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TEACHING FOUNDATIONAL APOLOGETICS AT WAURIKA
CHURCH OF CHRIST IN WAURIKA, OKLAHOMA

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TEACHING FOUNDATIONAL APOLOGETICS AT WAURIKA
CHURCH OF CHRIST IN WAURIKA, OKLAHOMA

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In Memoriam

of

Virgil R. Trout (1927-2016)

“Minister of the gospel, mentor, and friend: God’s man.”

and

My brother, Jesse Dirk Kerley (1956-2016)

“Until I see you again, upright, well, and beautiful.”

for

All those wandering in darkness . . .

“Open, O Lord, the eyes of all people to behold thy gracious hand in all
thy works, that, rejoicing in thy whole creation, they may honor thee
with their substance, and be faithful stewards of thy bounty.”

(The Common Book of Prayer, 1928)

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PREFACE

I am forever indebted to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary whose belief that advanced degree offerings in the discipline of Christian apologetics is not only a God-honoring enterprise, but that the good practice of apologetics always and forever points directly to the love of God through Jesus Christ. I am forever indebted to my faculty supervisor, Dr. Timothy Paul Jones, for passing along a fraction of his vast knowledge, and for patiently guiding me through the process. I thank Dr. Matthew Haste as well for his invaluable service as second reader; thank you Dr. Haste.

Most humbly I thank the honorable Elders at Waurika church of Christ: Biff Eck, Roy Himebaugh, Edward Trout, and Lance Waid, first for their willingness to sponsor this project, but so much more so for their prayers, encouragement, and Christian love that carried me along the way. For his impeccable logistical skills, and savvy in all things electronic, I am deeply indebted to deacon Jacob Eck. Likewise, I offer my gratitude in perpetuity to the Waurika adult Bible class for serving as both students and guinea pigs through the project. I have truly learned more from you, than you from me. To my beautiful wife, Vicki: your steadfast patience and love are beyond my words to capture. Someday our God, who created all honorable words, will tell you how very much you mean to me.

Above all else, I am unceasingly humbled before my God, who Himself reached into my shriveled soul with a most powerful arm and pulled forth from its hardened cocoon a new being, drawn only unto Him who made me. *Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

Ty Kerley

Waurika, Oklahoma

May 2024

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Scripture establishes at least three dynamics, or mandates vouchsafed to the church: to worship God, to edify one another, and to carry out the Great Commission of Christ. Each of these mandates not only touch the practice of Christian apologetics, but the practice of Christian apologetics greatly advances each of these mandates.¹ Paul writes to the Romans that great knowledge of God can be gleaned from natural theology; so much so that if mankind fails to “honor” God as God based upon that evidence, then they are without excuse (Rom 1:19-25).² Love *for* God, knowledge *of* God, and honor *to* God leads to deeper worship of God. Paul reminds the Ephesians that the role of church leadership is to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for *building up* the one body of Christ (Eph 4:12). And Peter commends all believers to “prepare a defense” of the Christian faith in order to evangelize the world (1 Pet 3:15). Worship, edification, and evangelization—the sacrosanct mandates of the church—are all enriched through an increase in certain aspects of knowledge that apologetics can uncover. In this way, the practice of teaching foundational apologetics at Waurika church of Christ directly strengthened and enhanced the proper function of Christ’s church.³ And while that is the

¹ The three mandates of the church found in the worship of God, the edification of the body of believers, and the evangelism of the lost are an oft referenced motif. For a ready example, see Niyi Amuda, “He [*sic*] Mission and Mandate of the Church,” Sermon Index Discussion Forum, May 24, 2016, 10:33, https://sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id+57047&forum=34. These three generalized mandates are herein directly linked to the necessity for the apologetics endeavor undertaken at Waurika church of Christ.

² All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

³ Within the churches of Christ, the word *church* is not capitalized, rather, the word church is capitalized only when used in the name of a specific church or denomination. Since the church of Christ is

ultimate *objective* of this ministry project, formally, the *research hypothesis* of this project was, *teaching foundational apologetics at Waurika church of Christ will significantly increase the member's apologetics knowledge and proficiency.*

Context

The Waurika church of Christ (WCC) congregation enjoys a surprising diversity of educational and vocational backgrounds offering a graceful balance of the bourgeois and the bucolic; a unity and a diversity yielding wisdom, experience, and reality to the congregation as a whole.⁴ Although the educational and vocational diversity of the local church aligns with what would be found in a large urban church, the congregation, at its core, is distinctly rural in flavor and worldview.⁵ However, a significant weakness within the church impacted the members' ability to more fully honor the three mandates of the church. It was further theorized and posited that this weakness had two interconnected sources: churches of Christ church tradition in general, and limited apologetic training at WCC in particular.

Churches of Christ Church Tradition

The churches of Christ are local, self-governed, and autonomous bodies of believers within the one church over which Christ is head.⁶ There is no generalized,

considered by its members to be the restored church, it is not considered a denomination within the catholic church, but *the* church proper.

⁴ While the *church* and *churches* of Christ are herein designated with a lower case "c," the standardized form of abbreviation using only capital letters (WCC) is used throughout.

⁵ *Waurika* (anglicized Comanche word for "worm-eater") is the county seat of Jefferson County Oklahoma with a population (2020) of 1,837. Waurika's economy is predominately agrarian, including secondary and tertiary support infrastructure.

⁶ This project defines, analyzes, theorizes, and propositions two coinciding entities directed first and primarily toward the local church of Christ at Waurika, OK, but equally and more broadly to the ubiquitous church(es) of Christ. As such, throughout this project commentary regarding the Waurika church of Christ is particular, while commentary regarding the churches of Christ, because of each congregation's autonomy, is generalized and may or may not include the Waurika church specifically.

multi-church governing body, no hierarchical organizational structure, and no state or national convention. Each local church within the churches of Christ is governed by an elder-rule polity. For these reasons, and others to be presented here, the churches of Christ have long been accused of insularity; a lack of interest in culture, being rigid, legalistic, and arrogantly exclusive.⁷ This hubristic posture among the churches of Christ traces back to the Restoration Movement and Alexander Campbell's restoration goals, couched in his theological and hermeneutical approach. Campbell had little use for any outside influence, including theological "systems" or "authority" whatsoever. Campbell boasted,

I have been so long disciplined in the school of free inquiry, that, if I know my own mind there is not a man upon earth whose authority can influence me, any further than he comes with the authority of evidence, reason, and truth. . . . I have endeavored to read the scriptures as though no one had read them before me; and I am as much on my guard against reading them today, through the medium of my own views yesterday, or a week ago, as I am against being influenced by any foreign name, authority, or system, whatever.⁸

Ironically, Campbell's "unbiased" hermeneutics and theology were melded into a cohesive "system" of which Campbell wrote extensively thereby producing volumes of "authoritative" extra-biblical material for Campbellite followers to abide in.⁹ Additionally, holding to the Campbellite doctrine of "speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where the Bible is silent," had the exclusionary effect of further curving the church of Christ in upon itself.¹⁰ Church historian Earl West speaks directly of the church of Christ

⁷ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University, 2014), 81.

⁸ Alexander Campbell, "Reply to: R. B. S., King County, Va.," *Christian Baptist* 3, no. 9 (April 1826): 229.

⁹ A Campbellite is best defined as a member of one of the three modern-day churches (churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Christian churches) that evolved out of Campbell's restored church. Though the term is seldom used today, it was quite popularly used by the denominations through the first half of the twentieth century; often used in a negative and condescending way.

¹⁰ Bill Humble, *The Story of Restoration* (Pensacola, FL: Firm Foundation, 1969), 13.

as “a people who were Christians and Christians only, who took the Bible and the Bible only.”¹¹

Consequently, the broader church’s historically exclusive, self-reflective substratum had provided for several negative influences upon the advancement of knowledge within, and cultural adaptability outside of the church.¹² First, it had inadvertently promoted an apologetic culture of fideistic presuppositionalism coupled with a coexisting doctrine of *nuda scriptura*, which has effectively excluded any noncanonical Christian influence, including the writings of the apostolic fathers, and early Christian philosophers.¹³ The great works of these saints were, and are seldom if ever mentioned in churches of Christ homilies, nor discussed in Bible classes. The names Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, as well as Aristotle, Plato, and Descartes, are unknown to the vast majority of the congregations, much less their contributions to Christian knowledge. All extra-biblical material is deemed unnecessary and unwelcome, condemning such sources as “that’s just man,” and having no benefit to offer.¹⁴ The same can be said of today’s apologists where the edifying and evangelistic works of J. P. Moreland,

¹¹ Earl I. West, *A History of the Restoration Movement 1849-1906*, vol. 2 of *A Search for the Ancient Order* (Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1950), 412.

¹² Throughout this work the term *knowledge* is used to denote *justified true belief*. For further discussion, see Kelly James Clark, “A Reformed Epistemologist’s Response,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 257.

¹³ The term *nuda scriptura* (naked, or bare Scripture), in contrast with the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, is the rejection of any council or church creed whatsoever. In fact, *nuda scriptura* taken to the extreme results in an overexaggerating of the elevation of Scripture above tradition by eliminating everything but Scripture. Quite literally, this exclusion extends to *anything* written by uninspired man, which includes the writings of the church fathers, all theological writings, as well as biblical commentary, except for that produced by Campbell himself. However, the doctrine easily can be, and in some instances has been, taken to near absurdity. Hence, Campbellite traditionalists proclaim the Bible alone to be their creed. See Gary Holloway and Douglas A. Foster, *Renewing God’s People: A Concise History of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 2001), 38.

¹⁴ This is an actual quote by an elderly church member in response to another member discussing what a Bible commentary had to say about a particular biblical passage.

William Lane Craig, Richard Swinburne, and Alvin Plantinga, to mention but a few, often lie untapped.

Second, the church of Christ's *nuda scriptura* approach historically promoted a very low view of natural theology which in turn impeded the acquisition of knowledge, especially from the "secular sphere," concerning God and the truthfulness of Christianity through application of apologetics. Consequently, the churches of Christ have been slow to recognize, support, and promote classical and evidential apologetics as a valid, pragmatic, and necessary edificational and evangelistic tool.¹⁵ This epistemological reality is borne out not only in the local churches, but also in the top churches of Christ universities around the country, where apologetic-based degree offerings are negligible. In short, the net effect has been the churches of Christ, in varying degrees, remain hampered by an anti-intellectual sentiment rationalized on the basis of *nuda scriptura*.¹⁶

Finally, and most germane to this project, Campbellite traditionalism, and the presuppositional apologetic which undergirds it, coupled with a doctrine of *nuda scriptura* has retarded congregational training in classical and evidential apologetics as a part of personal defense development (cf. 1 Pet 3:15), and as a tool in evangelistic outreach. To some degree, atavistic Campbellite fideism, often subconsciously held, remains a significant reality in most churches of Christ; especially in the conservative Southern wing, among the older generations, and among those in insulated rural settings.¹⁷

¹⁵ The churches of Christ are not alone in their aversion to the use of natural theology. Natural theology fell out of favor, especially among the Reformed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries arguing that there is only one correct starting point. J. V. Fesko explains, "In technical terms, theologians sought to deduce their systems from one central dogma, [Scripture] which stood in contrast to the modern models that recognized two starting points, namely Scripture, and God." J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 3.

¹⁶ Anti-intellectualism within the churches of Christ will be further delineated in chap. 3.

¹⁷ The term *Campbellite fideism* is used here to indicate those exclusionary traditionalists espousing a blind faith in Campbell's theology and hermeneutics (invariably held unconsciously) as the

Limited Apologetic Training

It must be said that there had been some limited apologetic training at WCC. In 2017, the Waurika church minister taught a short series on apologetics to a small group during the adult Wednesday night Bible class. The curriculum was broad-based and taught at an introductory level in a disjunctive, presuppositional-evidentialist hybrid format.¹⁸ More recently, an elder taught the high school class (3-5 students average) an introductory level, disjunctive, evidentialist based series of apologetics classes with the pedagogical goal of presenting a cursory introduction to apologetics. Because of the limited audience, as well as the disjunctive nature of the offerings, the current ministry project targeted the three general goals of introducing the church members to the breadth and gravity of extra-biblical evidences for Christianity, of actively preparing a personal defense, and developing a theologically consistent apologetic method for engaging in evangelism. In short, the class series intended to address a significant need within the congregation for foundational apologetic training while enhancing and strengthening the three dynamics of the church.

That salient need became crystal clear when early on the present author was approached by a church member concerned about his daughter-in-law. This gentleman reported his daughter-in-law maintained that the Bible was written by man, and as such did not believe it held any authority in her life. Beyond that, she was unsure if God even exists. Desperate to help her, he found himself quickly bereft of idea how to approach the

sole source of all truth, rather than a truth biblical supported by reason and evidence. See also Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1972), s.v. “fideism.”

¹⁸ A *disjunctive* methodology to apologetic argument is “an accumulation of independent sources/arguments that each argue for God’s existence” independent of one another. This independence yields a probability < 0.5 for each individual argument as well as the disjunctive collection. Scott Smith, “Cumulative Case Approach to God’s Existence” (class handout—*CSAP625 Philosophy of Religion*, Biola University, Fall 2019). *Presuppositionalism* is a particular apologetic methodology that begins with Scripture and is inherently circular; in this particular context, viciously so. For more on the presuppositional methodology see Clark, “A Reformed Epistemologist’s Response,” 265-313. *Evidentialism* is a particular apologetic methodology that relies upon evidences from history and science to argue for Christianity and the existence of God. For more on the evidential methodology, see Gary R. Habermas, “Evidential Apologetics,” in Gundry and Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 91-146.

issue himself, but rather turned to this author only because an elder had directed him. This seemed to further indicate that at least some people in the congregation were inadequately prepared to formulate and engage in a noncircular defense of essential Christian doctrines utilizing extra-canonical sources. Nevertheless, one thing stood impeccably clear: this member was in desperate need; not only to help his loved one, but was also in need of the essential tools necessary to be a “credible representative of Christ” in a hostile world.¹⁹

Throughout Scripture, time and again readers are reminded that God considers every human soul to be everlasting and of infinite value. C. S. Lewis found this idea distinctly striking. Writing of the value God places upon every individual person, Lewis wrote, “Blessed be He! Each thing was made for Him. He is the centre. Because we are with Him, each of us is at the centre. . . . In His city all things are made for each. When He died in the Wounded World He died not for men, but for each man. If each man had been the only man made, He would have done no less.”²⁰ The prayer throughout has been singular: if this ministerial effort might strengthen one member to “finish the race,” or might empower another member to bring one solitary sinner to Christ, then the necessity of the entire project was amply warranted. Jesus taught nothing less (cf. Luke 15).

Rationale

Although undoubtedly some in the congregation held to the old traditions of Campbell’s *nuda scriptura*, the eldership at WCC did not embrace that exclusivist doctrine. On the contrary, the elders embraced their commission as first and foremost focused on an uncompromising view of the biblically mandated role of the church. To that end, the WCC eldership recognized the benefits of engaging science, history, and natural theology in the discipline of classical and evidentialist Christian apologetics as an essential

¹⁹ “Credible Representatives of Christ” is the Waurika church of Christ’s vision statement adapted in early 2021. Biff Eck, Waurika church of Christ elder, telephone conversation with author, September 3, 2021.

²⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 186.

element in strengthening each of the three dynamical mandates of the church.

Indeed, the Waurika church of Christ's Congregation Mission Statement speaks to the elder's commitment to equipping the body for growth both within the church and without. The mission statement begins, "The vision of the eldership is to have the congregation mature to a faithful, vibrant, spiritual, and loving family of God. Our mission is to introduce Christ and His way of living to everyone outside and inside the church . . . so that they will have a chance for Christ to mature in their life."²¹

The Three Mandates of the Church

Ultimately, any evaluation of the weaknesses of any church must necessarily reflect upon how those weaknesses diminish the church's ability to fulfill the three biblical mandates. Scripture is explicit in that the immutable purpose of the church is to worship God (Ps 95:1-6; John 4:24; Rom 1:18-23; 11:36; Eph 4:1-16; Heb 12:28), edify the body of believers (Eph 4:1-16; 1 Thess 5:11; Heb 10:24-25), and to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:19; Eph 4:1-16; 1 Tim 4:12; 1 Pet 3:15; Jude 3). The strengths and weaknesses of any church, then, are most needs reflections upon the church's success in fulfilling these three biblical dynamics. Consequently, the rationale for training the members of WCC in foundational apologetics was grounded in each of these three mandates.

The worship of God. The Greek verb *προσκυνέω* (*proskuneō*) is the word most commonly used in the Bible to denote "worship, or obeisance."²² Scripture reveals that acceptable worship is an expression of gratefulness for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, with a sense of "reverence and awe" for the Almighty (Heb 12:28-29); a drawing near to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16); and the worshiping of God in spirit and truth (John

²¹ See appendix 5, "The Waurika church of Christ Congregation Mission Statement."

²² Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 297.

4:24) because He alone as sovereign Lord and God is worthy to receive glory and honor and power, for He created all things (Rev 4:11).²³ Paul tells the Romans that man became futile in his thinking, hardened his heart, and stands without excuse for refusing to worship God, as God (Rom 1:19-25). In other words, nature's own revelation of the glory of God is so evident that it demands his worship, and it takes a conscious act on behalf of man to deny this truth. Consequently, any man who consciously refuses to honor and worship God is without excuse (Rom 1:21).²⁴ Most importantly, what Paul bears out is that worship, is an act of honor and thanksgiving: it is a heart-centered action of love toward God (Rom 1:21).

However, love of God is only the first step of worship. Deep worship is also a function of knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge, Anselm of Canterbury believed, begins with a love that in turn drives one to seek knowledge. In fact, Anselm's motto, developed from St. Augustine, was "faith seeking understanding," which he defined as "an active love of God, seeking a deeper knowledge of God."²⁵

Teaching foundational apologetics to the congregation was couched in the penultimate goal of deepening the members' knowledge about God using philosophy, science, and history, as well as engaging noncanonical sources for the existence of God, and the truth of Christianity. All standing as servant and vassal to the axiom; deeper knowledge that is grounded in love drives deeper worship.

²³ In humble recognition of the One true and Everlasting God of heaven and earth, as well as the Three Divine Persons of the Trinity, I choose to capitalize all divine pronouns, (He, Him, His), as well as Bible, Cross, and Word, whether quoted from within Scripture or without in disregard of current academic writing practices.

²⁴ In deference to tradition, throughout this project the nouns, man, and mankind, and the pronouns he, him, and his are used in the all-inclusive, and gender-neutral sense of the terms.

²⁵ Thomas Williams, "Saint Anselm," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/anselm/>.

Edification of the body. The Waurika church of Christ’s approach to worship of God naturally carries over into the edification of the body in that true heart-centered worship leads directly to the “building up” of the body (Eph 4:12). Paul commends the Thessalonians to “encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (1 Thess 5:11). In fact, Paul uses the phrase *οἰκοδομή, ἤς, ἡ* (*building up*), on several occasions in his epistles, most succinctly in the “building up” of the saints in the unity of love (Eph 4: 4-6).²⁶ Within orthodox doctrine Christians hold that “the act of building” is “the act of one who promotes another’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, and happiness.”²⁷ Paul tells the Corinthians when they come together to “let all things be done for building up” (1 Cor 14:26). Also, he writes to the Ephesians that the church, under Christ, has been gifted with evangelists, shepherds, and teachers specifically to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ into one mature body (Eph 4:12) so as not to be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). The very building up of the body demands a strong defense, and a strong defense *is* Christian apologetics (see 1 Pet 3:15).²⁸

Similarly, sustained edification efforts at the WCC have focused upon increasing the congregation’s knowledge of God. From elder-led Bible classes, to seminary trained homiletics, to supporting this apologetic research project, the eldership continually invests in the edification of the body through encouraging increased knowledge of God. Paul commends the Ephesian church to use the knowledge they have been equipped with “for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of

²⁶ See also Rom 14:19; 1 Cor 3:10; 2 Cor 12:19; 1 Thess 5:11; 15:2.

²⁷ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 14th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019), 440.

²⁸ Rather than an expression of regret, the Greek root word *apologia*, (*ἀπολογία*), from which the English word *apologetics* is derived, is defined as “a verbal defense.” In that regard apologetic defense is redundant. The word *apologia* occurs eight times in the New Testament, for our purposes, most notably in 1 Pet 3:15. See William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 1019.

the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood” (Eph 4:12-13). How edifying is the outpouring of brotherly love expressed through one brother teaching another? And how much *more* edifying can that teaching be if it strengthens the congregation as a whole through the teaching of the great evidences for the Christian faith? To help a brother through times of doubt, to help a sister whose faith has faded, to reach the college student who so desperately needs a strong defense. Christian apologetics can and should be part of any healthy church body. Classical apologist William Lane Craig comments, “Since almost all intelligent adult Christians are bombarded throughout their education and adult life with multifarious defeaters for Christianity, it seems that for a great many, if not most, people, rational argument and evidence will be indispensable to the sustenance of their faith.”²⁹ Craig is talking about the increased knowledge of God gained through study and teaching, and application of apologetics. That knowledge in turn advances the church mandate of both corporate and personal edification.

While WCC has accomplished much in the way of fostering edification through congregational worship, Bible study, and fellowship, the incorporation of a practical understanding of Christian apologetics further strengthened and empowered the congregational body to hold firm in the unity of the truth (Eph 4:13-16). Then, in glorifying Christ by turning to apply that practical understanding of Christian evidences through evangelism “in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation” (Phil 2:15).

Fulfilment of the Great Commission. The third dynamic of the church is naturally evolved out of the first two, and is the call to look outside itself in continuing the mission Christ began. The Christian’s role as witness to Christ is not lost on the WCC elders, quite the opposite in fact. In early 2021, the eldership coined and approved a vision statement for the church—“Credible Representatives of Christ”—in order to drive

²⁹ William Lane Craig, “Classical Apologetics,” in Gundry and Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 33.

congregational focus on how the members of WCC engage the community.³⁰ While being a credible representative of Christ entails the exhibition of a higher ethical code, and an outpouring of service and compassion to those in need, being a credible representative of Christ also means always being prepared to give a defense for the hope the world sees in them (1 Pet 3:15). In fact, an inability to articulate a Christian defense would most likely devastate credibility.

As credible representatives of Christ, church members are to let their light shine before others (Matt 5:16), contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3), be ready to preach the Word in season and out (2 Tim 4:2), and always be prepared to give a defense to anyone who asks the reason for the hope that they see in them (1 Pet 3:15), all the while making disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:19). That is the commission Jesus gave to His disciples, which is handed down to all believers, and that is the mandate of Christ for the *further* building up of His church through evangelism.

The Rationale to Teach Foundational Apologetics

The congregation's limited apologetic training was the greatest weakness within the church because it touched all three church mandates. First, couched in love, the study of apologetics advanced deeper worship through a deeper knowledge and understanding of the awesome nature of God. Greater knowledge, in turn, promoted greater reverence, and greater reverence is an essential part of true worship of God (see Heb 12:28). Additionally, apologetic study impacted church edification because the church body was edified by increased personal knowledge of God. Comfort is found in having a strong defense, knowing that the evidences for God are everywhere, having assurance that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor 15:3-5), and knowing that Christianity best answers all worldview questions. These things edify and "build up" each member, as well as the corporate body.

³⁰ Eck, telephone conversation.

Finally, apologetics is the evangelist's indispensable instrument. When the *sacred* Christian worldview touches the *secular* on the street, apologetics is not only the best way to reach unbelievers, but also the key to having a strong Christian defense to evangelize a twenty-first century world with confidence. While there are many strengths in the congregation at WCC, at the same time the lack of apologetic training touched every aspect of the church's dynamical mandates, and therefore, indicted the church.

The elders at WCC recognized that apologetic training of the congregation was essential to all three biblical mandates: to worship God more deeply, to edify through "building up" the body in the knowledge of God, and to evangelize the lost as "credible representatives of Christ." Additionally, they recognized the inherent linking between actualizing the vision set forth in the Congregation Mission Statement and the training of the congregation in apologetics. The eldership recognized the church's shortcomings, and yet remained committed to improving those aspects, especially as the church faces the ever-present secular influences of both relativism and naturalism. Just as the field of Christian apologetics has blossomed in the last two decades, the atheist movement is once again gaining in popularity, especially noted by the New Atheists movement.³¹ Nevertheless, it is not just outside maundering forces surrounding the church that threaten, it is often the world that seeps *inside* the church. Today, WCC members are better equipped to meet that challenge having deepened their love and reverence for God through broadened knowledge, and having formulated a personal robust, noncircular defense of the Christian faith.

In addition, training the WCC congregation in Christian apologetics provided a very real and present opportunity to move beyond any old-time Campbellite traditionalism and concurrent anti-intellectualism. This opportunity was seized by actively engaging in critical worldview thinking, and discussing new sources of knowledge through the writings

³¹ For a substantial treatment on New Atheism, see R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Atheism Remix: A Christian Confronts the New Atheists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

of the apostolic fathers and philosophers, in addition to the edificatory benefits realized through each church member preparing their own Christian defense. Recognizing this opportunity to strengthen the congregation, as entrusted leaders of the church, the WCC elders desire that this project be undertaken was one of the most compelling rationales for this ministry.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to teach foundational apologetics in a cumulative case format to the saints at Waurika church of Christ to enhance their apologetic knowledge.

Goals

The endeavor to teach foundational cumulative case apologetics to the members at Waurika church of Christ was best accomplished by following a goal-based methodology. The following three goals were established to best provide that base.

1. The first goal was to assess the baseline apologetic knowledge of the church members at Waurika church of Christ.
2. The second goal was to develop and teach the cumulative case apologetic curriculum to the combined adult Bible class.
3. The third goal was to assess the efficacy of the teaching by evaluating the increase in apologetic knowledge, and the ability to offer a defense of the Christian faith of those attending the class series.

To measure the successful completion of these goals, a specified research methodology was developed. This methodology included the use of customized research tools and instruments to accurately quantify success. This methodology, as well as the relevant research tools and instruments, are further described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of the three goals. The first goal was to assess the current baseline apologetic knowledge of the church members at WCC. This goal was measured by surveying the combined adult

Bible class (approximately 51 individuals)³² using the Christian Apologetics Survey, pre-curriculum.³³ The survey not only assessed the class's apologetic knowledge baseline, but also determined to what extent Campbellite traditionalism might be manifest within the congregational body. To accomplish this goal, some survey questions probed the students' position regarding the use of noncanonical material to argue for the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity. This goal was considered successfully met when at least thirty-five individuals in the class had completed the pre-curriculum survey, and the data had been analyzed using a descriptive statistical method to quantify the baseline.³⁴

The second goal was to develop and teach the cumulative case apologetic curriculum to the combined adult Bible class. The planned andragogy included a total of approximately fourteen lessons (one introductory lesson, and thirteen topical lessons) over a sixteen-week duration.³⁵ This goal was measured by the WCC elders who utilized a rubric to evaluate the content, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.³⁶ Based upon the pre-curriculum survey, the apologetic teaching curriculum was adapted to include material designed to specifically address any reluctance to utilize noncanonical evidences (*contra* Campbellite Traditionalism) to better formulate strong arguments for the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity. This goal was

³² For some time, two separate adult Bible classes had run concurrently. It was the desire of the elders to temporarily combine these two classes for this teaching series on apologetics to maximize efficacy. The combined average Bible class attendance was 51 adult members. The elders also encouraged each adult member to invite a guest to attend the apologetic class series.

³³ See appendix 1. All the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee, and the Waurika church of Christ elders, prior to use in the ministry project.

³⁴ Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 191-98.

³⁵ *Andragogy* is a term relating to how adults learn, as opposed to *pedagogy*, which relates to how children learn. See Dugan Laird, *Approaches to Training and Development* (Reading, PA: Addison-Wesley, 1985), 124.

³⁶ See appendix 2.

considered successful when 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the “sufficient” level.³⁷

The third goal was to assess the efficacy of the apologetic curriculum teaching by evaluating the change in apologetic knowledge of those attending the apologetics class series. This goal was measured by administering the Christian Apologetics Survey, post-curriculum to the combined adult Bible class.³⁸ So that a change in apologetic knowledge could be statistically determined, the post-curriculum survey presented the same questions as the pre-curriculum survey, including some additional questions. Since a singular group comprised of the same people was studied under two distinct conditions (pre- and post-curriculum), a *t*-test for dependent means (samples) was the appropriate statistical instrument to utilize.³⁹ This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-curriculum survey scores.

Eldership approval allowed for the opportunity to video record each class session, then load those recordings each week to the church website to serve as makeup material for those who missed a class. Since the nature of the cumulative case curriculum was progressive, those attending fewer than twelve of the scheduled classes and failing to view the makeup recordings from the church website were excluded from the post-curriculum survey.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Antithesis. Antithesis is generally defined as two things standing in polar opposition to one another. Used in this project, antithesis describes the unbeliever’s

³⁷ See appendix 2.

³⁸ See appendix 3.

³⁹ Salkind, *Statistics*, 189.

incomprehensibility of all spiritual matters as a manifestation of the noetic effect of sin. Consequently, the believer stands in antithesis with the unbeliever.

Anti-intellectualism. Anti-intellectualism has a broad range of definitions. Here, anti-intellectualism is defined as a dogmatic belief, or doctrine against the use of any and all sources of knowledge generated outside of the text of Scripture as a source for the acquisition of independent knowledge of the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity. This includes theological, philosophical, natural theological, and scientific sources that support the biblical narrative but are not in what Alexander Campbell termed “Bible words.”⁴⁰ Anti-intellectualism is not to be taken as derogatory, insulting, degrading, or limiting, nor is it to be equated with a person’s level of education, manner of speech, vocation, income, or intellectual capacity. Anti-intellectualism, as used herein, connotes a conscious and deliberate rejection of non-biblical sources, and is not an insinuation, nor accusation of ignorance.

Arminialite theology. Arminialite theology is the Kerlian term given to the theology of Alexander Campbell, and subsequently most churches of Christ to this day. Unquestionably, Campbell’s theology “is turned toward Arminianism” except for a few soteriological points held somewhat uniquely by the churches of Christ.⁴¹ True to Arminian theology, most of the churches of Christ hold to the Arminian five points differing in the ordering of salvation and the effectualness of immersion baptism for the remission of sins.

Campbellite traditionalism. Campbellite traditionalism is a type of atavism with no standardized definition; it is used to denote a member of one of the three modern-day churches (churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Christian churches) that evolved out

⁴⁰ On Campbellism, “Bible words,” is synonymous with Scripture.

⁴¹ Royal Humbert, *A Compend of Alexander Campbell’s Theology* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1961), 11.

of The Stone-Campbell Movement, and one who holds to the strict teachings of Alexander Campbell (1788-1866).⁴² Campbell taught a theological system that averred there to be no other source of knowledge outside of the Bible. Second generation Campbellites, and beyond, carried this theology to the extreme and embraced a doctrine of *nuda scriptura* bringing about an atmosphere of anti-intellectualism. Though the term is seldom used today, it was quite popularly used by the denominations through the first half of the twentieth century; often in a derogatory and condescending way. However, atavism flourishes. Many church of Christ members in particular continue to hold to the conceptual foundations of Campbellite exclusivity, whether conscious of the fact or not. It is in that sense that the term is used in this project. Chapter 3 engages specifically with the topic of anti-intellectualism within the churches of Christ at large.

Cumulative case argument. A cumulative case argument is defined by R. Douglas Geivett as “the systematic formulation of reasons to believe that God exists, that he has a particular nature, and that he stands in relation to the world in certain definitive ways without relying directly upon sacred texts or any prophetic tradition.”⁴³ In practice, a cumulative case apologetic method is a particular approach to apologetics that calls upon an eclectic combination of elements from most or all of the recognized apologetic methods. By nature, a cumulative case approach is progressive in consolidating and strengthening the general argument for Christianity by appealing to the most persuasive arguments regardless of school, in a sustained progression.⁴⁴ In that way, each argument in the cumulative case is not forced to stand alone, but rather carries a small amount of weight

⁴² *Atavism* is defined as the “recurrence of traits of an ancestor in a subsequent generation.” See Merriam-Webster, *Atavism*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/atavism#:~:text=atavism%20E2%80%A2%205CAT%2Duh%2D,one%20that%20manifests%20atavism%203A%20throwback>. Accessed 12/30/23.

⁴³ R. Douglas Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick’s Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1995), 90.

⁴⁴ Smith, “Cumulative Case Approach to God’s Existence.”

in conjunction with a series of interconnected arguments. Practically, a cumulative case argument is not so much unlike an attorney arguing a case before a judge and presenting layers of evidence pointing to the same conclusion in a strongly compelling way.⁴⁵

Nuda scriptura. Nuda scriptura (naked, or bare Scripture), standing in radicalized contrast to the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, is the rejection of any council or church creed whatsoever.⁴⁶ Taken to extreme, *nuda scriptura* results in an overexaggerating of the elevation of Scripture above tradition by eliminating everything but Scripture. Quite literally, this exclusion extends to anything written by uninspired man, which includes the writings of the church fathers and all theological writings, as well as biblical commentary, except for that produced by Campbell himself. However, the doctrine easily can be, and in some instances has been, taken to near absurdity characterized by Bibliolatry.⁴⁷

Two limitations applied to this project. First, to the extent that some members either consciously or subconsciously hold to Campbellite traditionalism, there was a limitation of openness among the congregants to embrace arguments for the existence of God and the truth of Christianity using noncanonical sources. To mitigate this limitation a robust expository sermon was preached by the author in the morning service before the first lesson as an introduction to and a provision for scriptural warrant for the study of

⁴⁵ Paul Feinberg, “Cumulative Case Apologetics,” in Gundry and Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 151.

⁴⁶ Campbell defined *sola scriptura* in this manner: “the Bible alone is the Bible only, in word and deed, in profession and practice; and this alone can reform the world and save the church.” Alexander Campbell, *Christianity Restored: The Principal Extras of the Millennial Harbinger Revised and Corrected* (1835; repr., Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 2021), 7. Much of the same content was published four years later under the title *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians, and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Pled in the Current Reformation* (1839, repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2018).

⁴⁷ Bibliolatry is defined as “an excessive adherence to the literal interpretation of the Bible.” See Oxford Languages, “bibliolatry,” https://www.google.com/search?q=bibliolatry+definition&oq=bibliolatry&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBwgBEAAyQAQyCQgAEEUYORiABDIHCAEQABiABDIHCAIQABiABDIHCAMQABiABDIHCAQQABiABDIGCAUQABgeMgYIBhAAGB4yCAgHEAAYDxgeMggICBAAGA8YHjIGCAkQABge0gEIODM0MmowajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8. Accessed 2/9/2024.

natural theology. In addition, a sermon was preached by the author in the evening after the first lesson highlighting Paul's extensive use of classical philosophy in Scripture.⁴⁸ Second, the duration of the apologetic curriculum teaching was limited to thirteen to fifteen weeks. This limitation was two-fold: The Waurika adult Bible class is taught on the quarter system. As such, teaching series are generally limited to a three-month period.⁴⁹ Additionally, a thirteen to fifteen-week curriculum best utilized the established SBTS academic calendar for this project.⁵⁰ To mitigate this limitation, the cumulative case format was structured to maximize content while honoring these time limitations.

Three delimitations applied to this project. First, the anonymity of the research instrument respondents was ensured by asking only for the last three digits of the members' social security number. The second delimitation was that the apologetic curriculum was only taught to the adult members of the congregation and their adult guests. This delimitation allowed for the creation of a more tightly focused curriculum since the intended audience was somewhat homogenized. Third, since the goal was to present an introduction to foundational apologetics, the methodology being taught was delimited to the cumulative case argument, and within the cumulative case only five arguments were covered: the *Kalam* cosmological argument, the teleological/design argument, the combined argument from mind/morality, the historical resurrection of Jesus, and the authority of Scripture. This curriculum design best utilized the available timeline of thirteen to fifteen weeks and gave church members a foundation in an assortment of conjunctive arguments.

⁴⁸ See appendices 9 and 10.

⁴⁹ The class series, with eldership approval, overran the time limitation and was extended to a total of sixteen weeks.

⁵⁰ The teaching of the apologetics class series coincided with The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Summer 2023 academic term with the fall session beginning the week before the series was completed.

Looking Forward

Scripture calls all Christians to engage in the three mandates of the church: to worship God, to edify the body of Christ, and to evangelize the lost. In various ways, the knowledge and practice of Christian apologetics augments and advances the practice of each of these three church dynamics. Rooted in Scripture, the worship of God, grounded in love, is advanced by increased knowledge of God's existence and the intricacies of his works. The edification and unity of the body is enhanced through building one another up through preparing and sharing a common defense. Finally, evangelism is fortified through the preparation, and practice of a robust, well-informed defense of the faith in the public square.

The Bible commends all Christians to embrace these three church mandates and provides sufficient warrant for engaging Christian apologetics in that endeavor. Although a multitude of passages in Scripture provide a solid biblical foundation establishing God's three mandates upon the church, one particular pericope suggests these mandates can, perhaps, be highly honored and greatly advanced through the teaching and exercise of apologetics. That pericope is found in Ephesians 4:1-16, and it is to its exegesis, and application that this project now turns.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR TEACHING FOUNDATIONAL APOLOGETICS

While much was stated in chapter 1 concerning the importance of noncanonical sources of knowledge as they inform and enhance the Christian’s embrace of the three mandates of the church, at this point a word of clarification is in order. It was the Protestant reformer Martin Luther who coined the phrase *sola scriptura* as a protestation against the church’s long-held doctrine that elevated ordained clergy and church tradition to authoritative equality with Scripture. Matthew Barrett writes that quite simply *sola scriptura* means for the Christian that the Bible is the “chief, supreme and ultimate authority.”¹ Barrett notes that *sola scriptura* is too often “confused today with *nuda scriptura*, the view that we should have ‘no creed but the Bible!’”² Within many churches of Christ *nuda scriptura* not only means no creeds or confessions, but quite often *nothing* but the Bible. Much more will be presented on this topic in chapter 3, but for now it can be said, at minimum, the churches of Christ understand *sola scriptura* to mean “*Scripture, because it is God’s inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church.*”³

Indeed, Scripture alone has divine authority for all Christians. Consequently, *sola scriptura* is ultimately the grounding and guiding principle that governs all practical apologetic applications, whether within the congregational body, or in the public square.

¹ Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 23.

² Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 23.

³ Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 333, emphasis original.

No less the case is presented here concerning the relationship between the three mandates of the church and the teaching of apologetics at WCC to augment and advance those mandates. While a multitude of biblical passages speak quite directly to the use of apologetics as accessory and aid to the worship of God, the edification of the body, and evangelizing the world, these passages are written by a host of authors in a broad variety of contexts. However, a much more compelling case can be made for scriptural warrant from a single passage that addresses the relationship between teaching foundational apologetics and the advancement of all three mandates. Honoring God through *sola scriptura*, warrant for the execution of ecclesial dynamics, and ultimately the teaching of foundational apologetics to the saints at WCC, is realized within the single pericope found in Ephesians 4:1-16.⁴

Initial Considerations

The significance of the Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope, as it relates to the teaching of apologetics at WCC, is multifarious. Within Paul's words in this passage scriptural warrant is found for teaching apologetics so that the knowledge gained might be applied to facilitating and strengthening the three mandates. However, of equal importance, Ephesians 4:4-16 is the substantive scriptural foundation upon which the Restoration Movement was built. Ecclesial unity in love finding its antetype in "the seven ones" (vv. 4-6) is attained through the "equipping of the saints" (v. 11) so that the body grows strong and unified in love (v. 16), which, on Campbellite nineteenth-century eschatology, was determinate for the ushering in of the millennial dawn.⁵ Indeed, Rousas Rushdoony observes in Dante's *Inferno*, "The goal of being is potentiality and unity in the great chain

⁴ The American Restoration Movement most frequently found scriptural sustenance in the words of Paul in Eph 4:1-16. Unsurprisingly, then, the Waurika church of Christ's Congregation Mission Statement is crafted around the Ephesians pericope and concludes by quoting Eph 4:11-16 in full.

⁵ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. I," *Christian Baptist* 2, no. 7 (February 1825): 129.

of being. Hell is the perfection of the disruption of this cosmic unity.”⁶ Ecclesial unity drives everything. From the Restoration Movement’s biblical hermeneutic to a doctrine of *nuda scriptura*, and from a conscious anti-intellectual mindset, to a legalistic exclusivity, ecclesial unity supplants much to occupy what was the penultimate ambition of the movement; the restoration of primitive Christianity around which all Christians might unite subsequently bringing about of the earthly millennium reign of Christ.

Nonetheless, any ministry project within the churches of Christ is ill-informed if it fails in these two imperatives: (1) performing a thorough exegesis of Ephesians 4:1-16; and (2) acquiring a moderate familiarity with the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement.⁷ These two imperatives are theologically and functionally inseparable, and their consideration is essential to conceptualizing the goal of teaching apologetic at WCC to strengthen and advance the three mandates. A thorough exegesis of Ephesians 4:4-16 follows in this chapter. Chapter 3 then takes up the history of the movement, the churches of Christ, and how that history chastened apologetic endeavors related to the three church dynamics. Chapter 3 will also present a conceptual framework for “a more excellent way” (cf 1 Cor 12:31).

Authorship of Ephesians

Since much has been written concerning the authorship of Ephesians, this makes for a logical exegetical starting point. According to Harold Hoehner, the book of Ephesians enjoyed an unquestioned attestation that was already deeply entrenched by the late first century beginning with Clement of Rome who alluded to Ephesians in a letter to

⁶ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 2007), 230.

⁷ Although most present-day churches of Christ hold an amillennial eschatology, premillennialism contributed mightily to the foundational ideology and theology of the churches of Christ.

the Corinthians in AD 96.⁸ In fact, Pauline authorship was a foregone conclusion for well over a thousand years. It was not until 1792 when English clergyman Edward Evanson asked the simple question concerning why Paul, who at one time had lived in Ephesus for a two-year period, would claim that he had *heard* of their faith (1:15-16), that Pauline authorship was questioned.⁹ As it turns out, with that question Evanson opened a floodgate of speculation that, over the last two hundred years, has led to a significant number of scholars rejecting Pauline authorship.¹⁰ Although critical scholars argue that there are many reasons to reject Pauline authorship of Ephesians, most objections can be brought under three general categories: impersonal tone, language and style, and relationship to Colossians.¹¹

Impersonal tone. It is commonly noted that if Paul is the author of Ephesians, then there are strangely few details about his suffering, he seems to have little knowledge of his audience, and the letter lacks a personal greeting. Curiously, these characteristically Pauline traits are strikingly absent in the letter. After all, it was the impersonal and distant tone used by the author, “I have heard of your faith” (1:15), that initially drove Evanson to question Pauline authorship of the epistle. Indeed, it seems unlikely that Paul would write such a phrase given that he had spent nearly three years there (Acts 19) and was “known to all the residence of Ephesus” (Acts 19:17).

⁸ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 2. Joining Clement in attestation to Ephesians are Ignatius (35-107), Polycarp (69-135), who “places Ephesians on the same level as the Psalms making Ephesians the first NT book to be called Scripture,” Irenaeus (130-200), Clement of Alexandria (150-215), Marcion (d. 160), who included Ephesians in his canon, and Tertullian of Carthage (160-220). See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 2-4.

⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 6. Lincoln actually lists Erasmus (1519) as having been the first to doubt Pauline authorship, citing concerns over literary style. See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Bible Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), lxii.

¹⁰ Hoehner compiled an extensive list of scholars (279) from Erasmus in the sixteenth century, through scholars active in the twentieth century. Based upon his data, over the last century scholars who have rejected Pauline authorship averaged 48 percent, with a high of 58 percent through the decade of the 1980s. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 20.

¹¹ At minimum, these categories are considered by Cohick, Hoehner, Klein, Merkle, and Lincoln.

One possible solution can be found in the textual criticism of 1:1, to which William Klein directly states, “I will dispatch this objection quickly, given the general consensus that the words ‘in Ephesus’ did not appear in the original prescript of the letter.”¹² Perhaps Merrill Tenney, who words it nicely, is spot on: Ephesians was an encyclical “distributed through the Ephesian church.”¹³ Even so, further evidence indicates that Paul was inconsistent in his use of greeting. In fact, this is not unusual in Paul’s writings, there are no personal greeting at the end of Galatians or Philippians either. The impersonal nature of Ephesians does not disprove that the letter was intended as encyclical, distributed through the church in Ephesus, nor does it disprove Paul as its author.¹⁴

Language and style. Much has also been written about the uniqueness of the language and style observed in Ephesians. These observations specifically include “forty or forty-one *hapax legomena* for the NT found in Ephesians, and a further fifty-one words that never appear in the undisputed Pauline letters . . . as well as long sentences with extensive dependent clauses and participle construction.”¹⁵ Further evidence of unique

¹² William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Ephesians-Philemon*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 26. However, Lynn Cohick argues that the view that “in Ephesus” was in the original is the least problematic as it agrees with the early Christian writers. It also best explains the relationship of Ephesians to Colossians, and can account for the lack of personal greeting due to Paul’s extended absence from Ephesus. See also Lynn H. Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 30. Cohick argues this may very well be the correct reading given that the evidence for “in Ephesus” not being present in the original autograph is significant. Cohick summarizes, “The oldest source, P⁴⁶, a third century Alexandrian uncial, does not include ‘in Ephesus’ in the opening verse. The P⁴⁶ text reads: ‘to the saints who are and believers in Christ Jesus.’ However, the superscription of P⁴⁶ identifies the epistle as to the Ephesians.” The same holds true for both fourth-century Alexandrian codices κ and B. Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 26.

¹³ Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 319.

¹⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 23.

¹⁵ Klein, *Ephesians*, 22. Klein gives the example concerning Paul’s use of the words *santas* (satan) seven times throughout the undisputed letters, but never does he use the word *diabolos* (devil), which he uses twice in Ephesians. Also, Paul repeatedly uses the phrase “in the heavenly realms” (1:3, 20; 2:6, 3:10, 6:12), but he uses that phrase nowhere else in the Pauline corpus. And so, on the criticism goes through the remaining thirty-nine other hapax legomena.

language use in Ephesians being uncharacteristic of Paul is mentioned by Klein regarding the universal sense in which the word *ekklesia* (church) is used, in contrast to Paul's typical use of the word in reference to the local church elsewhere.¹⁶ However, *hapax legomena* evaluations are suspect from the outset. Statistical analysis of both the known and disputed Pauline corpus is a chancy proposition simply based upon sample size.¹⁷ Hoehner summaries the comparison nicely:

There are thirty-five words (thirty-one not counting proper nouns—Ephesians has no unique proper nouns) only in Galatians and there are ninety (eighty not counting proper nouns) words in Galatians not found elsewhere in Paul but occur elsewhere in the NT. Hence, the unique vocabulary in both Ephesians and Galatians are identical even though Galatians is about 10 percent shorter. Yet would this demonstrate that Paul did not write Galatians? Most agree that it does not.¹⁸

Also, except for Ephesians, all of Paul's letters are occasional and highly contextualized, which necessitates a particular uniqueness; consider the vast contextual range between Philemon, Galatians, and Romans for example.¹⁹ Hoehner rightly observes, "Paul uses unique words in every epistle" and that fact "does not necessarily demonstrate a non-Pauline authorship."²⁰

Relationship to Colossians. Andrew Lincoln states that the relationship between Ephesians and Colossians "points decisively away from Pauline authorship of Ephesians," suggesting that Ephesians and Colossians had different authors; namely, that Paul wrote Colossians, then an impostor used Colossians to write the pseudepigraph,

¹⁶ Klein, *Ephesians*, 22.

¹⁷ Regarding the inherent unreliability of the minimal sample size offered by the known Pauline corpus, see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 27.

¹⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 24

¹⁹ Klein concurs, adding, "Many of the unique terms in Ephesians are simply those required by the topic the author addresses." See Klein, *Ephesians*, 25.

²⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 25.

Ephesians.²¹ There is a generous quantity of potential evidence considering that 34 percent of the terms in Colossians also appear in Ephesians.²²

However, these observations do not necessitate Ephesians' authorship to be other than Paul. Lynn Cohick gives three solid reasons why this is so. First, the recommendation of Tychicus coming at the end of both letters could well have been the closing added by a secretary "copying the letter carrier's description," as an efficient use of time.²³ Second, the comparisons made between the two letters are oftentimes much more general in nature than critics suggest.²⁴ Third, the similarities and differences do not clearly show that Ephesians relied upon Colossians. The issue is further complicated when consideration is given to "the possibilities that the letters employed traditional, creedal, and liturgical language and that a single author repeated general, common language in two letters written about the same time."²⁵ Rather than force a contrast between Colossians and Ephesians, it seems quite reasonable to conclude, as F. F. Bruce does, that "Ephesians provides the logical sequence to Colossians, expounding the cosmic role of the church, the body of Christ, as Colossians expounds the cosmic role of Christ, who is head

²¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, iv.

²² The parallels become all the more striking when the recommendation of Tychicus is examined. All twenty-nine words of the recommendation in Colossians are repeated verbatim in Ephesians (Col 4:7-8; Eph 6:21-22). The overall theme and style of the two epistles are strongly similar, as well as the observed long and complex sentences that appear in both. The most prominent similarities, however, occur in the household codes where much of the language is exactly the same between the two. Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 12-13.

²³ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 14.

²⁴ Examples of this appear when literary structure is more closely observed, Cohick writes, "Ephesians includes a second prayer (3:14-19) and omits the exaltation of Christ (Col 1:15-20) but speaks of Christ our peace (2:14-3:4) and greatly expands the household codes." Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 14.

²⁵ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 14-15. It is certainly true that Paul was quite adept at embedding creeds into his letters (see Rom 1:3-4; 1 Cor 15:3-8; 1 Tim 3:16; etc.).

of his body, the church, and at the same time ‘head of every principality and power’” (Col 1:18; 2:10).²⁶

Finally, precedent and history matter. It is ungracious to conclude, as Lincoln, that precedent “cannot be a decisive in discussion of original authorship.”²⁷ It also smacks of chronological snobbery to consider that none of the great minds of early Christianity were intellectually advanced enough to pose such critical questions should they be necessary.²⁸ Precedent matters. And just as precedent matters, history matters as well.²⁹ Due consideration given, and concurring with Bruce that Ephesians is “the quintessence of Paulinism,” this project proceeds assuming Pauline authorship of both Ephesians and Colossians.

Dating and Purpose

For those holding to Pauline authorship, the general consensus is that Paul wrote both Colossians and Ephesians within a short timeframe during his imprisonment in Rome between AD 60-62,³⁰ with the Ephesian epistle being written for the church “in Ephesus,” and/or the surrounding churches, or multiple house churches, as an

²⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 241. Additionally, it stands to reason that if two letters were written by the same person, close to the same time, and covering the same general topic, then a multitude of similarities would be expected, especially if the letters were meant for a different destination. And that is exactly what a comparison of Colossians and Ephesian produces. There is also something to be considered from silence. Although the volume and nature of the lost Pauline letters are presently known only to God, heed must be taken when mounting arguments that presuppose the lost letters to have not been Ephesian-like in personal tone, language and style, and relationship to any of the other disputed or undisputed Pauline letters.

²⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxii.

²⁸ C. S. Lewis coined the phrase “chronological snobbery.” C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 207-8.

²⁹ Historian Michael Licona argues that in evaluating historical data, the earlier the better. The closer to the event that a historical document is produced, the greater the reliability of the document. Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Historiographical Approach* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 2010), 223.

³⁰ Cohick, Hoehner, Klein, and Merkle, are among the consensus who believe in a dating of AD 60-62 in Rome.

encyclical.³¹ Having established those presuppositions, attention now turns to Paul's purpose for writing the epistle to the Ephesians.

Many opinions have been put forwarded regarding the purpose of the Ephesian letter based upon some particular emphasis or another extracted from the text.³² However, John Barclay's work concerning gift-giving and gift-receiving in ancient societies provides a concrete historio-cultural backdrop to Paul's divine gift-giving tally explicated in the first half of the letter (Eph 1:3-3:21).³³ The recounting of the gift-giving of God in Christ gives rise to his exhortation to reciprocative action in the second half (Eph 4:1-6:9). The perfection of love found in Trinitarian love, divine-human love, and in the love shared among the saints is molded together in total unity through "the consummation of all things."³⁴ That uniting of all things in love comes only through the Perfect Gift of God in Christ.

Unity as a purpose of the Ephesian epistle is undeniable. The word *ἐνότητα* (unity) appears in the New Testament only in Ephesians (4:3, 13) while in one of the most beautiful pieces of New Testament writing Paul invokes the word "one" fourteen times. Further, the preposition used to convey unity also appears fourteen times, and some derivation of the Christian's unity with Christ specifically expressed; "in Christ" appears some thirty-six times. The word "church," the corporate unity of believers, is found nine

³¹ Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, 319.

³² Merkle provides the purpose statements of O'Brien, Thielman, Arnold, Hoehner, Barth, and Lincoln as ranging from God's power, the role of the church, and ethical responsibilities, to love for one another, teaching of a new identity in Christ, and strength to battle the powers of darkness, respectively. See Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 7.

³³ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 11-39. Barclay's contribution to this project is discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections, especially in this chap. under the subheading "Textual Relationship."

³⁴ It should be noted that in many regards the Eph 4:1-16 pericope is the actualization of Jesus's High Priestly Prayer in John 17, personified in the unity of the body of Christ modeled in the "seven ones" motif.

times.³⁵ Quite obviously, unity is the goal, and Paul is using gift-giving and gift-receiving language in the book of Ephesians as a mechanism that drives the unity of the church into a Christ-honoring reciprocal gift back to God. The purpose of the Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope, then, is to exhort the reader to unity (1-3), remind the reader of the foundations of Christian unity (4-6), describe the Christ-given vehicles to unity (7-11), and delineate the penultimate purpose of unity (12-16).

Historical and Cultural Context

The “cosmic reconciliation of all things in Christ,” however, was not only counter-cultural to life in Ephesus, but was also hostile to it. Ephesus, as attested to by Luke (Acts 19:18-19), was home to both the cult of Artemis and the imperial cult of Rome, as well as numerous magicians and sorcerers.³⁶ But far and away it was the goddess Artemis that captivated the city. The temple of Artemis was an enormous building four times the size of the Athenian Parthenon and the largest known in antiquity. Considered one of the seven wonders of the world, this massive building cast a long shadow across the city and stood as a constant reminder of the supreme powers that could be wielded by the goddess.³⁷ Hoehner notes that Artemis was “venerated for her supreme power over fate and supernatural powers,” including magical powers, and was “syncretistic in her practices” depending upon cultural and political motivations.³⁸ Cohick writes, “Ephesians mentions powers and authorities in four of its six chapters” and that “magic is often brought into the discussion about powers and authorities.”³⁹ To be sure, magic is inexplicable without power.

³⁵ Abraham Kuruvilla, *Ephesians: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 14.

³⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 86.

³⁷ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 34.

³⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 86.

³⁹ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 40-41.

Artemis was not only powerful, but her tremendous influence reached far and wide. Luke records the argument put forward by the Ephesian silversmith Demetrius who complained that Paul's preaching against Artemis would be devastating, not only for the silversmiths who fashioned "silver shrines of Artemis" (Acts 19:24), but that the goddess herself might be "deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship" (Acts 19:27). It is quite reasonable to conclude that the followers of Artemis, especially in Ephesus, thought her powerful enough to rule even the vast reaches of the cosmos. Against this cultural backdrop Paul comes to teach and preach Christ during his second and third missionary journeys.

Paul's first visit to Ephesus. Paul, along with Timothy, had originally intended to go to Ephesus early on during his second missionary journey but were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit" to preach in Asia, which would have likely put them in Ephesus, but they were instead diverted to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-9), then on to Corinth (Acts 18:1). There, Paul met Aquilla and his wife, Pricilla, and worked with them as a tent-maker (Acts 18:2-3) for "a year and six months" (Acts 18:11). Next, Paul set sail for Syria, then on to Ephesus where he "reasoned with the Jews" in the synagogue before declining an offer to stay longer, and setting sail for Caesarea (Acts 18:2-22). Scripture is not clear how long Paul stayed in Ephesus on this initial visit, but it can be assumed that it was not for long because the Jews were wishing to hear more (Acts 18:20).

Paul's second visit to Ephesus. Approximately a year after his first, Paul's second visit to Ephesus as part of his third missionary journey was lengthy, arriving from Antioch sometime in the fall of AD 53. Paul preached and taught in the synagogues for three months but withdrew when some began "speaking evil of the Way," moving on to teach both Jews and Gentiles for the next two years from the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). Luke records the power of Paul's preaching and his miraculous work of exorcism such that "a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books and

burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19). It does not take much imagination to recognize the significance of a magic book-burning by former magicians in the shadows of the temple of Artemis. Paul eventually leaves Ephesus in the wake of the uproar created by his confrontation with Demetrius and the silversmith union (Acts 20:1).

