, omniscient, and so forth, can and does create opportunities for people to come to faith in Him, but it is still the free choice of the person. Augustine, in *City of God* book V, stated:

Therefore, whatever a man has to suffer against his will is not to be attributed to the choices of man or of angels or of any created spirit, but to His choice who gives to wills whatever power they have. It does not follow, therefore, that there is no power in our will because God foreknew what was to be the choice in our will. For, He who had this foreknowledge had some fore-knowledge. Furthermore, if He who foresaw what was to be in our will foresaw, not nothing, but something, it follows that there is a power in our will, even though He foresaw it. The conclusion is that we are by no means under compulsion to abandon free choice in favor of divine foreknowledge, nor need we deny-God forbid !-that God knows the future, as a condition for holding free choice. We accept both. As Christians and philosophers, we profess both-foreknowledge, as a part of our faith; free choice, as a condition of responsible living. It is hard to live right if one's faith in God is wrong.²³

God knows the outcome and has created opportunities for the person to come to faith, but it is still a free choice because the person can always refuse, or do nothing. It is true freedom because knowledge is limited. To God, freedom of choice is more important to Him than being a cosmic puppet master. He wants people to make the free choice of faith in Him; otherwise, the faith is essentially worthless.

²³ Augustine, *The City of God. Books I-VII*, trans. Demetrius B Zema, Gerald Groveland Walsh, and Gilson Étienne, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 264

The Pelagian Controversy

Augustine worked through some of his formulation of free will due to the heretical claims of Pelagius. Much of what is known about Pelagius' doctrine was gleaned from Augustine's rebuttal. Pelagius and Augustine differed on the effect of original sin and how the gift of grace affected it. As written previously, Augustine believed grace was the only thing that could enable people to do good. Original sin had corrupted people so profoundly that they could only sin unless God granted grace and the ability to overcome the sinful desire. Pelagius did not believe this. He felt original sin did not compromise a person's ability to do good. Original sin was only Adam's sin and was not imparted to the rest of humanity. Pelagius did not subscribe to the idea of one person's sin being transmittable to another. The semi-Pelagians admitted original sin's impact, but only in making good works more difficult, not impossible. Pelagius held to the innate ability of a person to do good without the gift of grace. Pelagius was deemed a heretic due to his teaching running contrary to the church doctrine of original sin. He thought people had unhindered freedom to make choices, good and bad. The repetition of bad decisions led to a sinful nature, and the sinful nature was not ingrained as Augustine and the church had affirmed. God was not a necessary part of human salvation in Pelagius' view. Pelagianism, while fading into the historical background, still maintained a small group of followers.

The Problem of Evil

Free will and the problem of evil are inextricably intertwined and without understanding the importance of free will, the problem of evil is inexplicable. The problem of evil is trying to work out how there is evil in the world when there is an all-good God as a sovereign creator over the universe. In his earlier years, before his conversion to Christianity, Augustine subscribed to the notion of Manichaeism, which was a dualistic philosophy of equal, but opposing, forces of good and evil in the universe. For Augustine, this solved the problem of evil because it pitted God against an equally

powerful evil being.²⁴ Later on, Augustine became dissatisfied with this solution and Manichaeism in general. Since God was supremely sovereign due to His creation out of nothing being very good, evil could not be an equal opposing force to Him. By the nature of created things, they cannot be perfect and therefore are subject to contamination or disarray; hence, a potential for evil existing in the good creation of God. Augustine claims a hierarchy of created things, some being in a higher state of good than others.²⁵

This brings in a question that has been debated greatly. Did God create the best world he could have created? There are several views and gradations to this, however, the best answer seems to be that certainly God, being omnipotent, could have created worlds without sin and temptation so that all would come to Him. The problem inherent in that system would be a lack of free choices. God's creatures would be puppets with a hard determined future and no way to be any other way. The freedom to choose to come to God, not come to God, or ignore God altogether, in the end brings more glory to God than being puppets. Sin exists because freedom exists. Free creatures, by definition, are free to choose good or evil. It does not follow that since free creatures can make choices, that God would be liable for the actions of the creatures.

Looking at the case of choosing grace, God offers grace to all, but not all take the offer. In this, God does not change, only the free creatures, by making free choices, are changing and are responsible for those changes. God knows all the choices the person will make but does not take action to influence the choices, thereby making them truly free. An additional question would be, why does not God prevent evil or lessen evil's impact. While this looks like a fair question on the surface, it is a circular one. The question implies that God could not be omnipotent, because if He were, He could prevent evil from happening.

²⁴ William E. Mann, "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin," in Stump and Kretzmann, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 40.

²⁵ Mann, "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin," 42.

The resolution is two-fold. First, the question itself is subjective to the questioner because he does not know to what degree God may be preventing evil events. In the case of a madman shooting people in a Vegas concert, sixty people were killed. There is the possibility God prevented thirty additional people from being killed, but the questioner would never have access to that knowledge. This idea folds into the second part of just how much evil should God prevent. This too is subjective to the questioner. In the case of the Vegas massacre, the question of evil goes back to the questioner of how many deaths would be an acceptable evil. Ultimately, many people would say zero, for most moral people do not wish to see others killed. If zero are killed because God prevented it, then the world would not know the potential bloodbath because God prevented it from happening.

This in turn leads to the question that has no end. If God prevented this event then why not that event? Ultimately, it would be the person's wish that evil is eliminated from the world just to prove God's omnipotence. Based on what has been stated previously, this eliminates freedom. For Augustine, without the choice of sin, there can be no choice to live righteously either. Adam and Eve had freedom of choice as well but chose poorly.

These questions about evil continue into the modern era and many of the same questions are being posed. Modern apologists still wrestle with many of these questions on an academic level, but these questions are not limited to the universities. Every day people are concerned with the apparent level of evil in the world and how to reconcile it with the God they know to be only good. The academic answers can be applied pastorally with some modification. These situations would be particular to the person, so there is no handbook of how to handle each instance, but one must rely on knowledge of the person and how best to approach them.

Academically, the logical problem of evil was solved by Alvin Plantinga in his response to J. L. Mackie. The debate was complex but can be broken down into these

assertions. Mackie's objection to the free will defense was based on these premises. Mackie said, first, there is a possibility there could have been a world with free creatures who never go wrong. Second, an omnipotent being can actualize any possible world. Last, Mackie asserted therefore if God is omnipotent, then God could create a world as described, with non-sinners creatures.²⁶ Plantinga offered the possibility of transworld depravity, which means that in any possible world that could be created, depravity would exist and therefore evil would come about.

How is transworld depravity relevant to this? As follows. Obviously it is possible that there be persons who suffer from transworld depravity. More generally, it is possible that everybody suffers from it. And if this possibility were actual, then God, though omnipotent, could not have created any of the possible worlds containing just the persons who do in fact exist, and containing moral good but no moral evil. For to do so He'd have to create persons who were significantly free (otherwise there would be no moral good) but suffered from transworld depravity. Such persons go wrong with respect to at least one action in any world God could have actualized and in which they are free with respect to morally significant actions; so the price for creating a world in which they produce moral good is creating one in which they also produce moral evil.²⁷

In any world God could have created with beings endowed with genuine free will, there would be the capacity to sin and therefore evil would enter the world. Plantinga only had to offer the possibility of transworld depravity as a solution; he did not need to prove the idea to succeed.²⁸ It seems that God decided it was more important to create a world with creatures possessing free will than to rule out the possibility of evil coming about. God had good reason for allowing evil and also had a plan for the world's redemption. Even though these philosophical maneuverings are far afield from Augustine's original formulations, they are still based on his foundational work.

²⁶ Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 81-94.

²⁷ Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense," 128.

²⁸ Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense," 95-129.

Apologetics in the Modern Era

The following examination of the modern challenges to Christianity will show that contemporary apologists expanded upon and adapted early defenses of Christian beliefs to confront modern philosophies and cultural movements. The early defenses of the faith helped define the faith from without and within and provided a bedrock for defending beliefs of Christianity for centuries to come.