Paul’s meeting with the Ephesian elders. In the spring of AD 57, having spent the winter in Greece, Paul began a journey to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, leaving from Corinth and traveling to Macedonia then to Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, and then Miletus (Acts 20:3-16). At Miletus, Paul sends for the Ephesian elders. What can be known about the nature of Paul’s meeting with the elders is found in Luke’s account in Acts, where he writes that Paul reminded the Ephesians of how he had lived among them, how he was headed to Jerusalem, and that imprisonment and affliction awaited him in every town. Paul then announces that he will not be seeing them again but commends them to pay careful attention to themselves and the church, which was bought with Christ’s blood, specifically being wary of false teachers who will come and divide the church. Finally, with much sorrow, Paul kneels and prays with them before they accompany him back to his ship (Acts 20:18-38).

Paul leaves Miletus for Jerusalem where he is imprisoned for a brief period (Acts 21:33-23:22), then taken to Caesarea and imprisoned for two years (Acts 23:23-26:32), and finally transported to Rome and imprisoned there for two years as the record of Acts closes (Acts 27-28). Now some five years after Paul’s last visit to Ephesus, and four years since he met with the elders in Miletus, he writes his epistle to the Ephesians, most likely in AD 62. Cohick brings the reality for the Ephesian Christian to life: “The Ephesian believers lived with the tensions created by the city’s identity as the protector of Artemis’s honor. Pagan affinity to magic and the promise of power over spiritual forces

permeated the culture,” a culture made up of both Jews and Gentiles.⁴⁰ In this historical context Paul reiterates what had no doubt been a frequent topic he had preached in the synagogue, and “from the hall of Tyrannus” in Ephesus: all things in heaven and on earth are being consummated in Christ, who is the supreme authority of heaven and earth, through the love and unity of both Jew and Gentile, in His church.

Observations

Beyond authorship and historio-cultural considerations, observation of genre, literary structure, and grammar are also essential elements of good hermeneutics. Those elements are considered in this section.

Genre and Structure

Recent research concerning the structure of ancient letters has led scholars to categorize ancient Hellenistic letters into three broad categories: literary letters, used to convey general information or philosophical ideas to the general public; personal letters, written to a known audience; and fictitious letters, written for entertainment.⁴¹ Paul’s letters, including his letter to the Ephesus, fits into the “personal letter” category. In structure, ancient Hellenistic letters are generally composed of three to five parts, including an opening, a body, and a closing, along with a greeting in the opening. In the Pauline letters, the body often includes instructional information and an exhortation of a moral nature, considered *paraenesis* material. Cohick points out that the paraenesis section “holds the substance and assertions of the letter.”⁴² Given that Ephesians is certainly not written as fiction merely for entertainment, and since the letter lacks the length, complexity, and

⁴⁰ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 42.

⁴¹ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 50.

⁴² Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 50.

structure of a philosophical literary letter, the literary genre of the letter to the Ephesians is best described as a nonliterary epistolary paraenetic.⁴³

While following the general structure of a nonliterary epistolary paraenesis, Ephesians can be divided into two major sections based upon theological focus. The first section focuses vertically upon the consummation of all things in heaven through Christ, while the second section focuses horizontally upon the consummation of all things on earth in the church, which is Christ's body. It is in the uniting of both that true and eternal unity is found. An outline of the letter to the Ephesians follows.

- I. Prescript (1:1-2)
- II. The New Humanity a Divine Creation (1:3-3:21)
 - 1. Introductory Eulogia (1:3-14)
 - (1) Praise for the Gift of Election and Adoption (1:3-6)
 - (2) Praise for the Gift of Redemption and Final Reconciliation (1:7-10)
 - (3) Praise for the Gift of Assurance of the Believer's Heritage (1:11-14)
 - 2. Introductory Thanksgiving and Intercessory Prayer (1:15-23)
 - (1) Thanks for Reader's Faith and love and Prayer for their Increase in Knowledge ((1:15-19)
 - (2) God's Mighty Strength Shown in the Gift of Raising of Christ (1:20-23)
 - 3. The Saving Grace of God (2:1-7)
 - (1) New Life in the Gift of Christ (2:1-7)
 - (2) God's New Creation because of the Gift of Christ (2:8-10)
 - 4. The Incorporation of the Gentiles (2:11-22)
 - (1) Their Former Plight Before the Gift of Christ (2:11-12)
 - (2) Their Present Access Because of the Gift of Christ (2:13-18)
 - (3) Their Gift of Membership in the House of God (2:19-22)
 - 5. Intercessory Prayer Resumed (3:1)
 - 6. The Mystery of the Gift of Christ (3:2-13)
 - (1) Paul's Stewardship to Teach the Gift of Christ (3:2-7)
 - (2) The Eternal Purpose of the Gift of Christ (3:8-13)
 - 7. Intercessory Prayer Concluded (3:14-19)
 - 8. Doxology 3:20-21)
- III. *The New Humanity in Earthly Life (4:1-6:20)*
 - 1. *The Exhortation to Unity (4:1-3)*
 - 2. *The Foundation of Unity (4:4-6)*
 - 3. *The Vehicle to Unity (4:7-11)*
 - 4. *The Purpose of Unity (4:12-16)*⁴⁴
 - 5. Christian Conduct as Return of the Gift of Christ (4:17-5:20)
 - (1) The Old Man and the New (4:17-24)
 - (2) Negative and Positive Precepts (4:25-32)
 - (3) The Imitation of God (5:1-2)

⁴³ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 52.

⁴⁴ Italics indicate the central focus of this chapter; the exegesis of 4:1-16 pericope.

- (4) From Darkness to Light Because of the gift of Christ (5:3-14)
- 6. “Be Filled with the Spirit” (5:15-20)
- 7. “Be Strong in the LORD” (6:10-17)
- 8. “Watch and Pray” (6:18-20)
- IV. Letter-Closing (6:21-22)
 - 1. Personal Notes (6:21-22)
 - 2. Final Benediction (6:23-24)⁴⁵

Literary and Grammatical Observations

Paul begins the letter setting forth that because of the surpassing greatness of the gifts received in Christ who consummates all things in heaven (Eph 1:10; see also 1:3-2:22), there is, “therefore,” a behavioral and emotional response of reciprocation grounded in church unity in order to consummate all things through Christ on earth as well. Paul announces this essential exhortation to ecclesial unity in 4:1-3 and then presents the foundational principles of that unity in 4:4-6, followed by his description of the vehicles used to accomplish unity in 4:7-11. Finally, Paul delineates the purpose and significance of ecclesial unity in 4:12-16. The following observations are made in view of these four priorities that Paul explicates in the 4:1-16 pericope.

The exhortation to unity: 4:1-3. It is not surprising then, that Ephesians 4:1 marks the transition from the cosmic theology and supremacy of the gift from God in Christ that marked the first half of the letter, to the paraenesis of the second half by Paul’s use of the conjunction *oun* (therefore),⁴⁶ which inescapably links the realms of heaven and earth, gift-Giver and gift-receiver, Christ, and His church, all together. The consummation of all things in heaven has already begun, first in the election of the saints from the laying of the foundations of the world (Eph 1:4), then in the redemption found in Him through His blood (Eph 1:7). That redemption, then, is the saints guaranteed hope (Eph 1:18) that rests upon “the greatness of His immeasurable power” that He worked in

⁴⁵ This outline is an adaptation of Bruce’s work, with modification especially to the outline structure of the 4:1-16 pericope. See Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 247-48.

⁴⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of Greek words appearing in parenthesis are from Drayton C. Benner, ed., *The Greek-English Interlinear ESV New Testament: Novum Testamentum Graece* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

Christ by “raising Him from the dead” (Eph 1:19-20). And now, having already defeated all rule and authority and power and dominion, all things have been put under His feet by God, and He has been given “as head over all to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:21-23). Clearing the way for the further reconciliation of all things, He has “broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility” between Jew and Gentile, and reconciling “both to God in one body” (Eph 2:14-16). This already-but-not-yet is the beginning of the cosmic victory and the “uniting of all things” in Christ (Eph 1:10). On Restoration postmillennial eschatology, by virtue of having been raised from the dead, Christ has already won the cosmic battle (Eph 1:21). Now, the consummation of all things on earth falls to the church to inaugurate by and through ecclesial unity in love (Eph 4:16), fashioned after the consummate unity found in “the seven ones” (Eph 4:4-6).

Paul writes, οὖν (*oun*); “[T]herefore.” Paul argues that in light of all the gift-giving God has accomplished in Christ, there is an equally weighty responsibility for each member of the church, who is recipient of His “glorious inheritance” (Eph 1:18), “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1).⁴⁷ Paul uses the indicative παρακαλῶ, “to urge” the saints to walk worthy of their calling. Barclay notes that it is an expectation based upon the “circular nature” of the gifts that the saints have already received.⁴⁸ Because of this circularity of the gifts, Paul “urges” the believer to respond. Cohick adds, “God gives the unconditioned gift of salvation, which is not tied to the worth of the recipient. However, the gift requires a response, for in receiving it, the recipient accepts the relationship to God in Christ that comes with it.”⁴⁹ To be sure, Paul spills much ink in the first three chapters of Ephesians, enumerating the divine gifts given

⁴⁷ Hoehner states that the conjunction οὖν in 4:1 “is drawing an inference from all the preceding chapters in Ephesians. It is not uncommon for Paul to use this conjunction when moving from theology to paraenesis; i.e., Rom 12:1; 1 Thess 4:1; 1 Tim 2:1.” Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 502.

⁴⁸ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 569.

⁴⁹ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 73.

to man by God the Father, through Christ Jesus. However, for present concern it should be understood that these gifts relate directly to the consummation of all things in Christ through the recognition of the divine gift-giving and gift-receiving found in Jesus Christ. Since understanding Paul’s gift-giving and gift-accepting motif is essential to the 4:1-16 pericope’s textual relationship, it is adequately summarized in that subsection of this chapter.

Nonetheless, in clarifying Paul’s urging to “walking in a worthy manner,” Markus Barth points out that he uses the same three nouns, *ταπεινοφροσύνης* (humility), *πραΰτητα* (gentleness), and *μακροθυμίας* (patience), as aspects of “bearing with one another,” which not only echo Colossians 3:12, but are the very foundations of the ecclesial love he is exhorting.⁵⁰ The ecclesial love Paul is urging is not a watered-down hollow love—it is the same type of love as God’s love for man (Eph 1:4b); it is *ἀγάπη* (agape). Hoehner describes this God-like love as the “kind of love [that] seeks the highest good in the one loved, and more particularly for the believer, it has the idea of seeking the will of God in the one loved.”⁵¹ Of equal importance, Paul writes, is an eagerness “to keep [τηρεῖν] the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3). Here is one of only two instances (4:3; 4:13) of the word *ἐνότητα* (unity) in the New Testament, and it is strategically used here by Paul who is both calling back to the power of the Spirit in the believer (3:15) that was set as a seal to the promise of eternal victory in Christ (1:13), and is calling forward to the ultimate unity found in the Trinity (Eph 4:4-6). In these first three verses Paul has succinctly brought the eschatological realities of the believer’s victory in Christ from the first half of the letter forward to a climatical transition in the form of an exhortation to action.

⁵⁰ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, Anchor Bible, vol. 34a (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 427.

⁵¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 510.

The foundations of unity: 4:4-6. Having achieved his first priority to exhort the Ephesians to ecclesial unity, Paul then moves from prescriptive to descriptive in extolling the foundation of unity through one of the most beautiful confessions in all of Scripture: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (4:4-6).⁵²

Paul begins the confession with the church as “one body,” and “one Spirit” that binds the church together, followed by five anticipated embodiments of the church as “one.” The number “one” is repeated seven times, but also the word “all” is repeated four times, implying a diversity within the unity.⁵³ Diversity within unity is also strongly implied in the Greek noun forms Paul chose to use in the middle verse (5) of the three-verse creed. Paul uses the masculine noun εἷς Κύριος (one Lord), the feminine noun μία πίστις (one faith), and the neuter noun ἐν βάπτισμα (one baptism).⁵⁴ Lincoln concludes that “the one church composed of both Jew and Gentile is a pledge of the ultimate cosmic unity God will achieve, and a witness to the hostile cosmic powers that God’s cosmic purposes are already in the process of realization (Eph 3:9-10).”⁵⁵ More than that, however, just as Paul had argued that the “dividing wall of hostility” between Jew and Gentile had been broken down through the sacrifice of Christ (2:14), Paul now presents a vision of ecclesial unity that includes both men and women. The multiethnic and universal nature of Christ’s church is not an uncommon theme in the Pauline corpus; he quite distinctly

⁵² Alexander Campbell, in the translation of the New Testament he edited and printed, translates βάπτισμα (*baptisma*), as “immersion” consistent with historical, and prevailing church of Christ doctrine. See George Campbell, James McKnight, and Phillip Doddridge, *The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ, Commonly Styled the New Testament* (Bethany, VA: Alexander Campbell, 1828), 304.

⁵³ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 463.

⁵⁴ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 429.

⁵⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 231.

taught the Galatians that whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, “all are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Even so, the foundation of the particular ecclesial unity that Paul mandates has much deeper roots in the abject perfection of trinitarian unity. The first tripartite contains the foundational elements of “one body,” “one Spirit,” and “one hope.” These elements are anchored in the third person of the Trinity. Then, in the second tripartite of foundational elements for unity are “one Lord,” and “one faith,” and “one baptism.” These elements are anchored in the second person of the Trinity. Paul further underscores Christ’s divine status here using the word *Κύριος* (Lord), rather than Christ.⁵⁶ Cohick notes the significance here in that the LXX translates the Tetragrammaton YHWH, to the Greek word *Κύριος* (Lord). The significance of this is undeniable; Paul uses the same unspeakable divine name for God, to include Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ Lastly, and singularly, the third foundational element in which ecclesial unity is found is the “one God and Father of all” which anchors all things.⁵⁸ The phrase *Θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ* (God and Father) occurs five other times in the New Testament (Eph 1:3; 2 Cor 1:3, 11:31; 1 Thess 3:11; 1 Pet 1:3), all from Paul’s hand with the singular exception being 1 Peter 1:3. But a question presents itself: by “all” does Paul truly mean “all” people; believers and unbelievers alike? Benjamin Merkle notes that much has been written about the gender of *πᾶς* (all) in its four-fold usage, stating, “If the gender of *πᾶς* is masculine, then the reference is limited to redeemed humanity; i.e., all believers.”⁵⁹ However, and consistent with Paul’s previous use of *πᾶς* in the Ephesian letter (see Eph 1:10, 11, 22, 23; 3:9, 15; 4:10), if the gender is neutral then the reference to “all” is “cosmic in scope; all things.”⁶⁰ By engendering *πᾶς* as neutral, Paul is driving

⁵⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 516.

⁵⁷ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 64.

⁵⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 516, 518.

⁵⁹ Merkle, *Ephesians*, 117.

⁶⁰ Merkle, *Ephesians*, 117.

home the absolute sovereignty of God in the cosmos and the total victory of Jesus already won over all rule and authority and power and dominion (Eph 1:21). Ultimately, every knee will bow to Christ, and all things point to God (Phil 2:10-11).

Paul's linking unity of the church with the unity found in the Trinity helps explain why there has historically been much interest in the significance of the reverse ordering of the persons of the Trinity in the creedal statement (4:4-6) in contradistinction to the ordering given by Jesus in commanding that believers be baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). The same can be said of the Trinitarian ordering found in the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and later Christian Creeds that always order the persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁶¹ Likewise, Trinitarian theology has long held that without loss or division of the divine essence, the Father begets the Son, and both Father and Son spirate the Holy Spirit.⁶² Consequent of the reverse ordering, there is a powerful, progressive significance as the persons of the Trinity are increasingly linked to the ultimate foundations of unity. Hoehner summarizes nicely: "The one body of believers is vitalized by one *Spirit*, so all believers have one hope. That body is united to its one *Lord* (Christ) by each member's one act of faith, and his or her identity with him is in the one baptism. One *God*, the Father, is supreme over all, operative through all, and resides in all."⁶³ All seven foundational elements of the creed are united in the Trinity. Ephesians 4:4-16 is Paul's actionable exegesis of Jesus's High Priestly Prayer that "they may be one, just as you, Father are in me, and I in you, that they may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

⁶¹ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 463.

⁶² William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 246.

⁶³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 520-21.

The effect of the reverse ordering magnifies the profound and ultimate supremacy of God who by His grace saves through faith as a personal gift to each believer (2:8); an accepted gift that stipulates a return. Christians worship one God, and this is He. By reversing the order of the Trinity in the *credo*, Paul moves the reader to this reality. Klein writes, “If there is only one God who is the Father of all things, and the one whose presence nothing eludes, then, of all people, Christians, who readily acknowledge his supremacy, ought to submit to his will and reflect in their relationships with each other their unity under his regal Fatherhood.”⁶⁴

Finally, the Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope in general, and 4:4-6 in particular, serves as the impetus and bedrock foundation for the entire Restoration Movement. Alexander Campbell writes, “This is a splendid summary of the evangelical ministry from the pen of the chief of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the seven indestructible pillars on which Divine and immutable wisdom has builded [*sic*] its base; the house of God, the house of ransomed, beatified and glorified humanity.”⁶⁵ To this there is much more to be said in chapter 3.

The vehicle to unity: 4:7-11. Having called the Ephesians to greater ecclesial unity in 4:1-3, and having reminded the church that all things ultimately point to God through the foundations of unity (4:4-6), Paul now turns to the vehicle by which unity is to be accomplished (4:7-11). Paul reminds the Ephesians that all gifts come from God and are a measure of grace. Then, at verse 11, Paul transitions from the foundations of unity found in the “oneness” of which all believers are called, to now speaking of the diversity of individual gifts given by grace to “each” one. Hoehner notes that Paul, in moving “from the *πᾶς*, ‘all,’ to the particular *ἐνὶ δὲ ἑκάστῳ ἡμῶν* ‘to each of us’ has singled out every

⁶⁴ Klein, *Ephesians*, 109.

⁶⁵ Alexander Campbell, “The Evangelical Ministry,” *Millennial Harbinger* 5, no 4 (June 1862): 241.

single believer, ‘no one is excluded.’”⁶⁶ In singling out each individual as the recipient of a special and personal gift, Paul also enjoins each person to “let us use them” (Rom 12:6). Personal indeed! Paul writes that each person receives their gift “according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (4:7). Lincoln notes that the differing portions of grace gifted by Christ find their purpose in enriching the whole body, as will be made explicit in verse 16.⁶⁷ Paul then moves to reinforce that the gift given to each believer is a divine gift.

Then, Paul makes somewhat of an awkward move in verse 8 to which much has been speculated concerning not only his rationale for reaching to Psalms 68, but also in unique way he paraphrases the passage. Unsympathetically, Barth claims Paul’s use of the Psalms passage to “pose serious problems” because the author distorts the Scriptures.⁶⁸ Likewise, Merkle points to several inconsistencies between Paul’s version of Psalm 68 and the LXX: shifts in verb tense, shifts from second person to third, changes in verb meaning, and prepositional phrase changes.⁶⁹ However, it might be said that these objections have been adequately addressed. After much ink Barth concludes, “Paul did not invent a new hermeneutics. Rather he continued on a way laid out in the OT use of enthronement psalms. . . . Without detriment to its substance and quality Paul’s interpretation can be called midrash.”⁷⁰ In much the same way Manfred Brauch considers Paul to be adapting the Psalms passage to his own use “in familiar Jewish fashion.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, Hoehner rightfully argues, “The point that Paul is trying to

⁶⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 522.

⁶⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 242.

⁶⁸ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 472.

⁶⁹ Merkle, *Ephesians*, 122-23.

⁷⁰ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 476.

⁷¹ Manfred Brauch, “Ephesians,” in *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, by Walter C. Kaiser Jr. et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996), 638.

make is the fact that Christ, who ascended as victor, has the right to give gifts.”⁷² That right of Christ to give divine gifts is further reinforced by Paul in verse 10 with yet another reminder of the finished work on the Cross: “He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things” (4:10). “All things.” The verb πληρσώ (he might fill) is used twenty-three times by Paul in his writings, four times in Ephesians (1:23; 3:19; 4:10; 5:18). Here in 4:10 Paul uses the active form of the verb πληρσώ, making the object of the filling “all things” rather than exclusively the church reaffirming the overriding eschatological nature of Paul’s letter. In this instance, Christ’s ascension has given Him “the right to bestow gifts as he wills.”⁷³

After the Psalms excursus (4:8-10), Paul returns to the giving of gifts by Christ in the context of church leaders who are gifted by Christ with talents, who are then gifted by Him to the church so that “all things” on earth might ultimately be united in Him (1:10). In what Cohick notes as the beginning of a very long sentence (4:11) that closes out the pericope, Paul gets more purposeful and granular in listing the vehicles, as it were, to which the unity he has called them will be realized.⁷⁴ Again using the language of gift, Paul enumerates Christ’s gift of gifted leaders to the church: ἀποστόλους (apostles), προφήτας (prophets), εὐαγγελιστάς (evangelists), ποιμένας (shepherds), and διδασκάλους (teachers). It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive, such that the Christian apologist might reasonably pursue much useful work from any or all of these categories. However, it is important to recognize that all the individual gifts are given *for the church*. This is an emphasis on the unified body rather than the individual leaders.⁷⁵ These church leaders gifted *by* Christ, have in turn been gifted *to* the church for

⁷² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 530.

⁷³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 537.

⁷⁴ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 264.

⁷⁵ Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese, *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 2001), 197.

the two-fold purpose of equipping the saints for the work of ministry, and the building of the body (4:12).

The purpose of unity: 4:12-16. The beginning of verse 12, however, marks Paul’s transition from describing the vehicles provided by Christ to accomplish unity, to the purpose they are to help execute. The two-fold purpose is introduced with three prepositional phrases with the first being *πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων* (for the training of the holy ones). Here, the verb *καταρτισμὸν*, which is often translated “equip” (NIV, ESV, NAS, NKJV, RSV), is sometimes translated as a “perfecting” (KJV, AS) of the saints. The second prepositional phrase, *εἰς ἔργον διακονίας* (for work of ministry), is coordinate with the first, reinforcing the purpose Christ gave the gifts of leaders to the church.⁷⁶ Merkle notes that the emphasis is given to the gifts given “to each one” (4:7) so that “each part” (4:16) does its given work. It is not only the leaders who are to do the work of ministry, but each individual.⁷⁷ The third prepositional phrase is subordinate to the second phrase and sums up the ultimate purpose: *εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* (for the upbuilding of the body of the Christ). Abraham Kuruvilla succinctly summarizes, “The Head gives, leaders equip, saints minister, and thereby the body is built (4:11-12).”⁷⁸

Excursus 4:12: comma, or no comma? There has been much debate as to whether a comma should divide the first prepositional phrases in 4:12, into two (GNV, WYC, KJV, ASV MEV), or if the first phrase stands alone, with the second and third phrase subordinate to it (Tyndale, SW, ESV, NIV, NKJ, NASV, RSV). This debate is not new. The first English Bible, the Tyndale Bible, published in 1525, translates the verse without a separating comma after *ἁγίων* (saints), rendering the first phrase to be

⁷⁶ Merkle, *Ephesians*, 129.

⁷⁷ Merkle, *Ephesians*, 129.

⁷⁸ Kuruvilla, *Ephesians*, 126.

composed of two coordinate phrases.⁷⁹ Just thirty-five years later the Geneva Bible, published in 1560, translates the verse with a comma following *ἁγίων* (saints), followed fifty-one years later, by the 1611 King James Version, which also renders the verse with the comma. Over the years the debate has ebbed and flowed with both versions commonly found in print today.

Nevertheless, the implications are quite significant and bear directly upon the interpretation of the entire pericope, for if the role of the five-fold ministry as given in 4:11 is to gift the church for the purposes of (1) perfecting the saints, (2) for the work of ministry, (3) for the building of the body of Christ, then unity in the church is brought about actively, and exclusively by the work of the clergy, while the laity play a mere passive role in maturing into the fullness of Christ. If, however, there be no comma separating the “equip[ping] of the saints,” and “for the work of ministry,” then the laity are not passive but rather directly commanded to minister within the body (and without) to increase the knowledge of the saints, building one another up toward unified maturity in Christ and reaching to the lost.

Hoehner suggests that the first preposition, *πρὸς* (for), purposes the main verb from 4:11, *ἔδωκεν* (gave), while the second preposition, *εἰς* (for), depends on the first, and the third preposition, *εἰς* (for), depends on the second.⁸⁰ Given the progressive nature of the verse, it is quite comfortably rendered as Christ giving gifted people for the immediate purpose of equipping all of the saints for the work of ministry, which works toward the ultimate goal of building up the body of Christ. The significance here cannot be overstated: there is no distinction herein made between clergy and laity. On the other hand, there is much support found in the New Testament for the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:4-5) through “the teaching and admonishing [of] one another” (Col 3:16; see also Matt 5:19; Rom 15:4; 1 Pet 3:15; Jas 5:19-20). These things given, it is of

⁷⁹ Barrett, *God's Word Alone*, 58.

⁸⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 548.

no wonder that Alexander Campbell's translation of the New Testament, *The Sacred Writings*, renders 4:12 "to the empowerment of all believers to teach one another."⁸¹

Return to the purpose of unity: 4:12-16. Paul reaches back and then draws forward once again the concept of an all-inclusive ecclesial unity of individuals gathered around the "faith and knowledge of the Son of God" (4:13). This is the only other mention of *ἐνότητα* (unity) (see 4:3) in the New Testament, and Hohner notes that the expectation is total: "All (*οἱ πάντες*), not just some, are to attain the goal set before us. . . . The 'all' is mentioned because we are *all* being prepared for the work of ministry with the goal of building up the body of Christ to which we are all a part."⁸² Just as all have received divine gifts, so too all are to reciprocate both vertically to God through Christ and horizontally among one's fellow saints. Still, unity of the "one" faith is not the singular purpose presented here, but also unity in "the knowledge of the Son of God." This is the only time in the Ephesian epistle that Christ is presented as the "the Son of God," and Paul uses it to introduce, and to complement *τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* (of the fullness of the Christ) in 4:13. This once again harkens back to the Trinitarian formula of the Father who sends the Son to unify believers who are sealed by the Spirit; the formula iterated by Paul (Eph 1:3-23). Christian maturity, then, is reached through gaining a deep and abiding knowledge of this ultimate reality, which in turn builds up the body of the gathered saints to fullness.

A sense of edification also results from growth in the knowledge of the Son of God sent by the Father. True knowledge of God the Father, and Christ the Son, *is* edifying. Paul uses the noun *οἰκοδομήν* (upbuilding) three times in Ephesians, and seven times in his other letters (Eph 4:12, 16, 29; Rom 15:2; 1 Cor 14:3, 5, 12; 2 Cor 5:1; 10:8; 13:10),

⁸¹ Campbell, McKnight, and Doddridge, *Sacred Writings*, 304-5. The American Restoration Movement theology of Alexander Campbell will be discussed in more detail in chap. 4, but here, in brief, Campbell was dogmatically opposed to the hierarchical exclusivity of the Roman Catholic clergy, teaching instead the traditional Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

⁸² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 552.

often in the sense of extolling members to “encourage one another.” That encouragement ultimately comes through recognition that the divinely-gifted believer is “reconciled” to the creator God who has the power and authority “to unite all things in heaven and on earth in Christ” (1:10). Although Merkle argues that the three prepositional phrases in 4:13 are coordinate “and convey the ultimate meaning” and goal of bringing the church to maturity, others consider the three phrases to be progressive.⁸³ Hoehner concludes that the three phrases are not three separate goals but are aspects of a single goal to be attained in “stair-step” fashion, where each aspect progressively builds upon the previous toward maturity.⁸⁴ However, the conjunctive *καί* (and) joins “unity of the faith” and “knowledge of the Son of God” as coordinating phrases of equal importance in the first prepositional phrase of the three. This important observation bears directly upon the church mandate to worship God, in that by Paul linking unity of the faith with knowledge of the Son, Paul is suggesting that increasing knowledge brings faith, and faith drives the pursuit of knowledge, which produces more faith. In that way, knowledge also drives deeper reverence for the triune God, and reverence drives “acceptable” worship (Heb 12:28-29).

Paul then gives the immediate purpose of Christian maturity in Christ, to stand strong against the corrupting influence of “human cunning,” and “craftiness in deceitful schemes” (4:14) that foster strife and disunity. Paul commends all Christians to prepare an actionable *ἀπολογία* (defense).⁸⁵ Paul accomplishes this by first presenting a negative purpose clause, followed by a positive. Lincoln notes, “‘Children’ contains a double contrast to ‘mature person.’ Not only do silly infants contrast with the mature adult (see also 1 Cor 2:6; 3:1; Heb 5:13, 14), but the plural of ‘children’ also contrasts with the singular of ‘the mature person,’ individualism being a sign of childishness, unity a sign of

⁸³ Merkle, *Ephesians*, 130.

⁸⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 553.

⁸⁵ The Greek term *apologia*, most notably used in 1 Pet 3:15, is defined as “verbal defense, speech in defense.” See Joseph Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 14th printing (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019), 65.

maturity.”⁸⁶ Paul impresses that the gifts of the gifted leaders are essential to bring the entire church body to understanding, and to the measure of “mature manhood” (4:13). This childish state of understanding is a dangerous place to be and is described as a place where one is *κλυδωνιζόμενοι* (being tossed by waves). The second participle, *περιφερόμενοι* (being carried around) carries a connotation of mental confusion and instability. Lincoln notes, “The use of the imagery of wind and waves for instability is found elsewhere in the NT” (Jas 1:6; see also Heb 13:9; Jude 12, 13).⁸⁷ All of this is done by “cunning people” who, unlike the gifted leaders Christ gifted to the church, practice deceitful teaching instead. Although Paul is not specific, nor does he mention a specific threat as he does in Colossians, it is not hard to imagine that here he has the temple of Artemis, along with a host of other false teachings, in view.

Then positively, *δὲ* (but [rather]), and in stark contrast to the previous purpose given in the negative, Paul relays his hope that as believers *αὐξήσωμεν* (we may grow up) into Him in whom all things are being gathered (1:10). The whole body, held together *ἐκάστου ἑνὸς μέρους* (of each individual part), redirects the responsibility away from the gifted leaders that were gifted to the church, and back to the individual as a personal responsibility “to walk” (4:1) as one united under Christ. The expectation is explicit: each Christian will grow up “in every way,” and grow up in “all things” to maturity in Christ. Just as “iron sharpens iron” (Prov 27:17), implicit in the growth toward Christian maturity is the expectation that all believers will prepare, share, and execute their own *apologia* (1 Pet 3:15).

However, the key substance of unity is love. Paul knows the consummation of all things in Christ is ultimately about the love by which God predestined all believers, in Him, since time out of mind (1:4-5), and that same love is to be held among believers in ecclesial unity. Every *μέρους* ([of] part) is to do its share which *ποιεῖται* ([it] causes) growth

⁸⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 257.

⁸⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 258.

of the body for the edification of itself in love. Paul mentions love three times in the last three verses and in doing so brackets the 4:1-16 pericope as a literary *inclusio* bookended by “bearing with one another in love” (4:2), and the body that “builds itself up in love” (4:16). Between these two bookends Paul exhorts readers to unity (4:1-3), reaffirms the foundations of unity (4:4-6), details the vehicles to be used to achieve unity (4:7-11), and finally unveils the ultimate purpose of unity (4:12-16).

Relationship of Text

To fully understand the authorial intended meaning of the passage, it is important to consider the literary context in which the passage occurs, and the relationship of the passage within the various broader contexts. The context of the passage should be studied in each domain, or circle of context. The circles of context move from the immediate, to textual, to epochal, and finally to the passage’s relationship within the canonical context.⁸⁸

Textual Relationship

Although the contextual relationship between the 4:1-16 text and the entire book of Ephesians has been substantially referenced throughout this exposition, Barclay’s work concerning gift-giving and gift-receiving in the ancient world provides invaluable insight into the divine driver behind the unity of all things.

Gift-giving in archaic societies. There is a long and rich history of gift-giving and receiving going back to the very beginnings of human time. Anthropologist Marcel Mauss conducted extensive research into the gift giving systems of archaic societies, and published his findings in 1925.⁸⁹ Mauss discovered that in archaic societies gift exchanges were not just of objects, but were also of services rendered to one another, and these gifts

⁸⁸ Regarding circles of context, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 300-312.

⁸⁹ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 12.

of service, as well as material gifts, served a critical function in unifying society through a system of compulsory interdependence that is completely foreign to modern Western minds.⁹⁰

Mauss also identified something very interesting concerning the obligation to return a gift. In ancient societies there was a great expectation that the gift would be reciprocated with an equal or greater value because the gift or service given was not detachable from the giver.⁹¹ If a person failed to reciprocate with a gift of equal or greater value, then it was taken as a direct insult to the giver as a person. A failure to reciprocate was followed by a loss of honor within that society and honor in archaic society was paramount.⁹² However, it is also quite easy to see how these systems of gift-giving created strong and deep relationships between individuals through an endless cycle of gift-giving and gift receiving.

Gift-giving in Roman society. In first-century Roman society, at the time and from the place which Paul writes to the Ephesians, the archaic system had become even more refined as a system of gift-giving with the expectation of a return. Many ancient letters written on papyrus are brutally honest about favors given, and the expectation of a return. In the ancient Greek literature of Homer and Sophocles over and over again they refer to the standard expectation that a gift will be reciprocated.⁹³

The ultimate prize, however, was to attract the gift of the emperor. Imperial gifts were enormous and often given to the entire city. But the expected return was often enormous as well. In return, the emperors often demanded “honors equal to the gods.”⁹⁴ In

⁹⁰ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 12-13.

⁹¹ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 13.

⁹² Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 13-14.

⁹³ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 26.

⁹⁴ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 35.

a sense, their gifting of massive civic works and elaborate architecture became their own “immortality projects.”⁹⁵ Though, it was not just at the imperial level—gifting and reciprocating competitions occurred at all levels of society, eventually producing a gift-giving system that was exceedingly corrupt.

The perfect gift. It is in consequence to the corruption of gift-giving systems (especially those practiced in Roman society) which spawns the modern, Western conceptions of gift-giving and receiving. About the same time that gift-giving in Roman society reaches new heights of corruption, Christians begin to attract attention in response to their altruism, especially altruism extended to those who could not reciprocate, because such generosity appeared grossly antithetical to pagan Roman society. As a result, questions began to be raised within intellectual circles as to what would constitute “the perfect gift.” Over the next several centuries, Western theologians and philosophers came to consider that a perfect gift would satisfy one or more of six categories:

1. *Superabundance* in that the gift is far more than necessary.
2. *Singularity* in that the gift reflects the true character of the giver.
3. *Priority* in that the gift’s timing and manner given is perfect.
4. *Incongruent* in that the gift does not consider the worthiness of the recipient.
5. *Efficacy* in that the gift is perfect to achieve its goal.
6. *Non-circularity* in that the gift need not be returned (reciprocated).⁹⁶

These categories, in large measure, remain the Western standard today. However, there is a logical contradiction with the last category, the *non-circularity* of a gift. Barclay contends that the idea of a perfect gift as being one that need not be reciprocated is a

⁹⁵ Clay Jones writes, “Immortality projects are attempts to, in some way, live forever either literally or symbolically. Secularists would classify Christianity as just another immortality project . . . but Jesus really was raised from the dead. . . . It is important to note, however, that many—maybe most—Christians also employ secular immortality projects to give them a sense of transcending their deaths without God.” Clay Jones, *Immortal* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2020), 16-17.

⁹⁶ List summarized and synthesized from Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 70-75.

modern Western conception, and was an extremely rare notion in antiquity. Experientially, it certainly does seem to be humanly impossible to give a truly non-circular gift. That is, a return of some type, regardless of triviality, is always an expectation.

Twentieth-century philosopher Jacques Derrida concurred in arguing that a “perfect gift,” theoretically, would be one in which no return was expected. Not even a “thank you.” Because if a person acknowledged the gift with a “thank you,” then the gift ceases to be a “perfect gift” because a return was made. On the other hand, the idea of a pure gift being a gift that need not be reciprocated is a contradiction because such a gift does nothing to enhance solidarity, which is the very definition of a gift to begin with.⁹⁷ These things given, the notion of a “perfect gift” not needing to be reciprocated is a logical fallacy.

The concept of the “free *divine* gift” really took hold in the theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin in the sixteenth century. Both Luther and Calvin were so bent, and rightfully so, on opposing the Roman Catholic notion of works-based righteousness, that Luther went to the other extreme. From the Arminian perspective, according to Barclay, Calvin then went even further than Luther and what resulted was a Calvinist doctrine of a free divine gift in Christ that requires almost nothing in return.⁹⁸ The doctrine of “the perseverance of the saints” is in part undergirded by the concept of a *non-circular*, perfect, divine gift in Christ.⁹⁹ Since modernity, the doctrine of a “totally free” divine gift has been, and so remains a culturally situated assumption that the modern Western world brings into the interpretation of God’s gift, and God’s grace extended to mankind. It is an assumption not found in Scripture. The idea of gifts that require no

⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. P. Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 1:7-24, quoted in Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 61-63.

⁹⁸ Make no mistake, the inference is not works-based righteousness, but rather the Arminian antagonist to Calvin’s fifth point of guaranteed perseverance. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 56.

⁹⁹ The churches of Christ, while claiming “no theology but the Bible,” are functionally and theologically Arminian with some soteriological exceptions. The distinct theological commitments of the churches of Christ are further elaborated in chapters 3 and 4.

reciprocation would have been a foreign concept to Paul, and it was certainly a foreign concept to Jesus.¹⁰⁰ Barclay summarizes, “The gift needs to be realized in unconventional practice or it ceases to have any meaning as an incongruous gift. It creates new modes of obedience to God, which arise from the gift as ‘return’ to God, but without instrumental purpose in eliciting further divine gifts.”¹⁰¹ In the same way, Christian altruism is circular gift-giving as well in that all is done among men, to the glory of God (Matt 25:40-45; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17).¹⁰²

Gift-giving in the Ephesian letter. Understanding the philosophy of gift giving and receiving in the ancient world provides invaluable insight into Paul’s exhortation to “walk” in a worthy manner (4:1). Further, Paul urging the Ephesians to “walk” in a worthy manner leads the historio-culturally informed reader to suspect that the Ephesians have received some sort of gift, and that they are to reciprocate by walking in a manner worthy of the gift they have received. That gift, as it turns out, is extensively elaborated in the textual context, and is concentrated in first three chapters of the letter.

At the outset the gift-giving and gift-receiving language of Paul is unmistakable: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). From there, Paul continues recounting the gifts received from God:

¹⁰⁰ A common thread runs through several of the parables Jesus told, such as The Parable of the Sower, The Unforgiving Servant, and The Parable of The Talents in Matthew, and The Parable of the Dishonest Manger, and The Parable of the Ten Minas in Luke, etc. That common thread is the message that a response is required from those who have accept a gift. Likewise, concerning Christian altruism, Jesus teaches that it is the Father who “will reward you” (Matt 6:3-4).

¹⁰¹ Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 569.

¹⁰² Christian altruism is not human gift-giving with the expectation of human reciprocity, but rather human gift-giving as an expression of thanksgiving in reciprocity to God for the Perfect Gift received in Christ. In that way, Christian altruism ultimately points directly to the love of God and stands as a powerful apologetic for God’s truth and love. And that love is best expressed within the unified body of Christ, the church (4:17), as an ecclesial apologetic. See Timothy Paul Jones, “The Apologetic of Generosity,” *Apologetic Newsletter*, September 27, 2022. <https://timothypauljones.substack.com/p/the-apologetic-of-generosity>.

He *chose us* in Him (1:4).

He has *adopted us* as sons (1:5).

We have *received redemption* from sin (1:7).

Grace which he *lavished* upon us (1:8).

We have *obtained an inheritance* (1:11).

We have a *guaranteed inheritance* (1:14).

Called to a *guaranteed hope* in the riches of our inheritance (1:18).¹⁰³

In this sense, Paul's gift-giving and receiving language is striking. It seems Paul is tallying up a list of divine gifts, and the list continues into the next two chapters: "God, who is rich in mercy, even though we were dead in our sins, *made us alive in Christ*" (2:4) and "we have been raised up with Christ and are seated with Him in the heavenly places" (2:6). As to the origins of these gifts, Paul emphatically reiterates, "This is not something you have earned; it is *a gift from God*" (2:8). However, in the very next verse Paul writes that we were created for the purpose of good works "that we might walk in them" (2:9) setting up his exhortation in the 4:1-16 pericope urging divine gift receivers to "walk in a manner worthy of [their] calling" (4:1). Paul continues the gift-giving language by recounting how the Gentiles who were far off have been brought near by God's gift of Christ (2:14), and that Christ has brought peace to all men (2:15), and because of *the gift* we have been reconciled to God in Christ (2:16), and have all been brought together as members of God's household (2:19). In chapter 3 Paul writes that he himself received the *gift* of God's grace in order to preach to the Gentiles about the *gift of God in Christ* (3:7), and that he prays that the *gift of Christ* might dwell in their hearts so that they might comprehend the unimaginable love that God has *gifted to the saints* (3:14-21).

The perfect gift. The divine gift-giving motif in the first three chapters of Ephesians is undeniable, and it is overwhelming. In fact, Paul spends much of the first half of the Ephesian letter recounting how God's gift in Christ fulfills not one, but all the

¹⁰³ Emphasis added.

categories that make a gift, perfect: *superabundance*, *singularity*, *priority*, *incongruency*, and *efficacy*. At any rate, God's gift is not *non-circular*; God's gift-giving demands a response.

"Therefore" (4:1), Paul writes. Because of all this gifting-giving and gift accepting, because of the abject perfection of the gift, a response is required. Paul urges believers to respond by "walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (4:1). Paul initially describes that worthy manner as walking in humility, gentleness, and patience with one another. Paul is talking about church unity. Just as in archaic societies where the primary function was to strengthen society through cohesive relationship, hereto Paul is using gift-giving and gift-receiving language as a mechanism that drives the unity of the church into a Christ-honoring reciprocal gift back to God, and that reciprocation all starts with the acknowledgement that the saints have all receive divine gifts. This is ecclesial apologetics at its finest.

Importantly, it is to be understood that there is also a totality to the gift; Christ leaves no one out: "Grace [the divine gift] was given to each one" (4:7). In a long line of gifts that begin with the Creator of all things (1:4), God raised Christ from the dead (1:20), and Christ gifted church leaders with extraordinary skills (4:7). These church leaders are then gifted to the church (4:11) so that they might then gift the saints through their teaching and knowledge transfer (4:12-13), so that then the saints might teach and build up one another (4:12) to build the body up in love (4:17). God freely offers Christ as a free gift to mankind. But if a person accepts the freely given gift, along with it he accepts the relationship with God through Christ that comes with it, which is precisely Paul's point in the passage. He is urging all believers to make the appropriate response to the perfect gift that they freely accepted in Christ: to walk in a manner worthy of that call.

Walk is an embodied action; a movement of the whole body; a standing upright and moving in a forward direction; it is a movement with intent. Paul uses the word *walk* seven times in Ephesians:

1. To no longer *walk* as one dead in their sins (2:1).
2. To *walk* in the good works which God prepared for us (2:10).
3. To *walk* in a manner worthy of the gift received in Christ (4:1).
4. To no longer *walk* the way the Gentiles do (4:17).
5. To *walk* in love as Christ loved us (5:2).
6. To *walk* as children of light (5:8).
7. To *walk* as one who is wise (5:15).

The Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope is strategically situated at Paul's transition from a theology laced with gift-giving and receiving (1-3), to paraenesis in exhortation (4-6), where the infusion of the gift of Christ into the believer is a constant and unending gift to be reciprocated by "walking" in a constant and unending relationship of praise and obedience to the Gift Giver. In the totality of "the consummation of all things" (1:10), believers walking in unity are to be reflections of the unity made perfect by the Perfect Gift of God in Christ. The embodied Christianity of believers walking in unity truly is the ultimate and "final apologetic."¹⁰⁴

Epochal Relationship

The letter to the Ephesians, Bruce confidently proclaims, is "the quintessence of Paulinism."¹⁰⁵ Barth adds, "Ephesians represents a development of Paul's thought and a summary of his message."¹⁰⁶ Even Lincoln, who denies Pauline authorship, considers Ephesians the highwater mark in New Testament theological development.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, if

¹⁰⁴ Francis Schaffer, *The Mark of the Christian*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2006), 25.

¹⁰⁵ Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 229.

¹⁰⁶ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, Anchor Bible, vol. 34 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 4.

¹⁰⁷ Lincoln considers the high Christology and advanced Trinitarian theology in Ephesians as evidence to substantiate his claim that Ephesians was not written by Paul, and that it was written as late as the early second century. While I strongly disagree with Lincoln's conclusions, it is nonetheless noted that

Galatians was written in AD 48, and Ephesians was written in AD 62, then it would be quite naive to think that Paul's thoughts did not mature and develop over that fourteen-year period.¹⁰⁸ In fact, it would be inscrutable if Paul's theology was *not* observed to advance and to deepen across the corpus, and consequently across the New Testament as well.

In the same way that Bruce considers Ephesians to be “the logical sequence to Colossians,”¹⁰⁹ so too the Ephesian letter provides the *consummation*, as it were, of Pauline thought in three foundational Christian tenants. First, the Ephesian letter exhibits a further development of Paul's Trinitarian theology as he mentions God as Father more times in Ephesians than in any of his other writings (1:2, 3, 17; 2:18; 3:14-15; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23).¹¹⁰ The same holds true for the designation of “Christ,” which occurs more frequently per thousand words of text in Ephesians than in any other Pauline letter except Colossians, at twenty-six times.¹¹¹ And, the term “Spirit,” used fourteen times, is used more frequently per thousand words of text in Ephesians than in any other Pauline letter, with the exception of Galatians. Paul, in Ephesians, sees the Trinity in everything. As already indicated through the previous exegesis, Paul's presenting triades of phrases and thoughts, especially in the confession of faith (4:4-6), over and again reinforces a Trinitarian focus. In the first chapter of the letter Paul explicates the Trinitarian God as the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3) who sends His Son to redeem fallen man (1:7) who is then sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13). The Father sends, the Son obeys, and the Spirit raises.

Lincoln's position provides further supports to the argument made here, that Ephesians rests at the apex of Christology and Trinitarian theology within the New Testament epoch. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lx; lxiii; lxxxix.

¹⁰⁸ Holding to a South Galtian theory, Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians just after the first missionary journey, approximately AD 48. See Robert H. Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 389.

¹⁰⁹ Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 241.

¹¹⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 107.

¹¹¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 108.

Second, in the Ephesian letter Paul's Christology is progressively and directionally advanced. While the bulk of the Pauline text, as well as the New Testament, iterates the absolution of sin through the death of Jesus, Ephesians is much more eschatologically focused. Paul mentions the death of Christ indirectly describing the redemption that is ours "by His blood," (1:7), but is now much more descriptive of the cosmic victory of Christ who is now "far above all rule and power and authority and dominion" (1:21), and that all things have now been placed under His feet (1:22). It is a maturation from the subordination of Christ in obedience to God, to now the high exaltation of Christ in whom all things are being united. The progression Paul makes from a Jesus dead on the Cross for man's sins in most all of his letters, to now a resurrected, victorious, and all-powerful Christ Jesus who is now "all in all" (1:23) marks an advancement, of not only of Pauline Christology but also a Christological advancement of the entire New Testament epoch. However, with an eye toward the *parousia*, one sees the apex in the development of Paul's theology of Christ through the importance he places upon Christ given "as head over all things to the church" (1:22).

Third, Paul exhibits an advancement of thought regarding the function and purpose of the church as a uniting of all things on earth, in Christ (1:10). Ephesians represents the most extensive teaching regarding the church in the entire New Testament, and therefore stands as a much matured Pauline and New Testament ecclesiology. In fact, only in Ephesians and Colossians is Christ presented as head of the church.¹¹² The unity and purpose to be found in the church is an advancement of God's eternal plan and hence man's theological understanding of that plan as a linear progression from Jesus's ministry, to crucifixion, to resurrection, to now the placing of Christ as head over His body, the church. The maturing of the church in love (4:16) is the final pre-*parousian* development that ends with Christ presenting the unified, perfected church to Himself (5:27). This final reality ultimately drove Alexander Campbell's Restoration Movement.

¹¹² Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 69.

Canonical Relationship

The meta-narrative of God’s eternal plan for mankind is nothing less than “the story of everything.”¹¹³ Theologian C. Kavin Rowe writes that the story of everything is a story about all that there is. It is a story about God and all that God created because that is all that exists. All other stories that are told fit within the story of everything. No wider narrative encompasses that story because it is the one story from which all other stories can be told.¹¹⁴ Through this paradigm, so too is Paul’s Ephesian letter situated within the story of everything as an accounting of the climax to the story.

To be sure, the consummation of all things in Christ began at Eden where the condemnation of man was cojoined with the promise of a redeemer (see Gen 3:15) and travels all the way through Scripture to that final consummation of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ (1:10; see also Rev 21-22). However, the story of everything reaches a climax in the resurrection of Jesus. Rowe writes that the resurrection of Jesus “catalyzes a new understanding and a new way of being precisely because of the new reality that God brought into the world; life over death, the reversal of Eden, the hope for the future, and the power in the present.”¹¹⁵ Because of this new reality in Christ Paul “urges” the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling (Eph 4:1). Rowe explains, “What the story of everything thus required at a very deep level was the unity between claiming to be disciples of Jesus Christ and behaving in accordance with this claim. Where witness and transformation come apart, both are imperiled.”¹¹⁶ Paul was adeptly keen to this motivity, and it undergirds his writing in the 4:1-16 pericope; to give instruction in unity for both edification and evangelism. As God’s eternal plan moves unceasingly toward the

¹¹³ Kavin Rowe puts forward a brilliant summation of the meta-narrative of Scripture which he terms “the story of everything.” C. Kavin Rowe, *Christianity’s Surprise: A Sure and Certain Hope* (Nashville: Abington, 2020).

¹¹⁴ Rowe, *Christianity’s Surprise*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Rowe, *Christianity’s Surprise*, 12-13.

¹¹⁶ Rowe, *Christianity’s Surprise*, 23.

consummation of all things in Christ at the *parousia*, Christians on earth have a critical pre-eschatological role to play by continuing “to grow up in him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15). In that way, the Ephesian 4:1-16 pericope occupies a crucial, post-resurrection, pre-*parousian* location on the continuum of the canonical meta-narrative “according to the purpose of his will” (Eph 1:5).

Interpretation

William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard note that good hermeneutical methods of biblical interpretation follow the must-needs goal of determining the author-centered textual meaning. Consequently, this singular focus establishes that “the author-encoded historical meaning of these texts is the central objective of hermeneutics.”¹¹⁷ In writing the Ephesian letter, Paul had one and only one intended meaning of the text that he wrote.

Paul’s intended meaning of the 4:1-16 pericope can be summarized: believers are to walk in a manner worthy of the gifts they have received in Christ by walking in a unity with one another that parallels the united perfection found in the triune God, harkening believers to grow in the knowledge of the Son of God while striving for the edification and empowerment of the saints. For that very task Christ has gifted the church with gifted leaders in order to equip each member, for their own ministry, so that each individual within one unified body may grow strong and steadfast into Christ their head, and into deeper love for one another, all to the glory of God.

Application

In the High Priestly Prayer (John 17), Jesus prays that not only His disciples, but also all those who would come to believe in Him through their teachings, “may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us” (17:20-21). This is unity made perfect by the perfect gift from God in Christ so that all “may be

¹¹⁷ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 264.

perfectly one” (John 17:23). This is what “the consummation of all things” (Eph 1:10) looks like and this is the unity Paul has in mind in the Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope. “Therefore,” so that the church might reflect the “consummation of all things” in Christ, the three mandates of the church explicitly function to facilitate “walking in a manner worthy of the calling” (Eph 4:1), which corresponds to gift-receiving the perfect gift from God in Christ. For that reason, the application of the Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope will focus on how the text provides scriptural warrant for teaching foundational Christian apologetics to the WCC to provide resources to further advance the three dynamical mandates of the church: to worship God, edify the body of believers, and evangelize the world.

However, the historical culture of the churches of Christ has hindered the excellence of these three church dynamics. A long and well-entrenched history of anti-intellectualism has significantly hampered the “equipping of the saints” (Eph 4:12) in the application of apologetics intent on advancing all three mandates of the church. In the following chapter, the anti-intellectual roots of the conservative churches of Christ, as well as the historical doctrine of *nuda scriptura*, are investigated with an eye toward how this ministry project, grounded in the Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope, interfaces with that history, all the while moving toward the ultimate goal of maturity within the body in Christ (Eph 4:12-16). Even so, it is in the application of the Ephesians 4:1-16 passage that teaching apologetics to the WCC finds its scriptural warrant by strengthening and advancing worship, edifying the body of believers, and evangelizing the world.

Teaching Foundational Apologetics Advances Worship of God

Paul not only affirms that church unity is directionally commensurate with increased knowledge (4:13), but knowledge is the intended outcome of Christ’s gifting the church with leaders and teachers whose role is to “equip the saints” with increased knowledge (4:11-12). That acquired knowledge increases ecclesial unity and fosters a deeper understanding of the ontological Trinity, and how the saints are purposed to

participate in that perfect “oneness” (4:4-6). E. D. Mbennah notes, “Paul’s teaching, in this instance, is that Christians attain a ‘oneness’ with regard to the knowledge of the Son of God that they possess both in the content of the knowledge and in the manner in which they all together possess.”¹¹⁸ Knowledge of God is the ultimate goal of all theology because true worship is based upon knowledge in love. The late third century Christian author Lactantius writes, “The knowledge of God comes first, His worship is the result of knowledge when one begins to know God in His beauty and truth, worship springs into being.”¹¹⁹ It is that “knowing” God in His beauty and truth that ultimately deepens worship. Augustine of Hippo said, “We burn the sweetest incense in His sight when we are aflame with holy piety and love. As the best gifts we consecrate and surrender to Him ourselves which He has given us. . . . On the altar of our heart, we offer to Him a sacrifice of humility and praise, aglow with the fire of charity.”¹²⁰

Knowledge obtained through the study and application of apologetics in and of itself does not promote deeper worship of God; knowledge grounded in love promotes deeper worship. John Miley notes that love for God is conditioned on a proper mental apprehension of God. The study and application of apologetics promotes “proper apprehension,” and can greatly contribute to knowledge of and reverence for God’s “invisible attributes” (Rom 1:20) as one aspect of that knowledge grounded in love.¹²¹ In that, the study and application of apologetics is correctly viewed as an expression of knowledge grounded in love that can contribute to deeper worship. This is what Anselm

¹¹⁸ E. D. Mbennah, “The Goal of Maturity in Ephesians 4:13-16,” *Acta Theologica* 36, no. 1 (2016): 123.

¹¹⁹ Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 4.4, quoted in Kelly M. Kapic, *A Little Book for New Theologians: How to Study Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 23-24.

¹²⁰ Saint Augustine, *The City of God, Books VIII–XVI*, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2008), 121.

¹²¹ John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (1892; repr., New South Wales, Australia: Wentworth, 2020), 1:435.

meant when he wrote that worship begins with “an active love of God, seeking a deeper knowledge of God.”¹²² Knowledge in turn drives a deeper understanding of the ontological Trinity, and the saint’s essential “oneness” with God of all who is “over all and through all, and in all” (Eph 4:6). Just as Paul’s reverse ordering of the Persons of the Trinity in the *credo* (Eph 4:4-6) presents a powerful progression, so too increasing in the knowledge of God is a progression whose manifestation is then rightly expressed through deeper worship grounded in love. Cohick writes, “This ‘one God’ is the God of Israel . . . the God who led his people out of slavery in Egypt, the one testified to by Moses, David, and the prophets. God is the creator of the universe, the giver of the law, *the one to whom worship is due*.”¹²³ Deeper love for God, seeking deeper knowledge of God, begets deeper worship.

Implicit in the 4:1-16 pericope is that God is glorified in the church that is strong and resilient, unified in love and strengthened through a mature knowledge of God and His Son. The more believers *know* about God the closer they draw *to* God, and the closer they draw to God the deeper their worship *of* God. Elsewhere Paul indicts all of those who *know* God and yet refuse to worship Him as God, writing that they “are without excuse” (see Rom 1:21). Hoehner notes, “This is not an abstract but a concrete knowledge of Christ, which is opposite of the deceitfulness that is promoted by people.”¹²⁴ There is an irrefutable connection between knowing and worshiping, and deeper knowing leading to deeper worship. That is the intended outcome of a maturing body unified under Christ the head (Eph 4:13), and that is the reason gifted leaders are gifted to the church to attain “the full measure of Christ” in perfect reverence and worship of God. This is one aspect of the application of apologetics—to hasten the believer’s knowledge that deepens

¹²² Thomas Williams, “Saint Anselm,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2020, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/anselm/>.

¹²³ Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 253, emphasis added.