Naturalism, Secularism, and Scientism

Naturalism can be loosely defined as everything can be explained by natural causes. What exists does so only because of natural processes. There is no transcendent reality or supernatural. In this viewpoint, it seems to be a level playing field, where everything is equal. Naturalism dictates that all life has equal value—man has no more worth than plankton. One must ask if naturalists truly believe this. Naturalists claim that nature has no plan, no purpose, and does not distinguish between man and mantis. There is no supernatural; nothing exists outside of what can be shown through science. Death is the end of existence and there is nothing further. If a person hits a grasshopper with his car and kills it, nature does not care. If one were to hit a person with his car and killed them, nature does not care in this case either. This is not an equal situation for most people, but it is what naturalism dictates. Secular law does not agree that killing a human is the same as killing a grasshopper. If human life has more value than a grasshopper, then the naturalist argument falls apart.

Naturalism is a pointless and valueless system of philosophy that contradicts truth, reality, and logic. Removing any religious contexts, people seek to protect human life and assign value to it above all other living things. This is mutually incompatible with the tenants of naturalism. Society could claim that people are more intelligent than the animals, but that is still assigning a value to humanity, regardless of the parameter. It can be said because people know it is wrong to kill a human over a beast, but that is assigning morality and ethics on naturalism, which by definition has no such system. Scaling down

the moral issue from life and death situations, this morality system still applies. If a person needed to get a top grade in a class and knew for a fact he would not get caught, would he cheat on the test? Naturalism's law of the survival of the fittest would allow him to get ahead by any means necessary. Many people would agree that cheating is wrong, no matter the situation because of the innate human moral sense. Even if one would apply evolutionary altruistic behaviors, it still does not explain why some would cheat and why some would not. Naturalism is, by definition, strictly materialist, so where does this ethical sense come from and who decides what is right and what is wrong? Evolutionary altruism and ethics do not hold up, as will be seen in the next section.

Society has been shown historically to be malleable, therefore society cannot be any ultimate authority of right and wrong. There is moral relativism, which is the idea that one decides his right and wrong, thereby making the individual the ultimate authority. The issue here is that without the universal ethical code, one person's right or wrong is not the same as another's. For instance, Adolf Hitler felt it was perfectly okay to experiment on and extinguish the lives of several million people he considered worthless in the pursuit of perfecting the German race. In his mind, the end would justify the means. Without a doubt, what he did was wrong and is accepted as such by the vast majority. To the naturalist, however, this example should be no more heinous than the extermination of a termite colony. The objective truth is that there is a huge difference between the two. The answer to where the moral sense comes from is clear and simple for the Christian. Humans are created in the image of God and therefore are aware of God's ethics, science, logic, and art because of His creation. God gave humanity insight into His character, His reason, and His laws of nature because humans are made in His image. Mankind is not equal to animals, despite efforts to diminish our standing, and despite the assertion that we are nothing special. None of these arguments hold even under the most cursory scrutiny of logical examination.

Atheism, naturalism, humanism, and materialism do not answer the question of morality—its origin or cause—with any degree of satisfaction when one examines them. There are two main reasons why these philosophies work for many. The first reason is that the people ascribing to them do not fully understand that these so-called truth claims have little to no truth in them. There are huge moral and ethical consequences of these belief systems that people are not aware of. Most likely people are influenced by societal pressures to abandon “fairy tale” religions and embrace reason. This cosmology appeals mostly to the intellectual sophists that feel reason rules the world. The second and possibly largest draw of these belief systems is the rejection of the ultimate authority in God, which allows the person to not be accountable for his actions except to himself. A person feels like they can be freer when not constrained by the decrees of deity. This concept has invaded the culture in several forms that seem innocuous at first glance. One of these is self-actualization—the process of giving in to one’s most innermost desires to achieve true happiness. This is the primary goal of Buddhism and its western spinoff, Maslow’s hierarchy. These and similar philosophies back up Dawkins’s self-serving morality concept, but as will be shown in detail, that model is deeply flawed.

Enlightenment philosopher David Hume affected how scholars viewed theology and philosophy. Scholars found that the scientific influence of the Enlightenment and Hume, in particular, caused them to diminish or reject the supernatural altogether. Kant, Hume, and others introduced much skepticism into these schools of thought by their spurious suggestions about how to think of things like reality, cause and effect, and the like. Their arguments undermined monotheism in general and caused many to abandon their beliefs in light of the Enlightened truth. Naturalism and materialism replaced religion as nature could be explained rationally and scientifically. These new ideas even caused theists to question how God works in the universe or even if he works at all.

Methodological naturalism is the worldview positing all science should explain the natural world without reference to a God or any other creative, designing supernatural

force. This viewpoint insists natural processes alone are responsible for all that is seen in nature and are governed by the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, and other natural laws. This worldview is also referred to as scientism, in which believers hold to the idea that science holds all the answers to everything, including things not yet discovered. Scientism is an offshoot of the larger movement called modernism, which was spawned by the Enlightenment. One illustration of how scientism influences ideas are where neurological sciences claim that the mind is nothing more than a specific set of neurons triggered when certain thought processes are engaged. No metaphysical mind or soul is present, just the dictates of chemistry. Science solves the mystery of everything under this set of beliefs.

By adopting the scientism perspective, one buys into a viewpoint of the world without purpose and direction. This idea is embedded in the theory of evolution. One may not be aware of the full significance of accepting evolution as one may think that science provides the answers to life's big questions, however, it only worsens them. The evolutionary worldview says that life is an accident and came about strictly by chance. Nature is without direction, which implicitly asserts that there is no purpose to human life. Many secularists have emphasized this idea in an attempt to make humanity look less special than it is in actuality. The rationale behind this idea is that by denying the specialness of humanity, one can avoid the theological implication of mankind's creation, which is an unacceptable ramification. When setting aside the theological consequences from this movement, those who champion this cause claim they are trying to remove humanity's self-centeredness. These efforts often fail for various reasons. It is self-evident that humans are fundamentally different from any other animal. For the Christian, human life is special because of the image of God that puts humans above other life. The secularist may not be willing to accept or recognize the specialness of humanity, but the sense of specialness is embedded in humans and cannot be reasonably denied. A cursory examination of humans with the rest of nature reveals this truth, even without appeal to a

deity. Despite this, the secularist is so committed to naturalism and the subversion of purpose in human life that he must adopt extremes outside of observational facts.

In C. S. Lewis's *Miracles*, the third chapter discusses the problems associated with the naturalistic viewpoint in regard to miracles. The major problem with Naturalism, Lewis states, is explaining things that defy explanation with current scientific understanding. For Naturalism to be an acceptable viewpoint it should be able to explain everything that would be encountered in the world in terms of its Total System. In addition, it is understood that nothing can be independent of nature.

Lewis reasons out that people's minds cannot support the Naturalism idea because of how people come to gain knowledge. One takes in information from the senses, processes it, and systematizes it. People take these bits of information and make conclusions about things based on them. All sciences are reliant on the fact that humans can reason and think about relationships in nature and draw conclusions from observation. Lewis says of Naturalism, "It discredits our process of reasoning or at least reduces their credit to such a humble level that it can no longer support Naturalism itself."²⁹

Humans are not capable of knowing more than the five senses bring to the mind. Lewis states that any attempt to explain how human reasoning works without the act of sensory input knowledge only asserts a theory that there is no reasoning involved. Naturalism claims to offer an explanation of mental processes that disregards a person's capacity for insight and the use of knowledge to find the truth.

Any thing which professes to explain our reasoning fully without introducing an act of knowing thus solely determined by what is known, is really a theory that there is no reasoning. But this, as it seems to me, is what Naturalism is bound to do. It offers what professes to be a full account of our mental behavior; but this account, on inspection, leave no room for acts of knowing or insight on which the whole value of our thinking, as a means to truth, depends.³⁰

²⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 1974), 22.

³⁰ Lewis, *Miracles*, 27.

In the closing part of the chapter, Lewis states that the Naturalistic theory of reason must have come via historical and evolutionary processes. He then asserts this idea is absurd. This type of process does not explain human experience properly. The idea that reasoning came through a method of natural selection and behavior modification responses is short of an adequate theory of the human mind. To the theist, the human intellect is something given by God. He has given this capacity for reason to understand the Nature that He has made, not for humanity to ascribe human intellect to Nature. If humans give up the idea that God granted humans the ability to reason, then people should give up the idea of Nature too, for God made Nature as well.

The New Atheists

When the new atheists are mentioned, one usually thinks of Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett. They are the most visible and outspoken voices of the movement, but certainly, there are more of the new atheist mindset than these four men. Late physicist Steven Hawking could be counted as well, but he tends to argue from the point of physics while the others select philosophical or evolutionary arguments against God.

Ravi Zacharias, in his book *The End of Reason*, counters the claims of the new atheists from a logical perspective. One of the problems he addresses was covered previously in the realm of moral authority. Zacharias points out a refusal to acknowledge an objective moral sense does not preclude the existence of one.³¹ He mainly discusses atheistic ideas brought forth by Sam Harris, who questions the morality of religion, whereas Dawkins tends toward using atheistic evolution as a solve-all solution to ethics.³² Harris brings forth the questions posed by the problem of evil and uses it to

³¹ Ravi K. Zacharias, *The End of Reason: A Response to the New Atheists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 59-60.

³² Zacharias, *The End of Reason*, 46-49.

proclaim the evil of God. Zacharias dismembers Harris's arguments by pointing out the loss of logic and irrational emotional appeal of the arguments. Further, Zacharias, who understands several Asian religions due to his upbringing, points out Harris' shortcomings in touting these faiths as being above Christianity. Harris' downfall is the lack of an understanding of what these religions teach. Zacharias sums up other faiths thusly:

Hinduism has a caste system that's intrinsic to it. Buddhism denies personhood. Jainism puts him on par with the insect world. A study of the code of Hammurabi or the Laws of Manu reveals a stark difference from Christianity in their starting points. Only in the Judeo-Christian teaching do ethical imperatives follow from human worth, which has been imparted by God, not by human beings.³³

Zacharias refutes Harris' claim on the atheistic moral value being greater than any religious system by questioning where the moral sense in atheism comes from. By Harris' line of reasoning, there cannot be a moral sense, for morality is relative to the person. As previously discussed, this leads to many problems, not to mention the fact that most people agree on where moral boundaries are drawn. Murder tends to be wrong, as is rape, theft, and a host of other evils. Taken to the rational end, Harris' philosophy must conclude there is no objective evil, only perceptual differences exist. If there is no evil, then there is no good either; hence, one philosophy cannot be superior to another. If this is true, then Harris cannot, within his established boundaries, declare that atheism is morally better than theism.

Darwin Outside of Biology

Methodological naturalism has permeated the culture to the point where the biological evolutionary ideas of Charles Darwin have been misapplied to many other facets of life, such as social interactions and political theory. It seems doubtful Darwin would have applied evolution to social structures as he was only concerned with the origins of man, animals, and plants. Darwinian evolution gave the methodological naturalist a

³³ Zacharias, *The End of Reason*, 93.

framework around which to build the whole world. Nancy Pearcey, in her book *Total Truth*, recommends using apologetic techniques that had been used to combat evolution in biology, need to be adapted to confront the slippage of Darwinism into other realms of human life.³⁴

Evolutionary altruism. The topic of this section will deal with the efforts of scientists to impose the ideas of Darwinian evolution on humanity's moral and social structures. Pearcey asserts this movement arose from logic and is not based on scientific evidence:

We have to realize, however, that once someone has accepted the evolutionary premise, the question of evidence becomes all but irrelevant. Applying Darwinian explanations of human behavior is a matter of simple logic. After all, if evolution is true, then how did the mind emerge, if not by evolution? How else did human behavior arise, if not through the adaptation to the environment?³⁵

The evolutionary ideas that follow will be contrasted by God's design for human beings and the social systems He has designed. The discussion will first focus on the symposium on altruism, conducted at the University of California at Davis in December of 2010, supplemented by material from Richard Dawkins' book *The Selfish Gene*.³⁶ In this discussion, the symposium and Dawkins' works will be briefly analyzed in light of works on chimpanzee behavior, which will include a comparative overview of the genetic composition of humans and chimpanzees. The section will conclude by explicating God's social design for human beings and how He designed humans to relate to one another in the community. In conclusion, *evolutionary altruism*, like its biological cousin, does not conform to reality as designed by God.

The Symposium and the University of California Davis. The symposium

³⁴ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 205.

³⁵ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 211.

³⁶ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

had several speakers discussing the origins of altruism based on a neo-Darwinian model.³⁷ The theories were admitted by a few of the speakers to be speculative and the theories tended to be short-sighted in regard to human interaction. The speakers did not offer models that could explain the entire spectrum of human social interplay and the models in many cases did not line up with simple observational data. These theories were conceived and based on experiential evidence; however, the conclusions did not necessarily flow from the data. The various evolutionary theories broke into three categories: group selection, reciprocal altruism, and selection by reputation. Dawkins also went into detail about some variations within these frameworks. The assertion was that these behaviors developed over millennia, initially starting with kinship relations to protect the bloodline, and eventually became the full-fledged altruistic behaviors seen in modern man.

Before addressing the details of these theories, it must be stated that these categories are meant to be general archetypes and speak to tendencies within people. Certainly, human behavior is more complex than these somewhat narrow definitions and there are circumstances people can find themselves in where they would behave in one way or another. It would also show great disrespect for the image-bearer of God to pigeonhole behavior into tight categories without a fuller exploration of the person. The speakers and Dawkins seem to make this error in their theories.

Group selection is the process in which the group takes actions to suppress members with aggressive, cheating, or bullying tendencies by making members conform to a more cooperative behavior mode. This was supposed to, over time, eliminate alpha male aggression and change the whole group system to a more cooperative mode. One of the speakers, Christopher Boehm, freely admitted that this evolutionary model for the

³⁷ This symposium was broadcast on cable television by the University of California Davis and at the time of this writing, no transcripts could be found on their website. The information stated in this section is comprised from the notes I took while watching the broadcast.

development of altruism has many social institutions it cannot explain and is a very incomplete theory. Despite the shortcomings, this theory was presented as a probable answer. Boehm stated that the so-call free-rider problem (i.e., the alpha male bully) has not been bred out by group selection and that the theory, to be sound and complete, must address the free-rider problem. Dawkins handles this by suggesting there is a symbiotic relationship between what he calls *cheaters* and *suckers*. Cheaters are analogous to what Boehm calls free riders. Cheaters take all the benefits of society or social structures and offer nothing in return. The suckers are the individuals that enable the cheaters by servicing them and expecting reciprocation, but never receive it yet continue to service the cheaters.³⁸

Group selection features a component called reciprocal altruism. This process is simply stated as “I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine.” It postulates that all altruistic behavior, at its base form, is self-serving in some way. Under this assumption, people will only behave in altruistic ways if there is a reward or reciprocation of some description implied in the interaction. John Locke’s work on social contracts seems to be loosely based on this idea of reciprocal altruism in that he believes a person should behave in certain ways in hopes that others will see and model that behavior and thereby promote good social order. Dawkins states that this was probably the ancestral starting point for altruism: “Man may well have spent large portions of the last several million years living in small kin groups. Kin selection and selection in favour of reciprocal altruism may have acted on human genes to produce many of our basic psychological attributes and tendencies.”³⁹ Reciprocal altruism seems at first to contain enough truth and facts to be accepted as a solid theory or development; however, that is only a cursory glance at the theory. Like many other evolutionary-based models, it does not explain every case, every

³⁸ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 198.

³⁹ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 205.

human, and every culture, as it should be considered tenable. For example, the reciprocal idea does not allow people to act altruistically with no expectation of benefit to one's self. In regard to the suckers, while they do not receive reward and yet continue to act altruistically, they do expect reciprocation, which is the underlying motivation for their actions, even though they never receive it. Some people do not expect immediate repayment for their positive actions and have the patience to wait for future rewards, but this does not change the expectation of reciprocation. A scenario illustrating this would be doing a favor for someone and then telling them: "One day I will need you to do something for me, and I expect you to remember this thing I did for you."

The reward the person expects may not be visible or tangible to other observers of the behavior and thereby can be mistakenly seen as purely altruistic. Selection by reputation is the process by which group members behave in seemingly altruistic ways to gain a higher reputation within that group and therefore benefit socially. This is a variation of the reciprocal model, but it is subtly different. In the reciprocal model, actions are taken by one member in hopes that the recipient of the action will repay in kind in the future. The reciprocal model has some risk involved in the altruistic behaviors, for repayment is desired but not guaranteed, whereas the reputation model is more likely to ensure success.