¹²⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 554.

worship. It is this linking between love for God, increased knowledge of God, and deeper worship of God that teaching foundational apologetics to the saints at WCC consciously targeted. Lord Brougham, a contemporary of Alexander Campbell, observes that the psalmist implores, “Exalt the Deity by the contemplation of nature. . . By direct interposition [through nature], through miraculous agency, we become acquainted with his will, and are made certain of his existence but his particular attributes are nearly the same in the volume of nature and in that of his revealed word.”¹²⁵ The “equipping the saints” (4:11), with a vast array of knowledge from not only the Bible but also through an apologetically focused study of natural theology, is nothing less than a fulfilling of Scripture’s commendation to facilitate increasing knowledge of God, which in turn facilitates deeper worship. Growing up in all things to maturity in Christ (4:13) implies both a robust knowledge of and a deep reverence for God. These are contributions apologetics can make to the maturing of Christians; to facilitate the former, which drives the latter, all in the unity of love. Paul writes to the church at Corinth, “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).¹²⁶ Teaching the saints at WCC, to the glory of God, was nothing less.

Teaching Foundational Apologetics Advances Edification of the Body

Just as Paul’s exhortation implicitly leads all believers to worship the God “above all, through all, and in all” (Eph 4:6), he explicitly centers the 4:1-16 pericope in the “building up of the body” in unity (4:12). Paul’s edification language is unmistakable: the saints are commended to maintain the *unity* of the spirit (4:3), recognizing that all the saints are commonly united under the “seven ones” (4:4-6) and are each given gifts to help facilitate unity through edification (4:7). Ultimately, the united body is to actively

¹²⁵ Henry Lord Brougham, *A Discourse of Natural Theology: Showing the Nature of the Evidences and the Advantages of the Study* (1835; repr., London: Wentworth, 2021), 131.

¹²⁶ In 1 Cor 10:31, Paul is speaking in the context of orderly participation in the Lord’s Supper. However, “to the glory of God” should precede every thought and step.

pursue edification through learning from the gifted leaders (4:11-12), then through the work of ministry to further edify the entire collective and beyond (4:12) for the express purpose of *οικοδομῆν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* (upbuilding [of] the of body [of] the of Christ). Edification, Paul argues, is a direct result of the teaching of the saints by church leaders who were gifted by Christ for that very purpose. In fact, unity through increased knowledge, the penultimate goal of the pericope, is inconceivable without edification as a cherished product, and stands as a bulwark against the winds of “human cunning,” and every “wave” of false doctrine (4:14). On the other hand, lacking mature manhood, that is in part achieved through increased knowledge, leaves the body weak, vulnerable, and dumbfounded.

By calling out false teaching specifically, Paul’s prescriptive is found in his progressively linking increased knowledge (4:13), to a robust *apologia* (4:14), to an edified body built up in love (4:16). By doing so he explicitly calls for the andragogy of apologetics to serve as a vehicle to ecclesial unity through edification. Paul’s fears of false teachings remain well-founded. Christian Smith and Melinda Denton report their unsettling findings in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual lives of American Teenagers*, stating, “Students leave the faith behind primarily because of intellectual doubt and skepticism.” Specifically, young people responded by answering, “Some stuff is too far-fetched to believe,” or “I think scientifically and there is no real proof, and “too many questions that can’t be answered.”¹²⁷ Similarly, a recent Pew Research Center study found that of those who abandoned their faith, 50 percent said a “lack of belief led them to move away from religion. This includes many respondents who mentioned ‘science’ as

¹²⁷ Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 89.

the reason they do not believe in religious teachings. Others referenced common sense, ‘logic,’ or ‘lack of evidence.’”¹²⁸

Unfortunately, not only young people are troubled by what often seems to be unanswerable questions. Christian adults often fall into skepticism as well. Paul recognizes this vulnerability, expounding in Ephesian 4:1-16 that a church in which each saint has *not* been equipped for the work of ministry can fully expect to be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). For that very reason, teaching Christian apologetics to the saints at WCC, while playing a key role in the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, greatly augmented the church’s mandate for the continual edification of the body. Paul paints a picture of chaos in which no believer is safe if they lack the maturity that comes only through the edifying process of being built up in the knowledge of the Son of God. In the unified interaction that occurs through the learning process, manifest in the building of a coherent and formidable *apologia* (see 1 Pet 3:15), true edification and “building up” of the body to mature manhood might be accomplished. But it goes further than that. Brougham suggests a benefit of *mutual edification*, writing, “The desire of communicating it [knowledge] is a strong propensity of our nature and conduces to the same important end. There is a positive pleasure as well, in teaching others what they knew not before, as in learning what we did not know ourselves.”¹²⁹ Quite simply, teaching foundational apologetics to the church body at WCC provided significant means by which the body could be edified, as well as provided a deterrent to apostacy by furnishing answers to skeptical questions, and by protecting the body from false teaching (4:14). Paul’s call to edify the body of believers through increasing knowledge is inescapable in the Ephesians 4:1-16 passage.

¹²⁸ Travis Mitchel, “Choosing a New Church or House of Worship,” Pew Research Center, August 23, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/08/23/choosing-a-new-church-or-house-of-worship>.

¹²⁹ Brougham, *A Discourse of Natural Theology*, 45.

Teaching Foundational Apologetics Advances Evangelizing the World

Finally, teaching foundational apologetics is an essential aspect of successfully fulfilling the church dynamic of evangelizing the world. Leading up to the Ephesians 4:1-16 passage, Paul provides scriptural warrant for evangelizing the world, explaining that his personal role was to teach the members of the church so that he “might bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:9-10). Then, in the 4:1-16 passage Paul writes that the same task of bringing “light” to people through the teaching of God and His plan in Christ is to be passed along to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12). While the immediate application of the 4:1-16 pericope is “for the building up the body of Christ,” undoubtedly there is an evangelistic inference as well.

Barth rightly notes that in the credal confession (Eph 4:4-6), the “one hope” and “one faith” are still freely offered to all men, and that the “one baptism” is an ongoing sacrament for new members into the “one body” that continues to grow. Barth concludes, “The Father’s government ‘over all’ and ‘through all,’ also his presence ‘in all,’ cannot possibly be restricted to those believing in him at the present time.”¹³⁰ No doubt Paul’s view is not toward a self-contained and isolated church, but one actively continuing in the Great Commission tradition through evangelism. Bruce suggests that “evangelists” are not mentioned by Paul as “in the church” ministries set by God in 1 Corinthians 12:28, because their ministry is primarily exercised *outside* the church. However, their mention here (4:11) indicates that evangelism is exercised *for* the church as vital sustenance for a strong and growing body that does not “die out” through attrition.¹³¹

Evangelism in the postmodern world is more challenging than ever, especially among young people. Just as retaining Christian youth is an ever-growing challenge within

¹³⁰ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 496.

¹³¹ Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, 347.

the church, Christians evangelizing nonbelievers in the public square face even greater hurdles. Christian engagement in today's postmodern technological society calls for a nuanced approach that anticipates the intellectual questions and challenges of this era. Without some basic understanding of foundational apologetics, these questions become extremely difficult for the Christian to answer. That, in part, is the driver behind reaching mature manhood in the knowledge of Christ—so that the work of ministry outside the church might be well-informed and formidable. Timothy van Aarde notes, “It is through the inner equipping and building up of the body that the church is able to engage in missional outreach in society. In Ephesians 4:7-16, the inward equipping and the building out function together in a dynamic way.”¹³² To that end, teaching foundational apologetics at WCC compliments the church dynamic to evangelize the world.

Looking Forward

Gleaning and carrying forward from the preceding exegesis, Ephesians 4:1-16 provides ample warrant for teaching foundational apologetics to the saints at WCC to enhance the three dynamical mandates of the church: to deeply worship God, edify the body, and evangelize the world. Further warrant for teaching apologetics at WCC comes from within the church of Christ itself. Many churches of Christ, especially among the conservative wing in the South, have long been deeply seated in a culture of conscious anti-intellectualism that persists even today, thereby retarding the advancement of the church mandates. The outworking of this anti-intellectual milieu is not happenstantial, but rather finds its origin in the Enlightened thought and biblical hermeneutic of Alexander Campbell, then radicalized and advanced through the generations of evermore conservative influencers of Restoration history, and autonomous churches of Christ history. Chapter 3 is both rudimentary and imperative in that an understanding of the

¹³² Timothy van Aarde, “The Missional Church Structure and the Priesthood of All Believers (Ephesians 4:7-16) in the Light of the Inward and Outward Function of the Church,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017), <https://verbumeteclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/1709/3160>.

movement's historically grounded impetus in Ephesians 4:1-16 is essential. From the movement's historical actualization of the Ephesians text, lucidity is given not only to origins, but more importantly where the churches of Christ must go in the future, and a framework for how to get there.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO TEACHING CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

Church historian Leonard Allen notes that among the churches of Christ it has been common to reason that “if our origins come entirely from the Bible and our churches are New Testament churches, nothing more and nothing less, then we really need not bother ourselves with the recent past.”¹ However, since the past consistently informs the present, and in doing so grasps hold on the future, a brief history of the churches of Christ is in order.

Alexander Campbell, the quintessential visionary of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, was singularly focused upon the restoration of the apostolic and catholic Christian church that had existed long ago, in ecclesial *oneness*. Writing in the *Millennial Harbinger* of which he was founder and editor, Campbell said,

In his letter to the Ephesians, (ch. 4. 7,) he [Paul] presents the strongest argument for union, Christian union, ever expressed by mortal man. These are, we have but *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father of all*, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. . . . These seven superlative *facts*, not theories, not speculations, not opinions, not doctrines, not philosophies, not ordinances, not human institutions; these seven facts, we say, are the bases of pedestal, the die and cornice of the house of God, which Jesus Christ founded.²

In Campbell’s mind, the key to restoring the ancient church of Christ centered around the model of Christian unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17; which Paul gave structure to, and made actionable in the Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope. However, the tenants of

¹ C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 2016), 15.

² Alexander Campbell, “Union, Union, Union,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 5, 6, no. 1 (February 1862): 49-50, emphasis original.

Campbell’s visionary approach to church unity laid “the bases of pedestal” for a decidedly anti-intellectual heritage that would rise up time and again throughout the history of the churches of Christ in America.³

In a very real sense, once again, history matters. Historian Mark Noll places the importance of Christian history in clear relief, writing,

The Christian stake in history is immense. Every aspect of lived Christianity; worship, sacraments, daily godliness, private devotion, religiously inspired benevolence, preaching; every major theme of Christian theology, the nature of God in relation to the world, the meaning of Christ, the character of salvation, the fate of the universe; directly or indirectly involves questions about how the present relates to the past.⁴

For the churches of Christ member, the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement in particular, matters greatly. Perhaps nowhere within the churches of Christ does the historical legacy of the movement have such profound effect as it does upon the practice of apologetics.

Since all ministry projects are *corrective* in intent, and this particular project is without exception, it is prudent to access from history those legacy aspects that have plagued the effective application of Christian apologetics within the churches of Christ themselves, and without, and consequently hindered excellence in fulfilling the three mandates of the church. In this chapter a brief history of the Stone-Campbell Movement, which finds its pillars sunk deepest in the bedrock of Christian unity, will be presented. Jesus prayed for a vision of unity (John 17:21) that was given actionable structure by Paul (Eph 4:1-16). But more than that, the Restoration Movement is a tradition

³ Here, as throughout this project, the term *anti-intellectualism* can be defined as a dogmatic belief or doctrine against the use of any and all sources of knowledge generated outside the text of Scripture as a source for the acquisition of independent knowledge of the existence of God and truthfulness of Christianity, which includes theological, philosophical, natural theological, and scientific sources that support the biblical narrative but are not in what Campbell termed “Bible words.” The term is in no way to be taken as derogatory, insulting, degrading, or limiting, nor is it to be equated with a person’s level of education, manner of speech, vocation, income, or intellectual capacity. *Anti-intellectualism*, as used herein, connotes a conscious and deliberate rejection of non-biblical sources, and is not an insinuation, nor accusation of ignorance.

⁴ Mark Noll, “History,” in *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 295.

undergirded by a biblical hermeneutic of *nuda scriptura*, yielding a conscious anti-intellectualism within the conservative churches of Christ that in some respects endures today. This is the heart of the matter, as Os Guinness pointedly notes,

Anti-intellectualism is both a scandal and a sin. It is a scandal in the sense of being an offense and a stumbling block that needlessly hinders serious people from considering the Christian faith and coming to Christ. It is a sin because it is a refusal, contrary to the first of Jesus' two great commandments, to love the Lord our God with our minds.⁵

Even so, there is a clear path forward; a path that leads to a bridge built with the aid and comfort of Christian apologetics, in order that the body might grow in worship, edification, and evangelism. After presenting a brief history of the movement, this bridge is conceptualized in the last few sections of this chapter.

A Brief History of the Stone-Campbell Movement

Alexander Campbell's father, Thomas Campbell, first set forward a proposal for Christian union, in his 1809 *Declaration and Address*.⁶ Within this founding document the germ of restoration was put forward in thirteen propositions "merely designed for opening up the way, that we may come fairly and firmly to original ground; upon clear and certain premises: and take up things just as the apostles left them."⁷ In all, Campbell's propositions declared that there is only one universal and catholic church; the New Testament alone governs the New Testament church; where the Scriptures are silent, no man has the authority or power to intervene; and no human creeds or opinions are to be

⁵ Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 10-11.

⁶ Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington, (Pa.)* (Washington, PA: Brown and Sample, 1809), quoted in Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollmann, eds., *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address: Text and Studies*, Atla Monograph Series 46 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000), 3-58. See also appendix 6, "Declaration and Address of Thomas Campbell (1809)."

⁷ Lester G. McAllister, "Thomas Campbell (1763-1854)," in *The Encyclopedia of Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 138.

incalculated into the church.⁸ With this declaration, Thomas Campbell recused himself from the clergy and Presbyterian church, and formed The Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania calling on all denominations in Christendom to unite. Although Thomas Campbell remained a prolific writer and representative of the movement, he soon passed the task of turning the vision into reality over to his son, Alexander. Over the next several years the younger Campbell established a significant following of like-minded believers who called themselves Disciples, building Disciples of Christ churches throughout Virginia and beyond.

Barton Stone

At Cane Ridge, Kentucky, only a few years before Thomas Campbell withdrew from the Presbyterian Synod of Pennsylvania and published his *Declaration and Address* (1809), Barton Stone was brought before the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky, along with five other ministers, for having preached on church unity to a mixed crowd of Christians during a revival. Rather than await the Synod's verdict, they broke away, forming the Springfield Presbytery. Within a year, finding that it too discouraged unity, they officially disbanded through writing *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (1804).⁹ This document, along with Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*, serve as the two founding documents of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement.

Stone-Campbell Merger

First meeting in 1823, Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell came to realize that whatever differences they had were dwarfed by their desire for Christian unity.¹⁰

⁸ Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, quoted in Olbricht and Rollmann, *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 18-20.

⁹ Gary Holloway and Douglas A. Foster, *Renewing God's People: A Concise History of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 2001), 35-37. See also appendix 7, "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery (1804)" for the entire document.

¹⁰ Holloway and Foster, *Renewing God's People*, 57.

Nine years later, in 1832, Stone and Campbell united their respective congregations around two objectives: ecclesial unity, and the restoration of the primitive apostolic church. Although Stone remained quite active in the movement's efforts to unify the church, he deferred leadership to Campbell who further developed the ideological substratum of the movement. Although both Stone and Campbell brought to the movement an uncompromising commitment to *nuda scriptura*, and a separation from denominational Christianity, they approached the task from different foundational premises.¹¹ Campbell brought to the merger a rational and cognitive approach to biblical hermeneutics to unlock the "ancient order of things" upon which the primitive church had originally been built. The vision, described by Thomas Chalmers was "to come firmly and fairly to original ground; taking up things where the apostles left them; to be able to produce a 'Thus saith the Lord,' either in expressed statement or approved precedent, for everything *that is required*; to rebuild the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem."¹² Stone, on the other hand, brought to the movement the metaphysical manifestations of the spiritual realm and focused on individual aspects of piety, holiness, and unity in ecclesial love rather than the mechanical structure and operation of the primitive church.¹³

As early as the late 1830s, many of Campbell's followers, grounded in the rational Baconian and Lockean empiricism of Campbell, *pace* Stone, increasingly found little or no place for the Holy Spirit, even after conversion.¹⁴ Indeed, critic and Campbell

¹¹ Again, the term *nuda scriptura* (naked, or bare Scripture), in contrast with the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, is the rejection of any council or church creed whatsoever. In fact, *nuda scriptura* taken to the extreme results in overexaggerating the elevation of Scripture above tradition by eliminating everything but Scripture. Quite literally, this exclusion extends to *anything* written by uninspired man, which includes the writings of the church fathers, all theological writings, as well as biblical commentary. However, the doctrine easily can be, and in some instances has been, taken to near absurdity.

¹² Thomas Chalmers, *Alexander Campbell's Tour in Scotland: How He Is Remembered by Those Who Saw Him Then* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1892), 9.

¹³ Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 1996), 92-93.

¹⁴ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 101.

contemporary Robert Landis suggests, “The theory of Mr. C. in brief, is, that the Holy Spirit can exert no power over the soul of man, except what is contained in the *written word*.”¹⁵ In time, these differences and many others created great umbrage between Stone and Campbell, outweighing their similarities, eventually serving as a movement-wide, schismatical catalyst.

Alexander Campbell

Alexander Campbell was a true product of the Age of Enlightenment. During his time at Glasgow University, he was introduced to the inductive methodology of Francis Bacon, Scottish Common-Sense Realism as developed by Thomas Reid, and the epistemology of innate ideas of John Locke. These three influences overwhelmingly shaped the methodology and rationale Campbell would bring to bear upon the temporal Christian world to actualize the *oneness* that Jesus had prayed for (John 17) and Paul commended (Eph 4:1-16).

Baconian induction. Francis Bacon was an English statesman, lawyer, and philosopher of science. In his book *The History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell writes of Bacon, “While he thought that reason could show the existence of God, he regarded everything else in theology as known only by revelation. Philosophy, Bacon believed, should depend only on reason. He was thus an advocate of the doctrine of ‘double truth;’ that of reason, and that of revelation.”¹⁶ However, the highly nuanced Baconian *reason* is derived from “Baconian philosophy.” Even still, Bacon is perhaps best known for his development of the induction method of scientific inquiry, and its

¹⁵ Robert W. Landis, *Rabbah Taken: Or the Theological System of Alexander Campbell, Examined and Refuted* (1844; repr., Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2021), 55.

¹⁶ Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 542.

utility to the scientific method.¹⁷ Although Russell was critical of Bacon's inductive method for an "insufficient emphasis on hypothesis," many tenants of Bacon's method continue to undergird the modern scientific method in use today.¹⁸ Nonetheless, it was Bacon's methodology of observational data acquisition and arrangement he developed into a "systematic study," that Campbell keenly adapted to biblical hermeneutics.¹⁹

Campbell contemporary and Baconian philosopher, Samuel Tyler, explains that in Baconian philosophy

theology is grounded only upon the word and oracle of God, and not upon the light of nature. We must look to the light of nature for philosophy, but to revelation, for theology. And as the mind has no innate knowledge, if we interpret revelation by any other light than its own, we interpret it by the light of philosophy, whether we call it interpretation according to reason or not.²⁰

One quickly gains the sense that Campbell is stamped through and through with Baconian anthropology, epistemology, philosophy, and biblical theology.

Scottish Common-Sense Realism. Scottish Common-Sense Realism was first developed by Thomas Reid in eighteenth-century Scotland in response to the skepticism of David Hume.²¹ Hume attacked not only the credibility of eyewitness testimony, and in so doing the credibility of miracles, but more fundamentally he questioned man's ability

¹⁷ Samuel Tyler writes that *induction* may be defined as

a process of investigation and of collecting facts and phenomena, either with or without a view, to establish some general principle already suggested to the mind. It is manifest that the mere investigation and collection of facts and phenomena *without* a view to establish some general already suggested to the mind, is not a reasoning process. It therefore, only remains to examine the other. . . . In this case, the investigation and collection of facts and phenomena is conducted on the supposition or presupposition of the existence of a general principle or law; and is directed with a view to establish it, by the examination of a sufficient number of facts and phenomena. (Samuel Tyler, *Discourse of the Baconian Philosophy* [1846; repr., London: Forgotten, 2018], 164)

¹⁸ Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, 544-45.

¹⁹ Maurice Cranston, "Francis Bacon," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 239.

²⁰ Tyler, *Discourse of the Baconian Philosophy*, 367.

²¹ For more on David Hume's epistemological skepticism see especially David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748; repr., Cambria, CA: Anodos, 2017).

to know much of anything at all. Reid's rejoinder not only answered Hume's criticism, but more importantly Reid asserted the reasonableness of belief in a modern scientific age.²² Earl West writes, "Hume was once the literary lion of Scotland, but Reid . . . calmed him down by the application of 'Common Sense.'"²³ Reid, a great admirer of Newton, likewise adopted a commitment to empiricism and the analysis of factual data in all investigations.²⁴ Consequently, in refuting Hume, Reid argued that people receive empirical data (facts) from the external world through the five senses making reasonable decisions based upon those facts; as the name implies, by using common sense. C. Steven Evans argues that for Reid, "*common sense* is a technical term," not a capacity to "sense" truth, but rather "the ability that all humans who are sane have to grasp certain truths that are first principles."²⁵ Reid believed that all philosophical arguments must start with premises and these premises must start with the first principles of common sense.²⁶

Reid believed that common sense incalculated common judgement and the role of common sense was primarily "to judge of things self-evident."²⁷ Reid asserted that this is "the sole providence of common sense" and is quite simply another "name for one branch or one degree of reason."²⁸ This understanding of common sense, coupled with Baconian inductive reasoning continues today in undergirding the standard scientific

²² Carisee Mickey Berryhill, "Common Sense Philosophy," in Foster et al., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 230.

²³ Earl I. West, *A History of the Restoration Movement 1800-1865*, vol. 1 of *In Search of the Ancient Order* (Germantown, TN: Religious Book Service, 1990), 50.

²⁴ C. Steven Evans, *A History of Western Philosophy: From the Pre-Socratics to Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2018), 373.

²⁵ Evans, *History of Western Philosophy*, 374.

²⁶ Evans, *History of Western Philosophy*, 374-75.

²⁷ Thomas Reid, "Of Common Sense," in *Selections from the Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, ed. Francis Hutchinson et al. (Whithorn, UK: Anodos, 2019), 58.

²⁸ Reid, "Of Common Sense," 58.

method that governs most all research and discovery. Writing of the simple and intuitive nature of the Common-Sense methodology, church historian Leroy Garrett observes, “The Campbells had high regard for ordinary folk. Their plea appealed to the common people because they could understand it and saw something in it for them.”²⁹ The tenants of common-sense reasoning, along with elements from Bacon’s inductive method would be put to great use by Campbell as he formulated the movement’s biblical hermeneutic.

Lockean epistemology. John Locke was a British empiricist and Common-Sense Realist whose thought greatly influenced Campbell’s philosophy and epistemology. Campbell found much to embrace in Locke as a fellow evidentialist who held that all beliefs should be based upon sufficient evidence.³⁰ He relied heavily upon Locke’s work in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* to develop a theology that was singularly focused on the *facts* given in Scripture, and the abhorrence of speculative theories and human opinions.³¹ Campbell argued,

All revealed religion is based upon facts. . . . By *facts*, we mean something said or done. The works of God and words of God, or the things done and spoken by God, are those facts which are laid down and exhibited in the Bible as the foundation of all faith, hope, love, piety, and humanity. All true and useful knowledge is an acquaintance with facts.³²

Locke believed that complex ideas were just collections of simple ideas and could be deconstructed and understood in their simplicity.³³

²⁹ Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: The Story of the American Restoration Movement*, 3rd ed. (Joplin: MO: College Press, 1997), 31.

³⁰ Evans, *History of Western Philosophy*, 313.

³¹ John Mark Hicks, “John Locke (1632-1704),” in Foster et al., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 487.

³² Alexander Campbell, *Christianity Restored: The Principal Extras of the Millennial Harbinger Revised and Corrected* (1835; repr., Indianapolis: Faith and Facts, 2021), 113-14.

³³ Dale H. Schunk, *Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective*, 6th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 6.

In like manner, Campbell was strongly influenced by Locke's epistemology of innate ideas delineated in his work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke, following Aquinas, following Aristotle, considered human beings to be born with a *tabula rasa*; a mental blank slate that is nurtured and developed through sense perceptions and inductive reasoning.³⁴ Locke argues,

Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless foray of men has pointed on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer in one word, from experience: in that all our knowledge is founded, and from it ultimately derives itself.³⁵

Locke conceived that ideas have two sources: from sensation or from "perception of the operation of our own mind as an 'internal sense.'"³⁶ Even so, Locke refused the idea of "universal consent"; the idea that men possess "innate principles."³⁷ Likewise, Locke argues that the idea of God is not innate either because ancient cultures have been discovered that have "no notion of God." Locke said that even if all humans had an idea of God that would not make the idea innate because the idea of God is "grounded in 'the visible marks of extraordinary wisdom and power' that appear 'plainly in all the works of creation.'"³⁸ This meant that the mind's concept of God is not innate but comes only

³⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 23-24. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q 84, A3; as well as Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 2007), 205.

³⁵ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 33.

³⁶ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 29-30.

³⁷ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 7-8.

³⁸ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 26.

through God revealing himself.³⁹ In this, Locke rejected all natural religion as having “any valid source of religious knowledge.”⁴⁰ Garrett writes,

[T]his was a revolutionary point of view, but it was part of the new scientific way of thinking. Theologians and philosophers from Anselm to Thomas Aquinas to Descartes had contended that God could be known through reason and that his existence could be proved by logic, which was the essence of “natural religion,” summarily rejected by both Locke and Campbell. Campbell followed Locke not only in rejecting innate ideas, but in negating feelings and mystical experiences as valid sources of religious knowledge.⁴¹

Campbell, however, as did Locke, considered all things to originate with God. Rushdoony writes, “Locke still assumed God as the one who gives unity and order to the world of sensations.”⁴² From Locke, Campbell drew and employed his ideas of anthropology, epistemology, and the limited channels by which God communicates to man.⁴³ Herein lies the point of departure from any significant pneumatology within the churches of Christ. It is much for this reason that assent to the validity of the unseen workings of the Holy Spirit often remain difficult for the churches of Christ to achieve.⁴⁴

Aspects of these three influences (Baconian induction; Scottish Common-Sense, and Lockean epistemology) run throughout the minutiae of Alexander Campbell’s life work. However, it is in Campbell’s development of a biblical hermeneutic that these three salient influences are palpable.

³⁹ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 25.

⁴⁰ Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 27.

⁴¹ Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 27.

⁴² Rushdoony, *The One and the Many*, 304.

⁴³ Winfried E. Garrison, *Alexander Campbell’s Theology, Its Sources and Historical Setting* (1900; repr., South Yarra, Australia: Leopold Classic Library, 2021), 156-57.

⁴⁴ It is also the churches of Christ soteriological doctrine of free will, as the antithesis of an irresistible effectual call, that further constrains a robust pneumatology within the churches of Christ.

A Common-Sense Biblical Hermeneutic

Ecclesial unity, as expressed in the *credo* (Eph 4:4-6), was at the heart of the movement's goal. However, Christian unity was in fact Campbell's penultimate goal; the ushering in of the millennial dawn and the thousand-year earthly reign of Christ was his ultimate goal.⁴⁵ At issue, as Campbell saw it, was that since each denomination has its own human philosophy added to Scripture (i.e., Calvin, Luther, Arminius, etc.), as The Remonstrance of 1610 bore witness to, human philosophy ultimately prevents Christian unity, which in turn prevents restoration of the ancient apostolic church, which in turn forestalls the millennial reign of Christ.

Accordingly, on postmillennialism, the *parousia* could not commence until a temporal ecclesial unity had been established across all Christendom, and that could only happen by all Christians coalescing around one central truth. In the spirit of the Enlightened age, a premium was placed upon autonomy. Autonomy, however, is by definition always in tension with unity. The reconciliation between Enlightened autonomy and primitive ecclesiastical unity was to turn to the central truths of the Bible alone for resolution.⁴⁶ However, Campbell considered "the Bible alone" approach to be problematic unless it was fused with a universal hermeneutic. To accomplish consensus around the Bible alone, Campbell called for nothing less than a hermeneutical purification to purge Christianity

⁴⁵ Hughes defines *postmillennialism* as "an outlook that suggests that human beings will usher in the millennium, as the final golden age, by virtue of human progress. In this scenario Christ's second coming will occur only at the conclusion of the millennium and will thus be "postmillennial." Many Christians embraced this perspective following the eighteenth-century Enlightenment with its emphasis on progress through science and human rationality" (Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, xiii). Postmillennialism stands in contrast to premillennialism, which Hughes defines as "an outlook that suggests that human beings will usher in the millennium, or final golden age, by virtue of human progress. . . . Christ's second coming will occur only at the conclusion of the millennium" (Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, xiii). The premillennial position emphasizes that God alone is capable of inaugurating the millennial age. While Campbell held a postmillennial eschatology, Barton Stone held a premillennial eschatology. Most all of the churches of Christ today are considered amillennial viewing the eschatology of Revelation to be symbolic rather than literal. See Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, xiii.

⁴⁶ Garrison, *Alexander Campbell's Theology*, 74.

of all human speculation through a fundamental biblicism.⁴⁷ The non-biblical sources of knowledge that needed to be exorcised included doctrinal creeds, human philosophical opinions, and natural theology. Pure primitive biblical Christianity, Campbell argued, needed to be stripped naked.

Nuda Scriptura

It is in Campbell's interpretive approach to Scripture that the Enlightened influences of Bacon, Reid, and Locke, are strikingly evident. Preeminent church of Christ historian Richard Hughes writes, "In Campbell's view, the Bible was not so much a book of theology as a kind of scientific manual or technical blueprint, laying out in precise, factual detail the outlines both of primitive theology (what he called 'the ancient gospel') and the primitive church (what he called 'the ancient order')." ⁴⁸ Indeed, Campbell's biblical hermeneutic was not only empirically grounded, but the facts were accessible, he believed, by all common folk using their five senses, and their own common sense interpretation of those facts. Reflecting what Carl Trueman has termed "the inward turn at the Enlightenment," Campbell was a champion of the power of the individual to grasp biblical truth.⁴⁹ He argued that the biblical facts are self-evident and the Bible should not be read any differently than one would read a newspaper, stating the same rules of interpretation apply equally to both, allowing the natural conclusions to follow. Campbell said, "When God spoke to man in his own language, he spoke as one person converses

⁴⁷ Christopher A. Shrock, "Biblicism as Antidote to Hermeneutical Injustice," in *Restoration and Philosophy: New Philosophical Engagements with the Stone-Campbell Tradition*, ed. J. Caleb Clanton (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2019), 21.

⁴⁸ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 32.

⁴⁹ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 93.

with another; in the faith, stipulated, and well-established meaning of the terms.”⁵⁰ The influence of Reid’s epistemology here is striking. Reid stated, “What can fairly be deduced from facts duly observed or sufficiently attested, is genuine and pure, it is the voice of God, and no fiction of human imagination.”⁵¹ Further, in bringing the Baconian method of induction, “human investigation” and philosophical speculative reasoning could be held at bay. Indeed, “the inductive process is not governed by the principles of logic, but by the principles of evidence.”⁵² Approaching the Bible as a book of concrete evidential facts rather than abstract deductions and speculation renders its truths accessible to all people.

Having studied the philosophy of Reid at Glasgow University, where Reid had taught philosophy for many years, Campbell was an unapologetic Common-Sense empiricist, and a rational purist, and he applied tenants of these ideologies precisely to the Bible.⁵³ Of his Common-Sense biblicism, Campbell wrote, “We choose to speak of Bible things by Bible words, because we are always suspicious that if the word is not in the Bible, the idea which it represents is not there.”⁵⁴ In his theological treatise *The Christian System*, he states that the sects called Christians are a party “provided we hold fast, and only all, the apostolic traditions and build upon the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.”⁵⁵ With this biblical hermeneutic, backed by Baconian induction, Scottish Common Sense, and Lockean epistemological guidance, Campbell set about stripping

⁵⁰ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians, and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Pled in the Current Reformation* (1839; repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2019), 16.

⁵¹ Reid, “Of Common Sense,” 45.

⁵² Tyler, *Discourse on the Baconian Philosophy*, 165.

⁵³ West, *History of the Restoration Movement 1800-1865*, 50.

⁵⁴ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 100.

⁵⁵ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 84.

Christianity clean of doctrinal creeds, human philosophical opinions, and natural theology.

Doctrinal creeds. Barton Stone's apprehension of creeds dated back to his ordination into the Presbytery of Kentucky. When asked if he adopted, as required, the *Westminster Confession*, Stone replied, "as far as I see it consistent with the word of God."⁵⁶ Stone continued his ministry in the Presbyterian church with a distinct unease concerning the church's stand on confessional creeds. In 1804, when Stone recused himself from the Presbytery, he made clear his criticism of creeds and confessions in *Apology of the Springfield Presbytery*, declaring creeds as agents of confusion that rob people of the catholic foundation of unity.⁵⁷ Similarly, Thomas Campbell likewise opposed creeds and confessions in his *Declaration and Address*. Though by narrowing the scope of acceptable language both Barton Stone and Thomas Campbell were inadvertently planting the seeds of a "language-limiting" anti-intellectual tradition within the very fabric of church of Christ ideology. Christian scholar Olivier Roy argues, "The obliteration of language in favor of the Word is probably the most perfect example of holy ignorance."⁵⁸

Echoing Stone, and his father Thomas, Alexander Campbell's prolific pen was in frequent service disavowing confession creeds in what was to be Campbell's "iconoclastic" campaign against the elements of denominationalism.⁵⁹ Creeds, he said, are compellations of "doctrine in abstract terms" to be discarded and are "perfectly irrational, and consequently foolish and vain."⁶⁰ But there was much more to Campbell's opposition

⁵⁶ Paul M. Blowers, "Creeds and Confessions," in Foster et al., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 252.

⁵⁷ Blowers, "Creeds and Confessions," 252.

⁵⁸ Olivier Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*, trans. Ros Schwartz (New York: Oxford University, 2013), 145.

⁵⁹ Chalmers, *Alexander Campbell's Tour in Scotland*, 23.

⁶⁰ Alexander Campbell, "A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things, No. II," *Christian Baptist* 2, no. 8 (March 1825): 133.

to creeds; he saw compulsory confessional creeds, as well as creeds in general, in antithetical tension with the singular authority and sufficiency of God’s spoken Word. Ever conscious of the eschatological role played by ecclesial unity, Campbell reasoned, “If they [creeds] are necessary to the unity of the church, then the church cannot be united and one without them. . . . If they are necessary to the unity of the church, then the New Testament is defective; for if the New Testament was sufficient to the unity of the church, then human creeds would not be necessary.”⁶¹ Campbell maintained that, rather than unite, creeds operated “just in reverse” and are “in diametrical opposition to the wisdom and benevolence of the Heavens.”⁶² In short, creeds directly forestall the return of Christ.

In his 1843 debate with Presbyterian Reverend Nathan Rice, Campbell argued that creeds were an affront to Christ’s supreme authority through claiming greater clarity than the Bible itself. Campbell claimed the *Westminster Confession*, a creed to help clarify Scripture, is mired in obscurity, and by its nature is fallible, intrinsically intolerant, nonscriptural, and stands as “necessarily heretical and schismatical.”⁶³ Although Campbell referred to the *Westminster Catechism* simply as “childish things,”⁶⁴ he found creeds inherently divisive as articles of rebellion against the throne and rule of Christ.⁶⁵ Even so, nowhere is Campbell’s contempt for what he considered the evil nature of creeds and confessions more clearly articulated than in his exegesis of Jesus’s High Priestly Prayer in John’s gospel.

⁶¹ Campbell, “A Restoration of the Ancient Order, No. II,” 134.

⁶² Campbell, “A Restoration of the Ancient Order, No. II,” 136.

⁶³ Alexander Campbell, *A Debate Between Rev. A. Campbell and Rev. N. c. Rice, on the Action, Subject, Design, and Administration of Christian Baptism; Also on the Character of Spiritual Influence in Conversion and Sanctification, and on the Expediency and Tendency of Ecclesiastical Creeds as Terms of Communion*, reported by Marcus T. C. Gould, stenographer (Lexington: A. T. Skillman, 1844), 759.

⁶⁴ Alexander Campbell, “Reply to Robert B. Semple,” *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 3 (March 1830): 136.

⁶⁵ Campbell, “A Restoration of the Ancient Order, No. II,” 135.

Campbell presents Jesus’s High Priestly Prayer in John 17 as the vocalization of Jesus’s will—a will that is the same as the will of the Father who sent Him. Since the divine will of Jesus is *homoousion* with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, then Jesus’s will is the will of the Triune God.⁶⁶ In that way, Jesus expresses the divine will, saying, “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one” (John 17:20-21a). Campbell argues that nowhere in Jesus’s prayer does He will that all believe through the *Westminster* divines, shall be one. Campbell writes, “While the Savior prays that those who believe on him through the apostles may be one, he in fact and in plain meaning of the terms, prays that they who believe on him through any other media of means may be divided, and not be one.”⁶⁷ Campbell’s exegesis and common sense reasoning led him to a startling conclusion: attempting to unite all the saints by creed, or any means other than the Word of the apostles, is then “an attempt to overrule the will of heaven, subvert the throne of the Great King, and frustrate the prayers of the Son of the Blessed.”⁶⁸ Not only do creeds impede ecclesial unity, but they have eternal consequences. Ironically, immediate consequences brought about by the abandonment of all confessional creeds would be that *confessional unity* would cease to exist. More importantly, rational discussion of “theological issues,” which had been a fruitful intellectual exercise, was also abandoned and labeled a “distraction,” and a “divisive force.”⁶⁹ This phenomenon held true not only for denominational Christianity’s back-to-the-Bible revival in the twentieth century, but most significantly remained overt within the churches of Christ.

⁶⁶ Richard Muller defines *homoousian* as “of the same substance, consubstantial.” Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 152.

⁶⁷ Campbell, “A Restoration of the Ancient Order, No. II,” 136.

⁶⁸ Campbell, “A Restoration of the Ancient Order, No. II,” 135.

⁶⁹ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 22.

Even so, Campbell's hermeneutic of Christian purification reached far beyond human creeds and confessions of faith by striking deeply at their common progenitor: *human philosophy*.

Human philosophy. It is not surprising that Campbell, who was deeply influenced by the leading philosophers of the day, would in some capacity fancy himself a philosopher as well. Holding humanities' ability to apply Common-Sense reasoning in high regard, Campbell readily brought to bear a penchant for rational inquiry and analysis of facts, even as he recognized the limits of human reasoning in religious matters.⁷⁰ Further, he was keenly aware that philosophy was inadequate to answer the "the three most soul-engrossing questions . . . What am I? Whence came I? Whither do I go?"⁷¹

While Campbell, a well-recognized member of the nineteenth-century *intelligentsia*, oft applied the concepts of philosophy in his writing and argument, his true position seemed to be hard to pin down. To be sure, a friend and colleague once said he had "boxed the compass so often" that it would be impossible to say what he believed.⁷² But when Campbell assailed philosophy, it was most always linked to what he believed was human philosophy's role in ecclesial divisiveness. In elegant and flowing prose Campbell wrote, "Philosophy is proud and arrogant. She assumes too much. She cannot originate a spiritual idea. She steals from the Bible her best thoughts, and would palm them on the world as her own inventions. She seeks to find cause for everything in her own arena and discards revelation because it eclipses her glory."⁷³ Much like the creeds

⁷⁰ J. Caleb Clanton, introduction to Clanton, *Restoration and Philosophy*, xiv.

⁷¹ Alexander Campbell, "Christianity the True Philosophy, No. I," *Millennial Harbinger*, series 4, 7, no. 8 (September 1857): 481.

⁷² D. R. Campbell, "Reply of Dr. D. R. Campbell," *Millennial Harbinger*, series 5, 2, no. 1 (January 1859): 9.

⁷³ Alexander Campbell, "Reply to Mr. J. A. Waterman," *Millennial Harbinger* 4, no. 6 (June 1833): 243.

that are spawn by it, Campbell's objection to philosophy was in speaking where the Bible is silent, and by so doing imparting seeds of division into God's revelation.⁷⁴ He went further, reasoning that in refuting human philosophy and the creeds generated by it, all errors could be rectified and ecclesial unity might coalesce exclusively around the Bible. Campbell believed,

If you establish the Bible, as the only instructor in religion in our schools and out of them, and you wipe out all sectarian names and creeds and unite the whole church in one name, and establish it upon Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the gospel, as the New Testament, as the statue book of his kingdom. This will be the commencement of the millennial glory.⁷⁵

Even so, Campbell argued that philosophy had its place and could be gainfully employed when reasoning "against both infidelity and popery."⁷⁶ It would take a contentious internal rift to shine the light upon the value the movement placed upon philosophy, and to gain better insight into Campbell's philosophy of philosophy.

Philosophy on trial: Richardson-Fanning dispute. Campbell's philosophy of philosophy, along with that of the Stone-Campbell Movement in general, remained enigmatic for many years as his writings about philosophy seemed indeed to have "boxed the compass." All of that changed in 1857 through a series of articles published with Campbell's full consent in his monthly periodical *Millennial Harbinger*, titled "Faith versus Philosophy." The article series was penned by associate editor for, and protégé of Campbell, Robert Richardson. In his inaugural article, Richardson accused the brotherhood that some systems of human philosophy had "insidiously intruded itself" and that the

⁷⁴ Thomas and Alexander Campbell did not coin the concept of speaking where the Bible speaks and silence where the Bible is silent. Thomas Browne, the physician, is credited with the phrase's origin. Browne writes in 1643: "In briefe, where the Scripture is silent, the Church is my Text; where that speaks, 'tis but my Comment; where there is a joynt silence of both, I borrow not the rules of my Religion from Rome or Geneva, but the dictates of my own reason." Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici: The Religion of a Doctor* (1643; repr., Whithorn, UK: Anodos, 2018), 5.

⁷⁵ Alexander Campbell, "Christian Union, No. I," *Christian Baptist* 2, no. 12 (July 1825): 164.

⁷⁶ Campbell, "Christianity the True Philosophy, No. I," 484.

reformation [Restoration Movement] itself may now be “blended with error.”⁷⁷ Tolbert Fanning, president of Franklin College and one of the most prominent leaders among Southern Restoration churches at the time, took immediate offence. However, Fanning should have expected as much. Leonard Allen notes that Fanning had just written a series of articles in his periodical, *The Gospel Advocate*, declaring *all* philosophy inherently destructive to the Christian faith and charging Richardson with infidelity. Apparently, unbeknownst to Fanning, his approach was Lockean through and through thus proving Richardson’s point.⁷⁸

Richardson charged that some in the movement had reduced Christianity to Lockean materialism, claiming that only those things that could be deduced from the propositional facts conveyed in Scripture, using only the reasoning capacity of the human mind, revealed truth. And that in and of itself was a philosophy, Richardson declared, amounting to “Bibliolatry.”⁷⁹ The dispute quickly fell into mutual acrimony. What infuriated Fanning was Richardson’s accusation that such views do not honor the Bible, rather they honor a philosophical perspective (Lockean, specifically) imposed on the Bible.⁸⁰ Fanning refuted Richardson’s accusations through *The Gospel Advocate*, stating explicitly, “We regard all religious speculations as false, heretical, dangerous, and *damnable*.”⁸¹ Richardson responded, charging Fanning with conflating to include “philosophy of every kind,” and that he was waging a war against it all. Further,

⁷⁷ Robert Richardson, “Faith vs. Reason, No. I,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 4, 7, no. 2 (March 1857): 135-36.

⁷⁸ C. Leonard Allen, *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ in (and After) the Modern Age* (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood, 2004), 74-75.

⁷⁹ Robert Richardson, “Faith versus Philosophy No. 5,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 4, 7, no. 6 (June 1857): 336.

⁸⁰ Clanton, introduction to Clanton, *Restoration and Philosophy*, xix.

⁸¹ Tolbert Fanning, “Metaphysical Discussion, No. II,” *Gospel Advocate* 2 (November 1856): 327, in Clanton, introduction to Clanton, *Restoration and Philosophy*, xx.

Richardson argued that Fanning, by attacking philosophy in such a systematic fashion, actually establishes his own anti-philosophy philosophy, and in this way *his* philosophy had infected and obstructed the “Reformation.” Richardson attempted to argue that not all philosophy is bad: “Since the philosophy of anything is its reason, there is a philosophy in religion, else there would be no reason in it. It is *Christ [sic] Crucified* that is *God’s philosophy*. It is the gospel that is God’s power and reason. . . . It is because it is thus absolutely perfect in its own philosophy that any additions of human philosophy soils it.”⁸² Back and forth the two went after each other through most of 1857.

After several months, Campbell finally weighed in on the dispute. First, he admonished Richardson for approaching the topic with such adversarial vitriol, then claimed that in truth faith and philosophy are not incompatible. Campbell thought Richardson, more than anything else, failed to nuance his position by failing to clearly distinguish between “false” philosophy and “true” Christian philosophy. In agreement with Richardson, Campbell held that divine philosophy is abjectly perfect because it comes exclusively through God’s revelation in the facts of Scripture.⁸³ Although both Campbell and Richardson contended they were not against philosophy, in practice they were exactly that in holding tight to the Baconian doctrine of strict separation of philosophy and theology. Samuel Tyler wrote of an exceptional Baconian philosophy/theology that stood separate from what Bacon and Campbell otherwise considered philosophy’s poor utility: “that the Baconian method of investigation which maintains that induction, and not reasoning, is the paramount process in the question of knowledge, and the perception and consciousness, and induction, and not reasoning, are

⁸² Robert Richardson, “Faith vs. Philosophy,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 4, 7, no. 8 (September 1857): 494, emphasis original.

⁸³ Alexander Campbell, “On Which Side is A. Campbell?,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 4, 7, no. 8 (September 1857): 577.

the ultimate foundations of verity, has assumed a correct theory of the human mind.”⁸⁴ By ostensibly allowing only for “divine philosophy,” Campbell and Richardson channeled all things back to “the Bible alone.” In essence, Richardson, Fanning, and Campbell all end up at the same fideistic place: *nuda scriptura*.⁸⁵

In the end, Campbell suggested the real problem lie in Fanning’s prejudice against Campbell’s publication, *Millennial Harbinger*, and Bethany College, in favor of his own publication, *Gospel Advocate*, and Franklin College. In his remonstrance Richardson charged that Fanning had made a “bugbear” out of natural theology, accusing him of being “too ill-equipped in both attitude and mind to carry on such discussions.”⁸⁶ The real issue for Fanning was Campbell’s departure from the principles he had established in the beginning. As a result, Hughes states, “Campbell suggested that Fanning was intent on a war with us,” and he was absolutely right.⁸⁷ Fanning was crushed that of all people Campbell questioned his motives.

Contemporary Christian philosopher J. Caleb Clanton summarizes Fanning’s stance: “To leave no stone unturned, he further clarified that his condemnation applied no less to *natural theology* and moral philosophy, which he regarded as ‘well calculated to

⁸⁴ Tyler, *Discourse on the Baconian Philosophy*, 265-66.

⁸⁵ Used here, *fideism* is defined by Douglas Groothuis as “the making of belief a self-certifying and self-enclosed reality that needs no intellectual fortification from the classical arsenal of apologetics, natural theology, evidence for biblical reliability and arguments against other worldviews.” See Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 61. *Nuda scriptura* (naked, or bare Scripture), again, in contrast with the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, is the rejection of any council or church creed whatsoever. In fact, *nuda scriptura* taken to the extreme results in an over exaggeration of the elevation of Scripture by eliminating *everything but* Scripture as any source of knowledge. Quite literally, this exclusion extends to *anything* written by uninspired man, which includes the writings of the church fathers, all theological and philosophical (even Christian) writings, as well as biblical commentary, except for that produced by Campbell himself. However, the doctrine easily can be, and in some instances has been, taken to near absurdity. Hence, Campbellite traditionalists proclaim the Bible alone to be their creed. See Holloway and Foster, *Renewing God’s People*, 38.

⁸⁶ Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 216.

⁸⁷ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 75.

overthrow the hope of Christians.”⁸⁸ Even so, it is important to understand that Fanning wanted nothing to do with philosophy of any kind. And so it was that the major internal division to come, found its genesis in the Richardson-Fanning Dispute, which was aggravated by Campbell’s equivocation. Hughes observes, by combining “such diverse and contradictory themes into the original platform Campbell had raised up followers who, at many points stood diametrically opposed to one another.”⁸⁹ Ironically, Richardson, along with many of the subsequent leaders through the generations, took Campbell’s words to be an “admonition against *philosophy as such* in some important sense.”⁹⁰ Unlike the movement’s complex and confusing position on philosophy, the realm of natural theology enjoyed a near consensus within the early church of Christ: it too was an abomination, and its ardents anathema.

Natural theology. Considering Campbell’s Biblicism, it would seem inexplicable that he would embrace natural theology. Once again, however, Campbell’s ideological position appears to hold two concurrent ideas in tension: utilizing classical arguments from ontology and cosmology in his defense of Christianity, and at the same time railing against natural theology’s claim of general revelation from the God of Scripture.

In 1827, as his popularity as a Restoration leader was on the rise, the polymath Campbell responded to a series of articles written by a proponent of Deism. Campbell argued that no philosopher had yet shown, outside of the Bible, evidence that any man could, by logic, conclude that there is “a first cause, which is the effect of no antecedent cause,” suggesting, in rather Lockean fashion, that it would “require a sixth sense instead

⁸⁸ Clanton, introduction to Clanton, *Restoration and Philosophy*, xx, emphasis added.

⁸⁹ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 75.

⁹⁰ Clanton, introduction to Clanton, *Restoration and Philosophy*, xvii, emphasis original.

of five.”⁹¹ He said, “As soon as the bible words are proscribed, man is left in total darkness, both as respects his origin, and destiny. . . . While they [natural theologians] boast of light, they make man more ignorant than an ass which knows not its master’s crib . . . and make him of no more consequence than a snail or a mushroom.”⁹² Further, Campbell complained that natural theology, rather than complement the Bible, brought great violence against it: “As it appears to us the notion of natural theology as prerequisite to the revelation of God . . . robs the Bible of its supreme glory as making God known to us.”⁹³

Then, just two years later, in his 1829 debate with atheist Robert Owen, Campbell inexplicably and ostensibly utilized a modified form of the ontological argument from the classical apologetics of St. Anselm, along with the argument from First Cause that had been popularized by Thomas Aquinas and Rene Descartes.⁹⁴ One of the oldest apologetic arguments couched in natural theology, the ontological argument for the existence of God, *contra* Lockean epistemology, appeals to the inescapable notion possessed in the human mind of the existence of a supernatural being of unsurpassed greatness.⁹⁵ What makes Campbell’s appeal to the ontological argument appear so uncharacteristic of his Lockean epistemology is that the argument relies exclusively upon non-sensualistic, innate “feelings” rather than concrete and objective *facts*. Locke said God could be ascertained and is “naturally deducible from . . . the *visible* marks of

⁹¹ Alexander Campbell, “Reply to: Deism and Social Systems, No. V,” *Christian Baptist* 5, no. 3 (October 1827): 376.

⁹² Campbell, “Reply to: Deism and Social Systems, No. V,” 376.

⁹³ Alexander Campbell, “Natural Theology, No. 4,” *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 6 (November 1836): 511n1.

⁹⁴ Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 166.

⁹⁵ Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 17.

extraordinary wisdom and power, [that] *appear* so plainly in all the work of creation.”⁹⁶ In this way, Campbell’s utility of the argument appears to “box the compass” and fly in the face of what he had, and subsequently would write in condemnation of natural theology wholesale. But for Campbell, much like his finely nuanced rhetoric against philosophy, the ontological argument’s validity lay in its starting point. For Campbell, everything starts with God’s special revelation in Scripture, even philosophical and ontological arguments from apologetics. The only way man can have a sense of a maximally great being is that God had inputted the idea of His existence through special revelation.⁹⁷ Garrett summarizes nicely, “Since man has the idea of God, it had to be given to him by God through revelation, and, man’s nature being spiritual, he readily accepts the idea from God, the great First Cause.”⁹⁸ Though Campbell appears to appeal to arguments from classical apologetics, his finely nuanced utility of natural theology was the inevitable outworking of his presuppositionalism firmly anchored in Baconian-informed expository apologetics of the biblical *facts*.⁹⁹ In all his polemics, and apologetics, Campbell uncompromisingly presupposed the existence of God. For this reason Campbell’s ontological/cosmological hybrid argument is termed “revealed-ideal argument.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 26, emphasis added.

⁹⁷ Richard J. Chero, *Debating for God: Alexander Campbell’s Challenge to Skepticism in Antebellum America* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 2008), 47.

⁹⁸ Garrett here beautifully exemplifies Lockean *tabula rasa* epistemology, and fundamentalistic biblicism. See Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 166.

⁹⁹ *Expository Apologetics* is defined by Voddie Bauchman as “the application of the principles of biblical exposition to the art and science of apologetics. It is based on the inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency, and authority of the Bible. This approach to apologetics is not based on acquiring the latest knowledge in fields like astronomy, geology, physics, psychology, or comparative religion.” Voddie Bauchman Jr., *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 20.

¹⁰⁰ The “revealed-idea argument” is a term coined by J. Caleb Clanton. See Clanton, *Philosophy of Religion*, 25-58.

Historian Robert West summarizes Campbell's nuanced position regarding natural theology: "All nature proves the existence of God, once the idea of God is originated."¹⁰¹ This is the position taken by both Campbell and Richardson in the midst of the Richardson-Fanning Dispute, describing "true" Christian philosophy. However, and sounding very *pre-Van Tillian*, it is a "philosophy" that presupposes the existence of God to which epistemic assent can only be made through God's special revelation in Scripture.¹⁰² It is only "once the idea of God is suggested to our minds through revelation," West explains that "there is a legitimate place for natural theology."¹⁰³

Campbell argued, "It is *faith* [ascent to the *facts* of Scripture] and not by unaided human *reason* that we learn that God created the universe and man in his own image."¹⁰⁴ Going further, Campbell continued that he could not concur with "the idea that any man could, by any *a priori* reasoning power vouchsafed to him, originate the idea of a spiritual first cause, a spiritual universe, or any spiritual being or existence whatever."¹⁰⁵ Sure enough, Campbell's rhetoric against natural theology seems to have bookended a near lifetime of thought.

In 1860, near the end of his life, Campbell, in what seems to be an attempt to clarify his position, once again assailed natural theology in much the same unequivocal language:

It is, I have said, inconsistent for a natural religionist to commend the bible, seeing it flatly contradicts his whole system, I declare, 'the world by wisdom, or philosophy, knew not God: it declares that it is by *faith*, and not by *reason*, that men know the

¹⁰¹ Robert F. West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1948), 91.

¹⁰² The presuppositionalism of twentieth century apologist Cornelius Van Til will be juxtaposed alongside Campbell's apologetic in some detail in chapter 4.

¹⁰³ West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion*, 112.

¹⁰⁴ Alexander Campbell, "The Gospel Advocate," *Millennial Harbinger*, series 5, 1, no. 4 (April 1858): 231, emphasis original.

¹⁰⁵ Campbell, "The Gospel Advocate," 231.

world as created. It declares, that we must believe that God exists, and that we cannot reason ourselves into a knowledge that God exists. . . . I conceive, demonstrably evident, on the principles of reason, too, that without a revelation from God, no man can know that he exists.¹⁰⁶

In all fairness, Campbell found himself in a difficult position. While he realized the value of natural theology in defense of theism, he also recognized that Darwin's recently released *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and his theory of evolution was being touted as the deathknell for God and the triumph of science. Campbell, like many other Christians at the time, became aware that "Natural Theology" had overnight become, in the words of historian Tom Holland, "an Achilles heel."¹⁰⁷ Additionally, Campbell realized that any approval of natural theology gave immense credibility to the apologetic arguments from Deism. One of the greatest problems with the Deists, he contended, is that they present their position as a happy medium that lies comfortably between the extremes of atheism and Christianity. In his debate with Owen, he said the problem with Deism is that in fact "there is no stopping place between Atheism and Christianity."¹⁰⁸ Campbell found it near impossible to both counter-argue Deistic claims and at the same time embrace natural theology from which the Deists based their claims to begin with.

Moreover, many of the contradictions and tensions held in Campbell's thinking were a consequence of the two primary and divergent goals of the entire movement: restoration of the primitive church on the one hand, and postmillennialism on the other. The pairing of these visions pitted two diametrically opposed ideologies against one another with restoration looking and driving backwards to the simplicities of primitivism, and postmillennialism looking and pushing forward to the millennial dawn inaugurated

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Campbell, "Reformation in Colleges," *Millennial Harbinger*, series 5, 3, no. 7 (July 1860): 373, emphasis original.

¹⁰⁷ Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic, 2019), 438.

¹⁰⁸ Alexander Campbell and Robert Owen, *The Evidences of Christianity: A Debate between Robert Owen, of New Lanark, Scotland, and Alexander Campbell, President of Bethany College, Virginia, Containing an Examination of the "Social System," and all the Systems of Skepticism of Ancient and Modern Times* (1829; repr., St. Louis: Christian, 1906), 122.

through innovation and human progress. Restoration in search of primitivism fostered an intellectual regression by driving everything back to the basics; back to a plainer and simpler time.¹⁰⁹ Holding these two objectives equally paramount in the doctrine of the movement, it is little wonder Campbell would at times appear to “box the compass.”

Tolbert Fanning, the powerful leader of the Southern churches, had little use *a priori* for a finely nuanced approach to the ontological argument, or any other offering of natural theology or philosophy. He determined that not only natural theology, but philosophy as well were “well calculated to overthrow the hope of Christians.” Absent of quibble nor nuance, Fanning posited, “Without any hesitation, we pronounce the doctrine of Natural Theology, in all its shapes and bearings false, deceitful, and subversive of the Christian religion.”¹¹⁰ Fanning founded his anti-natural theology argument upon his fundamentalist exegesis of Roman 1:19-20, explaining, “That which may be known of God is manifest in them, (in man) for God hath showed it unto them; (not nature.) Being understood by the things that are made (done or shown by Christ).”¹¹¹ Fanning, along with his protégé, David Lipscomb, and a host of conservative movement church leaders in the South, reasoned that the investigation and ascertaining of God’s being and His attributes from observations in nature, and formed by human reasoning, simply become yet another system of human philosophy to be shunned. Indeed, widespread and *in toto* was the abject refusal to acknowledge the veridicality of *any* noncanonical source of knowledge. West notes, “The churches of Christ had, and still are inclined to reject *all* theology and philosophy as proper subjects and harbingers of knowledge, without

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 29.

¹¹⁰ Tolbert Fanning, quoted in Robert Richardson, “Faith vs. Philosophy No. 4,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 4, 7, no. 5 (May 1857): 267.

¹¹¹ Tolbert Fanning, “Reply to Professor Robert Richardson,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 4, 7, no. 7 (August 1857): 441.

discerning the *types* of theology and philosophy Campbell had rejected.”¹¹² In these ways Fanning, and later Lipscomb and all those who followed in their footsteps, increasingly put a hard edge on a “radicalized” version of Campbell’s fundamental doctrines, ever widening the chasm between the conservative churches of Christ and the progressive mainline.¹¹³ For this reason church historian Robert West could say in 1948: “The churches of Christ have not produced a seasoned Christian theologian of distinction for a hundred years.”¹¹⁴ It would be another fifty years before the church would.

In yet another irony, while the doctrines of the movement became more refined during the mid to late-nineteenth century, that refining process brought to light some fundamental differences that would eventually split in two the movement whose singular focus had been ecclesial unity. Ultimately the chasm created by theology and philosophy was largely based upon the conservative wing’s “failure to distinguish between Campbell’s ‘formal words,’ and his actual objectives.”¹¹⁵

Unity/Restoration Split

The Richardson-Fanning dispute not only publicized the *Faith versus Philosophy* debate, but, ironically, also publicized that by the mid-1850s there existed a significant and deeply entrenched division within the regional leaders of the movement itself.

¹¹² West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion*, 219, emphasis original.

¹¹³ Hughes writes of Fanning’s hard edge:

If one gathered all the facts and followed all the instructions of the Book in precise detail, one could rightfully claim to have no theology but the Bible, no creed but the Bible, no organization schemes other than the biblical pattern, and, indeed, one could rightfully claim that one’s church was no denomination as all but the true church of the first age. Fanning’s slavish allegiance to Lockean epistemology rendered him hostile to any suggestion that the human mind is receptive to divine illumination apart from the bible or that divinity might in some way instruct, inspire, or edify human beings through spiritual impulses. (Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 68)

¹¹⁴ West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion*, 219.

¹¹⁵ West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion*, 219.

The years following the Civil War uncovered additional points of contention within the movement. Of these, two issues in particular stand out as having been exceptionally divisive: support for missionary societies and instrumental music in the assembly. Both issues created controversy by exposing the limitations inherent in the old mantra of speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where the Bible is silent. Since neither support for missionary societies nor the use of instrumental music enjoyed *direct command, approved example, or necessary inference* from Scripture, the ensuing controversy had just as much to do with how biblical silence was to be interpreted as it did societies and organs.¹¹⁶ Ironically, this *argumentum ex silentio* became red-hot. With the death of Alexander Campbell in 1866, and no central figure to hold the belligerents together, these two issues in addition to core theological differences exposed by the Richardson-Fanning Dispute, very much sliced the movement back into the halves from whence they came.¹¹⁷

The divergent goals of restoration and unity that Campbell had held in workable tension, now split at the seam. Garrett notes that the Disciples of Christ resolved the tension by following ecumenical unity, while the churches of Christ resolved the tension by choosing to focus on restorationism.¹¹⁸ However, the seam split not only between restoration and unity, but between progressive and conservative; north and south; instrumental and acapella, societies and not; progress and primitivism, ecumenism and exclusivism, as well. The separation of the churches of Christ from the Disciples was official when, in 1906, the US Census Bureau asked then-movement leader David

¹¹⁶ First described by Thomas Campbell in the Third Proposition of the *Declaration and Address*, Command, Example, and Necessary Inference (CENI), has long been the foundation of the churches of Christ biblical interpretation. See T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, quoted in Olbricht, and Rollmann, *The Quest for Christian Unity*, 7. See also appendix 6, “The Declaration and Address of Thomas Campbell (1809).”

¹¹⁷ Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 307.

¹¹⁸ Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 383.

Lipscomb, the protégé of Tolbert Fanning, if the churches of Christ should be listed separately from the Disciples. Lipscomb's affirmative response formalized the separation.¹¹⁹

Over time, the liberated churches of Christ, running in a geographical belt that stretched from middle Tennessee to West Texas, became ever-the-more convinced their work of restoring the primitive church to have been successful. The resulting attitude only reinforced a hubristic solipsism that had long been prominent in the movement. If the church of Christ had been fully restored, then by implication all of those outside "the church" were excluded; a mindset within the church that remains hard to escape. Hughes notes that although the churches of Christ continue to work toward abandoning those exclusivist assumptions, for many members "these assumptions are so thoroughly bred in the bone that, though they may abandon them intellectually, they have great difficulty abandoning them emotionally."¹²⁰ In large part, however, the exclusivist demeanor of the churches of Christ in the South is owing to the legacy of Foy Wallace Jr. and the longevity of his influence upon the conservative wing of the movement.¹²¹

The Influential Foy Wallace Jr.

Foy Wallace Jr. exercised an extensive and substantial influence on the churches of Christ in the 1930s and 1940s, through both the *Gospel Advocate*, Fanning's old periodical which he now edited, and through what has been described as "militant

¹¹⁹ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 121.

¹²⁰ Richard T. Hughes, "What Can the Church of Christ Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?," in *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 404.

¹²¹ The term *conservative*, or *conservative wing*, is here used as doctrinally antithetical to *liberal*, *progressive*. Throughout the twentieth century as the churches of Christ further informally divided, the conservative wing could trace its heritage through a line running from Campbell, to Fanning, to Lipscomb, to Wallace.

preaching.”¹²² Wallace preached and published articles against “modernizers” who among other things were teaching an apocalyptic and premillennial worldview, most notably by the progressivist and liberal, R. H. Boll. Boll brought forward what were seen as progressive and liberal teachings of God’s unmerited grace. This grace was dependent upon God alone, and it flew in the face of most all conservative churches of Christ who had built upon the Enlightenment foundations of Campbell; a theology of “human initiative, self-reliance, and good works” extracted exclusively from the Bible facts.¹²³ Wallace’s attack on premillennial eschatology eventually reached to Harding College, and to the person Wallace credited with the origin of the movement in the churches: David Lipscomb. Wallace, above all, feared the loss of sectarian exclusivism within the churches of Christ and what he saw as a dangerous move from sectarian to denominational status; an intolerable encroachment of the *secular* into the *sacred*.¹²⁴ In Oklahoma, where Wallace had moved in 1935, the “churches of Christ came to view premillennialism as a heresy that diminished the significance of the New Testament church.”¹²⁵ In the end, Wallace and his followers crushed premillennialism in the churches of Christ and strengthened the fundamentalist resolve of the conservative wing, converting both Boll and Lipscomb in the process, and insuring “the crystallization of exclusivism.”¹²⁶

Resulting from his dogged defense of fundamentalism, Wallace attracted an enormous following, especially where his rough and ready style of intimidation and fanatical fundamentalism set quite comfortably among the Campbellites of Oklahoma

¹²² Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 454.

¹²³ Richard T. Hughes, *The Churches of Christ*, student ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 85.

¹²⁴ Hughes, *The Churches of Christ*, 93-94.

¹²⁵ W. David Baird, *The Churches of Christ in Oklahoma: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2020), 142.

¹²⁶ Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 453.

and Texas.¹²⁷ Foster notes that traveling evangelists, including Wallace in Oklahoma and Texas, “maintained doctrinal uniformity through wide contact with the congregations and the great respect they commanded.”¹²⁸ The legacy of Wallace, in faith and practice, can be glimpsed in the churches of Christ in Oklahoma who, owing to his lingering influence, are among the most conservative in the movement, and in the nation. Indeed, there remains today conservative church members who have living memory of the extraordinary impression left upon the churches of Christ by the most notable conservative leader of the mid-twentieth century, Foy Wallace Jr.¹²⁹ His vocal opposition to all things progressive left an indelible stamp on Oklahoma churches of Christ; a stamp still quite legible today.¹³⁰

As the conservative churches of Christ in the South continued to distance themselves from the denominations and society at large, the term *Campbellite* more and more became a derogatory moniker. More importantly, if restoration of the primitive church to the “ancient order of things” was already complete, then by all means necessary the corrupting influences of human philosophy and natural theology that had originally corrupted the church, had to be kept at bay. The restored church of Christ needed to be cocooned and quarantined within a *sacred sphere*, away from the *secular (and denomination) sphere* of speculation and the opinionism of men.¹³¹ Not so much unlike the Amish who live cloistered in the *sacred sphere*, believing “worldly things can pollute

¹²⁷ Hughes, *The Churches of Christ*, 91.

¹²⁸ Douglas A. Foster, *Will the Cycle Be Unbroken: Churches of Christ Face the 21st Century* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 1994), 85n1.

¹²⁹ Concerning “living memory,” one of the Waurika church of Christ elders grew up in the Healdton Oklahoma church of Christ which hosted Foy Wallace Jr. on several occasions in the 1960s. Healdton is 36 miles from Waurika.

¹³⁰ Baird, *Church of Christ in Oklahoma*, 210.

¹³¹ In the discussion that follows the terms *secular*, and *secular sphere*, consistent with the church of Christ’s legacy of exclusivism presented here, is to be understood as including *all* non-church of Christ institutions (i.e., *denominational* Christian churches, as well as secular society in general).

the purity of the church,” Campbellite traditionalists, especially among the more conservative churches in the South, sought to prevent the bridging of the *sacred sphere* with the *secular sphere*.¹³² Traditionalists contended that life in the *sacred sphere* originates in the Bible as commands to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15 KJV), and “wherefore come out from them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (2 Cor 6:17 KJV). All else is heretically *avant garde*. To the extent that these spheres can remain isolated, it is often vaunted, fidelity of the primitive church is assured. However, there will be consequences.

Anti-Intellectualism

“Anti-intellectualism,” Richard Hofstadter explains, “is usually the incidental consequence of some other intention, often some justifiable intention.”¹³³ The resulting “incidental consequence” of the Stone-Campbell Movement’s ideology of the *sacred/secular* split, and all that it entailed, was a particular brand of anti-intellectualism that, although recently much improved, persists unto today. Even so, Roy explains, “This rejection of profane culture also turns into suspicion of knowledge itself with the notion that, firstly, there is no need for knowledge in order to be saved, and secondly, knowledge can distract from true faith.”¹³⁴ Such are the manifestations of *nuda scriptura*, and fideism. However, C. S. Lewis articulates the great cost of anti-intellectualism: “Not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason,

¹³² Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish Way: Patient Faith in a Perilous World* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2016), 126.

¹³³ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in America*, 22.

¹³⁴ Roy, *Holy Ignorance*, 144.

because bad philosophy needs to be answered.”¹³⁵ That is the challenge even unto today since many in the churches of Christ still hold to the Campbellite belief that the ancient church has been restored, no further changes are needed, including a fresh look at how the study and practice of apologetics can help strengthen and advance the three dynamics of the church.

The Anti-Intellectualism of Two Spheres

The ideology of a *sacred/secular* split in the conservative churches of Christ is further reinforced by a similar trend that has played out in denominational Christianity at large. Christian philosopher J. P. Moreland notes, “Christian teaching and practice are privatized and placed in a separate compartment from . . . secular activities.”¹³⁶ Beyond the compartmentalized spatial separation, it has been argued that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, are inherently anti-intellectual institutions. Ancient Greco-Roman historian Charles Freeman goes so far as to claim the rise of Christianity in the third century under Constantine brought about “the closing of the Western mind,” and with it “the fall of reason.”¹³⁷ Freeman further suggests that “Christians would often pride themselves on their lack of education associating independent philosophical thinking with the sin of pride.”¹³⁸ No doubt, these concerns in the modern era drove Fredrich Nietzsche to argue in *The Anti-Christ* that his over-riding fear was of the spread of anti-intellectualism from the lower Christian masses to the “superior minority.”¹³⁹ More

¹³⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (New York: Harper Collins, 1949), 58.

¹³⁶ J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Age of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2012), 21.

¹³⁷ Charles Freeman, *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason* (New York: Vintage, 2002), title page.

¹³⁸ Freeman, *The Closing of the Western Mind*, 120.

¹³⁹ See H. L. Mencken, introduction to *The Anti-Christ*, by Fredrich Nietzsche (New Delhi: General Press, 2019), 14.

specifically, Nietzsche suggested that Christianity was similar to a “gruesome manner of continual suicide of reason.”¹⁴⁰ To be sure, the modern-day charge of anti-intellectualism within Protestantism traces its roots back to the Reformation, and most notable back to the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. In a very real sense, *sola scriptura* pitted *Faith versus Philosophy*; the *sacred sphere* versus the *secular sphere*. The American Restoration Movement, and the Stone-Campbell Movement which was a product of it, radicalized then perpetuated the separation of these spheres by first narrowing the scope of *sola scriptura* to a doctrine of *nuda scriptura* by condemning creeds and confession, then through incalculable by Southern leaders like Fanning, Lipscomb, and Wallace taking Campbell’s ambiguity as “an admonition against philosophy,” and finally by the conservative churches of Christ’s condemnation of natural theology at large. At each opportunity, church of Christ doctrine myopically turned inward to the *sacred* and away from the *denominational* and *secular*. In so doing, however, anti-intellectualism within the church was refined and reinforced. Separate shall be the *sacred* from the *secular*, and shall there be nary a bridge between them.¹⁴¹

The separation of spheres within the churches of Christ is perhaps most clearly glimpsed through a history of the church’s relationship with education, which Restoration historian Douglas Foster categorizes as “a hostility toward higher education.”¹⁴² Early on there were debates regarding the usefulness of higher education for Christians. Many thought higher education played a crucial role in the training of preachers, while others

¹⁴⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 250.

¹⁴¹ On many occasions, people who grew up in the churches of Christ have relayed to me that the separation of *sacred* from the *secular* was often pronounced in that their family was faithful to attend services every time the door opened, “but left the *sacred* there,” in that sphere. There was no home Bible study, no prayer before meals, no talking of belief or faith or reference to obedience to Christ. These things belonged in the *sacred sphere* which occurred at church, and were not comingled with the daily regime of predominately living their lives in the *secular sphere*.

¹⁴² Foster, *Will the Cycle Be Unbroken*, 71.

thought higher education at best unnecessary, and at worst, evil. Many within conservative circles even argued that “Bible colleges” were unscriptural.¹⁴³ Although both Campbell, and Fanning were founders and college presidents of Bethany College, and Franklin College respectively, both institution’s curricula were exclusively Bible-based, especially Fanning’s Franklin College.¹⁴⁴ Shortly after their separation from the Disciples of Christ in 1906, the churches of Christ began to build and support their own colleges and universities.

To keep these institutions of higher learning confined to the *sacred sphere*, the student bodies were strategically composed largely of church of Christ members, and taught exclusively by church of Christ professors.¹⁴⁵ These professors, in lockstep with the logophobic posture of the movement, taught curricula that focused exclusively upon the biblical text to the exclusion of the study of philosophy and theology; a stricture that reverberates even today. At the turn of the twenty-first century, none of the church of Christ institutions had developed a department of philosophy. Church of Christ academics who pursue doctorate degrees in philosophy are forced outside of the churches of Christ to do so.¹⁴⁶ The same holds true for the study of theology within these same church of Christ universities. Hughes writes,

Though theology involves systematic thought about God and the way God relates to humankind and the world He created, Churches of Christ for the most part have studiously avoided theological inquiry. The reason is clear: one does not think about

¹⁴³ Yater Tant, *J. D. Tant—Texas Preacher: A Biography* (Athens, AL: The C. E. I., 1973), 359.

¹⁴⁴ Fanning, in his counter charge against Richardson during in their 1857 dispute, charged Campbell with teaching natural theology at Bethany, he had; and he did. See Fanning, “Reply to Professor Robert Richardson,” 442.

¹⁴⁵ Hughes, “What Can the Church of Christ Tradition Contribute?,” 408.

¹⁴⁶ Because of its inherent linking to philosophy, the same circumstances have held true for advanced degrees in Christian apologetics. Church of Christ universities have only recently begun to offer a few classes in classical or evidential apologetics. Offerings for advanced study in apologetics are rare, and there are no doctorate degrees offered in apologetics by the top church of Christ universities.

God in a systematic way, but rather takes what the biblical text says about God at face value.¹⁴⁷

Here Hughes gives a precise textbook definition of the anti-intellectual strain that has long been pandemic in the churches of Christ.

Campbell, being ever conscious of the narrow boundaries of *nuda scriptura*, argues that to have pure speech “requires but little reflection to discover that the fiercest disputes about religion, are about what the Bible does not say, rather than about what it does say; about words and phrases coined in the midst of speculative theology.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, theology, and the knowledge of God and the Son of God (Eph 4:13) that generates it, is bound to the *secular sphere*, and there exists no bridging over to it from the *sacred*. It should not be understated, anti-intellectualism within the conservative wing in the church of Christ tradition, then, is “resistant to scholarship” because scholarship represents advancement, or a “change in the pursuit of truth” and a shift in axiological epistemology away from *nuda scriptura*.¹⁴⁹ It is a wholesale pollution of the *sacred* by the *secular* only preserved by pristinely embracing the strain of anti-intellectualism that harkens back to a Docetic dialectic of the fleshly, and the divine.¹⁵⁰

By the mid-twentieth century, however, the churches of Christ once again showed signs of the division that had been under the surface going back to their separation from the Disciples of Christ in 1906. The division cut quite cleanly between right and left; conservative and progressive; rural and urban; those without higher education, and

¹⁴⁷ Hughes, “What Can the Church of Christ Tradition Contribute?,” 408.

¹⁴⁸ Campbell, *Christianity Restored*, 125-26.

¹⁴⁹ Kavian McMillion, “Race, Theological Education and Churches of Christ,” *Leaven* 18, no. 1 (2010): 27.

¹⁵⁰ Recently, a Waurika church of Christ member commented during Bible class that he read a secular, nonfiction book, but before he gave a review of the book he said, “I read this book that a person gave me the other day; I don’t know, I feel guilty reading books, anyway.” He went on to give his review. When later asked what he meant about feeling guilty about reading books. He said that all a person should be reading is the Bible. He reasoned, if you have the Bible, why do you need to read anything else? It was an insightful discussion confirming that Campbellite traditionalism, and *nuda scriptura* are still very much present, at least to some degree, in the conservative churches of Christ.

those with. In fact, it is strongly suggested that the progressive movement within the churches found its genesis in the institutions of higher education that had been established by the church at the start of the twentieth century.¹⁵¹ Conservatives, especially in the South, charged the universities with abandoning core movement principles grounded exclusively in the biblical facts, and were producing heretical scholars rather than qualified preachers.¹⁵² In response, the conservative wing set about establishing new “preaching schools” specifically to train preachers. Brown Trail School of Peaching in Ft. Worth, Bear Valley School of Preaching in Denver, and Sunset School of Preaching in Lubbock, Texas were among dozens of such schools. True to a Campbellite andragogy of *nuda scriptura*, these church of Christ schools of preaching “focused entirely on the Bible and did not require the completion of any additional courses in the liberal arts or sciences.”¹⁵³ Even so, in some conservative circles these preaching schools were viewed as a corruption. Foster writes, “Our forebears often reflected this suspicion in their hostility toward college-trained preachers and the dangers of studying in theological seminaries, or as they were often called, theological cemeteries.”¹⁵⁴ Among many conservative churches even today, there remains the strong opinion that any higher education obtained outside of schools of preaching should be shunned.¹⁵⁵ Dave Miller of the anti-intellectual strain

¹⁵¹ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 310.

¹⁵² Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 330.

¹⁵³ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 332.

¹⁵⁴ Foster, *Will the Cycle Be Unbroken*, 71.

¹⁵⁵ Shawn Johnson is the current minister at the church of Christ in Claude, Texas. He recently relayed his insights:

[I]n the majority of churches [of Christ] that I see that are smaller (under 150 members), there does seem to be a prominent embrace of anti-intellectualism. . . . [A] few times when I have submitted a resume for consideration, I was not allowed to even receive an interview because of either my association with ACU [Abilene Christian University] or my advanced degrees because of the presumption of “liberalism.” Whether it is “liberalism” or higher education that scares off some elderships/churches, I cannot say.” Shawn Johnson, e-mail to author, September 20, 2022.

states, “the ‘scholars’ among us manifest a smug sense of superiority against those who insist on staying closely with the Scriptures,” and that higher education is a classic case of people being ‘educated beyond their intelligence.’”¹⁵⁶

The Stone-Campbell Movement’s “aesthetic of plain and simple,” endorsed and inculcated by movement leaders from Campbell, to Fanning, to Lipscomb, to Wallace, and beyond yielding a high-grade anti-intellectualism that persists today to find its expression in the offspring of *nuda scriptura*: anti-creedalism, anti-philosophy, anti-theology, and an exclusivism ultimately manifest in the separation of the *sacred* and the *secular*.¹⁵⁷ As Hughes rightly observes, an ideology and pattern of “plain and simple” within the sacred sphere is perhaps the most striking manifestation of the division that exists between the *sacred* and the *secular spheres*.¹⁵⁸

Apologetics as a Bridge Between Two Spheres

Biblical fundamentalism, and the anti-intellectualism that it encourages, has

I am compelled to argue that within the ideology of the conservative wing it is both. One is perceived as liable for, and inseparable from the other.

¹⁵⁶ Ironically, Dave Miller, BA, MA, MTh, MAR, PhD, and then President of Brown Trail School of Preaching, generally sees even the churches of Christ universities as overtly corrupted by liberalism and suggests that the young preachers of today have “been tainted by error from higher education.” Dave Miller, *Plotting the Strait: A Guidebook for Assessing Change in the Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain, 2006), 102, 109. While Miller’s advocacy for the continued primacy of the Bible is above reproach, publications like *Plotting the Strait*, in its eighth printing, stand to destroy any classical apologetic bridge-building before the foundation can even be laid. Miller is the current president of *The Apologetic Press*, a Scripture expository-based Christian apologetics ministry.

¹⁵⁷ Writing over one-hundred and sixty years ago, Tolbert Fanning still speaks for a large portion of the conservative wing in the South today of the essence of a plain and simple doctrine: “The idea of becoming wise above what is written led men at an early date to abandon the simplicity of truth, for dreams, visions, and idle fancies.” Tolbert Fanning, “Professor R. Richardson’s Second Notice of the Gospel Advocate,” *Gospel Advocate* 3 (July 1857): 209-10, quoted in Brock Rough, “The Aesthetics of Plain and Simple,” in Clanton, *Restoration and Philosophy*, 210. Within the churches of Christ, the primitive simplicity of the apostolic church has historically yielded an aesthetic of plain and simple that is not only explicit in their approach to biblical hermeneutics, the simplicity of worship services, their view toward higher education, and their embrace of anti-intellectualism, but also can be seen in their refusal of musical instruments and the architecture of their church buildings. For a thorough treatment of the “the aesthetics of plain and simple” within the churches of Christ, see Rough, “The Aesthetic of Plain and Simple,” 209-28.

¹⁵⁸ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 409.

certainly proven to be thoroughly “bred in the bone” of not only the churches of Christ but Christianity at large. Noll posits, “No creed but the Bible” put Christians at an enormous disadvantage, especially concerning Christian learning, having “cut themselves off” from resources accumulated since the apostolic age by countless “assemblies of the saints.”¹⁵⁹ And the consequences have been significant. J. P. Moreland observes, “The Contemporary Christian mind is starved, and as a result, we have small, impoverished souls.”¹⁶⁰ Likewise, Noll is precise when he explains, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.”¹⁶¹ A main contributor to this state of affairs, Noll adds, is that biblical fundamentalism across the evangelical Christian world has had “a chilling effect on the exercise of Christian thinking about the world.”¹⁶² Noll notes that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, evangelic Christianity in general was “pressed beyond their intellectual resources” in the face of so many challenges that pushed in from the *secular sphere*. The lack of a sustained witness in the cities, the Bible under attack as being an irrelevant book of mythology, and new views in post-Darwinian biology and the sciences redefining God’s created order, among a cadre of equally pressing issues. The result was that “when biblical fundamentalist turned to their intellectual resources for dealing with these matters, they found that the cupboard was nearly bare.”¹⁶³ Scripture held all the answers but since they failed to create a Christian theology—a product of Christian’s thinking critically about how to apply the Bible to real

¹⁵⁹ Although the churches of Christ rarely consider themselves evangelistic, the inference of anti-intellectualism is across Christendom. Thus, this travesty is the loss of an enormous volume of work assembled by early, devout Christians who by God’s grace occupied a period in history so very much closer to Jesus and the apostles than our own. See Mark Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 1.

¹⁶⁰ Moreland, *Love Your God*, 94.

¹⁶¹ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 3.

¹⁶² Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 114.

¹⁶³ Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 106.

world problems—they had no well-reasoned answers, including how to engage with ever-present questions about the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity. Among denominational evangelic Christians, Noll argues, “the prominence of Bible-onlyism, at the expense of well-articulated theology, meant that when new conditions arose . . . there was little ground from which to reason.”¹⁶⁴

Even well into the second half of the twentieth century, still largely constrained by Campbellite traditionalism, the churches of Christ had done little, in the words of Noll, to “stock the cupboard.” The venerable Virgil R. Trout, a highly regarded scholar and presuppositional apologist declared, “A common fallacy [in denominational Christianity] has been to begin in the wrong place when the existence of God is questioned. Unfortunately, we have relied more on Plato and Aristotle than Moses, Abraham, Job, David, Paul, and Christ.”¹⁶⁵ Trout, like Campbell before him, had a great appreciation for theology, philosophy, and science, and readily utilized them both within the church and without. Also, like Campbell, his starting point was the presupposition of the God of Scripture. Trout argued that “belief in the personal God of the Bible is necessary for a purposeful interpretation of the universe.”¹⁶⁶ Unfortunately, however vaunted, expository apologetics and the presuppositional assumptions it demands has done little to “stock the cupboard,” and ultimately falls short of significantly closing the intellectual lacuna long existing in the churches of Christ between the *sacred* and the *secular*.¹⁶⁷

Yet, it seems unfathomable that a movement “with such clear roots in the

¹⁶⁴ Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 106.

¹⁶⁵ Virgil R. Trout, *Christian Evidences: A Mature Study for Adults* (Austin, TX: R. B. Sweet, 1963), 12.

¹⁶⁶ Trout, *Christian Evidences*, 12.

¹⁶⁷ Presuppositionalism, being grounded exclusively in the absolute truth of God’s Word in Scripture, chooses to start the conversation presupposing the existence of God and the truthfulness of the Bible. There is more to be said regarding the utility and limitations of a presuppositional apologetic methodology within the churches of Christ later in this chapter and in chapter 4.

Enlightenment,” and the thought of Bacon, Reid, and Locke, would develop such “an anti-intellectual strain.”¹⁶⁸ Sure enough, church historian Robert West notes that the Enlightenment produced not only the empiricism of Locke and company, but that also of “the trio of skeptics, deists, and atheists.”¹⁶⁹ Indeed, it is surprising that Campbell was able to bring Enlightenment thinking to bear positively on Christianity. In his classic book *A Secular Age*, Christian philosopher Charles Taylor reasons that one of the driving forces leading to unbelief after the Medieval Period was the metaphysical skepticism that the Age of Enlightenment brought to epistemology in general, and Christian epistemology in particular.¹⁷⁰ The church of Christ, however, in her dogged praxis to keep the *sacred* quarantined from the *secular*, grew into this species of a tree exactly: a tree planted by Campbell’s Baconian/Lockean thought, whose ideological roots sunk deep in the soil of *nuda scriptura*, watered by conservative leaders Fanning and Lipscomb, and fertilized and nurtured to maturity by Wallace and beyond. It is the cool shade of this magnificent tree that produces, even today, “a chilling effect” not only upon the “exercise

¹⁶⁸ An observation suggested by Alyssa Johnson, nineteenth century Protestant historian, email to author, September 20, 2022.

¹⁶⁹ West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion*, 105.

¹⁷⁰ Charles Taylor argues that three things changed between the year 1500 and 2020 that explain why people moved away from belief in God. The first category is from the natural world. In the year 1500, “the natural world” was seen as a grand and constant testimony to the design and purpose of God. Looking into the cosmos in the year 1500, there was no question who made the moon and stars, and who constantly kept the planets in perfect orbital motion. However, the scientific revolution beginning in the seventeenth century eventually gave people a scientific theory about how the moon and the stars came into being without the help of God. The second category is that society itself was understood in 1500 to exist only as being grounded, or anchored, in something higher than the actions of man. God, it seemed, was tightly interwoven into every aspect of society. Man on his own, it was thought, could not have organized themselves into productive societies, and God’s hand actively held society together. Modern man, on the other hand, considers society anchored and grounded in his own brilliance and industry, and that man alone is the master of his destiny. That mindset became especially entrenched as a result of the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The third category of things that have changed since 1500 that impacted belief in God is that people, then, recognized that they lived in an “enchanted world.” These three lived categories, working together, pointed people living in the year 1500 inescapably toward God. The upending of these three modes of God’s felt presence in the world has ultimately led to society moving away from belief in God. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 25-43.

of Christian thinking in the world” but more importantly it fosters a milieu of anti-intellectualism in the churches of Christ hampering the church’s ability to satiate the three dynamical mandates of the church: to deeply worship God, edify the body of believers, and evangelize the world (Eph 4:1-16).

In Oklahoma, where the Wallace-inspired conservative wing has long dominated, it is not surprising church membership has continued to decline, no doubt in part due to the “chilling effect” of *nuda scriptura*. “Since 1970,” Oklahoma church historian W. David Baird explains,

the fellowship had tried to stem the tide of decreasing membership. The Oklahoma Christian University lectures, the SEARCH [radio] program . . . multiple campaigns, social service outreaches, a *Christian Chronicle* filled with encouragement . . . had not met expectations. Membership numbers continued to decline. To fill the pews again would be the challenge of the Churches of Christ in Oklahoma in the twenty-first century.¹⁷¹

The church has lost its relevance both inside and out; it is failing in the execution of its three central mandates.

Trout believed that the task of the church is “to devote *heart* and *mind* in a *reverent effort* to *know* and to *communicate* the *purpose of the Creator* for His world.”¹⁷² Rarely has been seen a clearer vision of the three mandates given to the saints by Jesus in The High Priestly Prayer, and actualized by Paul in Ephesians 4:1-16, than this. To get about this salient business that sets heavy before the church, a robust *bridge-builder* is needed. Campbell once said; “We take the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, as the foundation of all Christian union and communion. Those who do not like this will please show us a more excellent way.”¹⁷³ For the Christian, Campbell’s firm stand in biblical priority is *sine qua non*. However, what is of major concern, especially in the milieu of twenty-first century post-modern relativism, is how do the churches of

¹⁷¹ Baird, *Churches of Christ in Oklahoma*, 210.

¹⁷² Trout, *Christian Evidences*, 10, emphasis added.

¹⁷³ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 12.

Christ best glorify God and exalt Christ through the sacrosanct mandates of the church vouchsafed to them? How does the church become relevant again to the biblical skeptic in the public square without caving-in to rampant latitudinarianism? How are Christians to first bring the biblical skeptic *to* the Bible? Perhaps there *is* a more excellent way. Trout offers sound advice: “If something is true, it will not be harmed by careful examination. The Christian invitation is one which is directed to your heart and your head.”¹⁷⁴ It has been said that “apologetics patches the potholes in the road that leads to the door of salvation.”¹⁷⁵ For the churches of Christ, apologetics builds a bridge between the two isolated spheres in which many church of Christ congregations still live.

Apologetics as a bridge builder to deeper worship. The teaching of Christian apologetics at WCC provided an effective, safe, and necessary bridge that must be built between the *sacred* and the *secular*. This bridge may be crossed not to bring a deadly virus from the *secular* in to infect the *sacred*, but to glean aspects of veridical knowledge that might help immunize and strengthen the church so that it might glorify God in fulfilling the three mandates and begin to fill the pews again.

Paul ultimately links ecclesial unity with love, and the perfection of that love is personified in the “seven ones” upon which the Restoration Movement is anchored (Eph 4:4-6). There are aspects of knowledge residing in the *secular sphere* whose import to the *sacred* gives further clarity to the perfection of divine unity in love (Eph 4:4-6; see John 17:23), compelling deeper worship with “reverence and awe” (Heb 12:28). To be clear, philosophy and theology are not authoritative, nor are they inerrant. Campbell and the movement leaders were correct in that human philosophy is to some extent “speculative,”

¹⁷⁴ Virgil Trout, *Quest for Truth in a Scientific Age* (Lubbock, TX: Key, 1965), 39.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted by Kevin Lewis in a speech given at Biola University, La Mirada, CA, June 10, 2018. In e-mail correspondence to Lewis, he wrote, “I heard John Warwick Montgomery say this quote 30+ years ago. I don’t know if it originates with him, but he is the source.” Kevin Lewis, e-mail to author, April 6, 2021.

albeit performed correctly it is always informed by Scripture. Second-century Christian scholar and theologian Origen argued, in essence, that the *secular sphere* has an important contribution to make. Origen, Holland writes, was convinced that “shot through with errors though the speculations of the philosopher might be, they nevertheless could still help illuminate Christian truth.”¹⁷⁶ “The Christian faith,” Trout explains, “links man’s *heart and head* to worship to the Creator.”¹⁷⁷ No doubt it is a gospel truth that truth drives deeper worship (John 4:24).

In all ages, even since time out of mind, the faithful have come before God and offered “acceptable worship with reverence and awe” (Heb 12:28). God’s revelation of himself through “created things” (Rom 1:20) brings forth that “reverence and awe” from the depths of the human spirit, and are laid as offerings upon the altar in worship of the God who is “pure intelligence.”¹⁷⁸ “God, according to Christianity,” posits Groothuis, “is the ultimate and original Artist and the source, standard, and giver of beauty, ‘He has made everything beautiful in its time (Eccl 3:11).’”¹⁷⁹ The objectivity of beauty,¹⁸⁰ something experienced in nature, points precisely to the Artist, and is the singular source of all “thin places.”¹⁸¹ God is supremely “beautiful, good, and lovely, and is thus worthy of our full

¹⁷⁶ Holland, *Dominion*, 123.

¹⁷⁷ Trout, *Christian Evidences*, 28.

¹⁷⁸ Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.70, quoted in Holland, *Dominion*, 124.

¹⁷⁹ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022), 255-56.

¹⁸⁰ Concerning the objectivity of beauty, C. S. Lewis writes, “The man who called the cataract sublime was intending simply to describe his own emotions about it: he was also claiming that the object was one which *merited* those emotions.” C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper Collins, 1974), 15. Objective beauty, as an involuntary response, points explicitly to the Artist who created it.

¹⁸¹ *Thin places* are described as holy and sacred sites where the distance between heaven and earth is perceived to be very thin; where the Holy Spirit of God seems “as close as one’s breath.” See Tracy Balzer, *Thin Places: An Evangelical Journey into Celtic Christianity* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 2002), 29.

worship and adoration.”¹⁸² These things are the fruit of an *a posteriori* investigation of the *secular* realm; these things are the fruit of Christian apologetics. Jesus said mankind is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind” (Matt 22:37). There can be little doubt Origen had these words of Jesus in mind when he said, “No one can truly do duty to God who does not think like a philosopher.”¹⁸³ It is very much the case that Christian unity (Eph 4:4-6) and Christian maturity (Eph 4:13) are evidenced by closing the epistemic distance between man and God. The unity and application of knowledge gleaned through the study and application of apologetics play a significant role in closing that distance in unity (Eph 4:4-6) so “that they may all be perfectly one” (John 17:23).¹⁸⁴ Apologetics builds the bridge that makes accessible a “new,” old world that testifies to the glory of the God who “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16) and compels deeper worship.

Apologetics as a bridge builder to edifying the saints. Paul encourages the Ephesians that Christ has gifted the church with teachers whom He has gifted, so that they might teach and train all members for the work of ministry, building up the body of Christ to a unity centered around the knowledge of the Son of God (Eph 4:11-13). There is something about sharing knowledge that is incredibly edifying, both to the teacher and the student. Christian apologist Jonathan Marrow explains, “It’s so fun to see teenagers’ confidence grow and their faith come alive when they discover that Christianity is

¹⁸² Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed., 255-56.

¹⁸³ Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Origen and Panegyric Addressed to Origen 6*, quoted in Holland, *Dominion*, 122.

¹⁸⁴ John Hick argues that humans are given a high degree of autonomy in order to guarantee libertarian free will. This autonomy comes, in some significant sense, by virtue of an epistemic distance that exists between God and man so that man maintains free will in all things including whether to choose God. At the same time, this distance is not so great that man cannot come to know at least something about God through freely exercised inquiry and rational thought. The antithesis of libertarian free will is hard determinism, which, ironically, does nothing to close the epistemic distance between God and man. John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 45.

actually true.”¹⁸⁵ However, it is not just teenagers—doubt is a malignancy that can creep in upon the believer at any age and for a variety of reasons. Apologetics, then, should be viewed as the exercise of Christian “intellectual duties,” falling within the “intellectual obligations” bearing upon all of Christ’s church. Viewed aright, it is indeed a Christian’s obligation to “try to produce or promote, or enhance . . . intellectual virtues in oneself and others.”¹⁸⁶ Knowledge of the existence of God, the truthfulness of Christianity, and the inerrant authority of the Bible can be substantially reinforced through the study of apologetics to “build up the body in love.” It is not only commended by Paul in Ephesians, but also prayed for by Jesus in The High Priestly Prayer (John 17). There *is* a particular unity in love that edifies every believer through increasing their knowledge of the Son of God, to the glory of God (Eph 4:13). The strength rendered from knowledge “makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:16). And, being built up in knowledge forestalls believers being “tossed to and fro by the waves,” and “every wind of doctrine by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:14).

Apologetics as a bridge to evangelizing the world. More than any other dynamic of the church, the effective evangelization of the world is most advanced by bridging the *sacred* to the *secular* through apologetics. To the churches of Christ, Jeff Childers, Douglas Foster, and Jack Reese offer a pointed and necessary reminder: “We must not shrink our God-given responsibilities or neglect God-given gifts by isolating ourselves from other followers of Christ and justifying it as being faithful to our

¹⁸⁵ Jonathan Marrow, “Q&A With Jonathan Marrow,” in *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation, A Barna Report* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2018), 101.

¹⁸⁶ Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1991), 31-32.

identity.”¹⁸⁷ The current malady that the church is slowly dying from will find little respite aside from evangelic outreach that is relevant to the demands of today’s society. Time and again, researchers like Sean McDowell and J. Warren Wallace found that survey responses of why young people left the church “involve some sort of ‘unanswered, intellectual skepticism.’”¹⁸⁸ Such responses naturally drive the question: “Is it possible that many churches are preparing young Christians to face a world that no longer exists?”¹⁸⁹ The same holds true for why a good number of people, of all ages, finally leave the church. Researcher Tom Bissett observes the number one reason that people leave the faith is because “they have troubling questions about their faith.” He says people are no longer willing to “just believe” but are searching for a justified faith and opting for “intellectual honesty.”¹⁹⁰ Though beyond that, without apologetics there is no common ground from which to make appeal to the biblical skeptic. Theologian and apologists J. V. Fesko explains that all human beings, by virtue of being made in the image of God, share a common knowledge, or it can be said all possess *common notions*.¹⁹¹ Church of Christ soteriology holds that although the noetic effect of sin has greatly reduced unredeemed man’s ability to grasp concepts of God, he is not so fallen, nor is the epistemic distance so vast, nor the “hiddenness of God” so exhaustive, that he does not share some tacit understanding of God, even through general revelation (Rom 1:19-

¹⁸⁷ Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese, *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, 2001), 138.

¹⁸⁸ Sean McDowell and J. Warren Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know: Preparing Young Christians for a Challenging World* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2019), 36.

¹⁸⁹ David Kinnaman, quoted in Johnathan Morrow, “Why Gen Z Is Not Prepared to Follow Jesus in a Post-Everything World,” *Impact 360*, accessed March 12, 2023, <https://www.impact360institute.org/articles/gen-z-not-prepared-follow-jesus-post-everything-world/>.

¹⁹⁰ Tom Bissett, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1992), 22.

¹⁹¹ J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 30.

23).¹⁹² These shared innate *common notions*, *contra* Locke, imparted through the common grace engendered in the *imago Dei* provide a common ground from which the Christian might engage the unbeliever from natural theology.¹⁹³

In the churches of Christ tradition of *nuda scriptura*, the “cupboard” truly is bare when it comes to evangelizing the biblical skeptic; there is no common ground from which to begin a conversation. Whether or not it is realized, the biblical fundamentalist stands upon the Bible as a closed and exhaustive view of the world. As such, there can be no common ground between believer and unbeliever because the Scriptures alone hold all truth, everything outside of Scripture is spurious. However, if it is agreed that the Bible is absolute truth in all that it claims and yet does not provide an exhaustive view of the world, then it must be acknowledged that truth lies in two domains, or two volumes of truth: the book of nature, *and* the book of Scripture. And it is from the book of nature that common ground between believer and unbeliever can be found.¹⁹⁴

Recalling the gentleman from chapter 1 who was bereft of any answer for his daughter-in-law who “does not believe the Bible is God’s word,” what he was truly confessing is that his “cupboard is bare”—he has no bridge from his exclusive *sacred sphere*, to the *secular sphere* where he might grasp some *common ground* from natural theology and thereby begin a conversation with the Bible skeptic. Similarities in rationality between the believer and unbeliever for example, can provide solid common ground. Both believer and nonbeliever rely extensively upon the same fixed law of

¹⁹² The churches of Christ, obviously claiming no structured theological tradition, are generally Arminian in anthropology and soteriology, and as such are diametrically opposed to the five points of Calvinism, including the doctrines of original sin and total depravity. The interrelationship (or the impossibility of one) between presuppositional apologetics and Arminian soteriology will be further explored in chap. 4.

¹⁹³ Locke believed that the existence of common notions of what he termed “innate principles” were “stamped upon the mind of man, which the soul receives in its very first being and brings into the world with it,” is a false supposition. Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 7.

¹⁹⁴ Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 129.

noncontradiction in all areas of life. That does not mean that there are not areas of disagreement between the two, but agreement upon the basic rules governing rational thinking is essential common ground from which to start a philosophical apologetic presentation.¹⁹⁵ That is why apologetics, for the churches of Christ, is a life-giving bridge for believer and unbeliever alike. Paul in Ephesians 4:1-16 makes explicit that at least one of the church leaders who is gifted to the church for “equipping the saints,” is charged as an *εὐαγγελιστάς* (evangelist) to reach to the lost in the *secular sphere*, to grow the body of Christ (Eph 4:11). Harold Hoehner describes the “evangelists” as resembling modern day missionaries, “winning converts to the faith,” most likely working both inside and outside the church.¹⁹⁶ A unified church growing into maturity cannot be otherwise sustained. It is perhaps here that the application of apologetics plays its most vital role in heeding Paul’s paraenesis in Ephesians 4:1-16 and augmenting the fulfilment of the three mandates.

Summary

Tolbert Fanning once remarked that “nature is not a bridge from the visible world to the invisible.”¹⁹⁷ Sure enough, Christians are commanded to be separate from the world (2 Cor 6:17), to have their minds set on things above rather than things of the earth (Col 3:2), and that they are a chosen generation, a holy nation, and His own special people (1 Pet 2:9). There are aspects of Christian life, however, that are enriched by interaction with the *secular sphere*: honest work in, and for secular society, benevolence to all of God’s children, evangelism to those who are lost. For the most part, Christians are not called to Benedictine monasticism nor to a cloistered Essenian existence, but to

¹⁹⁵ Paul Feinberg, “A Cumulative Case Apologist’s Response: The Bible and Epistemology,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 253.

¹⁹⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 542-43.

¹⁹⁷ Tolbert Fanning, *True Method of Searching the Scriptures* (1854; repr., London: Forgotten, 2018), 9.

shine Christ's light in a dark world. Nowhere does the light of Christ shine brightest than through the radiance to be reflected by the church in the fulfillment of the three mandates: to deeply worship God, edify the body, and evangelize the world. And these pragmatic dynamics require a linking between the *sacred* and the *secular*.

The worship of God is strengthened and advanced by a deeper understanding of God and his nature, which elicits "reverence and awe" for the Creator, driving deeper love. True worship is an act of love, and love grounded in knowledge has much deeper roots than a blind love grounded in fideism. Christian apologetics and the application of apologetic knowledge drives deeper worship. However, in order to take hold of the knowledge that apologetics can render, it is imperative that the Christian build a bridge from the *sacred* to the *secular*. Likewise, the study and application of Christian apologetics can promote edification within the body, strengthening the common bond among believers so as not to be "tossed to and fro" by false teaching (Eph 4:15). Edification, and strengthening of the body through teaching and learning apologetics to help safeguard against apostasy also requires a bridge from the *sacred* to the *secular*, and apologetics is that bridge. Finally, the study and application of apologetics is an imperative to the advancement and strengthening of the church dynamic to evangelize the lost. Perhaps more so here, in evangelism, are the tools of apologetics so critical to the Christian being "a credible representative of Christ."¹⁹⁸ Just as worship of God and edification of the body, so too evangelism requires a bridging over from the *sacred* to the *secular*, and apologetics is a formidable and well-proven bridge builder.

For these reasons, and more to be presented in the next chapter, teaching Christian apologetics to the saints at Waurika church of Christ was an imperative.

¹⁹⁸ *Credible Representatives of Christ* is the Waurika church of Christ's vision statement adapted in early 2021.

Looking Forward

In chapter 4, the architecture of the apologetic bridge between the *sacred* and the *secular spheres* is presented, along with the rationale used for structuring the teaching curriculum in a *cumulative case* fashion. The intent of this particular methodology is to give the broadest perspective of foundational apologetic methodologies available to “equip the saints,” and expose church members to the incalculable benefits realized through an understanding of the cornerstones of Christian philosophy, natural and historical theology, and science, to advance the glorification of God and the exaltation of Christ through the three dynamics of the church. Chapter 4 also includes description and details of the curricula that was taught May 7 to August 13, 2023, to the adult members and invited guests of the Waurika church of Christ congregation.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

As presented in chapter 3, the study and application of Christian apologetics is essential to strengthening and fulfilling the three dynamics of the church at Waurika church of Christ as well as the churches of Christ universal. Among many of the conservative churches of Christ, however, and in keeping with the dual and parallel foci of this project, a bridge needs to be built in order to access the tools that are so vital to the enterprise of apologetics.¹ In practice, apologetics *is* that essential bridge-over. Nevertheless, to build an apologetic bridge between the *sacred* and the *secular spheres*, consideration must be given to architecture; the beams and the pillars that will form the framework of just such a bridge. In a word—methodology.

Apologetic Methodology

While there are any number of good methods available that the apologist can use in preparing a personal *apologia* (1 Pet 3:15), and to evangelize the unbeliever in the public square (Matt 28:19-20), only four of the more commonly used apologetic methods are evaluated here; the classical approach, evidentialism, presuppositionalism, and the cumulative case approach. Paul Feinberg notes, “Because a variety of epistemologies are compatible with the teaching of the Bible, a variety of apologetic approaches will have

¹ As previously described, this ministry project proceeded with a dual audience in view: primarily the congregation at Waurika church of Christ, and secondarily, but equally vital, the churches of Christ as a whole. While not all philosophical, theological, and theoretical assumptions apply equilaterally between these two foci, assumptions concerning the WCC in particular are designated as such, while the assumptions concerning the churches of Christ in general may or may not apply specifically to WCC. See chap. 1n6 for previous iteration.

legitimacy.”² Even so, rarely are these approaches practiced in their unalloyed form as most apologists augment their chosen approach with at least some elements from the multitude of other methods available. This holds especially true for the cumulative case approach which is truly an eclectic collection well-suited to customization. However, it is seldom true for presuppositionalists who tend to be more consistent in their apologetic methodology.

The Classical Approach

Among the oldest, with roots trailing back directly to the apostles, the classical approach emphasizes mankind’s ability to reason and use logic by “deducing” between different options while honoring the law of noncontradiction.³ Classical apologists employ a two-step method by first applying the principles of *deductive* reasoning to worldview questions concerning God’s existence. Typical arguments include ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, moral arguments, arguments from consciousness, and often various versions of the teleological argument (existence of God based upon design in nature).⁴ These traditional arguments together “constitute a powerful cumulative case for

² Paul Feinberg, “A Cumulative Case Apologist’s Response: The Bible and Epistemology,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 249.

³ Generally, the law of noncontradiction states that something cannot be both true and false at the same time. Based upon this simple principle, mankind at most all levels has the ability to use logic and the capacity to accurately reason to a conclusion. Aristotle actually produced three versions of his law of noncontradiction: “The first version is usually taken to be the main version of the principle and it runs as follows: ‘It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect’ (with the appropriate qualifications) (Metaph IV 3 1005b19–20).” See Paula Gottlieb, “Aristotle on Non-Contradiction,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, spring 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/aristotle-noncontradiction/>.

⁴ Although the classical arguments are considered deductive in nature, the *kalam* cosmological argument and assorted arguments from fine-tuning and from Intelligent Design are decidedly *inductive* arguments from the evidence presented through modern scientific observation and discovery.

the existence of God? . . . and provide the best answer to the question of why is there something rather than nothing; because God exists.”⁵

However, the first step in the classical method can only go so far. In other words, the classical approach can bring the unbeliever to an understanding of God through natural theology, but it does not reveal the salvific reality of Jesus and the cross. For that reason, once the case for the existence of the God of theism has been made, the classical approach needs a second step. That second step is most often the evidence-based approach, which appropriates facts from history to argue for the truth of the historical Jesus who was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead.⁶

Strengths and weaknesses. The classical approach capitalizes upon the common ground shared between believers and unbelievers. This is important because it introduces divine figures and religious doctrines only after the common ground between the believer and the unbeliever has been fully established around the strictures of rational and logical discourse. The classical approach also brings the differences among diverse worldviews to the forefront. It is at the worldview level that unbelievers are often convinced that their non-Christian worldview cannot answer all of life’s questions without running into a multitude of contradictions.⁷ Additionally, the classical approach, using a wide variety of theistic proofs, all together provides a strong case for the existence of God, *a se*.

Even though the classical arguments are sound, Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman point out that critics in general argue that by “beginning with a finite world, one

⁵ “Why is there something rather than nothing” is the famous question posed by Gottfried Leibnitz. See Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 66.

⁶ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 89.

⁷ Nancy Pearcey argues that one of five telltale signs of a false worldview is that it is internally inconsistent and therefore “commits suicide.” Nancy Pearcey, *Finding Truth: 5 Principles for Unmasking Atheism, Secularism, and Other God Substitutes* (Colorado Springs: David Cook, 2015), 48, 177-218.

cannot arrive at an infinite God.”⁸ The implication is that all theistic arguments are inherently circular.⁹ However, classical apologists counterargue that many of the theistic arguments are indeed sound and well-supported. Even so, Boa and Bowman note that any number of critics argue the structure of the classical arguments “are often exceedingly complicated and beyond the grasp of most people.”¹⁰ Finally, it has been argued that reason alone does not make something true, and that any test for truth is ultimately corrupted by the seeker’s own worldview. While this argument has some validity, human beings consistently use reason in their daily lives to ascertain truth with an exceedingly high level of confidence. With the same high level of confidence, the compelling weight of the classical theistic arguments ultimately point to the best explanation of the facts. For these reasons the classical approach has at least some elements that could provide significant support to a well-suited apologetic for the WCC as well as churches of Christ in general.

The Evidentialist Approach

The evidential approach, as the name implies, utilizes *inductive* reasoning to evaluate facts, or evidences related to historical inquiry to show the truth of Christianity. Often structured similar to a legal brief, Boa and Bowman write, “Evidentialist believe that ‘the facts speak for themselves;’ that the best approach to defending the Christian faith is to simply present the factual evidence for the crucial claims of Christ.”¹¹ The interpretation of facts leads to knowledge gained through the five senses by inductively analyzing the facts. The evidentialist approach is persuasive, in part, because people

⁸ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 133.

⁹ Edwards defines a circular argument is a type of *petition principii* argument consisting in arguing in a circle “when one proposition is defended by reference to another, and the second is defended by reference to the first.” See Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1972), 3:177.

¹⁰ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 134.

¹¹ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 155.

generally recognize as valid the legal system's ability to inductively determine truth from historical facts.

Unlike the two-step approach taken by the classical method, evidentialists follow a one-step approach, arguing for the historical Jesus who was raised as Deity proving God exists, and based upon Jesus's authority as Deity, argues for the authority of Scripture. After interpretation of the facts, a best explanation of those observed facts leads to a *probability* of truth rather than a certainty.¹²

Strengths and weaknesses. Evidence from historical inquiry provides common ground between believers and unbelievers. In fact, history often functions as a surrogate, authoritative god in nontheistic worldviews (i.e., Naturalism) claiming it provides a source of truth. In that sense, the "truths" about the world assimilated in histories can serve as strong common ground from which apologists can present how events in history best accord with a Christian worldview rather than a secular one. Since the evidentialist works from a mindset similar to a lawyer arguing a case, one strength of this approach is that it is the same familiar and widely accepted methodology found in the legal systems of the world.¹³ Likewise, Christian evidences can be quite convincing. Fourth century theologian Augustine of Hippo once said of Christian evidences, "You are deeply deceived if you think we believe in Christ without proof."¹⁴ That "proof" in the form of historical facts is a valuable commodity in any worldview. Ultimately, however, it is Christian truth that is uncovered and verified by objective historical evidence.

Yet, the historical (evidential) approach is challenged because it requires a theistic presupposition without having first argued for the existence of the God of theism.

¹² Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 159. Because of this probability characteristic, Pascal's Wager is often incorporated into the evidentialist and cumulative case arguments.

¹³ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 213

¹⁴ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *De fide rerum quae non videntur*, 5, quoted in Timothy Paul Jones, *Why Should I Trust the Bible?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019) 25.

At issue, historicity eventually hangs upon whether there exists a supernatural power who has miraculously acted in history. Even though Michael Licona argues that the determination of who raised Jesus from the dead is outside the historian's scope, the evidentialist approach assumes a theistic worldview while at the same time stating that "the facts speak for themselves." Though, facts cannot speak for themselves but require interpretation, and interpretation only occurs *through* an established worldview. In doing so, the evidential approach underestimates the limitations of anti-supernatural bias within an unbeliever since the first hurdle, the incarnation, presupposes theism evidenced by the miraculous workings of a metaphysical being followed *post haste* by the miraculous resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Notwithstanding, there are essential aspects of the evidential approach that are indispensable in support of a well-structured apologetic for the WCC, as well as the churches of Christ in general. Once again, Aquinas is correct, *ordering* of the apologetic arguments is significantly important.

The structural beams and pillars of the apologetic bridge, nonetheless, must also be of particular specifications dictated by theological considerations. Christian apologist Cornelius Van Til adamantly believed that apologetics is first a reflection of theology, writing that "systematic theology is more closely related to apologetics than are any of the other disciplines."¹⁵ In fact, critics both past and present have noted that Van Tillian apologetics is so firmly anchored in presuppositionalism that it is more accurately viewed as a "theological outlook on apologetics" rather than apologetics.¹⁶ Still, Van Til is correct: contemplation of theological commitments are of the highest order in the practice of apologetics. Certainly, the Mormon apologist no more proselytizes for the Methodist church, than does the church of Christ apologist proselytizes for Rome. Theology matters,

¹⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed., ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 23.