Part of Dawkins's view on altruism is based on reciprocal altruism. In *The Selfish Gene*, he does make an effort to clarify what he means by *selfish*. He also states that he does not endorse the idea that people are driven by self-serving genes, but says it is true and observable.⁴⁰ When Dawkins speaks of the *selfish* term, he is not talking of it in the colloquial sense of being greedy and self-absorbed. He means that on a genetic level is a drive to primarily preserve and serve one's genetic material. This starts in kinship relationships, which all can understand, but he extends the definition to include other people that seem to be like-minded to the individual. As an explanation for this, Dawkins

⁴⁰ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 3.

states that people can recognize similar genetic traits in others that are not direct family:

The possessor of an altruistic gene might be recognized simply by the fact that he does altruistic acts. . . . Are there any plausible ways in which genes might “recognize” their copies in other individuals? The answer is yes. It is easy to show that close relatives—kin—having a greater than average chance of sharing genes. It has long been clear that this must be why altruism by parents towards their young is so common . . . the same applies to other close relations- brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, close cousins. If an individual dies in order to save ten close relatives, one copy of the kin-altruism gene may be lost, but a larger number of copies of the same gene is saved.⁴¹

In kinship, there is a tendency to be protective or assign higher priority to the welfare of family over strangers. This is easily recognizable and it is also true that humans tend to value family relationships above others. As mentioned before, the observational data in these theories is often sound, but the conclusions drawn are sometimes at odds with biblical teaching.⁴²

The symposium speakers had other subtle and not so subtle shortcomings in their speeches. Sarah Hrdy shows the “tree of man” fossil chart that includes many apes unrelated to man, such as Australopithecus. The chart undermined her credibility considerably, as it references a creature that many now consider not to be human at all. A worse example was that Randolph Neese used a non-existing pre-man he called Pan on which to base his theory and asserted that since chimpanzees and bonobos exhibit this and that behavior on some level, that Pan must have also, and by that extension, explains why man behaves in these ways as well. Pan was his missing link between ape and man development. Having a non-existent creature to bolster a theory does not seem to make for a very strong argument. This is similar to some biblical scholars theorizing about a document called Q that was the base for some gospel material when there is no evidence whatsoever that Q existed. The problem with comparing ape and man is that man, even in an earlier time, was more advanced than any ape, and the analogy of behaviors between

⁴¹ Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 96-97.

⁴² The difference is discussed in greater detail in the section on God’s design for the community.

the two cannot be logically made. It would be like comparing the different hunting styles of the lion and tiger and making assumptions about the tiger by watching the lion. Neese also admits that he did not have any idea when in the developmental chain that altruism started. He went further and stated that many animals and most apes show these behaviors, but man is different in unexplainable ways.

All these theories and their various mutations have a common flaw that two of the theorists were honest enough to admit. No single model can be found to explain the entirety of humanity. One theory works well for a certain group, but not another, and so forth. Anthropologists and other scientists working on this question are largely divided on the issues and have yet to form a consensus, even among the current concepts. The general idea, for now, is to apply the theory only to the group that it holds for and wait until a “unified altruism theory” can be formulated.

Many times, researchers and scientists look to the present to find the key to the past. In terms of human behavioral origins, a common starting place is the closest genetic relative, the chimpanzee. Most scientists speak of this relationship in regard to the idea of common descent; that we share evolutionary ancestors with the great apes. Those who differ with Darwin would attribute the relationship to common design.

Genetic science states that chimpanzee and human DNA are about 98.8 percent identical. Observational data indicates that while this comparison is high, there are major differences between humans and apes. The main cause of these variations is in the percentage of differences. The 1.2 percent adds up to 35 million genetic differences. In these differences the creatures become separate. Some of the genetic material between humans and chimpanzees are technically identical in sequence but operate in varying degrees from each other. These degrees dictate things like brain capacities and muscle density. Chimpanzees, therefore, gain much greater muscle strength and humans get a smarter brain, comparatively.

A recent study sought to link specific sequences of chimpanzee DNA to human DNA to support common ancestry. Bits of what is called “junk DNA” or “broken DNA” appear both in the human and ape genome, which led the researchers to conclude that the idea of common descent was true. A new study called into question the earlier findings:

Undergirding the author’s conclusion about DNA “loss” is the assumption that humans and apes originally shared a common genetic sequence. Actual genetic data demonstrates a much bigger gap between humans and the apes. In contrast to the popular assertion that humans and chimpanzees are only 1 to 2% different, when the billions of letters in each species’ genome are lined up letter-by-letter, the genetic gap between these species becomes much bigger. Careful re-tallying of the numbers in the original paper describing the initial elucidation of the chimpanzee DNA sequence suggests that the two species are only ~89% identical. An independent reanalysis of a sample of the raw data concurs with this assessment.⁴³

Given this new research, it appears that the differences between chimps and people are far greater than once believed. While this does not abolish common descent, it does call into question its strength, while not weakening common design at all.

Certainly, chimpanzees and other high animals are fully capable of feeling emotions, and have intellectual capacities and social structures. Dogs have been observed to display happiness, fear, and other emotions. Dolphins have a language of clicks and whistles and show extreme intelligence. Chimpanzees are the closest to humans in the animal kingdom as far as some behaviors and genetics, but to use them to understand humanity’s past does not seem reasonable. Comparing humans to chimpanzees can only go so far due to the differences between them. Jane Goodall’s research on the chimpanzees of Gombe was remarkable and ground-breaking to be sure, but she seemed to overstate some observations. She felt that chimpanzees have a spiritual side to them, based on some behaviors she noticed. Without a doubt, Goodall cared deeply for these chimpanzees and formed relationships with them. Even in light of her work, and besides the obvious physiological structure, Goodall recognized that people and chimpanzees are

⁴³ Nathaniel T. Jeanson, “Differences Between Chimp and Human DNA Recalculated,” Answers in Genesis, September 17, 2015, <https://answersingenesis.org/genetics/dna-similarities/differences-between-chimp-and-human-dna-recalculated>.

different in some way, but she was not sure how exactly. She offered verbal language, abstract thought, or spirituality as things that separate humans from animals, but did not seem to stand firm on any one of them. Goodall advanced the understanding that animals are more than organic machines, as they were often thought of in her day, and are creatures capable of feelings like people.⁴⁴ Humans can and do form close bonds with animals, and in certain animals, there is reciprocation. Dogs will tend to be loyal, protective, and loving of their human friends. This does not mean that the relationship is somehow equal. Animals do have a purpose in God's plan and they are all under His provisional care (Matt 6:26). Humans were granted stewardship and dominion over the animals as a part of God's plan, so while He includes animals, it is clear that humanity is separate from them in responsibility and purpose (Gen 1:24-28).

God's design for human social structure. God's nature is the triune Godhead, which exists eternally in community. God, in designing the universe, made a social structure for humanity that flowed out of His very nature. He is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and His creation is made for community. "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:18), therefore God made humans be a reflection of His nature, in His image, in a community of others. With the creation of Eve, the family and social structures followed according to God's design for people. The diversity of roles seen in the Trinity are mirrored in humanity in the roles for women and men. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equal but with different roles, so are man and women equal with different roles. God is not alone in the Godhead, so man is not alone on the earth. This design shows the relationship between humans and God as well. God is not a theistic god who creates and then leaves, He wants a relationship, and we seek to have a relationship with Him. These relational qualities of love, fellowship, union, intimacy, and others have

⁴⁴ Steve Paulson, *Atoms and Eden: Conversations on Religion and Science* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010), 289.

existed eternally in the Godhead and is what He wants us to have with Him and among ourselves.

With the Fall of man came the corruption of the entire creation. Not only was our relationship with God damaged, but our relationship with each other was also dealt a blow (Gen 3:16-19). People greatly underestimate the level of damage that the Fall did to humanity. All of creation was affected, and not just the physical world but the emotional world as well. A veil over our human eyes prevents us from seeing God's truth clearly which has led to a departure of the social structure God designed. Though it is not clear, there is enough light shining through to discern what God had in mind for humanity's social structures. The social orders as designed by God are a reflection of the Trinity. The structures tend to be seen in three distinct parts. One example would be in God's relationship with mankind, familial relationships, and the church. Within these structures, the Trinity is again repeated. The family is husband, wife, and children; the church is Christ, leaders, and members; the world is physical, spiritual, and social, and God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Built within this design are authority, submission, and unity. If people were to adhere closer to God's design, then we would have considerably less social strife. Arrogance, pride, blindness, and a host of other emotions have caused a dissolution of social order. One does not have to look far to see this happening. History, any news website, any newspaper, the so-called social media, and many other outlets offer ample proof of the corruption of social order. The radical feminist movement damages family and authority structures. The sexual revolution damages family and personal identity. There is no need to go on, as a comprehensive list would fill volumes of books. Secular science has attempted to resolve these issues in society, but science is ill-equipped to even agree on what a society should look like.

Despite the aims of the scientists to conceive of a theory of the social behavior of people, their efforts fall short in key areas and do not conform to reality as well as God's design for the community. The Bible speaks directly about several of the proposed theories

of social behavior discussed by Dawkins and the speakers of the symposium. An example of a person acting under the reputation selection idea can be seen in Matthew 6:5: “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” In the theory, the person does achieve status in the community and receives benefits of that status. The Bible does not deny this and confirms that this happens, however, the person has gained the world but lost their soul. The reward they earned was short term and only good in the eyes of man. The speakers and Dawkins were on the right track but missed the vital component.

Christianity is not reciprocal altruism in the works sense. One does not do good works just to ensure entry into heaven. James 2:18 asserts that works are a natural outcome of a heart change. God wants a heart change. People can be seen doing the same actions, but one is behaving only in works and the desire to please God and love for others is not there. Then others act out of love for people and are obedient to God’s command to love one another and they act in this way because of a heart change. The distinction between these two examples is very fine. Obedience is serving God and showing love for Him because Christians are obedient to His Word, but if people are only obedient with a works mindset and do not love, human beings are missing the point by a great margin. God wants peoples heart to change, and with that change, a person’s works will change in alignment with love. Works, even when outwardly appearing to serve others, is no good if inwardly one hates performing the work. One can feed the homeless for years and if he despises doing so and acts only on the idea that he will earn heaven, then he does not understand the gospel.

One assertion covers all contingencies, cultures, and humans. God created mankind with a moral sense and mankind is a special creation above animals. All of creation has some level of moral sense and altruism, but humans, being created in God’s image, stand apart from all others in this world. The moral sense was not learned or

developed over time, it was embedded. From ants and apes to zebras and zooplankton, all have the ability on some level to behave in altruistic and cooperative fashions to protect the group and ensure survival, but man has free will and the choice to behave in altruistic ways or not. It is up to the person to decide to follow one's will or that of God's.

Conclusion

Apologetics has been employed to advance the message of the church since its inception. John and Paul both wrote about false teachers being in the very earliest church. The dedication of theologians such as Origen, Augustine, Clement, Tertullian, and others provided counterpoints to the claims of the surrounding Greco-Roman culture and false teachings within the burgeoning church. These men not only corrected errant ideas about Christianity in a variety of ways but also provided new ways to think about the teachings present in the Bible to better understand. The defenses mounted by those such as Augustine form the foundation for defending the faith against contemporary cultural attacks. The overview shows that early church history supported this thesis by demonstrating early church leaders developed Christian apologia to refine their beliefs when confronted with the misinformed surrounding culture. These apologias also helped Christianity to be better understood by its practitioners, which enabled them to spread the fledgling faith into the pagan world, bringing people to believe in Christ.

The section on the early church presented an analysis of Origen's *Contra Celsum*, Augustine's free will defense, and theodicy, showing how these challenges were handled in the dawn years of the church. These men, along with many others, developed defenses of the faith that carry through to the twenty-first century. The thesis was also supported by the second section, which was an investigation of modern apologetic techniques that have been employed to combat new challenges to the Christian faith. Among these challenges are secularism, scientism, naturalism, the new atheists, and the misapplication of Darwinian ideas outside of biology. Apologetics continues to be a firm base on which to build evangelistic techniques to make the gospel understood by more

people and to bring awareness of God's kingdom to the world.

CHAPTER 4

APOLOGETICS BASED EVANGELISM TRAINING

Due to two factors in 2020, there was both an exodus of members as well as a small influx of new members at FPCC. First, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States early in the year. To further complicate matters, the founding pastor of FPCC, Ronnie Caswell, retired at the end of 2019, after twenty-eight years of service. Caswell stated he would stay on during the transition to the new pastor, Carson Troutman, and would leave after Easter. His retirement was announced before COVID-19 made it to America.

The chaos of the pandemic caused great and heated debates on mask mandates and keeping the church open or closed. The elders were divided on these issues. There was also debate on if the church did stay open, would it continue to hold limited capacity in-person services or move to an essential personnel-only attendance and stream online services via Facebook? These COVID-induced situations, along with the transition of pastors, led to a dramatic loss of membership on a scale that has yet to be properly calculated.

During the early part of 2021, after opening up to in-person services, Troutman and the elders implemented measures to get a membership roster formalized as Caswell did not have a system in place. Most attending congregants, both in-person and online, completed the membership form, but not everyone. FPCC has gone from an estimated 150-person congregation in 2019 before Caswell's retirement to about 39 members as of the latest count. Several members have yet to come back to in-person services, but we remain hopeful that they will return since many of the governmental virus mandates have been lifted. FPCC has retained a few new members, but regrowth has been slow. Due to

shifting membership, the elders saw a need to make sure the church was unified theologically going forward. Part of this plan would be covered by my DEdMin project along with a few other outreach and teaching projects I had taken the initiative to organize.

The survey, the Bedrock of Christian Apologetics Assessment (BCAA), in my Google Drive was examined again by me and a church staff member to make sure there were no errors or unclear questions. On Sunday, May 23, 2021, after the opening prayer, general announcements, and greeting time, I announced and explained the basics of the project from the podium. Most congregants knew about the project and had expressed their interest in it. I talked about the details and made them aware that an email would go out within a week to the church emailing list to formally gauge interest in the project training. On May 31, I sent an email to 107 people on our contact list, not all of which are members. The email explained what the project was going to entail, which included a basic outline of the steps and timeframe. The email asked for a response with the phrase “Yes I am interested,” no later than June 4 at 11:59 p.m.

After a fair number of responses, I sent a reminder email on June 3 to attract more potential responses. The deadline came to pass and the final count of responders was sixteen. Next, on June 7, I sent an email with the survey link to the sixteen responders with instructions that the survey must be completed by June 11 at 11:59 p.m.¹ The email and the survey stated the survey should take no longer than ten minutes to complete. The survey consisted of twenty apologetics-oriented questions divided into four categories: Christian ethics, biblical inerrancy, general evolutionary theories and those specifically relating to human beings, and Christian doctrine. Responders were instructed on the survey to create a PIN using their three initials and their birth year. The PIN was to be used twice by the responders—first for the pre-training survey and again after the

¹ See appendix 1.

training. The PIN was used to enable a comparison between pre- and post-training responses. On June 12, the survey forms were examined. Fourteen people participated in the initial survey. The survey data revealed a need at FPCC to train in two areas: humans as a special creation of God and biblical inerrancy.

Between June 13 and July 1, the curricula were researched and written. Several resources I had used in the past were revisited along with the most updated creationist material I could find on human origins. Considerable effort was put forth to make technical paleontological evidence for early humans into a form that did not compromise the material, yet made it more accessible to the audience in the training session. Due to timing constraints for the project and events at the church, it was decided to do both the human origins and biblical inerrancy training in one evening over two and a half hours, with a break between sessions. In working through the material, I found a natural bridge to connect the two sessions. By establishing the understanding of biblical inerrancy and what that means, I was able to buttress the affirmation of Adam as a real, historical figure. An email was sent to the people who completed the survey informing them that the date of the training was July 5 from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. and giving them details on the material being covered.

The training session on human origins began at 6:10 p.m. to allow for stragglers. The session opened in prayer. Eight of the people who completed the first survey were in attendance, with eleven people total for the session. The material was delivered until 6:55 p.m. and attendees were asked to pose any questions at that time. Questions were answered and the group took a fifteen-minute break. Drinks and snacks were provided. Before starting the next session, there were a few more questions on human origins and those were answered before moving on.

Human Evolution and the Biblical Adam

The following is an overview of the training session material. A transcript of the lecture materials can be found in appendix 3 and 4.

The teaching session started with a clarification of terms. Big “E” evolution is a secular idea and is defined as one species changing to another given enough time. Small “e” evolution or micro evolution or adaptation is still change over time, but species lines are not crossed. Christians can accept small “e” evolution because there are changes in animals and plants over time as this can be seen in the fossil record. Big “E” evolution is a completely naturalistic way of looking at the world and eliminates God from its universe. It was discussed how Christians must be cautious in importing secular ideas into the Christian worldview to keep the purity of the gospel and also to not confuse the concepts being discussed.

The discussion continued with a brief description of Young Earth Creationism and Old Earth Creationism and how they are both within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy. Theistic evolution, however, was pointed out as the wrong doctrine for orthodox Protestants, despite it being the official teaching of the Catholic Church on the issue of origins. Theistic evolution was defined and reasons for rejecting it were given.