¹⁶ Gary Habermas, "An Evidentialist's Response," in Gundry and Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 236-48.

and it matters greatly, both theoretically and practically. Due consideration given, the presuppositionalist's bibliocentric approach to apologetics, it would seem, comports a near hand-in-glove fit with the churches of Christ's Campbellite fundamentalism.

The Presuppositional Approach

Presuppositionalism, rooted in the Reformed tradition (most significantly Van Tilian presuppositionalism), differs greatly from most other approaches by first and foremost grounding reason itself in the reality of the ontological Trinity. Timothy Paul Jones notes, "The reason that this is the case is primarily because the ontological Trinity can solve the perennial philosophical problem of the One and the Many, and it is solely this Trinitarian solution to the problem . . . that makes rational prediction possible, according to Van Til."¹⁷

Further, the presuppositional approach, grounded in Reformed epistemology, holds to the doctrines of original sin and hereditary total depravity. Consequently, on Reformed soteriology, the noetic effect of sin significantly altered man's ability to acquire knowledge of God either inductively (evidentially) or deductively (classically), rendering the acquisition of all human knowledge dependent exclusively upon special revelation from God. As a result, unredeemed man lacks sufficient intellectual capacity to autonomously reason in any sense of the word, and therefore stands in *antithesis* to the believer.¹⁸

The presuppositional approach considers the questions of God's existence and the truth of Christianity as truths revealed by God in Scripture and apprehended by believers alone. This is true, and only true, because, and only because all things cohere in the reality of the ontological Trinity. Meanwhile unbelievers, because of their totally

¹⁷ Timothy Paul Jones, "What Can a Presuppositional Apologist Use to Argue for God's Existence?" *The Apologetic Newsletter*, July 5, 2021, <https://timothypauljones.substack.com/>.

¹⁸ Van Til defines *antithesis* as the inability of the believer to find a point of contact with the unbeliever because his is totally depraved, stating that "there will be no point of contact with the natural man." Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 127.

depraved state and heavy veiled faces, are left groping in darkness unless, and until they are irresistibly and effectually touched by God's saving grace. Sure enough, Van Til argues, "All things are what they are because of their relation to the work of the triune God as reported in Scripture."¹⁹ Consequently, the believer and the unbeliever stand in both conceptual and practical antithesis to one another. Greg Bahnsen defines presuppositionalism: "The Christian gains philosophical presuppositions, not abstractly or by speculation, but concretely and directly from Scripture [antecedently from the *Author of Scripture*] at the very outset."²⁰ More comprehensively, Van Til suggests, "The best and only possible proof for the existence of such a God is that his existence is *required* for the uniformity of nature and for the coherence of all things in the world."²¹ Consequently, presuppositionalists argue that the deductive theistic arguments from the classical approach, and inductive discernment of the evidences from history in the evidentialist model, are useless when applied to the unbeliever precisely because of antithesis. John Calvin, co-progenitor of Reformed theology and early framer of presuppositional apologetics, writes,

Scripture should not be subjected "to proof and reason." Rather all human reasoning must be subjected to Scripture as from God; "therefore, illuminated by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgement. That Scripture is from God . . . we seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgement may lean, but we subject our judgement and wit to it as to a thing beyond any guesswork (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*] 1.7.5)."²²

In principle, Alexander Campbell undoubtedly agreed. As did the venerated Van Til, following in Calvin's footsteps, who considered all other apologetic methods to be useless,

¹⁹ Cornelius Van Til, "My Credo," *Reformed.Org*, accessed July 25, 2023, <https://reformed.org/apologetics/my-credo-by-cornelius-van-til/>.

²⁰ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Reading and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1998), 35n.5.

²¹ Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 133, emphasis added.

²² Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 225.

even heretical because they did not adhere to reformed theology.²³ But what is to be made of all this? Is a presuppositional apologetic method the best approach to apologetics within and for the churches of Christ?

Strengths and weaknesses. Presuppositionalism, rightly, argues from Scripture as a first principle. Indeed, it is only by God’s creative decree that human beings are endowed with the capacity to think and reason to at all. It must be said that although Campbell thought man could not reason to God aside from God’s facts conveyed through His Word in Scripture, there are significant limitations regarding the usefulness of a presuppositional approach with, and by members of the churches of Christ. Van Til was dogged in his assertion that any apologetic method must be grounded in theology.²⁴ And it is here, surprisingly, that many similarities between Van Til’s apologetic approach, Campbell’s, and subsequently many of the conservative churches of Christ today, are numbered.

Jason Matthew Murry. Jason Murry, in his doctoral thesis researching aspects of Campbell’s theology for points of contact with Van Tillian presuppositionalism, writes, “While he never used the word ‘presupposition,’ Campbell began with assumed ‘principles’ of the Bible’s unique and total authority as the sole basis for gospel success.”²⁵ Without question, Campbell relied heavily upon human deductive ability and Baconian induction to reason to the truth through the five senses alone. In fact, Campbell repeatedly argues that man can know nothing of God except through the sense’s perception of the

²³ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 29.

²⁴ Bahnsen notes, “There is a stark contrast (in principle) between traditional apologetics and presuppositionalism precisely because of the distinctive Reformed doctrines.” Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 534-35.

²⁵ Jason Matthew Murry, “Campbell and ‘Expository Apologetics’: Presuppositionalism Critiques Campbell’s ‘Original Gospel’” (DEdMin thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 56.

Bible facts, stating, “All that I know of God, and I believe all that can be known of him, is from the revelation he has given us.”²⁶ However, many miss Campbell’s assertion that reason alone cannot autonomously move a person to faith, but rather reason is bondservant to an interpretive hermeneutic through which the Holy Spirit actively unveils truth through faith and His Word. Understanding this important nuance, it can rightly be said that Campbell, very much like Van Til, presupposes God as a first principle. Indeed, Murry’s thesis argues that Campbell and his heirs have much in common with Van Tillian presuppositionalism.

To determine the similarities, Murry extracts Campbell’s apologetic methodology from his theological work *The Christian System*, among various other writings, juxtaposing Campbell’s approach to that of Van Til’s, along with John Frame’s, and Voddie Bucham Jr.’s, to gain insight into a potential *point of contact* between the Campbellites and Reformed Christians.²⁷ Of the comparison, Murry concludes, “At least five points of substantive agreement on practical presuppositionalism, with one significant disagreement in the area of antithesis” exists between the methods of Campbell and Van Til.²⁸ Finally, Murry, a Campbellite-heritage minister himself, concludes the thesis by posing the questions: “Can a believer merely reason with an unbeliever, even if the reason is God’s? Can ‘Bible facts’ convert? Can a hardened skeptic be led to faith primarily through fully biblical arguments, on the theory that the arguments are God’s ideas?” Murry proceeds to answer his own questions with a resounding “no,” then follows with a warning: “Campbellites need to hear and consider this answer. To expect God’s reasoning in the Bible, as reasoning, to overcome unbelief as reasoning, is to fail to defend the biblical

²⁶ Alexander Campbell, “To ‘An Occasional Reader,’” *Christian Baptist* 3, no 4 (November 1825): 197.

²⁷ For present concerns, only Murry’s comparison of Van Til to Campbell is considered here. The phrase *point of contact* is Van Tillian speak for common ground. See Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 99-100, 114-21.

²⁸ See Murry, “Campbell and ‘Expository Apologetics,’” 101.

gospel.”²⁹ Murry closes his thesis with these words: “Campbell’s heirs should take note, and be warned of the dangers of adopting unbiblical or antibiblical presuppositions buried in the formal acceptance and use of human reason. Antithesis exists, and it makes reason less a door to be passed than a barrier to be broken.”³⁰

Arminialite soteriology. Murry’s exercise in *human reasoning* is most informative. But more than that Murry displays the importance of Van Til’s axiom: theology matters—and it matters greatly. Campbell was not Reformed, though he detested all theological “systems of speculation” often lumping Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Arminians in a single group of “speculators.” Interestingly, his own theology was essentially a soteriologically nuanced form of Arminianism. Campbell historian John Mark Hicks notes that Campbell not only adhered to a “classic Arminian approach to the problem of evil,” but also his “Arminian soteriology emphasized human freedom within a high view of divine providence.”³¹ The Campbellite expression of Arminian theology can conveniently be termed *Arminialite theology*.³² Arminialite theology first and foremost rejects the doctrines of original sin, total hereditary depravity, and predestination. Campbell is quite clear upon the matter of original sin, writing in his theological treatise, *The Chrisitan System*,

²⁹ Murry, “Campbell and ‘Expository Apologetics,’” 102.

³⁰ Murry, “Campbell and ‘Expository Apologetics,’” 104.

³¹ John Mark Hicks, “Gratuitous Evil and Meticulous Providence in the Thought of Alexander Campbell” (paper presented at Christian Scholars Conference, Lynchburg, VA., 2012), accessed August 4, 2023, [www.https://johnmarkhicks.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2013/campbell-and-theodicy.pdf](https://johnmarkhicks.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2013/campbell-and-theodicy.pdf).

³² *Arminialite theology* originates with the author and is the portmanteau formed by the joining of the terms Arminian, and Campbellite into one word. It is the Kerlian term given to the theology of Alexander Campbell, and subsequently most all the churches of Christ. Unquestionably, Campbell’s theology, in the words of Royal Humbert, “is turned toward Arminianism,” except for a few soteriological points held somewhat uniquely by the churches of Christ. Royal Humbert, *A Compend of Alexander Campbell’s Theology* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1961), 11. True to Arminian theology, most of the churches of Christ, hold to the Arminian five points, differing in the ordering of salvation and the effectualness of immersion baptism for the remission of sins, hence, *Arminialite*. See also “Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations” section in chap. 1 of this project for a complete definition.

In Adam all have sinned; therefore “in Adam all die.” Your nature, gentle reader, not your person, was in Adam when he put forth his hand to break the precept of Jehovah. You did not personally sin in that act; but your nature, then in the person of your father, sinned against the Author of your existence. . . . There is therefore a sin of our nature as well as personal transgression. Some *inappositely* call the sin of our nature our “original sin,” as if the sin of Adam was the personal offense of all his children. . . . But until man in his present preternatural state *believes the gospel* report of his sins, and *submits* to Jesus Christ as the only Mediator and Savior of sinners, it is impossible for him to do anything absolutely pleasing to God.³³

In Arminialite theology man is corrupt in nature but is not personally guilty of Adam’s sin. As a result, man is not hereditarily totally depraved of his faculty to accurately reason to a logical conclusion. Campbell’s epistemology, rooted in the Enlightenment thought of Bacon, Locke, and Reid, and undergirded by Common-Sense Realism, argues that human freewill dictates human cooperation with the common grace of God. In fact, Arminialite theology is Semi-Pelagian tinted in the sense that it holds what William Robinson argues is a “synergistic doctrine of grace; the active co-operation of the will of man with the free grace of God.”³⁴ Campbell argues that God’s Word is addressed to human’s understanding and to the reasoning capabilities of man to discriminate between truth and falsehood by his own intellectual abilities. Indeed, Robinson maintains that all of those who have followed in Campbell’s footsteps have always maintained that “men must cooperate with God in winning salvation which is offered.”³⁵ Similarly, in reply to a subscriber’s query printed in *The Christian Baptist*, Campbell writes,

It is no gospel to proclaim, that “God from all eternity elected a few individuals to everlasting life; that these few of Adam’s progeny are all that he loved; the rest he doomed permissively to everlasting death; for the few elect ones, and for these only, his Son was born, lived and died. These only he effectually calls, these he quickens by his Holy Spirit, and these shall, in spite of all opposition, persevere to the end and be saved.” I say to this honest front of Calvinism, how true soever the

³³ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians, and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Pled in the Current Reformation* (1839; repr., London: Forgotten Books, 2019), 25-26, emphasis added.

³⁴ William Robinson, *What Churches of Christ Stand For* (Birmingham: Brean, 1946), 52.

³⁵ Robinson, *What the Churches of Christ Stand For*, 52n1.

metaphysics, is not the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord, and all the text which are brought to prove it are either wrested, perverted, or misapplied.³⁶

Arminialite theology holds that men are not predestined but are compelled to “chose this day whom ye will serve” (Josh 24:15 KJV). Thomas Aquinas once wrote, “Man has free-will: otherwise, counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would be in vain,” rendering Scripture unnecessary.³⁷ Importantly, *pace* Van Til, it is by virtue of man made in God’s own image that presupposes free moral agency.³⁸ Dave Miller observes that the Bible repeatedly “exhorts readers to use sound reasoning and rational thought: (Isa 1:18; 1 Thess 5:21; 1 John 4:11; Acts 17:3; 18:26; 26:25, *ad infinitum*).”³⁹ Likewise, Campbell, in true Lockean fashion, reasoned that if man were “spiritually dead as a stone,” and if it were only by the action of the Holy Spirit upon the elect, then all the evidences and all the truth revealed in Scripture “is quite unnecessary.”⁴⁰ Speaking again of man’s free will obligations, Campbell said, “Every man’s destiny forever depend[s] upon his own choice: if he must be judged for himself, he must think and choose for himself is as sound logic, as sound theology, as ever preached.”⁴¹ In fact, Hicks argues that Campbell’s free will argument is “similar to Plantinga’s ‘Free Will Defense’ in that God cannot ‘make an infallible fallible creature; and to make an infallible creature would undermine the moral purposes for which God

³⁶ Alexander Campbell, “To Amicus,” *Christian Baptist* 3, no. 12 (July 1826): 254.

³⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars, 50–119*. Translated by Fr. Laurence Shapcote, (Lander, WY: Emmaus, 2017), 318. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1738872>.

³⁸ John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (1892; repr., New South Wales, Australia: Wentworth, 2020), 1:437.

³⁹ Dave Miller, *Plotting the Strait: A Guidebook for Assessing Change in the Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain, 2006), 115.

⁴⁰ Campbell, “To Amicus,” 254.

⁴¹ Alexander Campbell, “Tracts for the People, No. VII,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 3, 3, no. 6 (June 1847): 310.

created the universe.”⁴² However, Campbell consistently argued that man can know nothing aside from God’s revealed Word, nor can he originate the idea of God from nature, because “*it is impossible for man to originate any of those supernatural ideas which are developed in the Christian religion.*”⁴³ And it is through the senses, reading the facts in God’s Word alone, that the Spirit influences men revealing to the unbelieving reader spiritual truths. It is then incumbent upon the reader to determine whether to trust in God or suppress the truth. Consequently, the epistemic distance between believer and unbeliever in Arminian soteriology is negligible, thus providing broad common ground and therefore a broad point of contact between mutual bearers of God’s image. In Arminian soteriology, C. Leonard Allen suggests that Divine agency in conversion is “an ‘unbreakable chain’ of cause and effect. It begins with ‘gospel fact,’ then testimony to those facts, belief of testimony, obedience, then appropriate feelings or ‘affections.’”⁴⁴

Calvinistic versus Arminian epistemology. Van Til applied the concept of antithesis to a wide range of topics but perhaps to none more extensively than apologetics. Van Til’s former student and biographer, John Frame, said, “Van Til promoted the concept of antithesis as a key to apologetics and even to the prosecution of differences between Christians.”⁴⁵ Frame observes, “In some respects Van Til’s entire apologetic may be seen as a rethinking of the nature and implications of ‘antithesis.’”⁴⁶ Taken to its

⁴² Hicks, “Gratuitous Evil and Meticulous Providence.”

⁴³ Alexander Campbell and Robert Owen, *The Evidences of Christianity: A Debate between Robert Owen, of New Lanark, Scotland, and Alexander Campbell, President of Bethany College, Virginia, Containing an Examination of the “Social System,” and all the Systems of Skepticism of Ancient and Modern Times* (1829; repr., St. Louis: Christian, 1906), 89, emphasis original.

⁴⁴ C. Leonard Allen, *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ in (and After) the Modern Age*, (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood, 2004), 76.

⁴⁵ John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995), 43-44.

⁴⁶ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 42.

logical conclusion, presuppositional apologists such as Greg Bahnsen cannot but conclude,

The traditional method of apologetics was constructed by Roman Catholics and Arminians. It was, so to speak, made to fit Romanist or Evangelical theology. And since Roman Catholic and Evangelical theology compromises the Protestant doctrines of Scripture, of God, of man, of sin and redemption, so the traditional method of apologetics compromises Christianity in order to win men to acceptance of it.⁴⁷

It seems presuppositionalists of this vein ungraciously build a straw-man argument against Libertarian free-will, then, not only is the strawman toppled over but is pounded and ground into detritus for so many worms. Once again, theology matters greatly.

Despite Bahnsen's declaration, J. V. Fesko speaks with a nuance indicating at least some compatibility exists between classical Reformed apologetics and Arminialite theology:

The Bible does not portray fallen humanity as existing in complete epistemological antithesis with believers at every point. To be sure, we have an antithetical relationship with the unbelieving world every time they suppress the truth in unrighteousness, whether that truth is revealed through general or special revelation. But this antithesis does not eradicate common notions . . . antithesis does not eradicate common grace.⁴⁸

Upon this common ground, by the common grace of God, the bases may be sunk for constructing the apologetic bridge; a necessary bridge that can prove so fruitful for churches of Christ internal strengthening and evangelistic efforts in the twenty-first century.

Presuppositionalism and the churches of Christ. Murry has much good to say, and his historical research is exceptional. Further, he is perfect in his claim that all true knowledge comes from God. However, theological differences between Arminialite and Reformed epistemology, anthropology, and soteriology, are much more extensive than antithesis alone, as made abundantly clear first by the Remonstrance of 1610, and then

⁴⁷ Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 559-60.

⁴⁸ J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 120.

leading up to, and at, Dort (1618-19). These two theologies are in fact antithetical on all five salvific points. To be sure, regardless of the veridicality of a presuppositional apologetic methodology, its practice in the churches of Christ, could be considered theologically absurd being, as Mark Linville asserts, “born of a tension between two incongruent things.”⁴⁹ Evangelizing a biblical skeptic with a presuppositional methodology, it would seem, are “two incongruent things” with little hope for success. Murry fails to see that this incongruence forms two horns of a dilemma: one horn being that a presuppositional approach aligns exactly with the current “empty cupboard” apologetic methodology for the Arminialite grounded churches of Christ; and the other horn being that presuppositional fundamentalism is useless in building a bridge from the *sacred* to the *secular* in order to engage the critic from common ground. Indeed, Molly Worthen notes, “Van Til shuts down open-minded exchanges before they can begin.”⁵⁰

Above and beyond that, for all the Van Tillian language about the totality of Scripture and the presupposition of God, Reformed theology never seems to move far from human contrivances. Van Til notes, “It was therefore, not until the fully developed Trinitarian theology of Calvin . . . that there was therewith developed a truly Christian methodology of theology and apologetics.”⁵¹ Similarly (having taken great pains to this point in expounding Arminialite iconoclasm regards creeds), Van Til’s words here seem rather contextually awkward: “*Only* in the Reformed creeds do we find the spirit of Christ to be an essential part of the work of Christ in saving his sheep.”⁵² Followed to its logical conclusion, one is left to wonder if Van Til was unable to produce a “this saith the Lord,”

⁴⁹ Mark Linville claims, “The absurd is born of tension between two incongruent things.” Mark Linville, “The Moral Argument,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (West Sussex, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 445.

⁵⁰ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University, 2014), 30.

⁵¹ Van Til, “My Credo.”

⁵² Van Til, “My Credo,” emphasis added.

or otherwise adequately find “the spirit of Christ” working to save His sheep from *within the Scriptures alone* that he presupposes rather than turning to humanly contrived confessional creeds. Nevertheless, the present intent is not polemical, but informational concerning the points of contact, suggested by Murry, between Van Tillian Reformed apologetics and Campbell’s Arminialite apologetic, for it seems those potential points of contact begin to wither upon closer scrutiny.

Ironically, the conservative churches of Christ are self-hindered being same-structured both ontologically and epistemologically by dint of *nuda scriptura* to a functional presuppositional apologetic method. This methodology, based exclusively upon an Arminialite biblical hermeneutic, yields no “common ground” from which to engage the biblical skeptic. Hence, the need for an apologetic bridge that can bring philosophy, history, and natural theology to bear, is manifold. Christian apologist Douglas Groothuis contends there is a great danger in denying general revelation and its use for natural theology, for denying its use tends to separate Scripture from nature and faith from reason: “Fideism or irrationalism is often the result, thus crippling apologetic endeavors.”⁵³ Campbell’s attempt to resolve the dilemma can be seen in his formulation of an ontological/cosmological hybrid argument that has been coined “the revealed-idea argument.” However, Christian philosopher J. Caleb Clanton notes that Campbell’s formulation was constrained by his epistemic and hermeneutical commitments that dictated his revealed-idea argument rely upon “a premise that could only be endorsed by presupposing the truth of the revealed text.”⁵⁴ Although Campbell’s argument is not question-begging, nor is it illogical, presupposing the *idea* does presuppose an *idea-Giver* established through special revelation. Once again Campbell’s, as well as most later

⁵³ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case of Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2022), 171.

⁵⁴ J. Caleb Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2013), 29.

Restoration leader's *hermeneutical spiral* always commences from and terminates in *nuda scriptura*.⁵⁵ Regardless of the anti-natural theological sentiments, there has never been a conflict between natural revelation and special revelation—to claim a conflict is to claim a conflict existing *within* the Simple, Divine Author of both.⁵⁶ Likewise, Lord Brougham compactly states, “Revelation cannot be true if Natural Religion is false.”⁵⁷ However, as is always the case, God is the perfect Artificer presenting his *apologia* of himself to Job, calling upon evidence to support his argument exclusively from the witness of nature.⁵⁸

Presuppositionalism and contextual limitations. Needless to say, because of the exclusivity of an Arminialite theology, firmly established in *nuda scriptura*, a Van Tillian presuppositional approach to apologetics becomes functionally indistinguishable from the same exegetically derived expository method that has been practiced in the churches of Christ since the apologetically anemic days of Tolbert Fanning. Rather than building bridges, teaching presuppositional apologetics could not help but further drive anti-intellectualism through isolating members from potential knowledge and apologetic

⁵⁵ A *hermeneutical spiral* is a biblical interpretive paradigm that asserts the interpreter always approaches the biblical text with incalculated “preunderstandings” that are subject to and bound to change in response to new understandings gleaned from study of a particular passage. See William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 240. Corrupted hermeneutical spirals are interpretive paradigms that are so subject biased by the interpreter’s preunderstanding that the text in question never demands a modification to the preunderstanding but rather fortifies it, and only so. Theological systems built upon *nuda scriptura* are invariably bound to yield a corrupted hermeneutical spiral that often results from the exclusivism of a “just me and my Bible” approach. Such paradigms are hermeneutical lemniscates (infinity sign, ∞) rather than spirals; always beginning and ending in the same place.

⁵⁶ *Simple*, i.e., the indivisible attribute of simplicity. See William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 274-275.

⁵⁷ Henry Lord Brougham, *A Discourse of Natural Theology: Showing the Nature of the Evidences and the Advantages of the Study* (1835 repr., London: Wentworth, n.d.), 126.

⁵⁸ See appendix 9, “A Sermon—Scriptural Warrant for Utility of Natural Theology” for commentary upon the sustained argument from natural theology that God presents to Job in Job 38-41.

tools to be gained from the secular sphere of philosophy, history, and science.⁵⁹ Further, a presuppositional methodology “assumes a rigidly dogmatic Calvinism” in direct opposition to a libertarian freewill, a tempered view of post-lapsarian depravity, and an Arminialite soteriology held within the churches of Christ.⁶⁰ Therefore, teaching presuppositional apologetics to the WCC would have been inscrutable and *reducio ad absurdum* because it cannot build a bridge to the secular sphere.⁶¹ For these reasons, the exercise of presuppositional apologetics in the churches of Christ is gravely challenged to dispel the charge of perpetuating anti-intellectualism, and is poorly fitted to build a bridge between the sacred and the secular spheres.

Nonetheless, it is a distinguishing beauty mark of the cumulative case approach that although it may begin in the *secular sphere*, it does not end with the reasoning of man but ends in the *sacred sphere* with the Word of God. That is the ultimate goal—to draw broken souls within the “understanding distance” of God.⁶² Therefore, for the churches of Christ holding an Arminialite theology, a cumulative case apologetic method ending in an argument for the authority of Scripture makes for a most satisfactory base and pillar of the apologetic bridge.

⁵⁹ Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 30-31.

⁶⁰ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 331.

⁶¹ It bears reiteration, a robust cumulative case should progress toward the zenith presentation of Holy Scripture alone as God’s inerrant, inspired, sufficient, and authoritative Word in all matters of faith and salvation. Any apologetic that falls short of this pinnacle goal is an incomplete, inept, and worthless methodology. To be sure, apologetic methods may start with diverse arguments, but *all* methods must end in Scripture alone.

⁶² Campbell said that there is an “understanding distance” with respect to God. All persons beyond that distance “cannot understand God; all within it can easily in that matter of piety and morality. Through God’s Word alone one moves into this understanding distance.” See Alexander Campbell, “Tracts for the People No III,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 3, 3, no. 1 (January 1846): 23-24.

The Cumulative Case Approach

Needless to say, all people are not persuaded by the same propositions. This holds true for almost all things in life. The same is true regarding persuading someone to consider the truth claims of Christianity. Boa and Bowman add, “Because we are all culturally conditioned in different ways, it is inevitable that some of us will be more impressed with one evidential approach than another.”⁶³ The same can be said for apologetic arguments across the board. As mentioned, to broaden the appeal of a particular methodology, one effective option is to hybridize an apologetic approach by combining elements from the various methods. Using a cumulative case that borrows from both the classical and evidential approaches often appeals to a wider range of people, significantly increasing efficacy and persuasion with the classical appealing to reason and the evidential approach appealing to facts from history. Ultimately, aspects of the presuppositional approach are employed as well to reinforce the case for Christianity. For this reason, a hybrid approach that utilizes aspects from all these approaches makes for a much stronger case. This hybrid methodology is best described as a cumulative case approach because of the compounding effect of accumulating arguments.

The cumulative case utilizes the best aspects of all the other approaches to maximize effectiveness while minimizing the burden placed upon any one argument standing alone. In this way, each argument has a limited scope of work (brush strokes) to accomplish, meaning the sum of the arguments is not linear and is not the sum of a series of individual <0.5 probabilities, but something potentially much greater as a collective. Timothy Paul Jones writes, “Evidence for Christian faith is an intricate web of interconnected truths scattered across the cosmos and throughout history. Taken in isolation, any one of these truths might have a multiplicity of explanations but, together,

⁶³ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 147.

they reveal a beautifully reasoned and well-evidenced confession.”⁶⁴ Additionally, the preponderance of the cumulative case evidence furnishes a logical ordering and cohesive structure beginning with what can be observed in creation then moving on to more specific and complex arguments.

The Contextually Preferred Approach

Although there are several apologetic methods, there are only two broad logical starting points: either argue for the authority of Scripture first, then argue for everything Scripture says about God, Jesus, and the resurrection; or argue for the existence of God using external sources, then having established theism as true, argue to the truthfulness of Scripture through the resurrection of the historical Jesus as Deity. The former creates an undue burden by starting the argument precisely at the point that many unbelievers have the greatest difficulty—believing that the Bible is true and authoritative; while the latter begins with one of the better apologetic arguments—the *kalam* cosmological argument.⁶⁵

Belief or unbelief in God is the foundational belief by which all other beliefs are buoyed. Therefore, arguing from the existence of God to the authority of Scripture is more functional than arguing from Scripture to God. Once an unbeliever has accepted that there is a Supreme Being and has changed his worldview to accommodate the existence of the God of theism, then subsequent arguments for Christianity, including the miraculous, are more readily accepted. Even so, changing the unbeliever’s understanding of reality regarding the existence of God is a massive paradigm shift. The stepwise progression through the *kalam* argument would seem to give the unbeliever opportunity to digest the

⁶⁴ Although Jones is arguing for a Transcendental approach, the same can be said for the strengths of a cumulative case method. See Timothy Paul Jones, “What Can Non-Christians Know about God Through Nature and Natural Reason?” *The Apologetic Newsletter*, July 5, 2021, <https://timothypauljones.substack.com/>.

⁶⁵ For further discussion regarding these two approaches see Habermas, “An Evidentialist’s Response,” 189-90.

first two premises before being confronted with the radical worldview change of accepting the conclusion; that the universe had a Cause.

The unbeliever is then presented with the teleological argument, and the moral argument, (perhaps others) that all reinforce the same conclusion. Using this particular approach, it is only after the unbeliever has been exposed to the cumulative evidence for an omnipotent God that the miracle of the incarnation and the resurrection are presented. Although Aquinas opposed the *kalam* version of the cosmological argument, Thomistic apologetics recognized the criticality of properly ordering the arguments 750 years ago. Aquinas, in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, writes, “Against the Jews we are able to argue by means of the Old Testament, while against the heretics we are able to argue by means of the New Testament. But the mohammadans and the pagans accept neither the one nor the other. We must, therefore, have recourse to the natural reason, to which all men are forced to give their ascent.”⁶⁶ This particular ordering of the arguments from observations in nature, to God’s existence, to the miraculous resurrection of Jesus would seem to be the most logical approach to take, especially with the Bible skeptic.

Anthony Flew, the atheist who later in life turned to God, observed that most apologetic arguments, standing alone, are weak for one reason or another, and that grouping weak arguments together does not make the argument any stronger. Flew considered grouping weak arguments together to be analogous to “ten leaky buckets.”⁶⁷ Critical of the classical and evidential approaches for this reason, Flew stated, “If one leaky bucket will not hold water, there is no reason to think that ten can.”⁶⁸ The solution, Douglas Geivett argues, is “a cumulative case for the existence of God [such that] the emphasis is not merely upon a steady accretion of plausibility on behalf of theism but

⁶⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2014), 62.

⁶⁷ Anthony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2005), 73.

⁶⁸ Flew, *God and Philosophy*, 73.

also upon the filling out of the specific content of theism as this is required by a wide range of phenomena calling for explanation.”⁶⁹

For these reasons, and to better explain the phenomena, the apologetics curriculum presented to the WCC apologetics class moved from general to the particular, creating momentum and direction; like having arms that reach out, pressing questions forward, and reaffirming answers backwards.⁷⁰ Like adding brushstrokes to a Christian worldview portrait, the cumulative case presentation moved from “God exists,” to “Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior,” to God’s Word “breathed out.” So, the resplendency of the cumulative case started with a general argument for God, then the arguments progressed to explain more particular created features observed in the world. Douglas Geivett observes that the result of proceeding this manner was that “our conception of the general explanation [presented] at the first stage of the argument becomes more and more complete.”⁷¹ Like the addition of brush strokes to a painting, the worldview portrait brought the image into sharper and sharper relief with each interconnected and progressive offering, all the while honoring Arminialite theological commitments.

Structure of the Class Series

Having selected the cumulative case approach as the preferred methodology for the current task at hand, attention turned to various and salient logistical details concerning the apologetics class taught to the saints at the Waurika church of Christ.

⁶⁹ Douglas Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: A Challenge to John Hick’s Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1995), 95.

⁷⁰ Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein, and Russell Durst, *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 3rd ed. (New York: WW Norton, 2014), 107-8.

⁷¹ Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God*, 95.

Logistical Details

With a view toward fostering the best possible learning outcome, much consideration was given to logistical pre-planning, including accommodations for Sunday School teachers who desired to participate, church bulletin inserts promoting the class series, as well as the employment of Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level scoring as an efficacious guideline during the writing of all class material and handouts. Advance efforts also included table and seating arrangement, wall décor, and student notebooks.

Advance efforts. Church bulletin inserts were created and made available before each Sunday morning worship service beginning six weeks prior to the start of the apologetic class series. These inserts included the class series schedule and location, as well as introductory information about apologetics and its function in Christian life. In total, three separate and distinct inserts were created, each appearing for two weeks. Additionally, because of the educational diversity of the student body, considerable thought was given to maximizing comprehension of both the written and oral material that was presented. To that end, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level assessment tool was utilized targeting a grade level 9 for all written and assembled class material. Grade level 9 corresponded appropriately to the theorized maximum Cognitive Loading Level.⁷² While the target Flesch-Kincaid level was set at 9, the average grade level for the series curriculum was 9.2, with a min/max of 7.4, and 11.2 respectively (see table 1).

To allow Sunday school teachers to participate, the eldership suggested and approved audiovisual recordings to be made of each class session to be posted to the church website. In that way, Sunday school teachers who desired to participate could watch the weekly video recordings. In addition, personal letters were sent to each teacher

⁷² Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, giving due consideration to the limited attentional resources available, states, "Since we can only process a limited amount of information at any one time, it is very important to avoid overloading attention which has implications for how we design presentations, write textbooks, and create multimedia materials." See Yana Weinstein and Megan Sumeracki, *Understanding How We Learn: A Visual Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 52.

inviting them to join the class “remotely” and to participate in the initial and final class surveys. Members who missed class sessions were encouraged to “makeup” the class by viewing the recording from the church website.⁷³ Several session recordings received a considerable number of views with some students commenting that they viewed the recordings even if they had attended class in order to hear the presentation a second time.

Table 1. Attendance statistics

Recording Views					
Date		Title	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	Attendance	Recording Views
5/7/2023	Class	<i>Introduction</i>	8.2	46	67
5/14/2023	AM Sermon	<i>Without Excuse</i>	7.4	—	32
5/14/2023	Class	<i>Kalam Cosmological pt 1</i>	8.9	56	66
5/14/2023	PM Sermon	<i>Philosophy According to Paul</i>	8.8	—	39
5/21/2023	Class	<i>Kalam Cosmological pt 2</i>	8.9	43	108
5/28/2023	Class	<i>Teleological pt 1</i>	11.2	49	43
6/4/2023	Class	<i>Teleological pt 2 / Mind</i>	11.2/8.4	50	30
6/11/2023	Class	<i>Moral</i>	8.4	48	42
6/18/2023	Class	<i>Resurrection pt 1</i>	10.7	52	34
6/25/2023	Class	<i>Resurrection pt 2</i>		54	65
7/2/2023	Class	<i>Resurrection pt 3</i>		50	34
7/9/2023	Class	<i>Resurrection pt 4</i>		49	33
7/16/2023	Class	<i>Resurrection pt 5</i>		57	43
7/23/2023	Class	<i>Resurrection pt 6</i>		53	33
7/30/2023	Class	<i>Resurrection pt 7</i>		49	28
8/6/2023	Class	<i>Scripture pt 1</i>	9.6	52	17
8/13/2023	Class	<i>Scripture pt 2</i>		52	13
8/20/2023	Class	<i>Review and Final Survey</i>	—	45	—

Note: Final tally of the lesson recording “views” was taken on Monday, August 21, 2023, the day after the post-curriculum surveys were completed.

⁷³ As an aspect of the limitations/delimitations of the project, and due consideration given the cumulative and linearly progressive nature of the curriculum, students failing to either attend in person or view the video recordings of at least 12 of the 15 class sessions were ineligible to participate in the post-curriculum survey.

Considerable thought was also given to the seating arrangement that would best facilitate both presentation and learning. To that end, the seating arrangement was changed from a “III” shaped configuration to a modified chevron which accomplished three important goals.⁷⁴ First, the seating change to a chevron configuration rightly emphasized the television screen projecting the PowerPoint presentation as the focal point of the classroom. Second, the seating change complemented the lecture style of the presentation reducing *ad hoc* interruptions, as well as impressing upon the conscious a sense of importance. The change in seating configuration also served to breakup traditional “cliques” and fostered new relationships and edification.⁷⁵ Further, substantial consideration was given to maximizing the learning experience through choosing the correct andragogical approach.

Andragogical Theory

Albert Einstein said of his learning habits that he typically thought “in terms of images and only reproduced his thoughts in words and equations” after he had conceptualized the thought visually.⁷⁶ Although Einstein was brilliant, his learning habit was not unique. In fact, Dugan Laird states that Sensory Stimulation Theory argues “for people to change [learn], they must invest their senses in the process.”⁷⁷ Research shows that the predominate sense stressed during the learning event, *à la* Einstein, is sight: “Advocates of the sensory-stimulus approach maintain that 75 percent of what adults know was acquired through the eyes. They credit hearing with about 13 percent,” and the

⁷⁴ Dugan Laird, *Approaches to Training and Development*, 2nd ed. (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1985), 201, fig. 12.17.

⁷⁵ Laird, *Approaches to Training and Development*, 196.

⁷⁶ Dale H. Schunk, *Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective*, 6th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 214.

⁷⁷ Laird, *Approaches to Training and Development*, 114.

remaining “12 percent they credit to touch, smell, or taste.”⁷⁸ Accordingly, these numbers place a didactic teaching format that relies heavily upon lecture presentation, at a considerable disadvantage. Even more concerning for the lecturer is that students retain only 30 percent of what they *see* as opposed to 70 percent retention of what students both *see* and *hear*.⁷⁹ Consequently, to maximize the learning experience of the WCC apologetics class, various sensate stimuli triggers were incorporated to compliment the auditory stimulation provided by the lecture. First, a 319-slide PowerPoint presentation (visual) was created to visually stimulate and facilitate retention, as well as to complement the 192 transcript pages of lecture (auditory).

Second, 75 linear feet of the classroom walls, in progressive and *cumulative* fashion, were decorated with graphics (visual) corresponding to each apologetic argument, and was chosen for their “expressive quality.”⁸⁰ These graphics ranged from short quotations to images and graphics⁸¹ “to blend the informational with the aesthetic.”⁸² Indeed, Judit Hortovanyi observes, “In our cognition the visual and the conceptual parts integrate each other. Pictures can convey such complex notions that the verbal cannot.”⁸³ Moreover, the utility of the wall graphics lie in their ability to convey the often-abstract

⁷⁸ Laird, *Approaches to Training and Development*, 114.

⁷⁹ Laird, *Approaches to Training and Development*, 114.

⁸⁰ Monika Jovanovic notes, “The term ‘expressive quality’ pertains to the emotional components of an artwork.” In that same spirit, some wall graphic and PowerPoint images were chosen for their ability to elicit an emotional response; perhaps a “sixth sense” as they relate to learning and memory. See Monika Jovanovic, “Seeing Paintings as They Are: Cognitivity of Aesthetic Qualities,” in *The Power of the Image*, ed. Andras Benedek and Kristof Nyiri (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 2014), 129.

⁸¹ Wall graphics and images were included solely to comment and critique as allowed under the fair-use provision of US copyright law: “The fair-use of copyrighted work . . . for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, . . . scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright.” US Code §107, Litigations on exclusive rights: Fair use.

⁸² Agnes Veszelszki, “Information Visualization: Infographics from a Linguistic Point of View,” in Benedek and Nyiri, *The Power of the Image*, 101.

⁸³ Judit Hortovanyi, “Visual Representation as Self-expression in Pedagogical Practice: Possible Explanations of Adolescents’ Symbol Drawings,” in Benedek and Nyiri, *The Power of the Image*, 161.

ideas of philosophical propositions using concrete (visual) examples.⁸⁴ The wall graphics posted biweekly and covering only one lesson each, paralleled the weekly, forward-looking trajectory being pursued by a cumulative case approach.⁸⁵ Third, each student was given a three-ring binder (tactile/visual), which was populated in progressive and *cumulative* fashion with handouts distributed one week in advance of each apologetic argument.⁸⁶ By the end of the class series the notebooks contained 116 pages of lesson outline notes and supplementals for each student to read, touch, and see.

Finally, and harkening back to elementary school pedagogical tactics, various topically germane “show and touch” objects were strategically passed around the room during the class series, eliciting many smiles, to facilitate tactile sensory stimulation.⁸⁷ Jestng aside, Dale Schrunk notes the benefit of combining sensory perceptions: “Allowing students to hold the shapes fosters understanding.”⁸⁸ While advocates of Sensory Stimulation Theory point out that the more senses that are stimulated the greater the retention, the olfactory and gustatory senses could not be accommodated.⁸⁹ All told, and in light of the remarkable benefits of sensory stimulation upon cognition, considerable effort was made to saturate the senses through environmental aesthetics and appeal to the

⁸⁴ Abstract ideas such as the impossibility of traversing an infinite number of temporal events, irreducibly complex systems, and the body/soul duality of human beings are examples of abstract ideas that were given concrete expression within the classroom wall graphics décor. For more on concrete examples see Weinstein and Sumeracki, *Understanding How We Learn*, 108.

⁸⁵ The biweekly addition of wall graphics not only added to the “cumulative” and progressive sense of the class series, but biweekly postings also served to reinforce cognitive loading considerations. See Weinstein and Sumeracki, *Understanding How We Learn*, 114.

⁸⁶ See appendix 8, “Waurika Church of Christ Christian Apologetics Class Series Lesson Handouts,” for an outline of the course, which also served as lesson handouts for the student binders.

⁸⁷ Objects passed around the classroom included Egyptian papyrus paper, mousetraps, Apple Snail shells, a disassembled wristwatch in a clear acrylic box, a copy of a harmonized gospel, a copy of the Jewish Tanakh, and a copy of Aland and Aland, *Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft*, Greek New Testament.

⁸⁸ Schrunk, *Learning Theories*, 215.

⁸⁹ Laird, *Approaches to Training and Development*, 114.

maximum number of sensate faculties as part of the class series learning experience. No doubt, the sensate empiricists Locke, Reid, and Campbell would have been well pleased!

With preliminary efforts in place, teaching of the class series began May 7, 2023.⁹⁰

The Apologetics Class Series Curriculum

The apologetic class series consisted of an introduction and initial survey, as lesson 1, followed by six cumulative case arguments for the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity over a fifteen-week period. Week 16 entailed a high-level review, open discussion, and administration of the final survey. What follows is an overview of each of the six lessons.

Lesson 1: Introduction and Initial Survey

The apologetics class series began with a short introduction followed by the pre-curriculum class survey.⁹¹ After the completion of the survey, the introduction resumed, bringing attention to the general concept of *Weltanschauungs*, or worldviews, which Kenneth Samples describes as “that cluster of beliefs a person holds about the most significant issues in life; such as God, the cosmos, knowledge, values, humanity, and history.”⁹² Once again, Alexander Campbell defines worldview in a most applicable fashion when he posits three questions which every worldview must answer: “What am I? Whence came I? Whither do I go?”⁹³ The presentation of “Michael and his dilemma”

⁹⁰ All environmental changes, wall graphics, seating arrangements, video recordings, writing the Sunday School teachers, etc., were proposed by the author and preapproved by the Waurika church of Christ eldership over the course of six elder meetings prior to starting class.

⁹¹ See appendix 1 for the initial pre-curriculum survey.

⁹² Kenneth R. Samples, *A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-Claims to the Worldview Test* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 20.

⁹³ Alexander Campbell, “Christianity the True Philosophy, No. I,” *Millennial Harbinger*, series 4, 7, no. 8 (September 1857): 481.

as the personification of the unbeliever's worldview became the hypothetical focal point of the class series. Michael, serving as interlocutor for the class series, does not believe that the Bible is God's authoritative Word, that Christianity is true, or for that matter that the God of theism exists, and *that* is Michael's dilemma; he does not believe.⁹⁴

Obviously, Michael is closed to a presuppositional apologetic methodology of Van Til and others as expounded above. Even still, and crucial to an effective apologetic with a biblical skeptic, sooner or later the unbeliever must be brought within the "understanding distance" of Scripture. Albert Mohler rightly contends, "The defense of biblical theism levels the great divide in intellectual thought to not merely over the existence of God, but over the question of whether he has spoken."⁹⁵

Having established Michael as the interlocutor, and his dilemma as the andragogical focal point, scriptural warrant for the study and application of Christian apologetic endeavors was presented to the class from 1 Peter 3:15. However, to begin laying the base and pedestal of an argument suited to Michael and his dilemma, the class was briefly presented with the concept of natural theology via Roman 1:18ff.⁹⁶ A brief explication of the exceptional utility of the "eclectic approach" of a cumulative case apologetic methodology then followed.⁹⁷ Considering the likelihood of some Campbellite

⁹⁴ During an interview "Michael" was asked, "Do you believe the Bible was divinely inspired?" Michael answered,

I don't think it was. I think inspiration comes in many forms like artist who write songs because of inspiration. I think the Bible could be written in the same way just like any book, song or other art. But I think it is in some ways art because it is a creation of man but it is also handpicked in certain ways because it has gone through different interpretations. I believe there have been selective interpretations to meet the needs of people in power at the time. I think there is so much human influence to say that it is divinely inspired; I can't see it. ("Michael," telephone interview by the author, November 27, 2018).

⁹⁵ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Atheism Remix: A Christian Confronts the New Atheists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 84.

⁹⁶ See appendix 8, "Waurika Church of Christ Christian Apologetics Class Series Lesson Handouts" for an outline of lesson 1: "Survey and Introduction."

⁹⁷ Habermas, "An Evidentialist's Response," 184.

traditionalism among the WCC members (possibly held fervently), establishing scriptural warrant to engage in apologetics was a crucial task. However, it was a task not nearly so crucial as establishing scriptural warrant for members of the churches of Christ to engage in the study of natural theology as it informs the cumulative case apologetic methodology as an apologetic starting point.

Finally, the class was presented with the overriding purpose of the apologetic class series and how the study and application of apologetics can very much serve to strengthen and further the three mandates of the church: to deeply worship God, to edify one another, and to evangelize the lost as commended by Paul, and anchored in the Ephesians 4:1-16 passage.

Sunday Morning Sermon

Given the churches of Christ legacy of anti-philosophy, anti-theology, and particularly anti-natural theology, establishing further scriptural warrant was imperative. To further aid the establishment of that warrant, elder approval was sought and given to allow the author to preach the following Sunday morning worship service prior to lesson 2, and again that Sunday evening.⁹⁸ In addition to warrant, both sermons allowed for elaboration to help foster deeper thinking about the use of Christian apologetics.⁹⁹

The message preached Sunday morning before lesson 2, was titled “Without Excuse,” and was based upon God’s chastisement of Job in chapters 38-41. In the biblical text, God crafts an *apologia* of Himself from natural theology and the world He alone created, *ex nihilo*. The argument that God uses is both powerful and insightful. Throughout

⁹⁸ See appendix 9, “A Sermon—Scriptural Warrant for Utility of Natural Theology” for transcript of the sermon preached by the author Sunday morning service, May 14, 2023, at Waurika church of Christ.

⁹⁹ *Elaboration* is simply defined here as “adding something to memory,” by thinking about, and processing information “on a deeper level. One remembers information better if it is processed more deeply than when it is processed in a shallow manner.” Weinstein and Sumeracki, *Understanding How We Learn*, 102.

chapters 38, 39, 40, and 41 God calls upon Job to consider the evidence provided by creation; evidence bearing witness that he is the creator God and is supremely sovereign. At its core this is what apologetics does: it looks at God's general revelation from nature, then the evidence from nature is utilized to craft a defense for the existence of God and ultimately the truthfulness of Christianity.¹⁰⁰

God's *apologia* to Job was followed with Paul's teaching from Romans 1:18ff whereby Paul using the same base argument God had used with Job as he warns the Romans that if they suppress the truth about God, which is so very evident in nature, then they are "without excuse." From the sermon transcript:

God tells us there is something crucial to be learned about the nature of His intentionality; that intentionality that is on grand display in nature. And perhaps it is this; all people, by virtue of being created in God's image, have the notion written upon their heart that there is a Higher Being; a Creator and Sustainer of all life. And that the existence of this Superior Being compels our worship. This includes the unbeliever; this includes Michael and his dilemma. It is these people who intentionally 'suppress the truth,' who are foolish, whose hearts are darkened; those are the people we have been commissioned by Christ to witness to.¹⁰¹

The sermon was well received by the congregation and served the designated purpose of providing further scriptural warrant not only for the study and practice of apologetics but also for the use of natural theology and its concurrent embrace of

¹⁰⁰ From the sermon transcript:

Listen to the "great cloud of witnesses" from nature that God calls to testify on His behalf: From the cosmos God calls forth Orion and Pleiades, and all the constellations of stars to testify on His behalf. Regarding the earth, God calls on its measurements, and its cornerstones; He calls upon its seas and its rivers. And its great expanse. From the atmosphere God calls as witnesses to His divine nature; light and darkness; wind, dew, and hail. Frost and ice; rain and snow; clouds and lightening. He calls forth the testimony of the grain of the fields; the Lotus plants and the grass. He calls the willow trees and cedars. From the animal kingdom God calls to bear witnesses, the hawk, and the horse; the eagle and the lion; the mountain goat, the donkey, and the wild ox; the raven, the ostrich, and the locust. He calls forward Behemoth, and He calls Leviathan. But, in the middle of all this, in chapter 38 something almost goes unnoticed. In verse 36, in that short little verse, God calls upon Job to use his God-given wisdom and understanding to reason from the evidence of nature; from testimony of such "a great cloud of witnesses," that God is sovereign. In verse 36 God asks Job if he knows; 'Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?' God is asking Job if he knows where the capacity of the human mind came from; how we think, how we use logic and reason. God calls upon His creation of our minds to bear witness as well. (See appendix 9, "A Sermon—Scriptural Warrant for the Utility of Natural Theology")

¹⁰¹ See appendix 9, "A Sermon—Scriptural Warrant for the Utility of Natural Theology."

philosophy and theology. In that way the sermon was an apt and necessary introduction to lesson 2, which followed immediately after the morning worship assembly.

Lesson 2: The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument

With scriptural warrant firmly in hand, and Michael and his dilemma securely in mind, lesson 2 commenced the presentation of a cumulative case argument for the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity with the *kalam* cosmological argument.¹⁰²

Although an argument for the existence of God from ontology (ontological argument) would seem to be the logical starting point, most all post-Kantian philosophers eschew its use.¹⁰³ In spite of this fact, Alvin Plantinga defends a version of the ontological argument showing that based upon “other possible worlds,” it is rational to accept its conclusion, it has some significant limitations. Sure enough, Immanuel Kant argued that *existence* is not a logically necessary predicate or property of God in the way that having three sides is logically necessary to the idea of a triangle. Since the *existence* of God is not a necessary property for the actual existence of God, the argument’s key premise postulated as “God exists” provides no substance to the argument. Kant reasoned, “The notion of a Supreme Being is in many respects a highly useful idea; but for the very reason that it is an idea, it is incapable of enlarging our cognition regarding the existence of things. It is not even sufficient to instruct us as to the possibility of a being which we do not know to exist.”¹⁰⁴ More sarcastically, Kant deduced, “The celebrated ontological

¹⁰² See appendix 8, “Waurika Church of Christ Christian Apologetics Class Series Lesson Handouts” for an outline of lesson 2, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument.”

¹⁰³ Feinberg, “Cumulative Case Apologetics,” 148-49. Thomas Aquinas, as well as most of his followers, “explicitly reject” the ontological argument. See Edward Fessler, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2017), 269.

¹⁰⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Three Critiques: Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason, Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. D. M. Meiklejohn, Thomas K. Abbott, and J. H. Bernard (1872; repr., Public Domain, 2023), 241.

or Cartesian argument for the existence of a Supreme Being is therefore insufficient; and we may as well hope to increase our stock of knowledge by the aid of mere ideas, as the merchant to augment his wealth by the addition of noughts to his cash account.”¹⁰⁵

Campbell’s epistemology was likewise inhospitable to an ontological argument sunk deep in the cognition of a maximally great Being the likes of which no greater being can be cognized by the human mind. Campbell historian Robert West writes,

Borrowing original ideas from known physical objects, imagination can abstract from one and add to another until it creates images “unlike anything existing in nature.” The Sphinx is an example. Or a picture of a tree with iron roots, silver leaves, and gold apples. But imagination would have to travel out of its providence to originate the first idea of God, a First Cause, or spiritual ideas.¹⁰⁶

Here, the ontological argument was not chosen for the starting point in the present cumulative case presentation for two additional reasons. First, it can be strongly argued that the ontological argument is viciously circular with a similar circularity found within an Arminialite fundamentalists approach to apologetic argumentation.¹⁰⁷ Second, and closely related, the ontological argument is categorically *a priori*, presupposing again what Michael categorically denies—the existence of the God of theism as revealed in Scripture. However, and more importantly, since it is well established that the Michaels of the world preclude a presuppositional, or Arminialite biblicist approach by virtue of beginning and ending with the tacit assumption that is primarily in dispute, another methodological starting point had to be selected. The *kalam* cosmological argument,

¹⁰⁵ Kant, *Three Critiques*, 241.

¹⁰⁶ Robert F. West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1948), 93.

¹⁰⁷ Immediately, both W. L. Craig and Gary Habermas, among many, may be cited as scholars who consider the presuppositional approach to be guilty of circularity. See W. L. Craig, “A Classical Apologist’s Response,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 232, and Gary Habermas, “An Evidentialist’s Response,” in Gundry and Cowan, *Five Views*, 243. The significance is found in that the apologist cannot, in good faith, argue *against* a circular Arminialite Biblicist approach, nor a Van Tillian presuppositional approach, then argue *for* commencing a cumulative case with the same-said ontological argument; circularity is circularity.

being well supported in the Bible, is well suited for such a starting point and was chosen specifically for its appeal to common ground existing between believer and unbeliever.¹⁰⁸

The family of cosmological arguments have had a long and varied history. Kant considered cosmological arguments to be of the same species and genus as ontological arguments in that they “require the presupposition of the existence of a necessary being as a basis for the empirical regress, and that, as this necessity must be unconditioned and *a priori*, reason is bound to discover a conception which shall satisfy, if possible, this requirement, and enable us to attain to the *a priori* cognition of such a being.”¹⁰⁹ However, much in cosmology and astrophysics has changed since the glory days of Kantian criticisms. Namely, the vast improvements in the instrumentation and telemetry utilized to collect empirical evidence from the cosmos significantly reduced the fantastical nature of the premises. These scientific innovations were undreamt of by pioneers of the argument such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Leibniz, and the Islamic scholastics. It was not until Christian philosopher William Lane Craig began to work with the *kalam* argument that a modern and truly robust version utilizing twenty-first century endowments from science was put forward. More specifically, empirical evidence confirming the expansion of the universe lends credence to the *a posteriori* nature of the argument even if the temporal regress of evidence eventually necessitates a necessary being, the *kalam* argument, undergirded by both logic and science, is a rather compelling argument, and a usefully splendid introduction of the Bible skeptic Michael to a classical apologetic argument.

¹⁰⁸ Groothius notes the *kalam* cosmological argument is well supported in the Bible through the Genesis account and throughout the Psalms, and well as in the creeds and confessions of the church. See Groothius, *Christian Apologetics*, 207.

¹⁰⁹ Kant, *Three Critiques*, 242.

The modern *kalam* cosmological version, improved and endorsed by William Lane Craig, served as the basis for lesson 2.¹¹⁰ After a brief introduction of how philosophical arguments are formulated, Craig’s *kalam* premises were established as “1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause. 2. The universe began to exist. 3. Therefore the universe has a cause.”¹¹¹

Premise 1 was presented as having little to no opposition, while premise 2 is much more contested by unbelievers. In support of premise 2, evidence was brought to bear from the impossibility of an actual infinite set, the impossibility of an infinite regress of temporal events, the expansion of the universe through the observation of stellar redshift and gravitational waves in the spacetime fabric of space, and finally from the Second Law of Thermodynamics concerning a finite fuel supply for stellar burning. These observations strongly indicate that the universe had a beginning. The inference, of course, is the high probability of the existence of an uncaused First Cause of the universe.

The Christian worldview portrait. Since the concept of worldview permeated the curriculum, and desiring to fortify the concept of building a cumulative case, each lesson was concluded by adding “brush strokes” to a Christian Worldview Portrait. This portrait, like the curriculum itself, was progressive with each lesson adding additional brush strokes (one paragraph) to the portrait. Lesson 2 began the portrait with these brush strokes: There exists an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe, who in relation to the

¹¹⁰ Adapted from William Lane Craig, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument,” in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, ed. William Lane Craig (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2002), 92-113; William Lane Craig and James D. Sinclair, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument,” in Craig and Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, 101-201; and Douglass Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011), 207-39.

¹¹¹ See appendix 8, “Waurika Church of Christ Christian Apologetics Class Series Lesson Handouts” for an outline of lesson 2, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument.”

universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful.¹¹²

Paul said to the Romans, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20 KJV). Paul is talking about the attributes of God; some of those same attributes were captured in the brushstrokes of the Christian Worldview Portrait from lesson 2. In keeping with the concept of a cumulative case being linked in an all-encompassing and cohesive unit of thought, painting of the portrait was progressive and cumulative as well. But the portrait was also forward-looking as each lesson’s portrait generated additional logical, and forward-looking questions such as, “If a supernatural Cause created the universe what can we learn from how He designed what He created?” To answer that, one need simply to look once again to what God’s general revelation can reveal, which is where lesson 3 picked up.