The lesson proceeded into the topic of human evolution and affirmed that while human beings share many characteristics of primates, humans are a special creation of God and the resemblance to primate animals is superficial. The question was posed, if humans are not animals, then what are humans and who were Adam and Eve. Humans were created in the image of God and that was shown as the main factor separating humans from animals. Fossil evidence of early humans was described in some detail. These hominin fossils can give the Christian pause to possibly rethink how Adam and Eve may have looked. Descriptions of Neanderthals and Denisovans were given along with a brief survey of genetics in regard to these hominins.

The Bible was shown to support a historical Adam in both the New and Old Testaments. A segue into the next lesson on biblical inerrancy was brought forth and was relevant to the understanding of the historical Adam. While it seemed unlikely that an evangelistic encounter with a non-believer would turn to a discussion of genetics, it was

described as affirming to the Christian to know how in-depth the evidence was for a real Adam and Creation.

Biblical Inerrancy

The definition of biblical inerrancy is that the Bible is without any error whatsoever and gives the Bible the authority and final word on what God wants us to do, and how to be. Evidence by the means of scriptural passages confirming the idea of inerrancy was described. A brief history of how theologians and scholars came to define inerrancy and the need to do so was elucidated. Common criticisms of the Bible's supposed errors were refuted in detail. Some of these criticisms included inconsistencies within the text, authorial error or ignorance, contradictions, and outside influences of Greek philosophy and Gnosticism. Each of the critiques was debunked in turn with historical data and scholarly evidence. The subject of the canon of Scripture and how it was decided was the next topic. The presentation showed students how the canon was decided over time by the church's use, and not by a group of men working in secret or at some council meeting. The lesson wrapped up with a rebuttal on the idea that God was a hateful deity as depicted in the Old Testament. This was explained as there is no disconnect between the testaments in regard to the character and actions of God.

The training finished at 8:25 p.m. with a few questions on the canon of Scripture. After answering those questions, the floor was opened to discuss potential future training topics. An announcement was made to remind attendees that an email would go out containing the post-training survey link they needed to complete before July 9 at 11:59 p.m. The session closed in prayer and attendees were dismissed. Positive feedback was given by many of the attendees.

On July 10, the Google survey documents were inspected. The total number of people that finished the first survey, attended the training and completed the final survey was eight. Those who had taken the first survey but not the second was removed from the

datasheet, which totaled six persons. The data was compiled to determine the learning change that took place.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This evaluation assays the goals and purposes of the project as well as the strengths and weaknesses in the various stages. An in-depth assessment of the project's strengths and weaknesses will be explored along with thoughts on improvements to the project going forward. In finishing, there will be reflections of both a theological and a personal nature regarding the project from initiation to culmination. Concluding thoughts will then be given.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to effectively educate members of Forestpark Community Church in apologetics-based evangelism to better serve the kingdom through active outreach in Louisville, Kentucky. Based on the feedback given by the attendees, the lectures were informative and engaging. Several attendees were excited to carry on with the series and inquired about what subjects would be coming up. The forthcoming lectures were described and met with a positive response. There were a few new suggestions for lessons as well, which are based on some recent events. The suggestions will be considered for future sessions. Despite the statistics revealed by the *t*-test, I was encouraged by the feedback and interaction during the lectures, considered them successful, and feel motivated to continue the series in a timely fashion to avoid losing momentum.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The goals as originally stated were as follows: The first goal was to assess the current apologetic and evangelistic knowledge among members of FPCC. The second

goal was for the elders to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip adults and youth on how to properly use apologetics in evangelistic encounters. The third goal was to equip FPCC members with apologetics for evangelism. In light of the difficulties the church was facing at the time with both COVID 19 concerns and the transition to a new pastor, I modified the second goal and decided I would handle the curriculum development. The original eight-session curriculum was retained, however, because of other practical involvements of church governance, only two of the eight project sessions were implemented to the members who participated in the initial survey. Due to the positive response to the training, the other six sessions, plus a few newly conceived ones, will be actualized at a future date and are not included in the statistical data for the project.

The first goal of evaluating the apologetic needs of FPCC was met by the completed survey illustrating the gaps in Christian theological knowledge possessed by some respondents. Based on the results of the first survey, respondents showed the greatest need for education on the issues of evolution and biblical inerrancy. The second goal was met when I finished developing curricula for those two studies. As mentioned previously, due to church-related issues, I handled the completion of the curricula. The two studies were developed first since they would be the only ones used within the project timeline. The other six sessions have a framework completed thus far. The two complete sessions were delivered with sustained interest and interaction. The second survey link was emailed to the qualifying attendees. When the attending membership completed the second survey, the third goal of equipping the members was considered reached. Using the spreadsheet generated by the questionnaire, a *t*-test for paired two samples for means was run on the survey numbers. The survey showed no statistically significant difference ($t(7) = 0.3771, p = .3586$) in pre-test and post-test surveys. This result occurred because the original survey showed a need for courses on biblical inerrancy and human evolution. However, several of the original survey takers did not

attend the teaching session. Due to those conditions, they could not participate in the post-survey. Therefore, those who completed all the steps already had good knowledge of biblical inerrancy and human evolution, thus showing no significant statistical change.

Strengths of the Project

One of the primary strengths of the project was the subject matter chosen for the lectures. The survey results did much to direct the topics of the instruction, but the way I approached the discussion helped facilitate engagement and learning. One of my strengths, as I have been told by several people in the past, is the ability to distill complicated technical facts into an easily understood instruction. I am always grateful for this kind of encouragement and feedback. In the case of the study of human origins, I was able to relate the scientific jargon of paleontology to the participants in a way that was both respectful of the original data and not “dumbed down” to the membership.

Another strength of the project was the active interest in apologetics from the FPCC membership. Apologetics can be multidisciplinary in many cases. Knowledge of ethics, science, world religions, philosophy, politics, sociology, and a score of other areas are helpful to the apologist in framing defenses of the Christian faith. FPCC congregants are interested in many of these fields and are naturally drawn to new ideas on how to discuss these matters with friends, family, or strangers.

The final strength is the interest the first lectures garnered. The membership was engrossed enough to continue learning in this series. Future lessons will be delivered in much the same way as the previous and hopefully, the interest and excitement will be retained or grow. Ideally, it would be outstanding to see the membership continue to investigate the subjects on their own and discover more knowledge.

Weaknesses of the Project

The primary weakness of the project was timing complicated by church issues unrelated to the project. As discussed, there were several complications to implementing

the project. There is no need to restate the particular issues, but they did not help the timespan in which the project was to be launched. The problems faced often took priority and the project was sidelined until a resolution was found. Some complications are ongoing but were settled well enough to allow the project to move forward. By virtue of these events, the project's eight sessions were not delivered. There was some shortsightedness of mine to blame as well. Some of the troubles that delayed the project could have been handled in a timelier manner and there would have been less of a delay. I tended to become emotionally derailed by the occurrence of events and lost motivation at times, thereby stalling the project implementation. I am determined to not let the emotional state dictate the future timing of the lessons.

What I Would Do Differently

Some of what I would do differently was detailed in the previous section on weaknesses. Another thing I would do differently going forward would be to conduct the sessions on different days. I would deliver only one subject per session instead of two. The biblical inerrancy lecture tied into the discussion of the historical necessity of Adam in valuable ways, but it would have been better to have separate sessions. There would have been ways to connect the two talks regardless of the time separation between them. Separate sessions would also allow participants to absorb one subject more fully rather than having to process two. This would facilitate a more detailed learning experience.

Theological Reflections

I have been in prayerful thanksgiving to God for calling me to seminary and equipping me to equip others to spread the glory of His Word. FPCC is blessed with many theologically grounded individuals with a thirst to learn and grow in their faith. The leadership team has a remarkable number of SBTS graduates for a church of its size. Within the next year, the church will have two doctoral graduates and already have four others who possess an MDiv. Despite the turmoil 2020 brought to the church and the

world at large, God has continued to stand by His church and His people, reassuring the doubtful, calming the frightened, and lifting up the downtrodden. Despite the destruction of life and disruption of the world because of the coronavirus, God did have a message for people to learn: know what matters most. Families grew stronger, being forced together for extended periods. They discovered something they would have possibly not have found if not for the quarantines, lockdowns, and whatnot. A genuine and deeper love was found. God rekindled the importance of family for many. He also taught another valuable lesson. Though it was made into a now clichéd slogan, we are all in this together. A reminder of the unity people need. The loss of so many members of FPCC due to the COVID lockdowns and pastoral transition can be daunting and disheartening, but the Lord has sustained the congregation and taught us to care for the sheep we do have and not overly mourn those who have moved away. I am not Paul, and the race is long from over, but his inspired words inspire me: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7).

Personal Reflections

These reflections are personal and partially theological as well. I came into the DEdMin program knowing not what to expect. My MDiv and ThM I felt were leading up to a pursuit of a PhD and I thought I was following God where he wanted me to go. I knew I was called to seminary and I thought I knew for what purpose, but the signs were there and my vocal convictions proclaimed one thing while I desired another. As I moved through my studies, I often stated that this newfound knowledge should be put to use to help others. The theme of “people, not projects” kept catching my notice. In one chapel service, the preacher spoke on how Jesus would often stop on His scheduled route to care for an individual. Jesus cared for the person, not the project, much to the frustration of his disciples at times. This made a rush of connections in my mind and changed my view of what I was doing at the seminary. Still wrestling with my introverted disposition, I felt called to share the knowledge of God for the betterment of others. I knew the importance

of ministries for youth, evangelism, and other types of outreach, but was too frightened socially to undertake them, despite the theological compulsion I felt. I had worked out in my head that perhaps God called me to obtain a PhD to write books, spread His Word, and educate others in that fashion. This made me happy as it was a win-win, or so I thought.

I did not get into the PhD program. I spoke to both the Research Doctoral Studies Office and a professor I was close to about this and they encouraged me to pursue the DEdMin program as it would open doors for me. Distraught, confused, and deflated, but yet determined to go on, I applied to the program and was accepted. I had no idea what I was signing up for. I went through a long period of not trusting my understanding of God's leading. I was not where I thought I would be, and I knew I must have misunderstood Him somehow. The DEdMin is a practical doctoral degree. This is the kind of thing I had been speaking about for a long time. It is applying what I learned to help others for God's glory. I had said it, but in my head somewhere was the notion that I would be the most perfectly happy in a library, researching and writing books for the rest of my life. This isolated library lifestyle was contrary to what I had said for so long, but apparently, it is what I wanted. God wanted me to be otherwise. He wanted me to be the person I spoke about, not a library mouse.

The ministry project was so different than what I had been used to writing about. It was about actually changing lives, not just arguing why free will is an important doctrine or a host of other academic subjects. I stumbled in the dark for a time, wrestling on how to approach the project, but I worked through it, and in the end, It is my sincere desire that implementing this project shows the glory of God to those who need to see Him.

The fact that so many FPCC members were lost to the aforementioned situations was disheartening. I expected to have twenty to thirty people engaged in the training, but I did not get that number, which was also discouraging. However, God knew the outcome before the project even started and I firmly believe it accomplished what He intended. As

with mission work, one always likes to see a great number come to the Lord, but the missionary does not always see that in their lifetime. Some missionaries may never see any fruit of their labor, but they continue because they trust in God and trust they are following what He commands. Perhaps I will not see any fruits from this project, or I may see much, but I can know that God knows who this has impacted and I must rest on that knowledge.

Conclusion

The project has been successful in opening new avenues of learning for the members of FPCC. I will continue to teach apologetically backed evangelism training and perhaps introduce some methods of measuring learning progress through role-playing or something interactive. The project has been encouraging to me in many ways already described and I hope that God's glory continues to be seen in the work I dedicate to Him. I can do no good apart from Him and it is with profound thanks that He has made me His child and a part of His plan of redemption.

APPENDIX 1

BEDROCK OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is the Bedrock of Christian Apologetics Assessment (BCAA). This is a twenty-statement survey with a six-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose is to assess each member's level of apologetic understanding and confidence in evangelism.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the knowledge base of the participant in regard to Christian apologetics and theology. This research is being conducted by Donald Bledsoe at Forestpark Community Church in Louisville, KY for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

The following survey is being overseen by Donald Bledsoe 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.

For the purposes of comparing the pre-project score to the post-project score, I would ask that you identify yourself in the survey in one of the following four ways:

- 1) Last name
- 2) Last four digits of your phone number
- 3) Last four digits of your social security number
- 4) Your numerical birth date (mm-dd-yyyy)

Please use the same identification method for both tests so that the data will be accurate.

Directions: Respond to the statements with your opinion using the following scale:

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

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. Euthanasia is merciful. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. Science gives more and better answers to questions than the Bible. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. The Bible is complete truth without any kind of error. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. Jesus is fully man and fully God. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. Abortion is wrong. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. The Big Bang is the way the universe came to be. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. The Scriptures we have are virtually unchanged since the originals were written. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. Jesus is the only way to heaven. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. All the events of the Bible are historical and accurate. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses Christians. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. Human beings are animals. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. Nature is directionless and unguided. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. The gospel narratives represent an accurate history of Jesus' life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. Islam has the same god as Christians. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. Homosexuality is a sin. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. The cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. The Bible is divinely inspired by God who used human authors to write His Word. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. All religions are equal. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. God is good despite the evil in the world. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. Animals, plants, and humans evolved from earlier forms to their current state over millions of years. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 2

APOLOGETICS TRAINING CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The curriculum evaluation rubric assesses the exegetical merit of the proposed pedagogical principles, biblical faithfulness to both biblical and systematic theology, appropriateness of pedagogical method, and contextual fit for the teaching model advanced within Forestpark Community Church.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Apologetics Training Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop a lesson to teach apologetics.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better evangelize using apologetics.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

TRANSCRIPT OF TEACHING ON EVOLUTION AND ADAM

As we begin this session on human creation, Adam, and evolution, I want to point out the value of education. I am not a biologist, geneticist, paleontologist, or other ologist, but education has helped me think critically and be able to rationally evaluate subjects in which I have no training. I could never have an in-depth discussion with a geneticist, but I can see the material presented as reasonable and logical and weigh its merits based on that. Science is generally very logical and reasonable except for quantum mechanics, which no one understands comprehensively yet. Education is for life.

There is much more at stake than an academic debate on whether Adam and Eve, as depicted in the Genesis accounts were historical, actual people, just a myth, the final ascendancy of mankind from animal to human, or whatever else. Big “E” evolution is a secular idea. Just to make sure we are discussing the same idea, Big “E” evolution or macroevolution is to be defined as one species changing to another given enough time. For example, monkeys eventually become humans, dinosaurs turning into birds, reptiles to mammals, etc. Small “e” evolution or microevolution or adaptation is still “change over time”, but species lines are not crossed. Despite some claims to the contrary, science and the Bible are not at odds with each other. God wrote the Bible and He also wrote the book of nature. It is perfectly fine for Christians to accept small “e” evolution because of changes in animals and plants over time as this can be seen in the fossil record. We no longer have dragonflies with two-foot wingspans, but we do have dragonflies. The Christian must keep in mind that Big “E” evolution is a completely naturalistic way of looking at the world and eliminates God from its universe. The Big Bang, while it does

sound like creation *ex nihilo*, it is not. The Big Bang is tied inescapably to a purely naturalistic worldview devoid of God, design, or purpose. Christians must be cautious in importing secular ideas into the Christian worldview for two reasons. The first reason is to keep the purity of the gospel, and the second is to not confuse the concepts being discussed. Creation *ex nihilo* is not The Big Bang plus God.

Creation applies to both Young Earth and Old Earth ideas. There are some problems with each of the views but they are nothing to get very worked up about. They are, at best, third-level doctrinal issues and should not be a divisive argument between Christians. First level doctrinal views would be items such as the Trinity, deity of Christ, and so forth. Issues in the first level define Christian belief and if, for example, one denies Christ's deity, one could not be called a Christian. Second-level doctrines are very important but typically are not deal-breakers. Baptism would be an example. Christians can differ between the timing of baptism and still be fine, but to exclude baptisms entirely would be a problem. Secular worldviews do not even argue about the age of the earth, they just assume that evolution is correct and 14.4 billion years is fine. Theistic creation is simply a wrong doctrine for orthodox Protestants, although it is the official teaching of the Catholic Church on the issue of origins. Theistic evolution is what it sounds like: the secular evolution model is correct, but God is behind it and drives the changes to His ends. For example, God created primates knowing that humanity would arise as their descendants. There are many good reasons to reject theistic evolution wholesale, but the basic idea is that theistic evolution is not biblically based. Genesis is clear when it says God made birds of the air and fish of the sea (Gen 1:20-23), but it did not say God made fish that would turn into frogs and then lizards and then so on and so on. God created animals very close to what we see now, barring extinctions and the like.