Sunday Evening Sermon: “Philosophy according to Paul”

The evening of that same Sunday after lesson 2 gave opportunity to provide scriptural warrant once again for the use of philosophy as bondservant and vassal to the suzerain—cumulative case apologetics. The message preached by this author Sunday evening was titled “Philosophy according to Paul,” and was based upon Colossians 2:8, with 1 Corinthians 15:12-22 as exemplar of Paul’s employment of quintessential, classical philosophy.¹¹³

¹¹² See appendix 8, “Waurika Church of Christ Christian Apologetics Class Series Lesson Handouts” for an outline of lesson 2, “The Kalam Cosmological Argument.”

¹¹³ See appendix 10, “A Sermon—Scriptural Warrant for the Utility of Philosophy” for transcript of the sermon preached by the author, Sunday evening service, May 14, 2023, at Waurika church of Christ.

The sermon posited the Colossians 2:8 text not as an admonition against the use of sound God-honoring philosophy, but a particular kind of corrupted speculation known as *merkabah mysticism*. The evidence that Paul is addressing this particular “philosophy” of merkabah mysticism, is compelling.¹¹⁴

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul structures a philosophical argument in the classical style arguing that Christ *has* been raised, and that the day is coming when the dead “in Christ” will be raised as well. Paul lists eight logical premises to craft his argument which culminates in the conclusion: “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22). It was impressed upon the church audience that Paul avails himself to the classical Greek philosophical tradition in its purest and simplest form. It is nothing less than Paul’s direct appeal to the people of Corinth to exercise their God-given capacity to utilize reason in order that a logical conclusion might be reached. Paul’s argument is pure, rational, intellectual discourse; it has all the elements of classical philosophy, all the while it is no less than Holy, God-breathed Scripture.

The sermon presented the audience with the truth, unbeknownst to many, that in the Pauline Epistles and Pastorals the most erudite Greek philosophers both ancient and contemporary are frequently quoted by Paul. The sermon was drawn to its closing with a list of several instances of Paul referencing philosophy and philosophers.¹¹⁵ The sermon

¹¹⁴ From the sermon transcript:

In the text, Paul warns the reader to “let no one disqualify you” by insisting on certain practices. It is here that Paul has merkabah mysticism specifically in mind listing particular food and drink (v 16), festivals and new moons and the Sabbath (v 17), ascetism and the worship of angels (v 18), the elemental spirits of this world (v 20), and “things according to human precepts and teachings” in (v 22). Finally, things giving the “appearance of wisdom,” which promote “self-made religion,” and ascetism are listed in verse 23. Paul’s rhetoric is sharp and direct; these, he argues, are all essential elements of merkabah mysticism, not classical philosophy. (See appendix 10, “A Sermon—Scriptural Warrant for the Utility of Philosophy”)

¹¹⁵ From the sermon transcript preached by the author:

We have already mentioned Paul’s discourse with the Epicureans and the Stoics in Acts 17 where he argues for the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity from both nature, and from Scripture. In his argument Paul even quotes two Greek philosophers in his speech; Seneca, and Aratus. But Paul often quoted Greek philosophers. In 1 Corinthians 15:33 Paul quotes Thais when he says

closed with the following heart-felt plea:

Paul recognized the power of philosophy; good philosophy, correct philosophy. We can hardly look upon Paul and his work without having some deep appreciation for the use of classical, God-honoring philosophy. Ultimately, that is all that philosophy is; logical reasoning to the truth. Paul knew it, Paul used it, and we should use it as well. Paul once said; “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22). If Paul used the means of philosophy over and again so that he might save some, should we refuse his example?¹¹⁶

The evening service concluded the day which had begun with the morning sermon, “Without Excuse,” expounding the scriptural warrant to be found in God’s *apologia* from the vast witness of nature, given to Job (Job 38-41), regarding his “eternal power and divine nature.” The morning moved from sermon to lesson 2, “The kalam Cosmological Argument” in the apologetics class series at midmorning. The day concluded with the preaching of the evening message, “Philosophy according to Paul,” and with a plea to the congregation, *contra* legacy church of Christ doctrine, to consider the philosophical apologetic examples set by both Paul and by God himself.

Lesson 3: The Teleological Argument

The forward-looking question posed at the conclusion of lesson 2 was, “If a supernatural Cause created the universe, what can be determined about this Cause from the design found in what He created?” In the cumulative case argument, that question was

“Bad company ruins good morals.” In Titus 1:12 Paul quotes Epimenides when he says that “The Cretans are all liars.” Paul paraphrases Aristotle in Galatians 5:23, and in Romans 2:14. He paraphrases Plato in 1 Corinthians 9:24, Romans 7:22-23, Philippians 3:19, Romans 8:5, and Galatians 6:8. Plato is very much present in Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 4:4, in Philippians 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:6, 1 Corinthians 13:12, and in 1 Thessalonians 5:15. Paul paraphrases Socrates in 1 Corinthians 8:2, Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:14-17 . . . and many more. Paul knew philosophy well, and he used it in the defense of Christianity. (See appendix 10, “A Sermon—Scriptural Warrant for Utility of Philosophy”)

For more information concerning Paul’s quoting and paraphrasing various Greek philosophers see Ramesh de Silva, “Paul and His Use of Greek Philosophy,” Bible Things in Bible Ways, July 14, 2013, <https://biblethingsinbibleways.wordpress.com/2013/07/14/paul-and-his-use-of-greek-philosophy/>.

¹¹⁶ Although the sermon was preached with a particular firmness, it was also a plea to the Campbellite traditionalist and strict fundamental Biblicists within the church body to consider Paul’s methods and to take him at his word. See appendix 10, “A Sermon—Scriptural Warrant for Utility of Philosophy.”

best answered by looking at what could be gleaned from a presentation of the teleological (and design) arguments to the skeptical Michaels of the world.¹¹⁷

The class was introduced to the classical teleological argument through reflection upon the logical reasoning that undergirds William Paley's Watchmaker Argument, in turn leading to the simple philosophical formula: (1) every design had a designer; (2) the universe has a highly complex design; and (3) therefore, the universe had a designer.

Premise 1, in much the same way as premise 1 of the *kalam* argument, is generally uncontested. Premise 2, however, draws considerable criticism, not necessarily because detractors consider the premise irrational, but because acceptance of the premise unequivocally implies the conclusion.

Scientific discovery over the last thirty years has produced an enormous amount of data, and much of that data indicates that the universe is highly fine-tuned for life. To support the argument, the four major fine-tuning forces of the universe and their corresponding ranges were presented to the class: the strong nuclear force constant, the weak nuclear force constant, the gravitational force constant, and the electromagnetic force constant.¹¹⁸

Since the cosmos is not the only place fine-tuning is observed, the class presentation focus moved from the primary force constants observed in the cosmos to the intricate "fine-tuning" that is also observed in biological systems, including human beings.

¹¹⁷ The teleological argument differs from the argument from design. While the two are often related in the sense of pertaining to the study of "created things," the teleological argument is primarily concerned with the finetuning of the cosmos, while the argument from design generally concerns observed design in biological systems. This lesson, titled the "Teleological Argument," was divided into two distinct sections in order to present both the argument from cosmic finetuning (teleological), and from the design observed in biological systems.

¹¹⁸ In addition to these four primary force constants, Hugh Ross lists thirty-one additional finetuning parameters observed in the cosmos. A detailed list of these thirty-five parameters was given as a class handout as an additional supplement. See Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Latest Scientific Discoveries Reveal God* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001), 155-57.

The presentation introduced Darwinian theory and a working definition of Darwinian evolution.¹¹⁹ The salient point was also made that Darwin himself recognized a potential shortcoming of his theory. Darwin said, “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.”¹²⁰ In 2006, biochemist Michael Behe took Darwin’s challenge and did just that—he demonstrated that there are some biological systems whose existence cannot be explained by “numerous successive, slight modifications.” These biological systems Behe termed “irreducibly complex.”¹²¹

Behe uses the standard mousetrap as example of an irreducibly complex system in which each component is necessary for the function of the system; nothing can be taken away and the system remain functional.¹²² Further examples of irreducibly complex systems presented to the class included bacterial flagellum, cilium, the blood clotting cascade, adaptive immune response, DNA replication, and the human eye.¹²³

It would, *in toto*, seem impossible to build such complexly integrated structures through the slow random process of evolution.¹²⁴ Fred Hoyle’s oft-quoted assessment is priceless: “The chance that higher life forms might have emerged through evolutionary process is comparable to the chance that a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein.”¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ See Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (Overland Park, KS: Digireads.com, 2016).

¹²⁰ Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 147.

¹²¹ Michael Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 39-40, 42-45.

¹²² To aid in conceptual cognition (and tactile stimulation), four (clean) mousetraps were passed around the classroom.

¹²³ Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box*, 69-73.

¹²⁴ Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box*, 20.

¹²⁵ Paul Davies, *The Fifth Miracle: The Search for the Origin and Meaning of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 95.

Lesson 3 of the curriculum was drawn to a close by adding additional “brushstrokes” to the Christian Worldview Portrait. From the teleological and design arguments the following “invisible attributes” of God logically followed: The design, unity, order, and complexity of creation itself implies the Creator of the universe is a highly intelligent Designer who purposefully designed and brought the universe into existence with such precise characteristics as to allow human life to thrive. From the inference of intelligent design found in the universe and in biological systems, it seems reasonable to suggest that one logical forward-looking question would engage the inexplicable assumption of evolutionary progress from inert atomic matter to human consciousness. Lesson 3 thus concluded with the introduction to lesson 4 formulated in that question.

Lesson 4: The Argument from Consciousness/Mind and the Moral Argument

Indeed, questioning “how is it that human consciousness can evolve from inert atoms” necessarily flows from the apprehension of the irreducibly complex phenomenon of human consciousness. Lesson 4, “The Argument from Consciousness/Mind and the Moral Argument,” picked up that salient topic, along with the concurrent topic of morality in a consecutive two-part format.

The class was presented with several additional questions to quicken their sense of the insoluble nature of the atoms-to-consciousness conundrum, beginning with a delineation of the differences between animal consciousness and human self-consciousness. Philosopher Anthony O’ Hear explains, “A self-conscious person . . . does not simply have beliefs or dispositions, does not simply engage in practices of various sorts. He or she is aware that he or she has beliefs, practices, dispositions, and the rest. . . . A conscious animal might be a knower . . . but only a self-conscious being knows that he

is a knower.”¹²⁶ Naturally, and rhetorically, the class was asked other questions: Why are humans created, and endowed with such a superior sense of self, how are nonmaterial phenomena such as love, hate, hope, faith, or seeing the color red, conceptualized? How can a person be prosecuted for a crime they committed forty years ago since that person is not the same *biological* person who committed the crime? What is it that serves as the footing and foundation for a continuity of personhood? Cartesian duality was briefly touched upon emphasizing the dual nature of man as the most coherent and rational answer to all these questions posed.¹²⁷ The concept of mind/body dualism provides concrete rationale for the immaterial nature of human self-consciousness as well as the continuity of personhood necessary for accountability of past evil acts.

Lesson 4 (part 1) was drawn to a close by adding additional brushstrokes to the Christian Worldview Portrait: The human beings that God freely chose to create consist of two substances; one material, and one immaterial; one body being uniquely human, and one spirit being similar in substance to God, who is Spirit. As segway to part 2 of lesson 4, a quote by Anthony O’Hear served as impetus in forming the next logical, forward-looking question: “The presence of thought, reflection, and self-conscious belief is what makes human activity different from the conscious but unreflective behavior of non-linguistic animals.”¹²⁸ O’Hear’s words compel a further, and simple question: could the Creator who is personal, intentional, and purposeful in his design and creation have a particular expectation of mankind that was not placed upon any of the other creatures?

From the existence of human consciousness naturally flows acknowledgement of the innate and universal sense of right and wrong, and good and evil; a moral law that

¹²⁶ Anthony O’Hear, *Beyond Evolution: Human Nature and the Limits of Evolutionary Explanation* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), 24.

¹²⁷ Cartesian dualism was introduced to give students the idea that the body/soul concept has been a point of philosophical inquiry for centuries. The issues with Cartesian dualism, such as The Interaction Problem, were not introduced for depth of concept, and lack of time.

¹²⁸ O’Hear, *Beyond Evolution*, 49.

stands as objective truth being true for all people in all places in all times. The moral law, as presented to the class, is premised as such (1) every law has a law giver; (2) the moral law is a law; and (3) therefore there is a moral law giver.

Again, premise 1 is rarely disputed. Premise 2, however, captivates much critical opposition, especially as postmodernity's malignant sense of subjective truth, heralded by the Michaels of the world, presses in. The class was presented with the modern conception of relative truth along with several counterpoints to consider, including the abundance of worldview contradictions found within all non-Christian worldview perspectives. Once again, rhetorical questions were presented to the class to feature and accentuate these contradictions: If there is no objective moral law, then how is it that society adjudicates between right and wrong; how do governments *govern*; on what basis does the relativist himself cry out against injustice? The moral cases of Adolf Hitler and Mother Teresa were juxtaposed as well, questioning the rational validity of a universal and natural moral law.¹²⁹

In drawing lesson 4 to a poignant close, the class was presented with the compact yet stark and salient words of Alyosha from *The Brother Karamazov*: if God does not exist “everything is permitted.”¹³⁰ But everything is not permitted. Lesson 4

¹²⁹ For a discussion regarding the moral comparison of Hitler and Mother Teresa see Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 169-93. The broad discrepancy in intellectual capacity, namely self-consciousness that exists between human beings and the next lowest members of the animal kingdom, was brought to bear once again upon the question of an innate moral law existing exclusively within the human animal. Philosopher Anthony O'Hear writes, “It is our perception of good and evil, of just and unjust, which distinguishes us from animals.” O'Hear, *Beyond Evolution*, 114. Summarizing from the striking work of William Lane Craig, the class was presented with evidence of an absolute moral standard existing exclusively among human beings. Craig calls attention to the lion and the zebra; the lion kills the zebra, but he does not murder the zebra. The male hammerhead shark copulates violently with the female shark, but he does not rape her. Why? Because there is no universal moral obligation pending upon non-human animals. See William Lane Craig, “The Moral Argument for God's Existence, Part 2,” *Reasons to Believe Podcast*, February 21, 2011, YouTube, 42:45, <https://youtube/bwUUmjfkSh8>.

¹³⁰ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonshy (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002), 263. In addition, there is an innate sense of universal moral obligations residing in the hearts of each man; the torture of a child, the murder of another human being, rape, etc.—these evil acts are such in every culture, in every race, throughout all of time. That is the objective moral law buried in the self-consciousness of every cognitively responsible human being. That is the moral law written by God upon the heart of all men by virtue of their creation in the *imago Dei*.

concluded that from the moral argument it can be determined that since the Great Designer and Creator of human self-consciousness is necessary for moral values to exist, the Creator must himself be a moral being who imparted moral values to human beings via the *imago Dei* with the obligatory expectation that they fulfill his moral standards. Therefore, these brushstrokes, made possible by the evidence gleaned from the moral argument, were added to the Christian Worldview Portrait: Further, the Purposeful, Spiritual, Creator and Designer of the universe, God, is a Moral and Just Being who imparted moral values into the spiritual consciousness of human beings whom He created, with the expectation that they embrace and fulfill His Moral Law.¹³¹

Critical transition. At this critical transition point from philosophical argumentation to the evidential argument for the historical resurrection of Jesus, the forward-looking questions carried an enhanced criticality. Consequently, “why” seemed *apropos*. Quoting at length from class lecture notes:

Why was the universe so finely tuned for life? Why did human beings come to thrive and to populate the entire earth? And why were those human beings, universally endowed with such complex capacities as consciousness, and reason, and an objective moral standard? Why do humans have those attributes? We have only touched the surface as to how Darwinian evolution cannot explain how human beings came to have these capacities, let alone, why humans are even endowed with these capacities to begin with. Why? One likely reason could be this: If the Creator of the universe is infinitely Moral, and infinitely Just, then wouldn't we expect the Personal, Intelligent, Purposeful, Intentional Designer, and Moral Law Giver, to want to communicate with the creatures He had created just so?¹³²

¹³¹ See appendix 8, “Waurika Church of Christ Christian Apologetics Class Series Lesson Handouts” for an outline of lesson 4, “The Argument from Consciousness/Mind, and the Moral Argument.” Lesson 4 concluded the presentation of those cumulative case arguments that are grounded in philosophy; the *kalam* cosmological argument, the teleological and design arguments, the arguments from consciousness and from morality. Each lesson was designed and presented with an eye toward the lynchpin of the entire cumulative case: the historical resurrection of Jesus. Up to this point in the class series, and all along the way, conscious effort was made to hasten overall curriculum cohesion by interlinking each lesson. This was accomplished at the end of each lesson through careful reflection upon not only the “invisible attributes” and what can possibly be determined regarding the volition of God, but also how God's volition informs and constitutes anthropology. In turn, these reflections stimulated the positing of forward-looking questions that the next lesson would address.

¹³² See appendix 8, “Waurika Church of Christ Christian Apologetics Class Series Lesson Handouts.”

The class was then reminded that an ancient people group (the Israelites) from the very basement of antiquity claimed that there is a God and this God communicated with mankind, created the universe and everything in it, and imparted a moral law written upon their hearts, and that they ignored their moral obligations and fell from God's graceful presence. More importantly, this ancient people group said that God promised a Redeemer, a Messiah who will come and restore their relationship with God. Convincing evidence from history suggests just that: such a man who lived in the first century AD; a man who claimed to be come from God to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

Lesson 5: The Historical Resurrection of Jesus

The curriculum for lesson 5, "The Historical Resurrection of Jesus," was based on Gary Habermas's conception of a "minimal facts approach."¹³³ In turn Habermas's protégé, Michael Licona, took the minimal facts concept, refining and synthesizing it to produce his seminal work, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Historiographical Approach*.¹³⁴ It is Licona's important work that lesson 5 relied most heavily upon, and from which the resurrection curricula was extracted.

Beginning with a generalization of typical historical research methodology, and the historian's criteria of probability and historical certainty, the class was encouraged to "put on their historian hats." Early on the class was repeatedly reminded of the legitimate strictures pending upon both the scope of inquiry as well as the near impossibility of absolute certainty regarding "irretrievable events." With the frame of reference unchanged from the outset of the class series along with Michael remaining the class interlocutor, the historical resurrection of Jesus was presented from the foundation

¹³³ Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 44-47.

¹³⁴ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2010).

of common ground that might be established between the believer and the unbeliever; between the Michaels of the world, and themselves as Christians. Implicit in recognizing common ground is the ceding of a mutual epistemological capacity to know history as something deductible from evidences tendered. From this *communis terra firma*, then, biblical evidences were presented, for the time being, as historical documents. The apt words of Timothy Paul Jones were shared with the class to set to mind the historical nature of the resurrection inquiry: “The Gospels and early Christian letters are, at the very least, a collection of ancient testimonies. These texts may turn out to be more than ancient claims about Jesus, but they are certainly no less.”¹³⁵ In the interest of occupying common ground with Michael, for the time being, divine biblical authority and Holy inspiration of Scripture were held closely, dearly, and silently.

Source evaluation. Having established the limitations and delimitations of the historical resurrection investigation, the task turned to an overview of the extant documents pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus, and ranking these sources against a single criterion: what is the likelihood that this document represents an independent testimony to the resurrection?¹³⁶

Table 2 lists the historical documents that mention Jesus or the resurrection within the first two centuries, and their assigned ranking as to their ability to provide independent testimony to the resurrection.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Jones, *Why Should I Trust the Bible?*, 42.

¹³⁶ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 200.

¹³⁷ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 201-76. In the interest of expediency, several of the sources from “other noncanonical Christian Literature” and “non-Christian sources” were not evaluated (—) but simply passed over with a comment that for various reasons these potential sources failed to meet the criteria of providing independent testimony to the resurrection.

Table 2. Source documents

Historical Sources	Ranking	Historical Sources	Ranking
Canonical Gospels	Possible	Other Noncanonical Christian Literature	
The Letters of Paul	Highly probable	Gospel of Thomas	—
Sources That Antedate The NT		Gospel of Peter	—
"Q"	Unlikely	Gospel of Judas	—
Pre-Markan Tradition	Intermediate	Revelation Dialogues	—
Speeches in Acts	Possible	Pseudo-Mark (16:9-20)	—
Oral Formulas		Non-Christian Sources	
Romans 1:3b-4a	Possible-plus	Josephus	Possible
Luke 24:34	Possible	Tacitus	Possible
1 Corinthians 15:3-8	Highly probable	Pliny the Younger	—
Apostolic Fathers		Suetonius	—
Clement of Rome	Possible-plus	Mara bar Serapion	—
1 Clement	Possible-plus	Thallus	—
Polycarp	Possible	Lucian	—
Letter of Barnabas	Possible-minus	Celsus	—

Minimal bedrock facts. The lecture presentation moved to establish the three minimal bedrock facts. Habermas and Licona define these bedrock facts as facts that are strongly evidenced such that virtually all scholars regard them as historical facts.¹³⁸ While Habermas lists up to a dozen such minimal facts, Licona, whose work the curriculum primarily follows, lists only three facts:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Very shortly after Jesus's death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and appeared to them.
3. Within a few years of Jesus's death, Paul converted after witnessing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus.¹³⁹

These three minimal facts were then validated intrinsically in similar fashion to the premises of a philosophical formulation using evidence derived from the previously

¹³⁸ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 47.

¹³⁹ These three minimal bedrock facts synthesized from Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 302-3.

ranked sources.¹⁴⁰

Comparative model. Having presented critical evidence in support of the three bedrock facts, the class was presented with the model to be used to juxtapose competing resurrection theories. These model categories included explanatory scope, explanatory power, plausibility, less *ad hoc*, and illumination.¹⁴¹ Table 3 illustrates the comparative model including the corresponding weight associated with each model category.

Four resurrection theories were then presented, analyzed, and subjected to the model criteria for evaluation. The first theory considered was a swoon-type theory by David Mirsch.¹⁴² Next, the class was presented with the resurrection theory of Michael Goulder,¹⁴³ followed by Gerd Lüdemann's theory.¹⁴⁴ Finally, the Christian resurrection narrative was presented.¹⁴⁵ Since the Christian resurrection narrative enjoys primacy of position, it was approached and presented as a polemic, or as a defensive apologetic, rather than a direct appeal to positive argumentation. The polemic focused upon and

¹⁴⁰ Although the first bedrock fact, that Jesus died by crucifixion, is widely accepted by a consensus of scholars, including atheists, a multitude of sources were presented in its defense. From the secular world, Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, and Mar bar Serapion were presented. In addition, the canonical Gospels, the letters of Paul, and the oral tradition especially 1 Cor 15:3-7 lent support to the claim that Jesus died by crucifixion. The second bedrock fact, that the disciples thought the risen Jesus had appeared to them, was supported by the oral creed in 1 Cor 15:3-7, the embarrassment factor associated with the testimony of women in the Gospels, the fate of the apostles, 1 Clement 5.2-7, and Polycarp. The third bedrock fact, that Paul had an experience he thought was the risen Jesus appearing to him, was supported experientially by his own testimony in his letters to Galatia, Corinth, and Philippi; by Luke in Acts, and by Paul's own martyrdom.

¹⁴¹ The model categories were defined as such: *explanatory scope*—considers the quantity of facts available; *explanatory power*—considers the quality of the facts available; *plausibility*—a leading theory must possess a greater variety of accepted truths; less *ad hoc*—refers to the leading theories lack of *ad hoc* assumptions; and *illumination*—relates to the theories ability, if true, to shed light upon other issue. See Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 109-11.

¹⁴² David Mirsch, *The Open Tomb: Why and How Jesus Faked His Own Death and Resurrection* (Bangor, MI: Booklocker.com, 2001).

¹⁴³ Michael Goulder, presented in Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 479-95.

¹⁴⁴ Gerd Lüdemann, presented in Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 495-519.

¹⁴⁵ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 582-606.

refuted three major categories of skeptical claims: (1) the resurrection story is the product of legend; (2) it violates Ockham’s Razor; and (3) it relies upon deficient sources.¹⁴⁶

After responding to these critical claims, the Christian resurrection story was subjected to the comparative model as well.¹⁴⁷

Table 3. Comparative model

Decreasing Weight					
Weight	5	4	3	2	1
Hypothesis	Explanatory Scope	Explanatory Power	Plausibility	Less <i>ad hoc</i>	Illumination
David Mirsch					
Michael Goulder					
Gerd Ludemann					
Christian Narrative					

The final model output (see table 4) shows the Christian resurrection narrative to pass all five categories, and consequently surpassed all competing theories. Based upon the model output, the historical resurrection of Jesus was determined to be a “very certain” fact.¹⁴⁸ The fact of the resurrection is a historical matter and was presented in that fashion, the *meaning* of the resurrection, however, is a theological matter whose interpretation requires a rather abrupt paradigm shift within the nonbeliever. While it is indubitably admitted by resurrection critic Bart Ehrman that “there are only two options.

¹⁴⁶ These skeptical claims are tendered by the critic of Christianity, Bart Ehrman, and is summarized in Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 584-600.

¹⁴⁷ Again, the class was reminded of the limitations placed upon the historian’s scope in that as historians a determination from the facts could be made concerning whether Jesus rose from the dead, but historians are not within their domain to suggest who raised Him.

¹⁴⁸ In total Licona compares six resurrection theories including Goulder and Ludemann theories (he does not include the Mirsch theory). The balance was not modeled or presented in the apologetic lesson on the resurrection for two reasons: (1) time constraints and (2) all three were similar to Goulder and Ludemann in that they rely in some significant way upon hallucination theory, which was thoroughly refuted in both the Goulder and Ludemann cases.

Either Jesus really appeared to his disciples after the crucifixion, or they were seeing things.” So, it is here that the Michaels of the world either believe or reject the historical facts.¹⁴⁹

In like manner, it is here that the class took off their historian hats and put on their theological hats. Nevertheless, from under the historical that it was determined that the man Jesus was raised from the dead, and with that, the supernatural implication for the Michaels of the world became inescapable.

Table 4. Model populated

Decreasing Weight					
Weight	5	4	3	2	1
Hypothesis	Explanatory Scope	Explanatory Power	Plausibility	Less <i>ad hoc</i>	Illumination
David Mirsch	F	F	F	F	F
Michael Goulder	P	F	F	F	P
Gerd Ludemann	P	F	F	F	P
Christian Narrative	P	P	P	P	P

Over and again Jesus claimed among His followers that He was from God, and was God, and was returning to God. The resurrection bears irrefutably strong evidence that what Jesus had said about Himself was true—He was raised by the same God that had long ago promised a Redeemer to His people; the same God who designed and created the universe and everything in it. Resurrection scholar N. T. Wright concludes, “The resurrection was the sign to the early Christians that this living god had acted at least in accordance with his ancient promise, and thereby shown himself to be God, the unique creator and sovereign of the world.”¹⁵⁰ And that is the same God that was being

¹⁴⁹ Bart Ehrman, “Why I (Actually) Discuss Hallucinations,” *The Bart Ehrman Blog*, June 6, 2015, <https://ehrmanblog.org/why-i-actually-discuss-hallucinations/>.

¹⁵⁰ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 726.

slowly revealed to Michael (and the doubting believer) through the cumulative case apologetic approach.¹⁵¹

Christian worldview portrait. As with previous lessons, lesson 5 was drawn to a close by adding additional “brushstrokes” to the Christian Worldview Portrait: “Man failed to uphold God’s Moral Law. To redeem mankind, God provided a propitiation for mankind in His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. By virtue of being raised from the dead, it can be said that Jesus was born of flesh, walked among men on earth, was crucified by the Romans, died, was buried, and was raised from the dead by His supernatural Father, God. This is the God of Christianity. And by virtue of His resurrection from the dead, the divine nature of Jesus is affirmed, including His sovereignty, and divine authority regarding all matters.”¹⁵²

Indeed, since the resurrection evidences and bears witness to Jesus’s divine nature, it is reasonable to suggest that he possesses divine authority. Therefore, the things Jesus said are authoritative by divine decree. Once again, posing a forward-looking question provided internal cohesion between lessons and was an introduction to the sixth and final lesson. That simple question was: what exactly is it that Jesus said about Scripture that can further substantiate the cumulative case objective?”

Lesson 6: The Authority of Scripture

Lesson 6 began with the words of Timothy Paul Jones: “To trust in the resurrected Jesus is to trust not only Jesus Himself but also the texts *He* trusted and the writings of the witnesses *He* commissioned to tell the world about Him.”¹⁵³ Jesus gives an

¹⁵¹ For a thorough and sustained argument that Jesus thought Himself to be God, see Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2016), 120-53.

¹⁵² For more information see appendix 8, “Waurika Church of Christ Christian Apologetics Class Series Lesson Handouts” for an outline of lesson 5, “The Historical Resurrection of Jesus.”

¹⁵³ Jones, *Why Should I Trust the Bible?*, 109.

all-encompassing textual endorsement in Luke 11:50-51, telling the Pharisees they are guilty of “the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world . . . from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.” After reading this passage to the class, a copy of the *Tanakh* was passed around the classroom while the ordering of the Hebrew canon explained that “Abel to Zechariah” circumscribed the entire Old Testament canon.

Presentation of the Dead Sea Scrolls discoveries at Qumran soon followed to illuminate the significance of the discovery regarding the light it shed upon the Old Testament text that was the contemporary of Jesus. And what that text indicates is that the modern Old Testament canon’s fidelity to the ancient text in Luke 11:51, is quite remarkable. Jones writes,

When the Dead Sea Scrolls were rediscovered in the twentieth century it became clear that the Old Testament had remained remarkably stable over the centuries. . . . In fact, a scroll of Isaiah found . . . was copied more than a hundred years before Jesus was born; yet, the wording of this scroll of Isaiah agreed almost completely with the Masoretic texts that were copied a thousand years later!¹⁵⁴

Anticipation of a new covenant. The presentation then moved to the New Testament as a long and much-anticipated dispensation. Johnathan Morrow suggests there are three good reasons to believe the New Testament canon was a natural aspect of the unfolding of redemptive history in Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁵ First, the story needed to be completed. Michael Kruger argues that the very structure of the Old Testament “with its truncated and forward-looking ending” set just such an expectation.¹⁵⁶ The first century Jews were waiting for God to finish the story of the Old Testament, and the earliest Christians believed that God was completing the story through the man come from God, Jesus of

¹⁵⁴ Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 43-44.

¹⁵⁵ Johnathan Morrow, *Questioning the Bible: 11 Major Challenges to the Bible’s Authority*, (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 60-64.

¹⁵⁶ Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 52.

Nazareth.¹⁵⁷

The second reason Morrow gives to believe that the New Testament was part of the natural unfolding of redemptive history in Christ Jesus was that “the earliest Christians understood that covenants in the ancient world were written documents and believed Jesus the Messiah had inaugurated the New Covenant.”¹⁵⁸ Jesus said at the Last Supper, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20), and Paul refers to himself as a minister of the “new covenant” (2 Cor 3:6).¹⁵⁹ The Israelites also knew that whenever God had acted in a redemptive way, he usually gave them a new revelation.

The third reason to believe that the New Testament was part of the natural unfolding of redemptive history, Morrow notes, was that “the earliest Christians believed that the apostles were uniquely authorized by Jesus to communicate the message of the New Covenant to the world.”¹⁶⁰ Jesus had specifically given the disciples His authority to teach, preach, and write the gospel message, and the New Covenant (cf. Mark 3:14-15; Matt 28:19-20). Given the Jewish heritage of most of the earliest Christians, it would be an expectation for the apostles to write down their eyewitness accounts of what they had seen and heard, just like Moses and the prophets before they died to capture and record the eyewitness testimony that would outlast the apostles themselves.¹⁶¹

New Testament criticism. While it was presented to the class that there is much reason to trust the authority of the modern Old Testament text as Holy writ affirmed by Jesus, and that there was much anticipation for a New Testament to be given, what

¹⁵⁷ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 60.

¹⁵⁸ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 62.

¹⁵⁹ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 62.

¹⁶⁰ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 63.

¹⁶¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 308.

about the truthfulness of the Gospels? After all, critics the likes of Bart Ehrman have challenged the Christian bases and pillars upon which not only the gospel rests but upon the entire New Testament canon; inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency, the essential aspects of biblical authority. Ehrmann's now-famous claim that there are more than 400,000 errors in the Greek manuscripts was presented and explanation given regarding how variants are counted by textual critics.¹⁶² Attention was also given to what constitutes a variant as well as its overall effect.

Biblical authority. Presentation was then made concerning tenets that undergird the authority of the Bible: inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency, as understood in the academy of textual criticism, with the conclusion and assurance that each of these tenets are lavishly beheld by the modern canon of Scripture. This discussion brought the class series to a close with the addition of the final brushstrokes to the Christian Worldview Portrait: “exercising his authority, Jesus affirms both Old Testament and the New Testament as God’s Word breathed out. And what God’s Word says is that there is a Creator of all that exists; that there is design and intentionality present in the created world; that human beings were created with self-consciousness and that there is an innate moral law residing in the self-consciousness of man, created in the *imago Dei* Himself. Scripture says that Jesus of Nazareth was a man born of woman, but He is also the living Son of God who walked this earth, was crucified, died, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. Scripture tells us that His death was a propitiation of the sins of all people who would believe, and that God would remember their sins no more. And that God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, along with all your people who have died in Christ are there, in heaven, waiting for you to get there.”¹⁶³

¹⁶² Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: the Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 89.

¹⁶³ For full text see appendix 11, “The Christian Worldview Portrait,” to view the document in its entirety.

Then, the class series on Christian apologetics taught to the saints at Waurika church of Christ was concluded. The next week a high level, general review of the class material was conducted, followed by administration of the post-curriculum survey.

Looking forward, chapter 5 stands poised to shed much light upon the potential success of this teaching endeavor.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This project began with a simple proposition: the modern-day conservative wing of the churches of Christ, to varying degrees, are hindered in their capacity to fully embrace and execute the three commanded mandates of the church—to worship God, to edify the body of believers, and to evangelize the lost. It was further hypothesized that the Waurika church of Christ in Waurika, Oklahoma, exhibited two distinct attributes that were potential hinderances to that effort: Campbellite traditionalism and limited apologetics proficiency. What was needed, it was argued in this project, was a bridge joining the *sacred* and the *secular spheres* so that the church of Christ might deepen their reverence and awe for the One God (Eph 4:6), that the body through increasing knowledge might be edified (Eph 4:13), and that the twenty-first century fields of white might be effectively harvested and brought into the one body (Eph 4:4), through the priesthood of all the saints (Eph 4:12). That bridge *is* Christian apologetics.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

With an eye toward the three mandates, the project's purpose was to teach foundational apologetics in a cumulative case format to the saints at Waurika church of Christ to enhance their apologetic knowledge. To that end this ministry project set about teaching apologetics not to complete an extensive causeway but rather to merely break the ground with a golden shovel in hopes of laying the foundation of an apologetics bridge between the *sacred* and the *secular spheres*. Traditions run deep; only the hopelessly naive would conjecture a grander scope. Consequently, what follows is an

evaluation of the respondents' survey data, which strongly suggests that the foundational construction of an apologetic bridge is well underway at the Waurika church of Christ.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

To reiterate, the goals of this ministry project were simplistic and straightforward:

1. The first goal was to assess the baseline apologetic knowledge of the church members at Waurika church of Christ.
2. The second goal was to develop and teach the cumulative case apologetic curriculum to the combined adult Bible class.
3. The third goal was to assess the efficacy of the teaching by evaluating the increase in apologetic knowledge, and the ability to offer a defense of the Christian faith of those attending the class series.

To measure the successful completion of these goals, a specified research methodology was developed. This methodology included the use of customized research instruments to accurately quantify success of the project goals, and are further described in the following sections.

Visualizing the Goals

To evaluate both the correctness of the hypothesis, and the potential efficacy of the apologetics andragogy, an adequate and able data assimilation methodology using Likert scale instruments were utilized, as well as two statistical processing programs.¹ However, project cohesion and clarity relied heavily upon a conceptual project model that stood as a structural guide for the project. conceptual

Conceptual project model. To provide overall project clarity, a model of the intricate relationships symbiotically coexisting between various elements and goals of the

¹ A project-specific, six-point Likert scale surveys across two groups (pre- and post-andragogy) were utilized, and the generated data were processed and synthesized using IBM SPSS®, Premium version 29 statistical software. Microsoft Excel 10 was also utilized. See appendix 1, "Christian Apologetics Pre-curriculum Survey"; appendix 2, "Curriculum Evaluation: Elder's Rubric"; and appendix 3, "Christian Apologetics Post-Curriculum Survey."

ministry project was developed to guide and safeguard accuracy of the process (see figure 1).² Johnson and Morgan argue the benefit of such a project model is that it “provides a visual representation of the research questions, the constructs that serve as the study variables, and the outcome.”³ In that, figure 1 visually depicts the theoretical basis for the entire project. Any assessment of the goals of this project would be incomplete without first grasping these internal interrelationships that the research instruments were designed to qualify, and quantify.

In figure 1, the *phenomenon* is the driving force behind the overall project: the fulfillment of the three dynamics of the church. The *constructs*, on the other hand, are concepts that are not directly observable and yet directly and significantly influence the *phenomenon*. For the church of Christ at Waurika, the observable *phenomenon*, it was hypothesized, was significantly influenced by two concurrent *constructs*: “Campbellite Traditionalism” and “Limited Apologetic Training.”⁴ To each in turn.

First, several independent variables, termed *domains*, reside under the Campbellite Traditionalism construct not only comprising the construct, but also giving it quantifiable traits and characteristics. These traits and characteristics were substantially detailed in chapter 3 of this project. Beginning with a remnant Campbellite traditionalism attitude significantly and firmly rooted in *nuda scriptura*, the conservative churches of Christ have tended to sequester themselves within the *sacred sphere*. From inside the *sacred sphere* the church has historically shunned science, theology, and philosophy as well as all other sources of religious knowledge existing outside of Scripture alone. Inevitably, the result of this Campbellite heritage has been to foster a particular strain of

² Roy warns that any item on the scale that “does not fit” potentially pollutes the summated scores of the respondents. Roy, *A Comprehensive Guide for Design*, 364.

³ Robert L. Johnson and Grant B. Morgan, *Survey Scales: A Guide to Development, Analysis, and Reporting* (New York: Guilford, 2016), 35.

⁴ According to Johnson and Morgan, *constructs* are non-observable mental attitudes and include personal interests, preferences, beliefs, and dislikes. Likewise, the domains of components that make up the constructs are attitudinal, and non-observable. See Johnson and Morgan, *Survey Scales*, 35.

anti-intellectualism that has been previously and much discussed herein as well. Therefore, anti-philosophy, anti-science, and *nuda scriptura* are among the domains of the Campbellite Traditionalism construct that exercise a considerable effect upon the phenomenon of fulfilling the three church mandates. Satisfaction of the project goals, particularly goals 1 and 3, is inescapably linked to each domain as each goal is based solely upon the significance that each domain holds in the student's belief structure both before, and after the teaching intervention.⁵

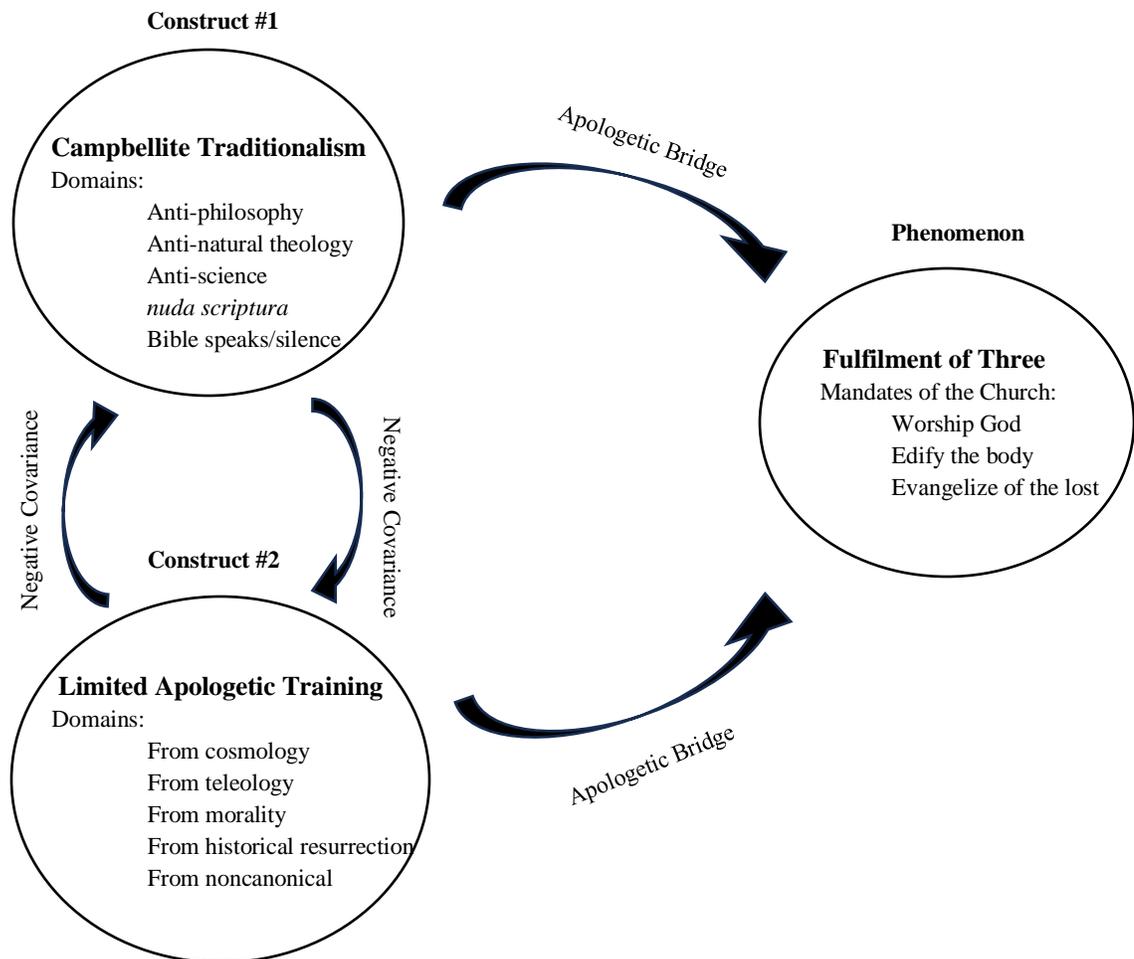


Figure 1. Phenomenon, constructs, and domains

⁵ The consistent assumption throughout has been that Campbellite Traditionalism is so intricately interwoven with anti-intellectualism that increased apologetic proficiency would inescapably be a move away from Campbellite Traditionalism as it has been herein defined.

Second, the construct “Limited Apologetic Training” is undergirded by a series of domains that reflect apologetics knowledge, or proficiency that the respondents consider themselves to possess. These domains align with elements of the cumulative case curriculum taught during the apologetics class series and presented as Likert statements asserting a confidence in defending the Christian faith from cosmology, teleology, morality, the historical resurrection of Jesus. Finally, confidence in using noncanonical sources exclusively to defend the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity was also ascertained. Likewise, satisfaction of the project goals was intimately linked with this second construct. However, critical to overall assessment of the success of goals 1 and 3, it was secondarily hypothesized that there exists an inverse (negative) covariance such that, within the churches of Christ, the higher the degree of Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes held, the weaker the classical apologetics proficiency among the members. Again, no assessment of the goals of this project can be posited without considering this intricate relationship. Correspondingly, each of the two constructs (i.e., the aggregate of independent variables that make up these two constructs) bring to bear significant influence upon the *phenomenon* by retarding or otherwise impeding its optimal function and fulfillment. As the current hypothesis postulated, the potential corrective centered around teaching foundational apologetics to the WCC to act as a metaphorical *bridge over to the secular sphere* where the tools of classical apologetics were identified and laid hold of, all the while modifying member attitudes toward the domains that comprise both constructs through the project andragogy. The task at hand, then, was to appropriate adequate research instruments to collect and analyze data necessary to prove, or disprove the hypothesis with a quantifiable degree of probability.⁶

⁶ Figure 1 is an adaptation of Johnson and Morgan’s conceptual model. See Johnson and Morgan, *Survey Scales*, 39.

Project Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the baseline apologetic knowledge of the church members at Waurika church of Christ. This was accomplished through administration of the pre-curriculum survey.

Likert survey data collection. The pre-curriculum survey was administered after a brief introduction during the first class session and offered again the next class session to those unable to attend the prior week. Respondents to the pre-curriculum survey also included Sunday school teachers who wished to participate “remotely” by viewing each lesson recording later in the week. While class attendance averaged 51 over the sixteen-week series, with the addition of Sunday school teachers, along with first session absentees, the total number of respondents participating in the pre-curriculum survey numbered 62. At this point in the project, the first goal, administration of the pre-curriculum survey was successfully completed.

The post-curriculum survey was administered during the last half of the final session, and was made available the following week for those absent from the final class session. The total number of post-curriculum respondents numbered 53.

The pre- and post-curriculum surveys were qualified following criteria previously defined in the “Research Methodology” section in chapter 1. Since the nature of the cumulative case curriculum was progressive, those attending fewer than twelve of the scheduled classes and failing to view the makeup recordings from the church website were excluded from the post-curriculum survey. Adhering to this criteria, seven post-curriculum surveys were disqualified. Six additional surveys, found to be incomplete, were returned to their respondents by a deacon (to maintain student anonymity) to secure survey completion. Of these six surveys, five were subsequently qualified.⁷ In all, forty-

⁷ Anonymity was secured and maintained by respondents identifying themselves on both surveys using the last three digits of their social security number. This also allowed for easy pairing of pre- and post-surveys, as well as simplified statistical evaluation by using a unique numeric identifier for each population member.

four qualified pairs of surveys were obtained for *t*-test analysis under two conditions (pre and post).⁸

Project Goal 2

The second goal was to develop and teach the cumulative case apologetic curriculum to the combined adult Bible class. Considering that project goal 2 was extensively detailed in chapter 4: to develop and teach the cumulative case apologetic curriculum to the combined adult Bible class, let it be sufficient here to simply state that the apologetics class curriculum *was* developed, and *was* presented to the WCC Sunday morning adult Bible class over a sixteen-week period. Further, goal 2 was considered successful when 90 percent of the criteria listed in the Elder’s Evaluation Rubric was evaluated as “sufficient” or higher. Therefore, the goal of developing and teaching a cumulative case apologetics curriculum was successfully met with the rubric showing a 100 percent “sufficient” or higher post-curriculum rating by the WCC elders.⁹ The elder’s rubric results are further discussed below.

Project Goal 3

The third goal was to assess the efficacy of the teaching by evaluating the increase in apologetic knowledge, and the ability to offer a defense of the Christian faith of those attending the class series. It is not only here that the ultimate success of the project is glimpsed, but perhaps more importantly, light is shed upon several important questions: Are the postulated project premises, correct? Was Campbellite Traditionalism found present at WCC? To what degree? Does its presence impede apologetics proficiency? Was the teaching intervention able to move members to a more gracious position regarding the practice of apologetics within the churches of Christ? To these

⁸ A “qualified pair” was considered one pre-curriculum survey and one post-curriculum survey from a student attending at least twelve of the fifteen lessons, and answering all survey questions.

⁹ See appendix 8, “Waurika church of Christ Christian Apologetics Class Series Outline,”

questions, a synthesis of the survey data has much to say.

Domain level synthesis. Survey responses to Likert statements concerning the domains under the Campbellite Traditionalism construct generally followed the anticipated pattern (see table 5). The “anti-philosophy” domain Likert survey statement, “Christians can learn much about God from philosophy,” was disagreed with to some extent by 41 percent of pre-curriculum respondents, but was disagreed with by only 13.3 percent in the post-curriculum survey.¹⁰ That is a directional movement away from the Campbellite Traditional anti-philosophy attitude of 67.6 percent. The anti-natural theology domain statement, “Christians can learn much about God through the study of the natural world,” was disagreed with to some extent by 8.1 percent of the pre-curriculum population, however, no one disagreed with the statement in the post-curriculum survey. Likewise, 26.2 percent of the pre-curriculum respondents disagreed to some extent with the statement with, “Science and religion are compatible,” while only 6.8 percent of the post-curriculum respondents disagreed. The survey statement regarding the *nuda scriptura* domain was posed as, “Christians should only study about God through the Bible.” The most frequent response (mode) to this Likert statement in the pre-curriculum data set was 3, “disagree somewhat.” Even so, 41 percent of the pre-curriculum respondents agreed with the statement to some extent, while only 28.9 percent of the post-survey respondents agreed with the statement to some extent—a decrease of 30.2 percent.¹¹ The final Campbellite domain statement was posed: “Christians are to speak where the Bible speaks, and to be silent where the Bible is silent?” Respondents

¹⁰ *Disagreeing to some extent* includes the survey response “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” and “disagree somewhat,” or numerically 1, 2, and 3 respectively. Likewise, *agreeing to some extent* includes the survey responses “agree somewhat,” “agree,” and “strongly agree,” or numerically 4, 5, and 6 respectively.

¹¹ This is one of two negatively worded statements that were recoded for uniformity in the statistical calculations of the summated pre- and post-survey data sets. Recoded post-survey respondents indicated a 30.2 percent movement away from a *nuda scriptura* attitude.

overwhelming answered “yes” with 80 percent agreeing with this yes/no formatted statement.¹² This question was not asked on the post survey since yes/no formatted questions cannot be analyzed using *t*-test for dependent means.

Table 5. Domain level summary

Constructs Influencing the Phenomenon	Percent Holding Attitude to Some Degree				
	Pre-Survey (df=59)	Post-Survey (df=43)	<i>t</i> (43)=	<i>t</i> critical one-tail	<i>p</i> =
Construct #1					
Campbellite Characteristic (Domain)					
Anti-philosophy	41.0	13.3	4.07	1.68	0.0001
Anti-natural theology	8.1	0.0	4.06	1.68	0.0001
Anti-science	26.2	6.8	4.07	1.68	0.0001
<i>nuda scriptura</i>	41.0	28.9	2.01	1.68	0.0255
Speak/Silence	80.0	—	—	—	—
Construct #2					
Limited Apologetic Training	18.3	100	—	—	—

It is noteworthy that the two strongest held Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes are centered around anti-philosophy and speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where it is silent. The relationship between these two attitudes should come as little surprise. Robert Richardson, Alexander Campbell’s biographer, wrote of this cocurrent relationship:

The silence of the Bible is to be revered equally with its teachings, and that to intrude into things not seen and not revealed evinces of a fleshly mind as much as to misinterpret and pervert the express statements of the Scriptures. . . . The silence of the Scriptures is to be respected equally with its teachings, that was almost peculiar to the reformation urged by Mr. Campbell, and continued to be one of its most important and characteristic traits.¹³

¹² “Speak/Silence” is an abbreviated notation for “Christians are to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.” This Likert statement appeared as a yes/no formatted question on the pre-curriculum survey only.

¹³ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1897), 351-52.

Consequently, philosophy is often perceived as an attempt to speak to “the silence of Scripture,” and is antithetical to the heritage church of Christ doctrine of respecting the silence of Scripture, with silence.

Construct 2 consisted of five domains as well (see table 7 and further discussion below), and was collectively represented on the pre-curriculum survey by the yes/no formatted question; “Have you had apologetic training in the past?” Of all respondents, 18.3 percent acknowledged at least some past apologetic training.

Construct level synthesis. At the construct level, Likert responses for each domain showed three characteristics. First, the data indicates that to varying degrees Campbellite Traditionalism was held by the WCC members along *all* domains with a significant minority holding to anti-philosophy and *nuda scriptura* (both at 41 percent) rooted beliefs and attitudes. It is important to note that respondents holding some degree of anti-natural theology attitude made up only 8.1 percent. This was truly surprising given the deep anti-natural theological roots of the Restoration Movement reaching back to Tolbert Fanning and beyond. Nevertheless, what was initially considered an unexpected anomaly in the pre-curriculum survey data (considering the Restoration Movement’s historical aversion to both theology and natural theology) has a logical explanation. As mentioned at the outset, the Waurika church of Christ is a direct reflection of the town’s rural disposition and demeanor with many members involved in some aspect of agriculture. No one more so than farmers and ranchers stand with Job in asking the rhetorical question, “Whom among all of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this” (Job 12:9). God’s creative and providential hand is everywhere manifest “in the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20) and are on constant display in the daily lives of farmers and ranchers. These created things are no less evident to the multitude of agriculturalists at WCC. Further, with the constant fear of appearing sympathetic of Deism, a long-forgotten concern, holding a positive natural theology attitude is no longer seen as a first order heresy. For these reasons, and with a high degree of confidence, it is

postulated that so few held pre-curriculum survey anti-natural theology attitudes. Further, this explains why the survey data indicates 100 percent of those 8.1 percent moved away from their initial anti-natural theology attitude following the apologetics teaching intervention.

Second, the data showed only one in five members had been previously exposed to at least some apologetics training. Naturally, because of this ministry project, near 100 percent of the members have now been exposed to formal apologetics training. In addition, the conclusions garnered from the data in table 5 can be held with a high degree of confidence. Since the absolute t values are greater than the t critical one-tail value, it can be stated that the teaching intervention made a difference. Further, since the p -value is < 0.05 , it can be concluded with a 95 percent probability that the changes in attitude were due to the teaching intervention rather than by chance.¹⁴

Finally, it should be observed that while the andragogy did not directly teach against Campbellite attitudes (domains), a substantial and significant movement away from Campbellite attitudes was predictably observed at the construct level; that data is captured in table 5 below. This observed relationship is further evaluated below using Pearson Correlation Coefficient calculations (see table 8).

Project level synthesis (pre-curriculum survey data). To properly compare the Likert data before and after the teaching intervention, all pre-curriculum survey scores for each construct (statements 1-10), including the scores from the apologetics proficiency section (statements 6-10), were summated then divided by the number of instances to yield the mean value of the data set.¹⁵ The same was then applied to the post-curriculum survey data set. The mean values for both data sets were then statistically

¹⁴ Critical one-tail values were used rather than two-tail values because the research hypothesis has a predicted directionality, as well as values at the $p < 0.05$ level.

¹⁵ See appendix 2, “Christian Apologetics Pre-Curriculum Survey”; and appendix 3, “Christian Apologetics Post-Curriculum Survey,” to view all pre- and post-curriculum survey questions.

compared to determine if the andragogy changed Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes and made a difference in self-perceived apologetic proficiency. The pre-curriculum survey mean value *of any single item* served as an initial indication of how tightly held the construct was across the data set. The pre-curriculum survey mean value *of all items* suggested not only how tightly Campbellite Traditionalism was held but also reflected perceived apologetics proficiency of the respondent. If the mean value fell on the “disagree” side of the scale, then many of the WCC members *lean* Campbellite. If the mean value fell toward the “agree” side of the Likert scale, then Campbellite Traditionalism was not tightly held by the majority. However, the summated data set, on a scale of 10 to 60, showed a mean value of 39.8. Therefore, the summated data set mean value occurred slightly to the right of the mid-point of the absolute scale (35) indicating that the pre-curriculum survey mean value *leans* towards “somewhat agree.” Even so, that does not indicate to what extent the significantly sized minority held to Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes nor to the potential lack of self-perceived apologetic proficiency.

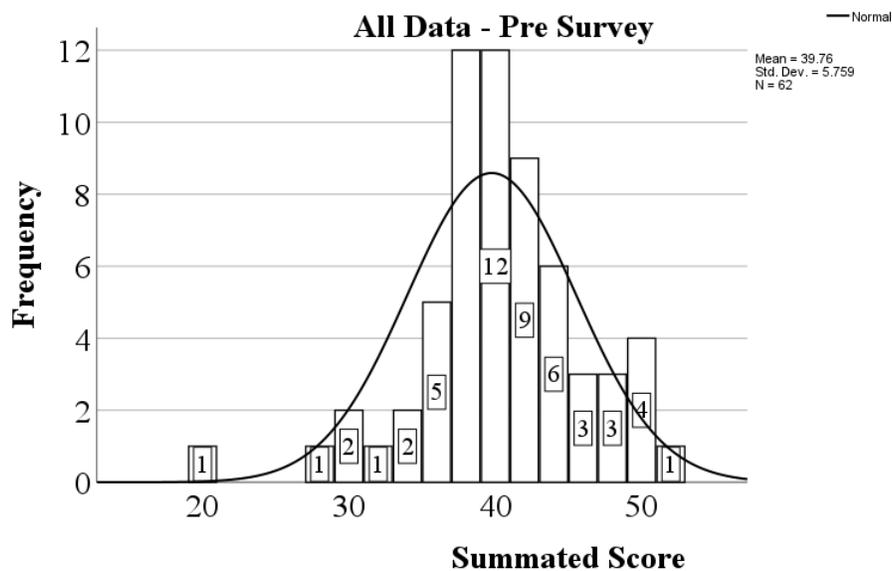


Figure 2. All data, pre-survey

Figure 2 shows the summated Likert scores of the pre-curriculum survey data set ($df = 61$), including the data set's distribution depicted by a bell curve. The absolute peak of the bell curve represents the mean value of the data set. Skewedness is a measure of the quality of the data distribution and defines the asymmetry of a distribution along the bell curve. In the figure below, a shorter "tail" on the right side of the bell curve than on the left "corresponds to a larger number of occurrences at the higher end of the distribution" and is a negatively skewed distribution.¹⁶ Correspondingly, the pre-curriculum survey distribution bell curve has a skewedness of -0.7. This negative skewedness is also indicative of some respondents holding to the moderate and extreme of the lower Likert score items.¹⁷ In other words, -0.7 skewedness indicates that a minority of respondents "strongly disagree," and "disagree" with one or more Likert statements, while an even smaller minority of respondents "agree," or "strongly agree" with one or more of the Likert statements, creating an imbalance in the distribution. Even so, the data generally fell within the anticipated distribution as the left skewedness aligns with the hypothesis.