I wrote a paper about dromaeosaurs for my ThM degree and argued that these animals were not exactly dinosaurs but not exactly birds either and had features of both. On the bird side, they are most like the flightless birds called ratites, which include

ostriches, emus, and cassowaries. Of the dromaeosaurs that many should be familiar with is a velociraptor, though the Jurassic Park one is too big and should be Utahraptor or Dakotaraptor. The velociraptor is turkey-sized. Dromaeosaurs were one of the many diverse creations of God, like the platypus, red panda, and other modern examples. These animals have no relatives or analogs but are their own thing. Human beings are like that. In many aspects, humans resemble primates, but it is clear that we are not like chimps, gorillas, or other primates. Even though humans and chimps share something like 98 percent of the same genome, it is abundantly clear that we are nothing like them. We also share a large percentage of genes with mice and pigs, and the same logic applies. Human beings, while superficially resembling some animals, are not animals. So who were Adam and Eve?

We know that we are created in the image of God and this separates us from animals spiritually and theologically. Theologically speaking, it is unclear what *imago Dei* exactly is. Is it the fact that humans can create, think abstractly, seek God, or something else? Or is it all of those things? It is a mystery, and what is human is not readily clear in the fossil record either. Some creatures test the boundaries of what divides humans from animals and they are currently in a debate on how to classify them within creationist science. Since they are not apes, but not humans either, they are likely to be found as a unique creation, like the dromaeosaurs. A well-documented hominin called Homo Naledi looks vastly different than modern humans. They stood about four feet tall as adults and had several skeletal features that differ from modern humans. Their ribcage is smaller at the top than the bottom, their skull features and hip structure indicate an upright walking posture, their shoulder blades indicate that their arms attach at an upward angle rather than straight across like modern humans, and their finger bones are curved to enable better climbing. So looking at Naledi, one is tempted to say “not human,” but the kicker is that they buried their dead, something no animal or primate does, only humans do that. A creationist classification system called baraminology

compares and contrasts traits of animals to better determine their relationships and also to see what the original created kind might have been like. I do not think that baraminological techniques have been applied yet to the hominin fossils.

Many creationist paleontologists view Neanderthals and Denisovans as within the range of human deviation and are indeed human beings. Denisovans are a very recent discovery and by my limited understanding, were similar to Neanderthals and modern humans but lived in further parts of Asia from the others. Denisovans, according to some recent migratory maps, ranged from India down to New Zealand and the Pacific islands. They did not seem to enter China but went through Vietnam and Thailand out to the Pacific and Australia/New Zealand areas. Neanderthals tended to stay in middle and eastern Europe and species like Homo Naledi were in Africa. As an interesting aside, the people of India have claimed that they are made of two “races,” the northern Indians, who came from ancient Iran/Iraq, and the indigenous people of India who were in the south. The northern Indians tend to be of lighter skin tone and the southerners, darker. Some southern Indians superficially resemble Australian aboriginals. Humans, Neanderthals, and Denisovans were close enough to be able to reproduce with each other and many people carry their genetic codes today. Using myself as an example, according to 23andme, I have 61 percent more Neanderthal traits than other 23andme members. What that means exactly, I am not sure. However, genetics has become a very exact science, and geneticists can look at the human genome and see where variations take place. Again, using myself as an example, I am 99.7 percent Scottish/Irish. The other .3% is some west African and Italian that the 23andme geneticists can see entered my genetic line somewhere in the 1720s. Steven Meyer has a very detailed description of how scientists can discern these things from the genome in his books *Darwin’s Doubt* and *The Signature in the Cell*. The book is admittedly a tough read but very thought-engaging.

When it comes to the Bible, the progenitor of the human race, Adam, is treated in Genesis and throughout the Bible the same way as other historical figures. Meaning,

Scripture speaks on his age, timelines, part of genealogies, children, etc. Jesus and Paul speak on Adam as if he was an actual person (see Luke's genealogy 3:38, Rom 5:14, 1 Cor 15:45, Jude 1:14, and a few others). There are other reasons as well. For one, the historical existence of Adam gives birth to the theological ideas of Adam. As an example of this idea, if there was no Adam introducing sin, then there would be no need for a savior in Jesus (Rom 5:12).

The false idea, put forward by some liberal scholars, is that the Bible is a document similar to other Ancient Near East documents. Ancient Near East creation stories, while all of them depict the creation of the world, are significantly different and have no direct connections to each other, nor the Hebrew texts. The Genesis accounts are not written in the myth genre, as explained by John Oswalt: "Myth is a literary or oral form which retells some phase of primordial events with the intent of reproducing those same effects in contemporary life. It is characterized by the understanding that the cosmos is God, and God is the cosmos. . . . There is nothing of this nature in the Bible."

Is this not all sort of academic? Yes, and it is highly unlikely that you will run across anyone that wants to debate genetics or literary genres. However, it does give you the ability and confidence to know how deep the evidence goes. Talking about the problem of evil with a person genuinely hurting who does not see God in their situation is entirely different than debating an atheist who only wants to win the argument. It is certainly possible that you could win over an atheist, but evidenced-based apologetic discussions do not tend to convert many. The person that is hurting wants to know why God allows this pain, but talking with the person requires a largely pastoral approach backed by a little academic knowledge. Evolution is not comforting and does not love. God loves. Being created in the image of God brings identity, worth, and assurance; such are things that many people seek. Evangelists should seek to capture both the minds and the hearts of people because we are created complete and should never regard one over the other.

APPENDIX 4

TRANSCRIPT OF TEACHING BIBLICAL INERRANCY

We know that we are created in the image of God and this separates us from animals spiritually and theologically. Theologically speaking, it is unclear what *imago Dei* exactly is. Is it the fact that humans can create, think abstractly, seek God, or something else? Or is it all of those things? It is a mystery, and what is human is not readily clear in the fossil record either. Some creatures test the boundaries of what divides humans from animals and they are currently in a debate on how to classify them within creationist science. Since they are not apes, but not humans either, they are likely to be found as a unique creation, like the dromaeosaurs. A well-documented hominin called Homo Naledi looks vastly different than modern humans. They stood about four feet tall as adults and had several skeletal features that differ from modern humans. Their ribcage is smaller at the top than the bottom, their skull features and hip structure indicate an upright walking posture, their shoulder blades indicate that their arms attach at an upward angle rather than straight across like modern humans, and their finger bones are curved to enable better climbing. So looking at Naledi, one is tempted to say “not human,” but the kicker is that they buried their dead, something no animal or primate does, only humans do that. A creationist classification system called baraminology compares and contrasts traits of animals to better determine their relationships and also to see what the original created kind might have been like. I do not think that baraminological techniques have been applied yet to the hominin fossils.

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ABSTRACT

REVITALIZING EVANGELISM THROUGH APOLOGETICS TRAINING AT FORESTPARK COMMUNITY CHURCH IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Donald Raymond Bledsoe, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Andrew T. Walker

The purpose of this project was to effectively educate members of Forestpark Community Church in apologetics-based evangelism to better serve the kingdom through active outreach in Louisville, Kentucky. Chapter 1 details the three goals, which were designed to increase the theological knowledge and evangelistic efforts among the members of Forestpark Community Church. Chapter 1 also presents the biblical and practical rationale for the project, the methodology on how to carry out the project, and the church context. Chapter 2 presents the theological and biblical foundations for implementing this project. This chapter looks mainly at two texts: Acts 17:22-34, Paul's discussions at the Areopagus; and 1 Peter 3:15-16, Peter's exhortation on how to defend the Christian faith. Chapter 3 describes a historical viewpoint on apologetics throughout the life of the church. This chapter focuses on Origen's work against the claims of Celsus, and various efforts by Augustine. The writings of Augustine also provide a segue into the modern era of apologetics in the discussion of the free will defense used by Alvin Plantinga. The balance of chapter 3 works through modes of evolution. Chapter 4 represents the mechanics of how the project was prepared via surveys and curriculum development. Chapter 5 confers the information of the results of the project and after-thoughts.

VITA

Donald Raymond Bledsoe

EDUCATION

BA, University of Louisville, 1988

MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017

ThM, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018