Project level synthesis (post-curriculum survey data). The post-survey data distribution ($df = 43$) showed a negative skewedness as well, indicating that within the post-intervention population there remains some very committed Campbellite Traditionalist (see figure 3). However, the data indicates the degree of moderate and extreme Campbellite Traditionalist attitudes and concurrent apologetics proficiency, decreased as observed in the decrease of the distribution skewedness from -0.7 to -0.5. The data distribution also showed a "tightening" of the standard deviation from 5.8 in the pre-curriculum survey data, to 5.6 in the post-curriculum survey data, indicating more

¹⁶ Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 388.

¹⁷ Salkind, *Statistics*, 61.

responses closer to the mean value in the post-survey data than in the pre-survey data (see table 6).¹⁸ The post-curriculum survey summated data set, on the same summated Likert scale of 10 to 60, revealed a mean value of 51.4. Therefore, the summated data set mean value occurs significantly to the right of the mid-point (35) on the summated Likert scale indicating the mean value sets solidly at “agree.”

In addition to an observed reduction in skewedness, and a reduction in the standard deviation between the pre- and post-curriculum survey population, the data set mean value showed *movement* and *directionality* from 39.8 to 51.4. This is a substantial movement of the mean value away from both Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes and limited apologetic proficiency toward more hospitable attitudes toward apologetics and an increase in self-perceived apologetics knowledge (see table 6).

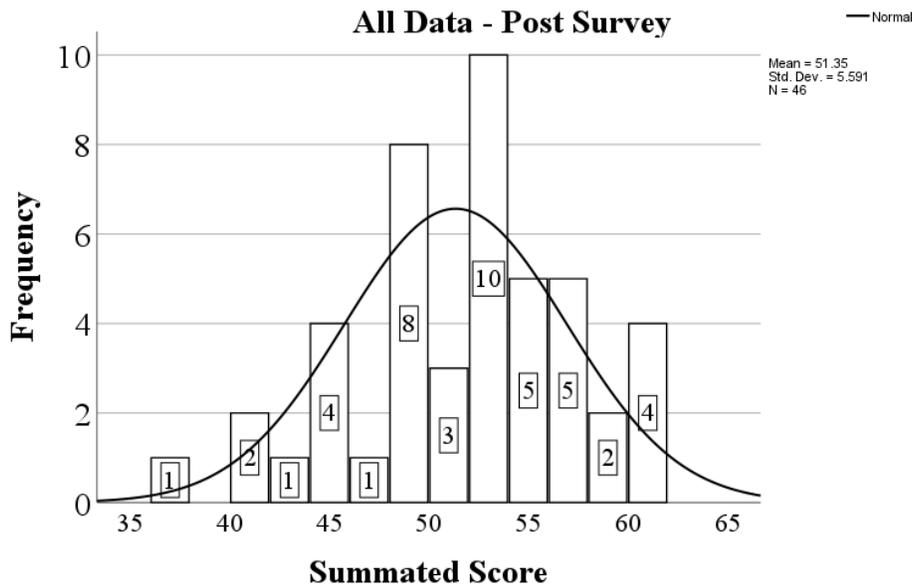


Figure 3. All data, post-survey

¹⁸ *Standard deviation* (Std. Dev.) is an indication of “the typical amount of deviation a score has from the mean.” See Johnson and Morgan, *Survey Scales*, 107.

Table 6. Survey data distribution

	<i>df</i>	Std. Dev.	Mean	Median	Skewedness	<i>t</i> ₍₄₃₎	<i>t</i> -critical one tail	<i>p</i>
Pre	61	5.8	39.8	40.0	-0.7	—		—
Post	43	5.6	51.4	52.0	-0.5	—		—
All Data	43	—	—	—	—	4.06	1.68	0.0001

The summated pre- and post-curriculum survey mean values (table 6) were statistically compared (*t*-test for dependent means), yielding a $t_{(43)} = 4.06$, a value greater than the critical one-tail value of 1.68, and a probability of $p = 0.0001$.¹⁹

Likert data interpretation. While the influence of Campbellite Traditionalism upon the acquisition of apologetics knowledge and proficiency has been well argued to this point, the teaching of foundational apologetics was the primary impetus of the project. Success of that endeavor was determined in large part by how respondents answered statements related to their comfort with defending their faith through classical apologetic arguments. It is noted, however, that the data summarized in table 7 is highly suggestive of a covarying, inverse (negative) relationship existing between Campbellite Traditionalism and apologetic knowledge/proficiency just as this project has heretofore argued.²⁰

¹⁹ A *t*-test for dependent means is utilized to analyze a single group under two conditions such as a pre-test and a post-test. The value *p* indicates the significance and is used to determine the probability that the difference between the two conditions observed is due to intervention (teaching apologetics) or the difference is due to error. See Salkind, *Statistics*, 180.

²⁰ Two variables that change together are considered to “covary” or “change together.” See Johnson and Morgan, *Survey Scales*, 108.

Table 7. Apologetics proficiency

Construct #2 Limited Apologetic Training	Average Likert Response (1-6)		Change	$t_{(43)} =$	t critical one-tail	$p =$
	Pre-Survey ($df=61$)	Post-Survey ($df=43$)				
I can defend my faith:						
From the cosmos	3.8	5.4	+ 1.6	4.07	1.68	0.0001
From design	4.4	5.7	+ 1.3	4.07	1.68	0.0001
From morality	4.2	5.3	+ 1.1	4.07	1.68	0.0001
From the historical resurrection	4.2	5.6	+ 1.4	4.07	1.68	0.0001
Using noncanonical sources	2.8	4.1	+ 1.3	4.07	1.68	0.0001

Just as teaching Christian apologetics to WCC members brought about a quantifiable decrease in the degree of agreement with Campbellite Traditionalism domain attitudes (see table 5), teaching apologetics also quantifiably increased members' self-perceived apologetic proficiency.

Covariance correlation (a secondary hypothesis). To measure the degree of covariance between the two constructs, the pre- and post-curriculum data were analyzed and Pearson Correlation Coefficients (r -value) were derived to adjudicate on the secondary null hypothesis: there does not exist an inverse relationship between Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes and apologetics proficiency. To calculate Pearson coefficients the survey scores for each respondent for statements 1-5 pertaining to the Campbellite Traditionalism construct, and questions 6-10 pertaining to the Limited Apologetic Training construct were summated for both pre- and post-curriculum data sets. Statistical computation then yielded the Pearson correlation coefficients of interest (see table 8).²¹

Understanding that a *perfect* Pearson correlation (r -value) between two items

²¹ Again, a one-tail test was used since this secondary research hypothesis also predicted directionality (negative) of the covarying relationship between Campbellite traditionalism and Limited Apologetic proficiency.

equal 1.0 for a positive correlation, and -1.0 for a negative correlation, any absolute r -value ≥ 0.03 is considered remarkable. That being the case, the pre-curriculum data in table 8 indicates a weak inverse (negative) correlation exists between respondents holding Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes, and apologetic proficiency as indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.145. In other words, the Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the stronger a respondent held to Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes, the weaker the respondent's perceived apologetics proficiency.

The same directional correlation was observed in the post-curriculum data set exhibiting an even greater polarity in the inverse relationship indicated by an r -value of -0.304. In fact, the inverse relationship between Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes and apologetic proficiency is ~100 percent stronger in the post-curriculum data as it is in the pre-curriculum data. This would indicate that the teaching of apologetics brought about a remarkable shift in attitudes away from Campbellite Traditionalism and toward greater self-perceived apologetics proficiency.

Table 8. Covariance correlations

		Campbellite Attitudes - Pre	Apologetic Proficiency - Pre	Apologetic Proficiency - Post	Campbellite Attitudes - Post
Campbellite Attitudes - Pre	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.145	-0.156	0.268
	Sig. (1-tail)		0.177	0.159	0.041
	n (df)	43	43	43	43
Apologetic Proficiency - Pre	Pearson Correlation	-0.145	1	0.225	0.118
	Sig. (1-tail)	0.177		0.074	0.225
	n (df)	43	43	43	43
Apologetic Proficiency - Post	Pearson Correlation	-0.156	0.225	1	-0.304
	Sig. (1-tail)	0.159	0.074		0.024
	n (df)	43	43	43	43
Campbellite Attitudes - Post	Pearson Correlation	0.268	0.118	-0.304	1
	Sig. (1-tail)	0.041	0.225	0.024	
	n (df)	43	43	43	43

Note. Correlation is considered remarkable at the absolute value of ≥ 0.3 . Output generated by IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0.

Based upon these Pearson correlation coefficients, the secondary null hypothesis is rejected and the secondary research hypothesis accepted: *there exists an inverse relationship between Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes and apologetics proficiency*. That was the assumption all along, that both Campbellite Traditionalism and Limited Apologetic Training were impeding, to some degree, fulfillment of the three dynamics of the church: to worship God, to edify the body, and to evangelize the lost. The prescribed corrective—to teach foundational apologetics at Waurika Church of Christ—sought to mitigate this weakness. Consequently, of considerable importance is the answer to the question; did the WCC members increase their perceived proficiency in apologetics? In short, was the primary research hypothesis of this project, correct?

Statistician Neil Salkind contends, “Here’s what it all boils down to. A null hypothesis can be either true or false. Either there really is no difference between groups, or there really and truly is an inequality (such as a difference between two groups).”²² Absolutely critical to the scientific method, the *null hypothesis* allows for falsifiability of a theoretical proposition. The absence of falsifiability can and often does lead to unrestrained propositional absurdity. For this ministry project, the *null hypothesis* can be stated as, “Statistically there is *no* significant difference in the degree of self-perceived apologetic knowledge and proficiency among the WCC members before, and after teaching the apologetics class series.” Conversely, the *research hypothesis* can be stated as, “Statistically there *is* a significant increase in the degree of self-perceived apologetic knowledge and proficiency among the WCC members after the apologetics class series.”

According to the Likert survey data, the WCC members displayed a uniform directional movement toward greater confidence in defending the faith from each of the

²² Salkind, *Statistics*, 144.

categories: the cosmos, design, morality, the historical resurrection of Jesus, and confidence to utilize noncanonical sources in defense preparation (see table 7). The Likert score mean value for each category increased by an average of 1.34 points (22.3 percent) on a six-point Likert scale, which is a remarkable change. Across these five apologetic proficiency categories the Likert score data yielded $t_{(43)} = 4.07$, a value greater than the critical one-tail value of 1.68, and a probability of $p < 0.05$. These data indicate that a statistically significant change in attitude did occur, and with a 95 percent probability that the change was not due to random chance.²³ Therefore, according to the collective of Likert survey data, the *null hypothesis* for the project was rejected, and the *research hypothesis* was accepted: *teaching foundational apologetics did increase the level of self-perceived apologetics proficiency of the members at WCC by a statistically significant margin.*

Strengths of the Project

Consequent of the statistically significant increase in apologetics proficiency and the positive nature of respondent comments, it can be stated that the curriculum material and the presentation method were strengths of the project. In fact, Likert data shed light upon additional aspects of the projects that can be considered strengths as well.

Elder Evaluation Rubric

In large measure, the success of this ministry project was determined by the survey responses of the Waurika church of Christ eldership. Indeed, the second goal of the ministry project was to develop and teach the cumulative case apologetic curriculum, with the eventual success of this goal to be determined by elder survey.²⁴ To facilitate the evaluation, each of the four elders were given a survey after the final lesson to evaluate

²³ For $df_{(43)}$, critical one-tail value at 0.05 level of significance = 1.68. See Salkind, *Statistics*, 358.

²⁴ See “Goals” section of chap. 1 of this project.

the class curriculum.²⁵ The rubric consisted of six statements on a four-point Likert scale of “1–Insufficient; 2–Requires Attention; 3–Sufficient; 4–Exemplary.”

Success of this project goal was defined as “90 percent of the evaluation criteria meeting or exceeding the ‘Sufficient’ level” (see table 9 below). Based upon elder evaluation data, four strengths of the project are brought into focus. First, elder evaluations reflected unanimous ratings of “sufficient” or greater for the criteria of curriculum content. Second, the evaluations reflected high marks for congregational feedback that they received from the members. Third, the elders unanimously evaluated the teaching methodology as “exemplary.”

Table 9. Elder evaluation rubric

Elder	Number of Answers Given			
	Insufficient	Requires Attention	Sufficient	Exemplary
1	—	—	3	3
2	—	—	—	6
3	—	—	—	6
4	—	—	2	4

Fourth, the elder evaluations also allowed for free commentary, which was quite informative. Based upon the level of Likert statement agreement, as well as the general tone of the commentary, it was concluded that the elders were satisfied with the curriculum and presentation of the course material. Interestingly, one elder noted that there was “some hesitation on the part of a few members to look outside of the Bible for learning.” Also, two elders noted issues concerning the lack of “invited guests” (further discussed below). Overall, however, the elders were pleased with the ministry project facilitation and outcome with one elder noting, “I believe the object to provide a layer of

²⁵ See appendix 2, “Waurika church of Christ Elder’s Evaluation Curriculum.”

knowledge of apologetics was met. . . . My hope was that all would come away with more and I am confident that hope was met.” Another elder, sensing the broader application, wrote, “This is something that is needed throughout the church.”

Finally, it bears mentioning that free-flowing commentary from the respondents, like these elder remarks, humanizes the study data giving “attitudes” personal color, and additional strengths of the project can be gleaned from the class members themselves. Of the forty-four qualified post-curriculum surveys, thirty-one respondents left “additional comments.” Survey commentary gave respondents an opportunity to speak to what they had learned and what they struggled with. For instance, one respondent commented that it “might be difficult to deliver this lesson to a nonbeliever . . . without the thorough education to present the material, it seems intimidating.” Another wrote, “I feel that most of the material would need to be simplified for most people I come in contact with.” Nevertheless, the general tone of the commentary was encouraging such as the respondent who wrote, “This class was extremely informative and eye opening for me. Having these points presented to me in a way I never considered before, I can honestly say this class has given me a lot to think about.” And another writing, “I feel it has made me stronger in my faith.” Others suggested they were “sad the study has ended.” Of all the commentary, perhaps the most poignant was from a respondent who simply wrote; “Phenomenal, thought-provoking experience. The most interesting Bible class I have attended.”

Finally, one respondent appeared to have been strongly compelled to present a brief *apologia* stating with emphatic penmanship, “Human beings are created beings (created by God). It’s the only way—material & immaterial, physical & spiritual. Only created beings created to be *like* the Creator!!! In every way . . . consider the moral argument also !!!” All told, by the strength of the member’s responses it would seem some good work was done here.

Weaknesses of the Project

Naturally, a project of this scope and nature inevitably suffers from unforeseen weaknesses. Two particular weakness were concerning.

Community Outreach

The first remarkable weakness of the project concerned the community outreach initiative. While the WCC members were encouraged on several occasions, through various mediums to “invite a friend” to the apologetics class series, ultimately participation outside the membership was poor. Since the hope was that some nonbelievers might be invited as a vehicle for community outreach, this aspect of the ministry project proved to be an untenable goal, perhaps for several reasons.

As noted by two of the Elder Evaluation Rubric responses, the class meeting time may have played a role in the poor community outreach aspect of the project. The pertinent Likert statement in the rubric was, “the community outreach aspect, and the response to the ‘invited guest’ initiative, was encouraging.”²⁶ One elder responded, “We elected to have the series of lessons on Sunday to get the most member involvement. That election did limit the visitor aspect.” Another elder commented, “Our order of worship/class was the problem.” These are certainly valid observations holding true for any potential guests currently attending services at another church. In fact, one elder supported two such guests remotely by providing class notebooks and handouts of printed material because the apologetics class conflicted with church services at their home congregation. Nevertheless, it was interesting to note that no mention was made as to possible reasons why no secular friends were in attendance either.

There are several possible reasons the “invite a friend” outreach failed. First, aside from asking members to “invite a friend,” no other community outreach avenue was utilized. There were no promotional efforts: advertising, flyers, newspaper ads, posters,

²⁶ See appendix 2, “Waurika church of Christ Elder’s Evaluation Rubric.”

or yard signs created or posted that might have reached unbelievers in the community. This reality exposes a personal failure on the present author's part to properly preplan, and to consider the potential weakness of the community response resulting from it. Second, asking both denominational Christians and secular community members to commit to attend a sixteen-week class series as an "invited guest" is a difficult commitment for a guest to make. The duration of the class in and of itself was a likely deterrent. However, one additional factor may have impacted the success of this outreach. Perhaps the invite a friend initiative failed due to a hesitancy among the membership to actually extend an invitation to begin with.

Molly Worthen argues that "the inward turn" to fundamentalism, an entrenched characteristic of the Restoration Movement, inevitably hampers evangelists, not in the least by becoming "polemicist rather than apologists."²⁷ How could it not? William Chance rightly notes that once the Restorationist considered their restoration of the apostolic church complete, there was nothing more to improve upon. Chance writes, "Thus, the emphasis was no longer one of unity [among the denominations], but exclusivity, focusing upon duplication of patterns, methodologies, and beliefs of the first century church as closely as possible. Therefore, if one deviated from this supposedly divine pattern even in one part, he or she would really be displeasing God."²⁸ While this rigidity has significant impact upon the practice of classical apologetics within the churches of Christ, it also profoundly effects evangelism simply because folded in is the Campbellite conception that the denominations are by consequence "outside the church." It is quite possible a Campbellite-heritage mindset of exclusivity within the churches of Christ is still held today, albeit most often unconsciously. In short, it could be said that to

²⁷ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelism* (New York: Oxford University, 2014), 24.

²⁸ William T. Chance, *Restoration Run Amuck: Legalism in the Church of Christ* (Bloomington, IN: iVerse, 2012), 9.

some extent the churches of Christ still maintain exclusivity by subconscious default.

That is often the depth and frustrating complexity of the phenomenon: Campbellite traditionalism attitudes are often the subconscious default regarding attitudes toward universal Christian unity, apologetics, and evangelism. Given the present author's poor planning, the length of the class series, class times conflicting with denominational service times, and an inherent subconscious Campbellite default, it is not surprising that the "invite a friend" initiative substantially failed.

Critical Response

The second remarkable weakness of the project concerned critical response. Although the research hypothesis was proven—that there was a statistically significant increase in apologetic proficiency resulting from the teaching of apologetics—there were critics. Unsurprisingly, given the church of Christ exclusivity concerning interaction with the denominations, questions were raised by some members as to why the ministry project had ties to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Three separate individuals even insisted upon assurance that the class was not going to be taught from "Baptist" material. However, upon explanation of the limited opportunities to study Christian apologetics at the doctoral level at a church of Christ university, and assurance that the class material was "church of Christ approved," these concerns generally subsided. Additionally, one member made several private comments to me during the class series indicating an eagerness to finish the apologetics class "so we can get back to the Bible." After the class series concluded, one member said, "I enjoyed the class; I know you have to do it but I don't like going through all those theories of man, but overall, I enjoyed it." Even still, the most disappointing critic by far and away was a gentleman who led his family of four to boycott the entire sixteen-week class series. The reason, as relayed by an elder, was that apologetics has nothing to do with "Bible" class, choosing rather to withdraw his fellowship than suffer himself and family to the study of noncanonical

sources to defend the Christian faith. Nevertheless, many encouraging, and pro-apologetics attitudes were relayed in the post-survey comment section.²⁹

What Could Be Done Differently

From the brilliance of hindsight, it seems quite clear that much more could have been done at the preplanning stage regarding engagement with the community. That is perhaps the greatest weakness of the project and would be approached differently given a future opportunity. The irony, however, should not be missed: exclusivity inhibiting evangelism. There was a personal failure to utilize apologetics to promote, model, and engage in the third mandate: to evangelize the lost. An underlying premise of the project, it would seem, confirmed my own “exclusivity by subconscious default.” Given future opportunity, community outreach will occupy a more notable role in preplanning.

Second, it would have been beneficial to interview a small representative cross-section of the congregants concerning Campbellite Traditionalism attitudes before the apologetics class series was taught. To maintain an unbiased and pristine audience, no apologetic-related topics or apologetics at large were spoken of, taught upon, or preached upon for at least twelve months prior to teaching the class series. However, pre-interviewing a select group would have yielded much good information.

Third, in retrospect, a post-curriculum focus group consisting of no more than ten class members would have provided invaluable information and criticism of the curriculum, teaching style, and content. In addition, insight could have been gained concerning what students considered potential theological implications for practicing classical apologetics within the churches of Christ .

Theological Reflections

Musings on theological commitments have been substantial throughout this

²⁹ For a full list of post-curriculum survey comments, see appendix 12, “Post-Curriculum Survey Comments.”

project. Therefore, a brief summary should suffice. It is a fact and cherished function of history to constantly inform the present and in doing so lay some hold on the future. Much of this project has looked back in history so that the churches of Christ might lay hold on the future; a hopeful future; a future that was prayed for by Jesus in The High Priestly Prayer; a future given structure and command by Paul in the Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope; a future hope for all who now wander in darkness.

Christians are called to worship the One God of all who is over all, and through all, and in all (Eph 4:6). Lynn Anderson calls this an “overwhelming mega truth; the glory of God, once beheld in unapproachable light, then revealed in Jesus Christ, is now actually to be reflected by those in the church.”³⁰ Likewise, Jesus prays for edification of the body of believers so that in their unity they might be “perfectly one” (John 17:23). Paul then actualizes the prayer of Jesus detailing how ecclesial unity is commensurate with edification, and edification, along with reverent worship of God, drives evangelization of the lost. These three *are* the three dynamics of the church. To do that, however, Jeff Childers, Douglas Foster, and Jack Reese argue the churches of Christ need to make some changes from traditionalism to reach a new generation.³¹ Similarly, Foster argues that leaders within the church must change their teaching philosophy to be relevant “to the time in which they live.”³² Campbell historian Robert West notes Campbell’s insistence that at times the Christian had to go “into Babylon and fight the enemy with their own weapons.”³³ In addition, the apostle Paul explained to the Corinthians, “I have

³⁰ Lynn Anderson, *Navigating the Winds of Change: How to Manage Change in the Church* (West Monroe, LA: Howard, 1994), 68.

³¹ Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese, *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: ACU, 2001), 147.

³² Douglas Foster, *Will the Cycle Be Unbroken: Churches of Christ Face the 21st Century* (Abilene, TX: ACU, 1994), 70-71.

³³ Robert F. West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1948), 90-91.

become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22b). Christian apologetics, it has been argued, *is* one of those invaluable “means” that, often of necessity, must be launched from *common ground* with the unbeliever.

While there is much to admire about Cornelius Van Til’s apologetic, his presuppositional approach, grounded in Calvinist theology, is broadly incompatible with traditional church of Christ theology. Further, Calvinism’s rejection of common ground by virtue of antithesis, leaves the apologist bereft of the necessary resources to evangelize the Bible skeptic. Nonetheless, Van Til is clearly right about one thing, one’s apologetic is always an outworking of one’s theology.

Personal Reflections

Personal reflections upon the project are not only philosophical and theological, but are also psychological. By that it is meant, to a significant degree, that there is an emotional facet to these personal reflections.

Author’s Note—Confessions of a Neo-Campbellite

There being those who will take great umbrage with my approach, and consider my treatment of the churches of Christ, here, to have been *quite harsh*, I feel a final word of clarity is necessary. First, however, lest I be grossly misunderstood, my fervent prayer is that the churches of Christ continue holding fast to the Word *once delivered unto the saints*, now and until the last trumpet sounds, in the spirit of the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*: that high view of the Holy Bible as the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God. Nothing is to be held above or in equality to its singular sufficiency in all matters of faith unto salvation as God’s Word breathed out.

Further, let me with full reflection and unabashed conviction unequivocally state that my good conscience rests firmly within the doctrinal and theological domain of the churches of Christ. My attempt and intents here, I am certain, have not been myopically nor intentionally deconstructive of church of Christ doctrine nor of the broader

Restoration Movement. Nor have I sought to perch myself upon some anathematic plateau—I have proudly argued this project’s hypothesis from my perspective *within* the church of Christ. Nor, heaven forbid, should the elders and saints at Waurika church of Christ feel disparaged in the least—they are more roundly informed, solidly grounded, and diligently led than that. Rather, it has been my “soul” desire to offer a clarion call-to-action throughout the churches of Christ in the midst of what Davis and Graham have termed, *The Great Dechurching* in our generation.

Finally, it remains my fervent conviction that the churches of Christ can, and must hold to our cherished legacy of the restored church of Christ, and if that practice so earns the title “Campbellite,” then I humbly welcome that moniker. Nevertheless, in the same instant it is imperative that the churches of Christ reach to the necessary tools to best fulfill the three scriptural mandates of the church. Paul has commended it, Jesus has prayed for it, and God has commanded it.

Conclusion

This ministry project set out to uncover and identify attitudes and aspects held by the members of the Waurika church of Christ, and by extension the conservative churches of Christ at large, that were possibly impeding greater fulfillment of the three church dynamics. The intervention that was proposed and implemented was teaching foundational apologetics as a means by which the WCC members might safely venture out of the *sacred sphere of nuda scriptura* in order to lay hold of the vast tools and resources of Christian apologetics, so that the three mandates of the church might be strengthened and earnestly fulfilled. Based upon the significant findings presented in this chapter, the stated goals have been met and this ministry project has been a success.

Finally, Jesus prayed to the Father, “I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17:23).

And all of God’s children said Amen, Come Lord Jesus!

APPENDIX 1

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS PRE-CURRICULUM SURVEY

The following survey was used to assess the baseline apologetic knowledge of the adult Bible class. This survey contained three parts: five preliminary statements, followed by five lesson statements, followed by five general questions. The survey intended to quantify to what extent Campbellite traditionalism resides among the Bible class attendees. This survey also contained the informed consent clause to satisfy the ethical requirement allowing the researcher to utilize information collected through the survey. Parental consent for minors to participate, which is required of minors in addition to the standard consent located on the survey(s), can be found in appendix 4.

Date: _____

Last three digits of your SS #: _____

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS SURVEY

Pre-Curriculum

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess each members current knowledge in Christian apologetics and to determine how confident you are in defending your Christian faith. The following survey questions will assess the baseline knowledge, then, following the conclusion of the apologetic class series, a very similar survey will be administered in order to determine how successful the teaching was. All responses given in this survey will be held in the strictest of confidence. It is for this reason I am asking for you to only submit the last three digits of your social security number as a means to track your before and after progress. Additionally, you should know that each of the following questions have been pre-approved by the Waurika church of Christ elders, and by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee.¹ By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the researcher, Ty B. Kerley, to use your survey responses in this research ministry project.

Section 1: Preliminary Statements

Using the following scale please pick the corresponding number related to your agreement and write the number in the blank.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Disagree Somewhat 3	Agree Somewhat 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

1. Christian apologetics, and the defense of the Christian faith is commanded in Scripture.
2. Christians can learn much about the nature of God through the study of the natural world.
3. Christians can learn much about God from philosophy.
4. Christians should only study about God through the Bible.
5. Science and religion are incompatible.

¹ Waurika church of Christ eldership approval February 26, 2023; SBTS Ethics Committee approval March 1, 2023.

Section 2: Lesson Statements

Using the following scale please pick the corresponding number related to your agreement and write the number in the blank.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Disagree Somewhat 3	Agree Somewhat 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
---------------------------	---------------	---------------------------	------------------------	------------	------------------------

6. I can argue for the existence of God based upon the existence of the planets and the moons and the stars.
7. I can argue for the existence of God based upon the evidence of design in the world.
8. I can argue for the existence of God based upon an innate sense of right and wrong.
9. I can defend the historical accuracy of the resurrection of Jesus.
10. I can defend my faith in the truth of Christianity using noncanonical sources only (sources outside of the Bible).

Section 3: General Questions

Choose your response by circling Yes or No.

11. Have you received previous training in Christian apologetics in the past?
Yes, or No?
12. Christians are to speak where the Bible speaks, and to be silent where the Bible is silent?
Yes, or No?
13. Christian apologetics is an important aspect of the Christian faith?
Yes, or No?
14. I have been challenged by unbelievers that the Bible is just a creation of man, and not God's Word?
Yes, or No?
15. I sometime question the truthfulness of the Bible?
Yes, or No?

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was used by the elders to evaluate and critique of the content, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability, and teaching style of the curriculum.

Date _____

**WAURIKA CHURCH OF CHRIST ELDER'S
EVALUATION RUBRIC**

Christian Apologetics Training Course					
1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The course series that was presented was the correct level of detail.					
The instructor presented the material in an easy-to-understand format.					
As an elder of the church, I am pleased with the lesson series.					
The congregation's feedback has been acceptable.					
The community outreach aspect, and the response to the "invited guest" initiative, was encouraging.					
I am pleased how the instructor taught this series of classes.					

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX 3

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS POST-CURRICULUM SURVEY

The following survey assessed the post-curriculum apologetic knowledge of the adult Bible class to quantify the success of the teaching.

Date: _____

Last three digits of your SS #: _____

How many of the fifteen lessons did you attend (in person or through website recording)?: _____

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS SURVEY

Post-Curriculum

Agreement to Participate

The research survey in which you are about to participate is designed to assess each member's current, post-curriculum knowledge in Christian apologetics and to determine how confident you are in defending your Christian faith. The following survey questions will assess the new baseline knowledge in order to determine how successful the teaching of this class series was. All responses given in this survey will be held in the strictest of confidence. It is for this reason I am asking for you to only submit the last three digits of your social security number to track your before and after progress. Additionally, you should know that each of the following questions have been pre-approved by the Waurika church of Christ elders, and by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee.¹ By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the researcher, Ty B. Kerley, to use your survey responses in this research ministry project.

Section 1: Preliminary Statements

Using the following scale please pick the corresponding number related to your agreement and write the number in the blank.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Disagree Somewhat 3	Agree Somewhat 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

1. Christian apologetics, and the defense of the Christian faith is commanded in Scripture.
2. Christians can learn much about the nature of God through the study of the natural world.
3. Christians can learn much about God from philosophy.
4. Christians should only study about God through the Bible.
5. Science and religion are incompatible.

¹ Waurika church of Christ eldership approval February 26, 2023; SBTS Ethics Committee approval March 1, 2023.

Section 2: Lesson Statements

Using the following scale please pick the corresponding number related to your agreement and write the number in the blank.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Disagree Somewhat 3	Agree Somewhat 4	Agree 5	Strongly Agree 6
---------------------------	---------------	---------------------------	------------------------	------------	------------------------

6. I can argue for the existence of God based upon the existence of the planets and the moons and the stars.
7. I can argue for the existence of God based upon the evidence of design in the world.
8. I can argue for the existence of God based upon an innate sense of right and wrong.
9. I can defend the historical accuracy of the resurrection of Jesus.
10. I can defend my faith in the truth of Christianity by using noncanonical sources only (sources outside of the Bible).

Section 3: Curriculum Questions

Write in your response on a scale of 1-6

11. On a scale of 1-6 with 6 being the greatest (most difficult), how difficult were the concepts presented to understand.
12. On a scale of 1- 6 with 6 being the greatest, rate the general content of the material presented.
13. On a scale of 1- 6 with 6 being the greatest, rate the general format of how well the material was presented.
14. On a scale of 1- 6 with 6 being the greatest, rate the instructor's ability to teach the material.
15. On a scale of 1-6 with 6 being the greatest, based upon your experience in this class, rate your desire to attend more class like this.

APPENDIX 4

PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE

The following parental consent for minors was used for any apologetics class series attendee under the age of 18 years. Completed consent forms allowed for minors to fully participate in the class and surveys.

WAURIKA CHURCH OF CHRIST APOLOGETICS CLASS SERIES

PARENTAL CONSENT FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE

Agreement to Participate

You are being requested to give permission for a minor or member of a vulnerable population under your legal supervision to participate in a class series designed to teach foundational Christian apologetics. This research is being conducted by Ty B. Kerley for purposes of thesis project research. In this research, a person will be asked to participate in a study designed to evaluate prior knowledge of apologetics by survey, to participate in the class series as a student, and to participate in a post-class survey.¹ Any information provided will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will a person's name be reported, or a person's name identified with his or her responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and the person you are giving approval to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time. By signing your name below, you are giving informed consent for the designated minor or member of a vulnerable population to participate in this research if he or she desires, and you are giving informed consent for the researcher, Ty B. Kerley, to use your survey responses in this research ministry project. Additionally, you should know that this parental consent has been pre-approved by the Waurika church of Christ elders, and by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee.²

Participant Name _____

Parent/Guardian Name _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Date _____

¹ This parental consent was in addition to the consent students signed in order to participate in both surveys. Minors completed the same surveys as the adults and were required to sign for themselves if they chose to participate.

² Waurika church of Christ eldership approval February 26, 2023; SBTS Ethics Committee approval March 1, 2023.

APPENDIX 5

WAURIKA CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATION MISSION STATEMENT

The Waurika church of Christ mission statement is included in this appendix. It is an excellent example of the importance of the Ephesians 4:1-16 pericope to the Restoration Movement, as well as the continuing unity efforts of the churches of Christ today.

WAURIKA CHURCH OF CHRIST *CONGREGATION MISSION STATEMENT*

The vision of the eldership is to have the congregation mature to a faithful, vibrant, spiritual, and loving family of God.

Our mission is to introduce Christ and His way of living to everyone outside and inside the church in every circumstance that we find ourselves so that they will have a chance for Christ to mature in their life.

We must have His smile on our face and His love in our hearts. Our actions and words must reflect His kindness and gentleness so that His way of living is evident in us. In order for the church of Christ in Waurika to truly be God's family, our lives must reflect Jesus.

Live His life, Speak His language, Glorify God.

Eph 4:11-16

And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (ESV).

APPENDIX 6

*DECLARATION AND ADDRESS OF
THOMAS CAMPBELL (1809)*

Considered to be one of two foundational Restoration Movement documents, the following is Thomas Campbell's restoration vision given cohesive structure, and officially made available to the public.

DECLARATION AND ADDRESS OF THOMAS CAMPBELL (1809)

PROP. 1. THAT the church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else as none else can be truly and properly called christians.

2. That although the church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies, locally separate one from another; yet there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Christ Jesus hath also received them to the glory of God. And for this purpose, they ought all to walk by the same rule, to mind and speak the same thing; and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

3. That in order to this, nothing ought to be inculcated upon christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion; but what is expressly taught, and enjoined upon them, in the word of God. Nor ought any thing be admitted, as of divine obligation, in their church constitution and managements, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles upon the New Testament church; either in express terms, or by approved precedent.

4. That although the scriptures of the Old and New Testament are inseparably connected, making together but one perfect and entire revelation of the Divine will, for the edification and salvation of the church; and therefore in that respect cannot be separated; yet as to what directly and properly belongs to their immediate object, the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline and government of the New Testament church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members; as the Old Testament was for the worship discipline and government of the Old Testament church, and the particular duties of its members.

5. That with respect to the commands and ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, where the scriptures are silent, as to the express time or manner of performance, if any such there be; no human authority has power to interfere, in order to supply the supposed deficiency, by making laws for the church; nor can any thing more be required of christians in such cases, but only that they so observe these commands and ordinances, as will evidently answer the declared and obvious end of their institution. Much less has any human authority power to impose new commands or ordinances upon the church, which our Lord

Jesus Christ has not enjoined. Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the church; or be made a term of communion amongst christians, that is not as old as the New Testament.

6. That although inferences and deductions from scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word: yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men; but in the power and veracity of God--therefore no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the church. Hence it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the church's confession.

7. That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient; and the more full and explicit they be, for those purposes, the better; yet, as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of christian communion: unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment; or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; whereas the church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.

8. That as it is not necessary that persons should have a particular knowledge or distinct apprehension of all divinely revealed truths in order to entitle them to a place in the church; neither should they, for this purpose, be required to make a profession more extensive than their knowledge: but that, on the contrary, their having a due measure of scriptural self-knowledge respecting their lost and perishing condition by nature and practice; and of the way of salvation thro' Jesus Christ, accompanied with a profession of their faith in, and obedience to him, in all things according to his word, is all that is absolutely necessary to qualify them for admission into his church.

9. That all that are enabled, thro' grace, to make such a profession, and to manifest the reality of it in their tempers and conduct, should consider each other as the precious saints of God, should love each other as brethren, children of the same family and father, temples of the same spirit, members of the same body, subjects of the same grace, objects of the same divine love, bought with the same price, and joint heirs of the same inheritance. Whom God hath thus joined together no man should dare to put asunder.

10. That division among christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils. It is anti-christian, as it destroys the visible unity of

the body of Christ; as if he were divided against himself, excluding and excommunicating a part of himself. It is anti-scriptural, as being strictly prohibited by his sovereign authority; a direct violation of his express command. It is anti-natural, as it excites christians to contemn, to hate and oppose one another, who are bound by the highest and most endearing obligations to love each other as brethren, even as Christ has loved them. In a word, it is productive of confusion, and of every evil work.

11. That, (in some instances,) a partial neglect of the expressly revealed will of God; and, (in others,) an assumed authority for making the approbation of human opinions, and human inventions, a term of communion, by introducing them into the constitution, faith, or worship, of the church; are, and have been, the immediate, obvious, and universally acknowledged causes, of all the corruptions and divisions that ever have taken place in the church of God.

12. That all that is necessary to the highest state of perfection and purity of the church upon earth is, first, that none be received as members, but such as having that due measure of scriptural self-knowledge described above, do profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the scriptures; nor, 2dly, that any be retained in her communion longer than they continue to manifest the reality of their profession by their tempers and conduct. 3dly, that her ministers, duly and scripturally qualified, inculcate none other things than those very articles of faith and holiness expressly revealed and enjoined in the word of God. Lastly, that in all their administrations they keep close by the observance of all divine ordinances, after the example of the primitive church, exhibited in the New Testament; without any additions whatsoever of human opinions or inventions of men.

13. Lastly. That if any circumstantial indispensable necessary to the observance of divine ordinances be not found upon the page of express revelation, such, and such only, as are absolutely necessary for this purpose, should be adopted, under the title of human expedients, without any pretence to a more sacred origin--so that any subsequent alteration or difference in the observance of these things might produce no contention nor division in the church.¹

¹ The *Declaration & Address* portion, which covers fifty pages, is not included in this appendix. For the full document, see Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington, (Pa.)* (Washington, PA: Brown and Sample, 1809), quoted in Thomas H. Olbricht and Hans Rollmann, eds., *The Quest for Christian Unity, Peace, and Purity in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address: Text and Studies*, Atla Mongraph Series 46 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000), 5-58. Original spelling maintained throughout.

APPENDIX 7

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF THE SPRINGFIELD PRESBYTERY (1804)

Along with Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Adress*, Barton Stone's *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* lay the initial framework for the movement out of which the churches of Christ were eventually established. This appendix contains Stone's presbytery dissolution document in its entirety.

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF THE
SPRINGFIELD PRESBYTERY (1804)

The Presbytery of Springfield sitting at Caneridge, in the county of Bourbon, being, through a gracious Providence, in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness and composure of mind; but knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, do make and ordain this our last Will and Testament, in manner and form following, viz.: Imprimis. We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling. Item. We will that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one. Item. We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Item. We will, that candidates for the Gospel ministry henceforth study the Holy Scriptures with fervent prayer, and obtain license from God to preach the simple Gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, without any mixture of philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, or the rudiments of the world. And let none henceforth take this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. Item. We will, that the church of Christ resume her native right of internal government,—try her candidates for the ministry, as to their soundness in the faith, acquaintance with experimental religion, gravity and aptness to teach; and admit no other proof of their authority but Christ speaking in them. We will, that the church of Christ look up to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest; and that she resume her primitive right of trying those who say they are apostles, and are not. Item. We will, that each particular church, as a body, actuated by the same spirit, choose her own preacher, and support him by a free-will offering, without a written call or subscription—admit members—remove offenses; and never henceforth delegate her right of government to any man or set of men whatever. Item. We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell. Item. We will, that preachers and people cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect that redemption draweth nigh. Item. We will, that our weak brethren, who may have been wishing to make the Presbytery of Springfield their king, and wot not what is now become of it, betake themselves to the Rock of Ages, and follow Jesus for the future. Item. We will, the Synod of Kentucky examine every member who may be suspected of having departed from the Confession of Faith, and suspend every such suspected heretic immediately, in order that the oppressed may go free, and taste the sweets of Gospel liberty. Item. We will, that Ja-----, the author of two letters lately published in Lexington, be encouraged in his zeal to destroy partyism. We will, moreover, that our past conduct be examined into by all who may have correct information; but let foreigners beware of speaking evil of things which they know not. Item. Finally we will, that all our sister bodies read their Bibles carefully, that they may see their fate there determined, and prepare for death before it is too late.

Signatories:

ROBERT MARSHALL & JOHN THOMPSON,
RICHARD M'NEMAR & JOHN DUNLAVY,
B. W. STONE & DAVID PURVIANCE¹

¹ “Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery, 1804,” accessed February 13, 2023, <https://intotheword.net/pdfs/LastWillSpringfield.pdf>. Original spelling maintained throughout.

APPENDIX 8

WAURIKA CHURCH OF CHRIST CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS CLASS SERIES OUTLINE

This appendix includes the compilation of (biweekly) class lesson handouts. These handouts were progressively collected by each attendee and incorporated into their class notebook.¹

¹ The format of the lesson outlines have been compacted from their original configuration to reduce space.

WAURIKA CHURCH OF CHRIST CHRISTIAN
APOLOGETICS CLASS SERIES OUTLINE

Outline - Lesson 1 – Survey and Introduction

Sunday Morning Bible Class
May 7, 2023

I. Introduction

A. Welcome

B. Elder Acknowledgement

II. Survey Questionnaire

The goal of any class series is to increase the participant’s knowledge in a particular subject. In order to determine the increase for this class, a baseline must be established at the outset. Then, at the end of the class series, another very similar survey will be given. To establish the baseline this morning I ask you to take a short and simple survey questionnaire. It should not take but about 15 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, please let me know.

A. General Consent Form

At the top of the survey is a consent form, please read it carefully. Also, notice that the survey is anonymous. All I am asking for is the last three digits of your SS number so that the initial survey, and the final survey can be compared.

B. Consent for Minors

Since the high school class will be joining us a separate parental consent form for minors will be required for any student under 18 years of age.

C. Post-curriculum Survey

There will be a post-curriculum survey questionnaire. It will be almost identical to the initial survey and will be given at the end of the last class.

III. Worldviews

A. Definition

Christians view the world, and the things in it in a very particular way. As do atheists, and naturalists, and agnostics, and Buddhist, and so on. How a person views the world is often called that person’s worldview.

B. Christian Worldview

Although there are hundreds of worldviews, there can only be one that is true. Because of this, all worldviews compete against one another with each claiming to be the one true worldview. Throughout this class not only will a *Christian Worldview Portrait* be progressively “painted,” but also the Christian worldview will be presented and defended as the one true worldview.

C. The Big Three

Ultimately, all worldviews serve to provide the answers to the three ultimate questions in life:

1. How did I get here?
2. What is my purpose in life?
3. Where am I going when I die?

D. Worldview Comparison

All people in all cultures through all of history have asked these questions, and the answers to those questions come directly for a person’s worldview. Christian apologetics provides a rational and systematic way to compare worldviews to determine which one is true. In other words, which worldview best answers the three big questions: How did I get here?, What am I here for?, and Where am I going?

Table A1. Big three questions

THE BIG THREE Questions		
Ultimate Questions	Christian	Atheist
How did I get Here?	Created by God	Blind Evolution
What is my Purpose?	Reconciliation with God	Self-Gratification
Where am I Going?	Heaven or Hell	Annihilation

This useful chart gives an example of how worldviews differ in how they answer The Big Three questions. Every person, whether they recognize it or not, answers these questions based upon their worldview. Christian apologetics is a tool that is used to compare worldviews, and at the same time defend Christianity.

IV. Christian Apologetics

A. Definition

The English word; “defense” is the translation of the Greek word *apologia*. It does not mean that we apologize for our faith, it means we form a defense for the Christian faith.

B. Scriptural Warrant

Although there are several passages that commend us to practice apologetics, the verse most often referred to is 1 Peter 3:15.

1. First Peter 3:15

“[B]ut in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15).² The practice of apologetics is a clarion call to all people, not just ministers and elders and deacons.

V. Michael’s Dilemma

A couple of years ago I had an opportunity to interview a person; we will call him Michael. Michael was a Bible skeptic, and therefore a skeptic of Christianity.

A. Question

Michael was asked the question; “Do you think the Bible is the inspired word of God?”

² All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

B. Answer

He answered; “I don’t think it was. I think inspiration comes in many forms like artist who write songs because of inspiration. I think the Bible could be written in the same way just like any book, song or other art. But I think it is in some ways art because it is a creation of man but it is also handpicked in certain ways because it has gone through different interpretations.”

C. Where to Go from Here?

What do we do with this? How do we start a conversation with Michael? If we say, “but 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is God breathed,” what happens then? More than likely, he will go back to his answer that the Bible is just a book written by men. Where do we go from here with Michael who considers the Bible just a book written by man? How do you even start a conversation?

If we are going to prepare a defense as Peter instructs us, and if we are going to be able to use that defense in the public square, and to engage with people like Michael, then it better be a defense that can argue for the existence of God, and the truthfulness of Christianity without *first* using the Bible. This may make some of you uncomfortable, and I understand that. Notice I said *first*. We will eventually get to the Bible as our only authoritative source of knowledge of God but we have to get them there.

VI. Natural Theology

God has revealed Himself to mankind in two different ways. First, God has revealed Himself in *special revelation* through His written Word in Holy Scripture. But God has also revealed Himself through *general revelation* “in the things that have been created.” General revelation is the foundation of Natural Theology.

A. Romans 1

Paul describes general revelation, from which Natural Theology is derived, in Romans 1; specifically verse 18-20: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom 1:18-20).

B. The Human Mind

God created all things, including the human mind with the capacity to use reason, generate philosophies, record histories, and to make scientific discovery. Paul argues that if man fails to use all that is available, including his own minds, in order to deduce that God exists, then he is without excuse.

What Paul is telling us is that part of our defense for God and Christianity can and should come from the natural world, our mind, and the things it generates, logic, science, history. These things provide evidences from nature that testify to the existence of God and should be embraced to help form a defense of the Christian faith.

VII. Methodology

A. Piecemeal

Christian apologetics is often presented and taught in piece-meal fashion. And we end up with a mixed bag of disjointed, stand-alone arguments, that are not as strong as we think.

B. Cumulative Case

This class series will present an apologetic method that is much more cohesive and ties things together. It is a continuous, interconnected series of progressive arguments that begins with an argument for a supernatural Creator, and ends with an argument for the authority of the Bible. It is a cumulative case approach, and it is not so much unlike a court-room case where each piece of evidence that is not forced to stand alone, but is tied into the overall case in such a way as to be incredibly compelling. This is the very best way to reach the unbeliever, like Michael, who refuses the authority of the Bible.

VIII. Ultimate Goals

Ultimately apologetics is essential in helping the Christian excel in strengthening and advancing the three mandates from Scripture placed upon the church:

A. To Deepen Worship of God

B. To Edify One Another

C. To Evangelize the Lost

Outline - Lesson 2 – The *Kalam* Cosmological Arguments

Sunday Morning Bible Class

May 14, 2023

I. Introduction

A. Absentees

Reminder of makeup survey and class recordings posted on the church website. Since the surveys are used to help determine how well I do at teaching these classes, it is important that you not miss more than one class session without at least listening to the class recording on the website. In other words, if you miss more than one class and do not make it up by listening to the recording, I will not be able to use the data from your surveys.

B. Surveys

If any of you missed class last week and have not taken the initial survey, I would like to ask you to take a quick survey before you begin class.

C. Nature of Class Material

One could study apologetics for the next year and not cover all that there is to cover. It is a field that enjoys an enormous amount of research and writing. But it also contains some very complex notions, and some concepts that can be difficult to follow. I have attempted to make this material as easy to understand as possible, but some of the concepts are complex and there is a limit to how simple these concepts can be made.

III. Methodology – The Cumulative Case

The cumulative case argument is like a criminal court proceeding where a single statement is made during the opening argument such as; “John *did not* kill Sam.” That is the argument of the defense. The prosecution argues the opposite; John *did* kill Sam. Then, regardless of how long the trial lasts, everything that follows this opening statement is presented as evidence to substantiate that opening statement. It is an accumulation of evidence that points to a single conclusion; “John did not kill Sam.”

A. Cumulative Case Argument:

“God exists, and Christianity is true.” That is our opening statement. Just like the opening argument, John did not kill Sam; “God exists, and Christianity is true” is our opening statement that we will present an accumulation of evidence to defend.

B. Michael is Our Jury

Remember Michael and his dilemma? He is the Bible skeptic that thinks the Bible is a man-made work of art; and not God’s inspired and authoritative Word.

1. Where to Start?

Where do we start with Michael? It would seem he has taken the Bible off the table, at least at the start. But how do we start? What we need is a starting point; some common starting point that we can both agree upon.

2. Common Notions

What we need to find is some *common ground* that exist between Michael and ourselves, and from there we can begin a conversation. *Common notions* give us *common ground* upon which people of differing worldviews can stand. We can define common notions as an innate knowledge of God that all people have by virtue of being created in God’s image, and is attested to in the book of nature.³

3. Common Notions from Nature

There is nothing new here, even the ancient Greek pagan philosophers Plato and Aristotle who lived in the second and third century BC reasoned that man had these innate *common notions* that a Higher Being existed and that one could tell this simply by looking at nature; specifically, by looking at the moon and the stars man is compelled to believe there is a supreme supernatural Creator.

Today, thanks to the Hubble Telescope which was launched in 1990, and now the newly operational Webb Telescope, we now know so much more about the universe than Plato and Aristotle ever dreamed of.

4. The Existence of the World as a Common Notion

The critical question is this: “Has the universe always existed?” How you answer that question is very closely related to your worldview. We do at least know the universe does exist, and that is common ground that we all can stand together on and begin a discussion.

III. The Workings of Logic

A. Simple Argument

Reasoning, or logic, in philosophy begins by making a truth statement through a series of premises, then by arguing for the truthfulness of each premise so that a confirming or denying conclusion can be made. Example:

1. No Married Bachelors

Premise 1 - All unmarried men are bachelors

Premise 2 - John is an unmarried man

Premise 3 - Therefore John is a bachelor

³ J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 1-4.

So that is how logical arguments are constructed and tested to see if they are true. And again, logical arguments follow guidelines that are universally accepted, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Atheists, it does not matter.

IV. *Kalam* Cosmological Argument

A. Formal Argument

The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument is structured like this:

Premise 1 - Whatever begins to exist has a cause

Premise 2 - The universe began to exist

Premise 3 - Therefore, the universe has a cause⁴

The next step is to examine, and to argue for or against the truth or logic of each premise. If the conclusion, that the universe has a cause, is true, then that will become our first piece of evidence in our cumulative case for the existence of God.

1. Premise One - Whatever Begins to Exist Has a Cause

Beginning with the first premise, “whatever begins to exist has a cause,” we ask, “is that true?” It is a rather straight forward premise; and it is true that nothing comes into being on its own. Rarely someone will argue against this but generally, their argument has no evidence to support their claim. Also, the Law of Conservation of Mass tells us that matter can neither be created nor destroyed.⁵ In other words; there are no uncaused causes, and almost no one, not even the atheists, dispute this concept.

a) Who Caused the Cause?

The follow up question: if nothing comes into being without a cause, who caused the Cause? Who caused God? Christians hold that when God created the universe, He also created time, because without space, or matter, there can be no time. That is, God existed in timelessness before creation. He needs no antecedent cause because He has always existed in the eternal present.

b) Premise 1 Conclusion

In sum, the conclusion is made that premise 1 is true; “whatever begins to exist has a cause.”

2. Premise 2 - The Universe Began to Exist

This statement appears rather straight forward as well. However, issues arise when someone makes the claim that the universe has existed from all eternity. That, then, is something that must be reasoned through.

a) No Actual Infinite

So how is it known that the universe began to exist? Remember we are working within space-time so when someone claims that the universe has existed since eternity,

⁴ William Lane Craig, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument,” in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, ed. William Lane Craig (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2002), 92.

⁵ It is sometimes argued that subatomic particles (gluons, quarks, etc.) appear to come into existence from nothing. However, although the evolution of gluons and quarks is not fully understood, these particles do not arise from absolute nothingness but are generated through the collision of two *antecedent particles* at high speed.

they are claiming that time itself goes back to infinity past. But there are real problems with the concept of the universe having existed from all eternity past.⁶

One problem is that there is no actual infinite set of things, there are only potential infinite sets. Now this may sound a bit confusing but it is key to arguing against the universe having existed from all eternity.

(1) Traversing an Actual Infinite

Imagine you are standing on a time line going backward in time to infinity past, and you start walking. It is impossible for you to go all the way back to the beginning because it just goes on forever. You can never arrive at the beginning of infinity past. Reason and logic tell us that if you cannot go all the way back, then you cannot come all the way forward either. You cannot *traverse*, or cross all the events from eternity past to get to today. The fact that we are here today is evidence that the universe has not existed from all of eternity, it had a beginning.⁷

b) Expanding Universe

But to show that the universe has not always been here we can also look to “things that have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world.” These things are much more clearly seen today thanks to scientific discovery through data collected by the Hubble telescope.

(1) Redshift

One significant indication, or point of evidence that the universe had a beginning is that the universe is expanding. Using Einstein’s General Relativity equation along with field calculation by Edwin Hubble in the 1920’s a theory was put forth that the universe was expanding. That everything was moving away from a center point and moving out in space in all directions.⁸

Today, the expansion of the universe has been observed by scientific measurements of the shift in the red spectrum of light from distant stars. These measurements indicate that the stars in the universe are actively moving further and further apart. The universe is expanding outward.

(2) Space Ripples

Scientists have also observed what are called gravitational waves in the space-time fabric at the extreme edges of the universe. These are waves similar to the waves created when a pebble is thrown into a pool of water. These are essentially shock waves from the very beginning of the universe.

(3) Tiny Dense Beginning

The implication is that this expansion started from a very tiny and very dense beginning very similar to an explosion; exactly like a *Big Bang*.

⁶ Craig, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument,” 94-97.

⁷ William Lane Craig and James D. Sinclair, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (West Sussex, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 118.

⁸ Craig, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument,” 101-3.

c) Second Law of Thermodynamics

The third argument for the universe having a beginning is based on the Second Law of Thermodynamics which states; “The total entropy of an isolated system can never decrease.”⁹ That means that all temperatures in a system eventually become equal.

(1) Coffee Cup

If I had a hot cup of coffee setting here. Over time the coffee would cool off. My coffee would actively give its heat up to the air in this room. The temperature of my coffee would go down, and the temperature of the room would go up. The increase in the room temperature would be almost nondetectable because the room is so large, but eventually the temperature of the room and my coffee would come into balance; they would be exactly the same temperature.

(2) Limited Stellar Fuel

Over time the stars burn giving heat to the universe but the universe is so vast and so cold that the temperature of space does not go up a detectable amount. The fuel in the sun and in the stars is a limited supply. Eventually all the stars will consume all of their hydrogen fuel, burn out and the emptiness of space will absorb the heat. If the universe has existed from all eternity, why haven't the stars already run out of fuel? Thinking back about the inability to cross an infinite number of events. The same is true here. If the universe had existed from eternity past, we would not be here because the stars would have already burned out.¹⁰

Even atheist scientists conceded this to be true. Atheist physicist Paul Davies reluctantly states: “even though we may not like it, we must say that the universe’s energy was somehow ‘put in’ at the creation as an initial condition.” Since we have sunlight and starlight, we know that the universe had a definite beginning at some point in time past.

3. Conclusion: The Universe Began to Exist

Returning to the formal argument:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Given the arguments we have presented, we can say that the universe did indeed have a cause.

V. Christian Worldview

One of the purposes of this class series is to help identify what a Christian worldview looks like.

A. What It Is

If you recall, it is our *story of everything* and it is from this story that we view everything else.¹¹ The Christian worldview is also where the answers to the Big Three

⁹ Craig, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument,” 103-7.

¹⁰ Craig, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument,” 103-7.

¹¹ C. Kavin Rowe, *Christianity’s Surprise: A Sure and Certain Hope* (Nashville: Abington, 2020), 11-33.

questions are found: Where did I come from?; What is my purpose?; and What will happen to me when I die? Over the next 12 weeks we will be building a “Christian Worldview Portrait” with each lesson.

B. What we Glean from the *Kalam*

From the cosmological argument presented here, these questions can be asked: If the universe had a First Cause, what has this Cause revealed to us? What can we possibly come to know about the Cause based upon the conclusion of our logical argument?

First, we can determine: The First Cause is beginningless because the First Cause is uncaused; that the Cause is changeless because you cannot traverse a series of infinite changes. We can say that the First Cause is immaterial because material things involve changes at least at the molecular and atomic level; we can say that the First Cause is also timeless given that time had a beginning, the cause of the beginning of time must itself be timeless. The First Cause is spaceless since the First Cause transcends both time and space. And, we can say that the First Cause is enormously powerful by virtue of creation *ex nihilo*.

We can deduce from the cosmological argument that the creation of the universe can only be explained by an Agent and his volitions (will). An Agent acting to satisfy his will is a personal agent. In that way the creation of the universe was a personal demonstration of the will of the First Cause. Only the personal volition of an uncaused First Cause can account for the first temporal change from a changeless cause. Creation *ex nihilo* also eliminates all pantheistic gods since the Creator and the creation cannot be one and the same.

C. Christian Worldview Portrait

These are the first brush strokes of the portrait that we are going to progressively paint throughout this series of classes. From what we have learned from the *kalam* cosmological argument, and the attributes of the First Cause, we can begin our portrait by saying: “There exists an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe, who in relation to the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful.”¹²

At this point, that is all we can say. We *can* say that the First Cause is not the pantheistic god of the Hindu, or of the Buddhist, but we *cannot* say this is the God of the Bible. And we cannot say if He is the God of Judaism, or Christianity, or Islam. We can only say He is the First Cause of creation.

¹² Craig, “The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument,” 111.

Outline - Lesson 3 – The Teleological and Design Arguments

Sunday Morning Bible Class

May 28, 2023

I. Introduction

A. Review

From our Christian worldview portrait last week, we determined: “There exists an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe, who in relation to the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful.”

1. Attributes of the First Cause

But this only raises more questions about the nature of the First Cause. It can say that this First Cause Caused the coming about of the universe out of nothing, but what specifically, did He create? If you want to know something about an artist, study his work. If you want to know about the First Cause, then you need to study what it was that He caused to come in to being, namely the cosmos, and biological systems on earth.

2. Common Notions

The ancient Greek pagan philosophers Plato and Aristotle who lived in the second and third century BC reasoned that man had these innate *common notions* that a Higher Being existed and that one could tell this simply by looking at nature; specifically, by looking at the moon and the stars.

II. Teleology and Design

In Christian apologetics, The Teleological Argument, and the Argument from Design are often considered two names for the same argument but they are two different arguments. They both relate to creation but consider different aspects of creation. Teleology, and its argument, are commonly called the fine-tuning argument because it considers the preciseness of the universe demanded for it to exist, and for life to flourish on planet Earth. The Design Argument, considers the preciseness of biological systems within the universe and their highly designed components.

A. William Paley

William Paley was an English clergyman, Christian apologist, and philosopher. Paley suggested that if a person were walking through the woods and came upon a rock, it would gain no special attention because it is something that is fully expected, and fully at home in the woods. However, if a person walking in the woods came upon a watch, then by instinct it would be known that the watch was not part of the woods, and was at odds with the surrounding environment. But more than that, where the rock was a naturally occurring object, the watch indicated an object with an intricate design. In other words, the watch indicated a Watchmaker.

III. The Teleological Argument

Applying Paley’s logic, the cosmos shows signs that it is the result of a highly designed creation.

We can present the argument in this manner:

1. Every design had a designer
2. The universe has highly complex design
3. Therefore, the universe had a designer

A. The Four Primary Forces

The fine-tuning characteristics of the universe can best be seen in what are the four primary forces; the strong nuclear force constant, the weak nuclear force constant, the gravitational force constant, and the electromagnetic force constant.

1. The Strong Nuclear Force Constant

The strong nuclear force constant governs how tightly the protons and the neutrons inside an atom hold on to each other. If the force is too weak, protons and neutrons would not stick together allowing for complex molecule development. If that were the case then the only element in the entire universe would be hydrogen which only has a one proton and no neutron to bond to. Nothing else could be formed not even oxygen, much less human beings. If the strong nuclear force were even slightly stronger than it is then the protons and neutrons would have too much attraction and there would be no lone protons, so there would be no hydrogen. Just as there can be no life with too much hydrogen, there can be no life with no hydrogen either.

It is a delicate balance, if the strong nuclear force constant were only 2% weaker, or 0.3% stronger, life would be impossible.

2. The Weak Nuclear Force Constant

The second is the weak nuclear force constant. The weak nuclear constant governs among several things the rate of radioactive decay. If the weak force were very much stronger the matter in the universe would all be quickly converted to heavy elements. If the weak force were any weaker there would only be the very lightest elements in the universe. Either way there would be none of the essential elements for life like carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, and phosphorous.¹³ You cannot build a human being out of lead and bismuth.

3. The Gravitational Force Constant

Gravitational forces are responsible for the orderly rotation and orbit of the planets. This force is extremely sensitive, or it might be said it is extremely *fine-tuned*. If the gravitational force constant were altered by as little as 1×10^{-38} our sun would not exist. That number is zero, point, then 38 zeros, then 1, percent. That is a tiny number. Gravitational forces not only keep the planets in their perfect orbits, but gravitational forces also determine how hot the core of a star will burn. If the gravitational forces are too strong stars would burn up too quickly and erratically for life to exist. If the gravitational force constant were lower, stars would never become hot enough to ignite nuclear fusion which produces a range of medium to heavy elements.¹⁴

4. The Electromagnetic Force Constant

The fourth constant is the electromagnetic force constant. And it as well concerns chemical bonding properties. And again, any slight variation prevents molecular formation.

B. Universe Expansion Rate

But I want to touch on one more before we move on. We looked at the expansion of the universe last week. Remember we talked about the red spectrum shift in the light coming from the distant stars. And that red shift indicates velocity and movement

¹³ Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Latest Scientific Discoveries Reveal God* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001), 146-47.

¹⁴ Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 102.

consistent with an expanding universe. But the expansion rate requires a very tight specification. In fact, the expansion rate must be to an accuracy of 1 in 10^{-55} . That is zero, point, followed by 55 zeros, followed by a one. If the expansion rate were slightly slower the universe would collapse back on itself, if the rate were greater then no galaxies would have formed.¹⁵ It looks very much like the Designer of the universe had a specific *purpose* when He created the universe as He did.

IV. The Design Argument

But cosmology is not the only place we see fine-tuning. We see many examples of fine tuning, or more commonly said; we see signs of *design* in biological systems as well.

A. Darwinian Evolution

In 1859 Charles Darwin put forward a theory of evolution in his book, *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin had based his model on the premise that all life evolved from some primordial primitive cell, and through natural selection and genetic mutation over millions of years, led to the emergence of human beings. For Darwin's theory to work, there must be a genetic mutation that is a benefit to the organism that helps its survivability. These advantageous mutations then build upon each other over successive generations becoming more and more complex and beneficial.

1. Irreducible Complexity B. Behe's Challenge

Darwin once made the comment that "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down."¹⁶ In 1996 a biochemist named Michael Behe wrote a book titled *Darwin's Black Box*. In the book Behe took on Darwin's challenge.

What Behe argued was that there are indeed complex organs which cannot possibly be explained by numerous slight modifications. Behe called this phenomenon "Irreducible Complexity."¹⁷ An irreducibly complex system is one which has many parts, and each part is necessary to the overall function of the system. If one single part is defective or missing, the entire system is nonfunctional. Behe gives multiple examples to demonstrate that there are complex systems that cannot be reduced to simplicity; meaning they could not have been evolved from simplicity to complexity.

a) Behe's Mouse Trap

Behe uses a mousetrap to illustrate the concept of an irreducibly complex system. A mousetrap is composed of several parts any one of which if removed would render the entire mousetrap useless. That indicates the mousetrap is irreducibly complex.

¹⁵ Hugh Ross, "Astrological Evidence for a Personal, Transcendent God," in *The Great Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer*, ed. J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1994), 163.

¹⁶ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859; repr. Overland Park, KS: Digireads.com, 2016), 147.

¹⁷ Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 39-40, 42-45.

b) Bacterial Flagellum

One irreducibly complex system that Behe presents is that of bacterial flagellum. Flagellum are small tail-like structures that propel bacterial bodies through fluids. The structure that powers the flagellum is called a motor, and, it is designed much like a mechanical motor that would be found on a boat motor. There is a propellor, a universal joint, a shaft, a stator, and a rotor. The flagellum motor is powered by a highly complex system that pumps acid through a membrane to generate energy.¹⁸

All told there are some forty different specialized proteins that make up flagellum and its motor. If any one of the motor's parts or any single one of the forty proteins are missing, the flagellum is worthless. That makes it an irreducibly complex system.

c) Other Irreducibly Complex Systems

(2) **Cilium** – Hair-like structures that are found in our throats that moves mucus up and out, are another example.

(3) **The Blood Clotting Cascade** – There are a dozen clotting factors, dozens of proteins, and dozens of steps involved in blood clot formation.

(4) **The Adaptive Immune System in Living Systems**

(5) **DNA Replication**

(6) **The Golden Ratio**

(a) **In the Human Face**

(b) **In Art**

(c) **In Architecture**

(d) **In Biological Systems**

(e) **In the Cosmos**

(7) **And The Human Eye**, among many more.

(d') **The Human Eye**

The human eye is one of the most complex systems in human anatomy. Darwin gave it much attention and even though he recognized the complexity of the eye, he still maintained that a complex eye could evolve from simple random mutation first creating some primordial light-sensitive cells, and from there the complex human eye evolved.

However, even during Darwin's time in the mid nineteenth century, science knew much about the anatomy of the eye. Scientists also knew that if any one of the eye's many integrated features were damaged or missing severe loss of sight or blindness would result. They knew that the eye could function only if it were nearly completely intact.¹⁹ Once again, Darwin argued that the eye could only develop through a slow, incremental process over many, many generations.

2. Unlikelihood of Darwinian Chance

Astronomer Fred Hoyle summed up the absurd improbability that irreducibly complex systems in biology, and in human beings developed by consecutive genetic mutations over long periods of time. Hoyle compared "the odds against the spontaneous

¹⁸ Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, 69-73.

¹⁹ Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, 16-22.

assembly of life to those for a whirlwind sweeping through a junkyard and producing a fully functioning Boeing 747.”²⁰

3. Formal Argument

Returning to our argument

1. Every design had a designer.
2. The universe has highly complex design.
3. Therefore, the universe had a designer.

The universe is highly fine-tuned for life showing that the universe had a purposeful Designer. Design is also evident in a multitude of irreducibly complex biological systems including in human beings.

V. Christian Worldview Portrait

From the *kalam* Cosmological Argument last week: “*There exists an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe, who in relation to the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful.*”

And here, from The Teleological and Design Arguments we can add: “*The design, unity, order and complexity of creation itself implies the Creator of the universe is a highly intelligent Designer who purposefully designed and brought the universe into existence with such precise characteristics as to allow human life to thrive.*”

But the one *design* characteristic that sets humans far above the rest of creation is man’s capacity for high intelligence. But the big question is this: “If Darwin is right, how do you get from simple atoms to conscious thought?”

That is the subject of the next lesson.

Outline Lesson 4a – Argument from Mind, and the Moral Argument

Sunday Morning Bible Class

June 11 - 18, 2023

I. Introduction

A. Review

1. From the *Kalam*

There exists an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe, who in relation to the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and The enormously powerful.

2. From the Teleological and Design Arguments

design, unity, order, and complexity of creation itself implies the Creator of the universe is a highly intelligent Designer who purposefully designed and brought the universe into being.

²⁰ Paul Davies, *The Fifth Miracle: The Search for the Origin and Meaning of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 95.

II. Purpose

The second of The Big Three questions: “What is my purpose?” If we say that the Creator of the universe, which includes the creation, is a *purposeful* Creator, then He must have had a purpose when He created mankind.

A. Atoms to Thoughts?

The one characteristic that sets humans far above the rest of creation is man’s capacity for reasoning. But the big question is this: “How do you get from atoms to consciousness?” If we are simply bodies composed of atoms as Darwin says, then how do atoms gain the capacity to think?

1. Corn

Or you might question, how do you get from, say corn, to that part of the brain that allows us to reason? Chemically, corn is made up of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur atoms, and a few trace elements.

2. The Brain

While chemically, your brain operates on Endorphins, Serotonin, Oxytocin, and Dopamine. Likewise, these brain chemicals are made up of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur, and a few trace elements. They are both constituted of the same base components; they are both composed of atoms.

3. From Whence Cometh Consciousness?

So back to the question, how do we get from atoms to consciousness? How do you get from the atomic chemistry in your brain to a mental thought. If we are all just a conglomeration of atoms like the materialist, or the naturalist, or the atheists say, then from whence doest thou thoughts comest?

III. Consciousness

States of consciousness are not our brains. The brain and conscious states, or we can say the mind, are two different things.

A. Definition of Consciousness

For our purposes we will say that consciousness is “what it is like to be you.”²¹ How you perceive yourself setting in this room, how you perceive the person next to you, the words I am saying, your being in this group, what your mind is saying to yourself, all these things make up what it is like to be you.

What we are talking about is uniquely human. Evolutionists argue that we set at the apex of the evolutionary chain that began in some stinky pond water, moved on slowly step by step to the primates, who in turn evolved into human beings. But there is a huge distinction in the capacity of consciousness. There is a huge consciousness gap between the animal kingdom, and human beings. Those in the animal kingdom are conscious of light and dark, sound and movement, predator and prey. However, whatever it is that dogs do, dogs do not set around and contemplate what it means to be a dog but they lack self-consciousness. Humans *are* self-conscious. Philosopher Anthony O’Hear explains; “A self-conscious person . . . does not simply have beliefs or dispositions, does not simply engage in practices of various sorts. He or she is aware that he or she has

²¹ Sharon Dirckx, “A Beginner’s Guide to the Argument from Consciousness,” *Solas*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.solas-cpc.org/a-beginners-guide-to-the-argument-from-consciousness/>.

beliefs, practices, dispositions, and the rest. . . . A conscious animal might be a knower . . . but only a self-conscious being knows that he is a knower.”²²

B. From Whence Comes Faith, Hope, and Love?

Here is another thought, how do we explain such things as love, hate, hope, faith, seeing the color red? These are nonmaterial things. They are not made up of atoms. There is no love atom, or faith atom. These are all nonphysical states. How can this be explained? Remember Michael’s dilemma? How do you suppose Michael explains these things? How do you get from atoms in your brain chemistry, to *thoughts* and *feelings* of faith, hope, and love?

C. Whence Comes Continuity of Personhood?

How about this? How do you prosecute a person for a crime committed 50 years ago? How do you keep a man in prison for life?

1. Continuity and the Body

Based upon human physiology, most every cell in your body is replaced on some particular frequency. Blood cells live about 90 days and are replaced with brand new cells. Skin cells are replaced about every seven days, bone cells are replaced every 10 years and on it goes.

2. Continuity and Justice

Over a period of time, you end up with a brand-new body. When they convicted Charles Manson for murder in 1971 he was made up of a composite of particular atoms. But at the end of his life in 2017, some 46 years later, the only thing about him that was physically still the same were some of his neurons, and the enamel in his teeth. *Substantially* he was a new man.

a) Unity of Self Over Time

In order to hold Manson accountable for a crime he committed with a completely different body 40 years ago, there must be a “unity of self over time.” The interesting thing is that naturalists, or materialists, or Darwinists have absolutely no way of explaining where consciousness comes from. They have no way of explaining faith, hope, or love. They cannot explain what it is like to be you. And they have no way of explaining how it is just for Manson to be held accountable 40 years after his crime.

D. Mind/Body Dualism

Those who believe there is a God, do have an explanation for these things; *body/mind dualism*, or *body/soul dualism*. Body/soul dualism maintains that human beings are made up of a material body, and an immaterial soul.

1. How Do Atoms Think?

It is the soul of man that houses consciousness, it is the immaterial soul that explains how “atoms think;” and it is the soul that provides “unity of self over time.” This is also how it is just that there are very few statutes of limitation for murder; there is a “unity of self over time.”

2. Long-Term Justice

It is because of the immaterial, unchanging nature of the soul that a criminal can be prosecuted for a crime 50 years after the fact even though his entire body is no longer the same body that committed the crime.

²² Anthony O’Hear, *Beyond Evolution: Human Nature and the Limits of Evolutionary Explanation* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), 24.

3. Faith, Hope, and Love

It is from within the soul that love, and hate, and hope is found. And it is only the soul of a person that knows “what it is like to be you.”

E. Divine Purpose

If the First Cause Designer and Creator of all creation was *purposeful* in his design and creation, and human beings were created with both a material body, and a soul that houses the mind, what can be the *purpose* of that? From a Darwinian perspective, there is no benefit to survivability by humans having both a body and a soul. All the other animals who do not have consciousness have survived exceptionally well without a soul.

IV. Christian Worldview Portrait

From this idea of body/soul dualism we can add a few more brush strokes to our Christian Worldview Portrait:

The human beings that God freely chose to create consist of two substances; one material, and one immaterial; one body being uniquely human, and one spirit being similar in substance to God, who is Spirit.

Man stands at the apex of the animal kingdom by exclusive virtue of his capacity to know that he is a knower. Again, O’Hear is helpful here writing; “The presence of thought, reflection, and self-conscious belief is what makes human activity different from the conscious but unreflective behavior of non-linguistic animals.”²³

O’Hear compels us to ask a simple question: could it be that the Creator who is *personal*, and *intentional*, and *purposeful* in His design and creation had a particular expectation of mankind that was not placed upon any of the other creatures?

Outline Lesson 4b – The Moral Argument

Sunday Morning Bible Class

June 11 - 18, 2023

(Continuing from lesson 4a)

V. The Moral Argument

Philosopher Anthony O’Hear writes; “It is our perception of good and evil, of just and unjust, which distinguishes us from animals.”²⁴ There is another characteristic that is found within man’s consciousness but is *not* found in any of the other creatures. The Moral Law. As Christians we hold that there is a Moral Law written on the hearts of men, given by the Creator as an aspect of their creation. That means that the Moral Law is seated in the human consciousness.

A. Objective Truth

It is an objective truth. That means it is true whether we like it or not, whether we follow it or not, whether we agree with it or not. The Moral Law applies to all people,

²³ O’Hear, *Beyond Evolution*, 49.

²⁴ O’Hear, *Beyond Evolution*, 114.

across all cultures, and across all time. That is also the definition of an absolute objective truth; it is true for *all people* in *all places* across *all of time*; Absolute truth.

1. Objection to Absolute Objective Truth

But the atheist claims there are no absolute truths and that all truth is relative to whatever you want it to be.

a) Bumper Sticker

That notion is best illustrated by the “COEXIST” bumper sticker. The bumper sticker implies that all religions are equally true, no particular one is right and no one is wrong, so let’s all just get along.

This is simply not true, there *is* an absolute Moral Law, and that law points to a Law Giver.

B. The Argument

We can present the argument this way:

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

1. Every Law Has a Law Giver

There is little dispute here. It is widely recognized that no law comes into existence on its own; all laws have some level of government as their law giver. That is a primary purpose of government. As such, premise one is rarely disputed.

2. There is a Moral Law

This premise *does* have opposition and it comes from those who reject absolute objective truth. But there is no such thing as a *relative* Moral Law because without a concrete Moral Law, concepts of good and evil are just opinions. Good is whatever I say it is for me, you say good is whatever is good for you. But human rights cannot be grounded in opinion, they must be grounded in a common higher authority.

a) Universal Recognition

Even the relativists cannot live in a world that has no Moral Law because even the relativist cries out for justice. Even the thief knows it is wrong to steal; just watch what happens when someone steals from them. This is one of the classic signs of a false worldview; they cannot live within their own worldview; they must borrow from the Christian worldview to make theirs work. Relativists say there is no absolute moral law but they do not consistently live as if that is true.

That is why it is said; “the Moral Law is not always the standard by which we treat others, but it is nearly always the standard by which we expect others to treat us.”²⁵

(1) Teresa and Hitler

The implications here are wide-reaching, and profound. If there is no absolute and universal Moral Law that exists as the absolute standard for moral behavior then there is no moral difference between Mother Teresa and Adolf Hitler. It is just whatever your opinion of them is. It is only because there is a Moral Law seated in the consciousness and written on the human heart, that we can make that distinction.²⁶

It is only because there *is* a Moral Law that things repulse us.

²⁵ Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 175.

²⁶ Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 169-93.

b) Darwinist Answer

For several reasons, the Darwinist and the evolutionist have very little to say about the Moral Law because it, like human consciousness, it is an internal reality. There are no atoms that make up the Moral Law, just as there are no atoms that make up consciousness. With no atoms, there are no molecules, and without molecules there are no cells, and without cells there can be no evolution.

(1) Moral Obligations

Consider this: there are no moral obligations in the animal kingdom, the Lion kills the Zebra, but he does not murder the Zebra. In the same way, the male dog sometimes breeds with its mother, or sister. It procreates with its kin, but it does not commit incest. The hammerhead shark copulates violently with the female shark, but he does not rape her.²⁷ There is nothing morally wrong with these behaviors because there is no moral obligation pending upon them. These things in the animal world are things that “just are.”

(2) Human Obligations in the Image of God

Why? Because God does not create [H]imself, so [H]e does not create moral values, they are eternally constituent in His being. For that reason, when God creates humans in His own image and likeness, they must acknowledge objective moral values, and they must treat each other accordingly.”²⁸

(3) Without Human Moral Obligations

But further, what this means is that if you are a Darwinist and believe in evolution, then there is no moral ground to stand on concerning the Holocaust or any other moral evil. Since Darwinist believe that survival of the fittest is a natural outworking of evolution, then there is no Moral Law that says the Holocaust was wrong or evil. In fact, without the Moral Law, then what Hitler did is no different than the Lion killing the Zebra, or the dog breeding his sister; “it just is.”

(a) Dostoyevsky

The Russian writer and Christian philosopher Fyodor Dostoyevsky said, “If God didn’t exist everything would be permitted.”²⁹ For Hitler, God did not exist; in *his* mind everything *was* permitted.

(b) Nietzsche

Even the hardcore German atheist philosophy Fredrick Nietzsche wrote; Morality “has truth only if God is the truth; it stands or falls with faith in God.”³⁰ Even the atheist recognizes there is no grounding for morality outside of the Moral Being that Christians call God.

²⁷ William Lane Craig, “The Moral Argument for God’s Existence, Part 2,” *Reasons to Believe Podcast*, February 21, 2011, <https://youtu.be/bwUUmjfkSh8>.

²⁸ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 355.

²⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002), 263.

³⁰ Fredrick Nietzsche, in Mark Linville, “The Moral Argument,” in Craig and Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, 392.

C. Argument Summary

That returns us to our argument.

1. Premise 1

We have said, yes, every law has a law giver.

2. Premise 2

And we have just looked at several reasons why, yes, there is a Moral Law.

3. Premise 3

Therefore, there is a Moral Law Giver.

VI. Christian Worldview Portrait

Much like a courtroom argument, we are continuing to build a cumulative case argument for the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity. But as we are also continuing to progressively paint the Christian Worldview Portrait, we can add several new brushstrokes based upon the arguments presented thus far:

A. From the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument

There exists an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe, who in relation to the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful.

B. From the Teleological Argument:

The design, unity, order, and complexity of creation itself implies the Creator of the universe is a highly intelligent Designer who purposefully designed and brought the universe into being.

C. From the Argument from Consciousness:

The human beings that God freely chose to create consist of two substances; one material, and one immaterial; one body being uniquely human, and one spirit being similar in substance to God, who is Spirit.

D. From the Argument from Mind

Since the Great Designer and Creator is necessary for moral values to exist in created humans, He must Himself be a Moral Being who, by virtue of His creative will, imparted moral values to the consciousness of human beings, having written it upon their hearts via the image of God. In summary we can add to our Christian Worldview Portrait:

Further, the Purposeful, Spiritual, Creator and Designer of the universe, God, is a Moral and Just Being who imparted moral values into the spiritual consciousness of human beings whom He created, with the expectation that they embrace and fulfill His Moral Law.

VII. Why?

So how are we to think about this? *Why* was the universe so finely tuned for life? *Why* did human beings come to thrive and to populate the entire earth? And *why* were those human beings, universally endowed with such capacities as *consciousness*, and *reason*, and an *objective moral standard*? *Why* do humans have those attributes? We have only touched the surface as to how Darwinian evolution cannot explain how human beings came to have these capacities, let alone *why* they are even endowed with these capacities to begin with. Why does He care if humans follow His moral standard?

A. Divine Communication

One likely reason could be this: if the Creator of the universe is infinitely Moral, and infinitely Just, then wouldn't we expect the Personal, Intelligent, Purposeful,

Intentional Designer, and Moral Law Giver, to desire communication with the creatures He had so created?

1. Israelites

It turns out that there is a group of ancient people who claimed that very thing; that God had communicated with them through the prophets that lived among them. That God had indeed communicated that He *did* create the universe, and that He *did* create mankind, and that He *did* impart to them a Moral Law, and that He loved them, and cared for them, and wanted to save them from their hopelessness.

2. Jesus the Man

And one of the things that these ancient people say is that YHWH would send a Redeemer who would propitiate the sins of all of those who would believe. There is evidence from history, that such a man lived in the first century. A man who claimed to be the Son of God, came to redeem fallen mankind. And it is the history of this man and the claim that He was raised from the dead that is the topic of our next several lessons.

Outline Lesson 5 – The Historical Resurrection of Jesus

Sunday Morning Bible Class

June 18 – July 30, 2023

I. Introduction

A. Review

1. From the Kalam Cosmological Argument, we determined:

There exists an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe, who in relation to the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful.

2. From the Teleological Argument we determined:

The design, unity, order, and complexity of creation itself implies the Creator of the universe is a highly intelligent Designer who purposefully designed and brought the universe into being.”

3. From the Argument from Mind:

The human beings that God freely chose to create consist of two substances; one material, and one immaterial; one body being uniquely human, and one spirit being similar in substance to God, who is Spirit.

4. From the Moral Argument:

Further, the Purposeful, Spiritual, Creator and Designer of the universe, God, is a Moral and Just Being who imparted moral values into the spiritual consciousness of human beings whom He created, with the expectation that they embrace and fulfill His moral standards.

B. Going Forward

From all of this, we then considered a question: “If the Creator of the universe is infinitely Moral, and infinitely Just, then wouldn’t we expect the Personal, Intelligent, Purposeful, Intentional Designer, and Giver of the Moral Law to want to communicate with the creatures He had so created?”

1. Expectation

The way we are constituted; the advanced attributes that we possess, our intellectual capacity, our ability to use reason at a very high level, for us to have the ability, unlike any of the other animals, to think abstractly, endowed with an innate sense

of morality that is unlike any other living thing. These are unique and purposeful endowments. Since we are so unique in the created world, then we must have been endowed with these attributes for a distinct reason. There is an overwhelming sense of accountability.

Repeating the question: “If the Creator of the universe is infinitely Moral, and infinitely Just, then wouldn’t we expect the Personal, Intelligent, Purposeful, Intentional Designer, and Giver of the Moral Law to want to communicate with the creatures He had so created?”

2. God’s People

There exists even today a people group who long, long ago through both oral and written histories foretold that the Creator of the universe, and Maker of mankind would send a Redeemer in the form of a man, to cleanse people of sin, and to restore relationship with them. That people group is the Jewish people, and consider themselves *God’s Chosen People*.

3. A Redeemer Come

That Redeemer, it is believed by Christians, to have been a Jewish man named Jesus of Nazareth.³¹ It is this *historical claim*, that this man claimed to be God on earth lived, died, and was later seen by many people, that we will spend at least the next five weeks investigating.

II. Historical Approach

As historians we can investigate historical events, but it is not within our scope, or domain, to say whether a miraculous event has happened or not. We can determine if Jesus rising from the dead is historical, but as historians we cannot say that it was God who raised Him.³²

A. Investigation Steps

The Historical approach will proceed in four steps:

1. Evaluate and rank the historical documents that mention Jesus.
2. Establish the Minimum Historical Bedrock Facts.
3. Construct a comparative model to evaluate different resurrection theories against the bedrock facts.
4. Determine which resurrection theory best accounts for the evidence.

1. Citations

We will generally be following a methodology established by the Christian resurrection scholar, Gary Habermas, and perfected by Michael Licona. This is a classical historical investigation based upon solid, well-established historical research principles.

³¹ This historical presentation of the resurrection of Jesus borrows extensively from Michael Licona’s *The Resurrection of Jesus*. Particular words, phrases, and quotations, as well as the general concept of the hypothesis model used in this presentation result from a synthesis and summation of Licona’s work. See footnotes throughout Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2010).

³² Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 3-4.

B. Common Ground and Bias

1. Common Ground

A historical account of a past event can very much serve as common, common ground. That means that history is yet one more aspect that the Christian shares in common with the Michael's of the world. And so, it is here that I will remind you of something Virgil Trout has written: "[if Christianity] is true then it will not be harmed by careful examination. The Christian invitation is one to the heart and to the head."³³ The goal here is to investigate the resurrection with our heads *as historians*.

2. Bias

However, secular historians can be biased as well. We can define bias in this way: "it is prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair." Writing history is always challenging; trying to sift out your own bias. However, the greatest challenge to historical research is this: history is "an interpretation of an interpretation of an irretrievable event."

a) Biased Sources

Good historical writing comes exclusively through good sources. Historical writers are tasked with collecting sources written by others and compiling that information into a cohesive narrative about a past event. By this process, historians are only privileged to review second order facts. In other words, historical events are "an interpretation of an interpretation of an irretrievable event."

(1) Custer

Most all people are familiar with General Custer's last stand. How the seventh cavalry was totally destroyed by the Sioux and Cheyenne. After the battle American soldiers who were sent to bury the dead reported that the Indian had mutilated Custer's body by jabbing arrows through his ears. The American version of history is that the Indians mutilated his body.

The Sioux and Cheyenne version is that apparently Custer had trouble hearing since he had not heard that there was a peace treaty between the Sioux and the US government. They simply wanted Custer "to be able to hear better" on the next world. That is bias. It depends on what side is telling the story.

3. Historical Bedrock

Some facts, however, are so evident that they are virtually indisputable. These are called minimal bedrock facts. Resurrection scholar Gary Habermas suggests that a "minimal facts approach" is the very best to take when engaging the Bible skeptics concerning the resurrection.³⁴

However, even though the evidence can be so strong for a particular position, a consensus can never be obtained. Only a *very few* people consider Jesus as a person to be a myth. But there are a few.

C. Historical Approach Only

Since absolute truth cannot be ascertained about past events, we find ourselves in a domain that has very little *absolute* truth. Regarding this idea of very little absolute truth, historian A.J.M. Wedderburn writes: "So, if a historian says that x occurred in the

³³ Virgil Trout, *Quest for Truth in a Scientific Age* (Lubbock, TX: Key, 1965), 39.

³⁴ Gary R. Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for The Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 74.

past what he is really saying is; given the available data the best explanation indicates that we are warranted in having a reasonable degree of certainty that x occurred and that it appears more certain at the moment than competing hypothesis. Accordingly, we have a rational bias for believing it. However, our conclusion is subject to revision or abandonment, since new data may surface in the future showing things happened differently than presently proposed.”

1. Sources

There are several sources that mention Jesus, His death, and even His resurrection. This is our working list of all the sources that reference Jesus written between the time of Jesus at ~30AD, to about the mid-3rd century; about 250 AD. This is what we have.

Table A2. Source documents

Historical Sources	Ranking	Historical Sources	Ranking
Canonical Gospels		Other Noncanonical Christian Literature	
The Letters of Paul		Gospel of Thomas	
Sources that Antedate the NT		Gospel of Peter	
"Q"		Gospel of Judas	
Pre-Markan Tradition		Revelation Dialogues	
Speeches in Acts		Pseudo-Mark (16:9-20)	
Oral Formulas		Non-Christian Sources	
Romans 1:3b-4a		Josephus	
Luke 24:34		Tacitus	
1 Corinthians 15:3-8		Pliny the Younger	
Apostolic Fathers		Suetonius	
Clement of Rome		Mara bar Serapion	
1 Clement		Thallus	
Polycarp		Lucian	
Letter of Barnabas		Celsus	

Note: Synthesized and summarized; see Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 201-275

The goal is to evaluate these sources asking one simple question: “How likely is this document to provide independent testimony to the resurrection.”³⁵

2. Source Rankings

Sources are ranked based upon how likely each document is to “provide independent testimony to the resurrection.”³⁶

³⁵ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 200-201.

³⁶ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 201.

3. Roadmap

In order, we will;

1. Evaluate and rank the historical documents that mention Jesus from our list.
2. Establish the Minimum Historical Bedrock Facts.
3. Construct a comparative model to evaluate different resurrection theories against the bedrock facts.
4. Determine which resurrection theory best accounts for the evidence.

II. Source Evaluations

A. The Canonical Gospels

At this point something needs to be said about *biblical* sources. I am sure you have already noted that the Gospels appear on the list. For our historical investigation it is important to view the ancient gospel accounts as *historical* documents. New Testament scholar Timothy Paul Jones writes; “The Gospels and early Christian letters are, at the very least, a collection of ancient testimonies. These texts may turn out to be more than ancient claims about Jesus, but they are certainly no less.”³⁷ Since we are investigating the resurrection *historically*, we will continue in our study by considering the gospels, and all other biblical accounts and sources, as *historical* writings.

1. Theological Biographies

The Gospels are widely considered to be *theological biographies*.³⁸ They are literary biographies, and are historical narratives in style. The Gospel biographers are thought to have taken some liberties with their writing but, the fact that the Gospels are written in a biographical style indicates that the writers considered what they wrote to have really occurred (remember, we are investigating the resurrection historically, we are not considering the Gospels to be divinely inspired works, but simply ancient works).

2. The Synoptic Problem

Study of the Synoptic Gospels immediately presents an issue: why are all three Gospels so similar? To explain it as the natural result of three different people writing what they individually witnessed quickly falls apart.

This is a good example: 95% of Mark’s gospel is repeated in Matthew and Luke.³⁹ It is not so much that the Synoptics are similar, it is that they are *too* similar. And that similarity is often called the *Synoptic Problem*.⁴⁰ Many scholars believe that Mark was written first, (in biblical studies this is called Markan priority), and that Matthew and Luke borrowed from Mark as a source. It is also thought that both Matthew and Luke

³⁷ Timothy Paul Jones, *Why Should I Trust the Bible?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019), 42.

³⁸ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 512.

³⁹ R. A. Burridge and G. Gould, *Jesus Now and Then* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), quoted in Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 204.

⁴⁰ Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 118.

used other sources as well. Many of you are aware of these similarities, but let us look at an example of the incredible similarity between Matthew and Luke.

a) Examples

Looking at Matthew 12:41-42 and Luke 11:31-32, and taking Luke's version and inverting the order so that it reads 32-31, the verses are almost exactly the same. From the ESV;

The men of Nineveh will rise up at the [day of] judgement with this generation and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up at the judgement with this generation and will condemn it, for she came from ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

This makes it hard to say that the accounts are different simply because it is two people telling the same story from differing perspectives. This verse does not appear in Mark so if Matthew and Luke borrowed from Mark, they must have also had another source. Scholars propose a hypothetical document called "Q."

All three resurrection narratives from the synoptics are written with almost the same number of words. Luke uses 123 words, Mark 138, and Matthew 136 however, in the resurrection narrative, Luke uses only 16 of the same words as Mark, and Matthew uses only 35 of the same words as Mark.⁴¹ Even with all the overlap in the Gospels, the *resurrection portion* of the narratives appear to be more independent of each other than they are dependent. If we are looking at independent testimony of the resurrection, this independence within the Synoptic Gospels is very good.

3. Ranking

For this reason, we will rank the canonical Gospels as *possible* as to their ability to provide independent historical testimony to the resurrection event.

B. The Letters of Paul

The letters of Paul are important for three reasons:

1. His writings are the earliest written sources on the resurrection of Jesus.
2. Paul's writings most likely predate the Gospel.

Paul claims to have personally known some of the disciples to whom the risen Jesus had appeared, specifically Cephas (Peter) and James (Gal 1:18-24).⁴²

3. Paul also claimed to have been someone to whom the risen Jesus had appeared.

1. Ranking

Because of this, the letters of Paul are considered as *highly probable* as providing independent testimony to the resurrection of Jesus.⁴³

⁴¹ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 589-90.

⁴² Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 208-9.

⁴³ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 209.

C. Speeches in Acts

There are 13 separate instances in the book of Acts where three separate individuals testify to the resurrection of Jesus. Three of these have very serious consequences each for Peter, Steven, and Paul. The question is often asked by historians and Bible scholars; are the speeches in Acts summaries of speeches or are they the creations of Luke?⁴⁴

The Athenian historian, Thucydides who explained his method for recording speeches for his book, *Histories* gives some insight:

“With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one’s memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said.”⁴⁵

As historians, we ask; was Luke with Peter at Pentecost? Was he in the temple when the priest questioned Peter? Was Luke with Steven before the Sanhedrin? Was Luke with Paul on the road to Damascus?

1. Historical Approach Reminder

We are looking historically at these speeches in Acts and we are not considering the work of the Holy Spirit inspiring, and guiding Luke as he wrote these accounts. For the time being, our perspective is strictly limited to a historical perspective.

2. Ranking

Since we do not know which sources he used we can only go as far as ranking the speeches recorded by Luke in Acts as *possible* in their application as independent testimony to the resurrection.

D. Oral Formulas

Oral traditions followed a particular composition that allowed a cadence-like recitation. This cadence allowed for easy memory and teaching. Many scholars believe that such oral formulas were recited during early worship services and baptisms and that they were eventually incorporated into the writings of the New Testament.⁴⁶

1. Romans 1:3b-4a (NKJV)

Paul writes; “[He] was born of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” Many scholars believe these verses go back to the Jerusalem church and was being recited even before Paul was converted.⁴⁷

a) Oral Characteristics

There are telltale characteristics of an oral formula given by the following:

⁴⁴ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 217.

⁴⁵ Thucydides, *Histories*, 1.22.1-3, quoted in Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 217.

⁴⁶ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 220.

⁴⁷ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 221.

(1) These are Two Verses in Antithetic Parallelism

The same meaning from two different perspectives. This is born-flesh / Spirit-resurrection.

(2) The Parallel Verbs are Aorist Participles

Simplification of a past tense verb – Born Declared.

(3) Untypical Pauline Term

Greek equivalent of the word “declared.”

(4) Semitic Usage

“Son of David” not in line with Paul’s writing to Gentiles.

(5) Primitive Description of the Resurrection

“resurrection of the dead.”

These clues all point back to a Jerusalem origin and a Jewish audience.⁴⁸ The significance of this is that it is early; shortly after the resurrection of Jesus, and it originated out of Jerusalem meaning it is consistent with what the eyewitnesses, specifically Peter, James and John approved of as early doctrine.

b) Ranking

For this reason, the oral formula in Romans 1:3b-4a is given a ranking of *possible-plus*.

2. Luke 24:33-34

“And getting up that same hour they returned to Jerusalem and found gathered the Twelve and those with them saying, ‘The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.’”

a) Problematic

Verse 33-34 seems odd for a couple of reasons: let us look at the oral formula characteristics.

(1) The Lord “has appeared to Simon” seems oddly out of place.

Luke makes no mention of Simon elsewhere in his narrative or by any other (Matthew, Mark, or John).

(2) Mention of Simon

It seems odd that Cleopas and his companion would mention Simon having just personally seen the risen Jesus themselves. These two arguments are strong and indicate these verses have an oral formula structure.⁴⁹

b) Ranking

Because of this, Luke 24:33-34 is ranked as *possible* in providing independent testimony to the resurrection of Jesus.

3. First Corinthians 15:3-8

Paul writes:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters

⁴⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 221.

⁴⁹ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 222.

at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

a) Importance

(1) Early

This oral tradition is early, meaning it started in Jerusalem very shortly after the resurrection.

(2) Direct Report

(3) Non-Pauline

There are several non-Pauline traits to the passage.

(a) For Our Sins

The words “for our sins” does not appear in any other of Paul’s writings or anywhere else in the New Testament. In all other cases the singular is used; “sin.”

(b) According To

“[A]ccording to the Scriptures” is absent in all of Paul’s other writings as well as in the entire New Testament. It is referred as “it is written” rather than “according to the Scriptures” everywhere else.

(c) The Twelve

“The Twelve” is only used in these verses by Paul; in all his other writings he uses “the apostles.”

(d) Parallelism

Parallelism exists between the first and third lines which are followed by shorter sentences. This is another indication that these verses are from early oral traditions.⁵⁰

The importance that these verses by Paul cannot be overstated; they are rooted in oral tradition originating from Jerusalem. The apostles were teaching and evangelizing, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles; *first*, by oral transmission of the Good News. If the Jerusalem apostles controlled doctrine, it is very probable that Paul received his resurrection tradition directly from the Jerusalem apostles, directly from the other eyewitnesses. I cannot imagine even the very first sermon not containing these words.

b) Ranking

Virtually all scholars who have written on the resurrection, including skeptics, maintain that Paul provides tradition that he did not form but received from others very early and may very well be the oldest extant tradition pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus. For that reason, the oral tradition found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 is ranked as *highly probable* as to providing independent testimony to the resurrection.⁵¹

E. Apostolic Fathers

The apostolic fathers were the first-generation church leaders who followed the apostles. Of the apostolic fathers we will limit our concern to three; Clement, Polycarp, and Barnabas.

⁵⁰ The forgoing items were synthesized and summarized from Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 223-35.

⁵¹ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 235.

1. Clement of Rome

When considering Clement, the question becomes *did he know Peter* and if he did what was that relationship? Our study as to the relevance of a historical document is really no different than the guidelines that were in place during the canonization of the Bible:

- a) Written by an Apostle or recognized associate of an apostle?
- b) Agreement with canon of truth?
- c) Universal acceptance?
- d) Self-authenticating nature? ⁵²

a) Relationship to Peter

Several possible links between Peter and Clement have been proposed:

(1) Paul

Paul mentions a Clement in the letter he wrote to the Philippians in 4:3

“Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

(2) Eusebius

Eusebius of Caesarea reports this Clement became bishop of Rome in 92 A.D.

(3) Irenaeus

Irenaeus mentions a Clement who becomes the third bishop of Rome and was seen conversing with the apostles.

(4) Tertullian

Tertullian wrote that Clement was ordained by Peter for the church in Rome.

(5) Ignatius

Clement is mentioned by Ignatius in a letter where he writes that Clement is a helper of Peter.

(6) No Contradictions

There are no competing sources to say Clement was *not* associated with Peter.⁵³

b) Ranking

Because of this connection between Clement of Rome and Peter, it is given a ranking of *possible-plus*.

2. First Clement

Scholars traditionally consider 1 Clement to have been written 95-97 A.D. by Clement of Rome to the church at Corinth. Clement wrote concerning the resurrection: “Let us understand, dearly beloved, how the Master continually showeth unto us the resurrection that shall be hereafter; whereof He made the Lord Jesus Christ the firstfruit, when He raised Him from the dead” (1 Clement 24:1).

Considering the probable connections between Clement and Peter that we just discussed, the letter of 1 Clement becomes valuable as it provides information on the

⁵² Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 148.

⁵³ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 250.

teachings of one who had known eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus; most notably Peter.⁵⁴

a) Ranking

For this reason, 1 Clement is given a *possible-plus* ranking as providing independent testimony to the resurrection.⁵⁵

3. Polycarp

We have more information on Polycarp than any of the other Apostolic Fathers.

a) Texts

There are three text which include:

- (1) We have a letter written *to him* by Ignatius
- (2) One written *about him* by Irenaeus
- (3) A letter written *by him* to the church at Philippi

His letter to Philippi is considered to have been written in 110 A.D. So, you can see we are moving further and further away in time from the resurrection in 33 A.D. Closer is always better.

In the Irenaeus text he insists Polycarp was instructed by the apostles, especially John, and had spoken to a number of people who had seen Jesus.⁵⁶ Although Polycarp is removed from the resurrection by one degree, or one generation, according to Irenaeus, he had direct contact with one of the leaders of the church of Jerusalem but there is only one source to reference; the writing of Irenaeus.

b) Ranking

Because of this Polycarp's writings are given a ranking of *possible* as to providing independent testimony to the resurrection.⁵⁷

4. Letter of Barnabas

Barnabas was an Apostolic Father who wrote the Letter of Barnabas sometime between 70 A.D. and 130 A. D. The letter was what is called a treatise (a systematic written work) on the use of the Old Testament by Christians.

a) Authorship

There are four sources that attribute the letter to Barnabas, the associate of Paul. These four sources include:

- (1) **Clement of Alexandria** (ca. 150-215 A.D.)
- (2) **Origen** (ca. 185-254 A.D.). Early Christian Theologian
- (3) **Didymus the Blind** (ca. 313-398 A.D.). Christian theologian in the church of Alexandria.
- (4) **Jerome** (ca. 342-420 A.D.). Priest and Christian teacher.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 249-55.

⁵⁵ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 255.

⁵⁶ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 256.

⁵⁷ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 256.

⁵⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 256.

b) Dating Problem

The letter speaks of the temple destruction in 70 A.D. and that plans are being made to rebuild the temple. This puts an early date at 70 A.D. but that is not very likely. If the date is late 1st century, that is 90-95 A.D. then Barnabas would be well into his 80's.

c) Law Problems

Another issue is that the letter takes a position on the applicability of the literal interpretation of the Jewish law that is radically different from that of Paul. Although such a change in the position of Barnabas on the Jewish law is possible, it is unexplainable.⁵⁹

d) Ranking

The problem with dating along the Jewish Law interpretations lowers or ranking of the Letter of Barnabas to *possible-minus*.⁶⁰

F. Non-Christian Sources

There are several historical texts we have available that mentions in some way or another Jesus, His crucifixion, and reports of what some believed to have been his resurrection from the dead.

1. Josephus

Josephus was born in 37 A.D. to a highly regarded Jewish priest named Matthias.⁶¹ This is important as it puts Josephus both geographically in Jerusalem and chronologically in the time frame of the Jerusalem apostles and the eyewitnesses of Jesus with Josephus eventually becoming a Roman court historian.

Josephus mentioned Jesus in two locations in his work, *The Antiquities of the Jews* written in 95-96 A.D.

a) Importance

Josephus is important for a couple of reasons:

- (1) He is independent of Christianity
- (2) His location and time in history are ideal since he lived in Jerusalem and grew up just after the crucifixion of Jesus.

b) Problematic

But Josephus is also problematic for a couple of reasons:

- (1) No early manuscript
- (2) Uncertain authenticity

c) Ranking

Josephus is used with caution in light of concerns over Christian interpolation and is ranked as *possible* as to providing independent testimony to the resurrection.⁶²

2. Cornelius Tacitus

Tacitus is considered the greatest of the Roman historians. He was a Roman official and served as proconsul of Asia. He wrote several biographical histories of

⁵⁹ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 257.

⁶⁰ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 257.

⁶¹ Synthesized and summarized from Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 235-42.

⁶² Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 242.

Roman rulers including Nero. Many scholars compliment Tacitus as a diligent and careful historian.

a) Importance

Tacitus as a source is important for a couple of reasons:

- (1) He is independent of Christianity
- (2) He has access to government records

He writes of Jesus in his work titled, *The Annals* which is dated at 116-117 A.D. Tacitus does not show signs of *gross interpolation* but there are questions as to the sources he used.

b) Problematic

There are potential issues with Tacitus.

- (1) Later dating (116-117 A.D.)
- (2) Unknown sources

c) Ranking

With this uncertainty concerning Tacitus, we will rank him as *possibly* providing independent testimony to the historical resurrection.

This completes our source ranking list:

Table A3. Source documents with rankings

Historical Sources	Ranking	Historical Sources	Ranking
Canonical Gospels	Possible	Other Noncanonical Christian Literature	—
The Letters of Paul	Highly Probable	Gospel of Thomas	Unlikely
Sources That Antedate The NT	—	Gospel of Peter	Unlikely
"Q"	Unlikely	Gospel of Judas	Unlikely
Pre-Markan Tradition	Intermediate	Revelation Dialogues	Unlikely
Speeches in Acts	Possible	Pseudo-Mark (16:9-20)	Not Useful
Oral Formulas	—	Non-Christian Sources	—
Romans 1:3b-4a	Possible	Josephus	Possible
Luke 24:34	Possible-plus	Tacitus	Possible
1 Corinthians 15:3-8	Highly Probable	Pliny the Younger	Not Useful
Apostolic Fathers	—	Suetonius	Not Useful
Clement of Rome	Possible-plus	Mara bar Serapion	Not Useful
1 Clement	Possible-plus	Thallus	Not Useful
Polycarp	Possible	Lucian	Not Useful
Letter of Barnabas	Possible-minus	Celsus	Unlikely

G. Summary of Our Sources

1. What We Wish We Had

a) **A letter certified to have been written by Jesus.** That would be nice.

b) **Saul Material.** No material written by Paul, pre-conversion. That would help us gain insight as to why Paul so hated the Christians.

c) **Material from the Sanhedrin.** No material written by Jewish leaders during Paul's ministry describing his conversion.

d) **Roman Government documents.** No official documents from the Jewish or Roman governments that mention the Christians, Jesus's death, or reports of his resurrection.

But that does not mean what we have is not good.

2. What We Do Have

a) Eyewitness accounts.

Reports from the Apostles, Peter, the woman, Thomas looking at the wounds in Jesus's sides, and, the eyewitness in Paul that Jesus had been raised from the dead. We also have the accounts of the Jerusalem apostles preserved in the oral tradition (kerygma), and the apostolic preaching of salvation through Jesus Christ.

b) Early accounts.

These reports are considered very early, as in the case of 1 Corinthians 15, this oral formula is believed to have originated almost immediately after the resurrection.

c) **Multiple testimony.** These reports are multiply attested; Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke.

d) **Hostile testimony.** Testimony from one who was once hostile to Christianity (Saul/Paul).

e) Early writings / Oral formulas

(1) We have the early writings of Paul and the oral traditions embedded in the Gospels and the Epistles.

(2) Clement and Polycarp

(3) We have the speeches in Acts recorded by Luke.

(4) And we have the very important oral tradition in First Corinthians 15:3-8.⁶³

III. Minimal Bedrock Facts

It is said that "one of the greatest weaknesses of alternative explanations to the resurrection is their incompleteness: they fail to provide a comprehensive explanation of all the data."⁶⁴ Gary Habermas is a Biblical historian who, through his research has interviewed over a hundred resurrection scholars (Christian and atheistic), and has catalogued over 3400 sources on many Biblical topics. Habermas says that a case for the historicity of Jesus can be built upon a very few foundational facts that most all scholars

⁶³ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 275.

⁶⁴ William Lane Craig, *Knowing the Truth about the Resurrection: Our Response to the Empty Tomb* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1981), 110.

agree upon.⁶⁵ These few facts make up the historical bedrock for the resurrection of Jesus.

Historical Bedrock Facts can be defined as: Those facts that are strongly evidenced such that virtually all scholars regard them as historical facts can be listed as:⁶⁶

1. Jesus died by crucifixion
2. Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and appeared to them.
3. Within a few years of Jesus's death, Paul converted after witnessing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus.⁶⁷

These are three minimal facts that are “so strongly evidenced that the historian can fairly regard them as historical facts . . . and the majority of contemporary scholars, *even atheistic scholars*, regard them as historical facts.”⁶⁸ Any resurrection theory must acknowledge the historical bedrock facts or it is not worthy of consideration.

A. Bedrock Fact #1 – Jesus Died by Crucifixion

1. Four Non-Christian Sources

Outside of the Bible, there are four sources for the crucifixion of Jesus.

- Josephus
- Tacitus
- Lucian
- Mara bar Serapion

a) Josephus

Josephus is our first source to confirm the bedrock fact that Jesus died by crucifixion. Josephus wrote of Jesus's crucifixion in his work entitled *Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus was a Jewish historian and a Pharisee. He is considered to not be partial to the Christians nor did he write favorably about them.

On the crucifixion Josephus wrote:

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it is lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many Jews and many Gentiles. He was [the] Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him from the first did not forsake him, for he appeared alive to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had

⁶⁵ Habermas confirms the three minimal bedrock facts and adds two more: the conversion of James the brother of Jesus, and the empty tomb. See Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 221-24.

⁶⁶ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 47.

⁶⁷ These three minimal bedrock facts synthesized from Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 302-3.

⁶⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 56.

foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.⁶⁹

(1) Interpolators

However, here is some controversy and objection to this particular document. It is widely thought that this work by Josephus has been altered by whom scholars call “Christian interpolators.” These are Christians who later changed some of the wording to show a more favorable Christian emphasis. Interpolation is *not uncommon* and we have examples of this even in the canonical Gospels. For this text written by Josephus, there has been some modification by interpolators but those modifications do not alter the phrase that Jesus was crucified.

(2) Arabic Version

There is in existence an Arabic copy of Josephus’ work that is believed by most to have not been altered by interpolators:

At this time, there was a wise man who was called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.⁷⁰

The interpolated version has Christological elements that are not found in the Arabic version. Phrases like “*if it is lawful to call him a man*” and “*he was the Christ.*” In comparing the two, it is widely accepted that the first version has been altered and the second is more accurate. But that is not what is important, the great thing about this is, regardless of which version you look at, the statement that Pilate condemned Him to be crucified and to die, is unchanged. Josephus is one source to help us establish that Jesus died by crucifixion as a bedrock historical fact.

b) Tacitus

Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman leader and historian who wrote extensively about the Roman rulers Augustus, and Nero. In his writing titled *The Annals*, Tacitus wrote about the fire in Rome in 64 AD that was being blamed on Nero; having been started as a distraction from some unpopular political moves.

In *The Annals*, Tacitus wrote:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite torture on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our Procurators, Pontius

⁶⁹ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3.

⁷⁰ Josephus, “Arabic Version,” in *Antiquities* 18.3.3, recorded in the manuscript entitled *Kitab Al-Unwan Al-Mukallal Bi-Fadail Al-Hikma Al-Mutawwaj Bi-Anwa Al-Falsafa Al-Manduh Bi-Haq Al-Marifa*, quoted in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 57.

Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.⁷¹

Again, some scholars believe some interpolation of this passage may have occurred. But the wording we are concerned with; that Jesus died by crucifixion, is not disputed.

c) Lucian

Lucian is another non-Christian source and we scratched it from our list because it does not meet our criteria for independent evidence of the *resurrection*, but it does help us with the first bedrock fact that Jesus died by crucifixion. Lucian of Samosata was a second century Greek writer. In his writing; *The Death of Peregrine*, Lucian wrote:

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites and was crucified on that account. . . . then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.⁷²

So again, we have a solid, non-Christian evidence for the crucifixion of Jesus.

d) Mara bar Serapion

Mara bar Serapion was a Syrian stoic philosopher. If you remember, Serapion did not make our final list as an independent source for the resurrection, but he does help us in affirming that Jesus died by crucifixion. Serapion had been captured by the Roman invasion about 73 AD, and while in prison he wrote in a letter to his son about 73 A.D. the following:

What advantage did the Athenians gain from murdering Socrates? Famine and plague came upon them as a punishment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand.

What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, live in complete dispersion.⁷³

That is a pretty healthy group of sources that give evidence to our first historical bedrock fact; “That Jesus died by crucifixion.”

2. Other Sources

But that is not all, there are several Christian sources as well, including:

⁷¹ Tacitus, *The Annals* 15.44, quoted in McDowell, *New Evidence*, 55.

⁷² Lucian of Samosata, *Death of Pelegrine*, 11-13, quoted in McDowell, *New Evidence*, 59.

⁷³ Mara Bar-Serapion, “Syriac manuscript 14, 658,” The British Museum, quoted in McDowell, *New Evidence*, 59.

1. The canonical Gospels
2. The letters of Paul
3. In 1 Corinthians and in Galatians
4. The Kerygma (Oral Tradition)

Reference to the death of Jesus is found many times in the kerygma of oral formulas. The kerygma is not a written book *per se* but is the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ. First Cor. 15:3 is thought to have originated as a kerygmatic oral formula.

a) First Corinthians 15:3-8

First Corinthians 15:3-8 is believed to have been an oral tradition that goes back to the Jerusalem Apostles.

3. Other Supporting Evidence

a) No Contradictory Evidence

b) Low Probability of Survival

It is for these reasons that “very few scholars today challenge the fact of Jesus’s death by crucifixion.”⁷⁴

Resurrection scholar Michael Licona summarizes the first bedrock fact this way:

The historical evidence is very strong that Jesus died by crucifixion. The event is multiply attested by a number of ancient sources. Some of which are non-Christian and thus not biases toward Christian interpretation of events. They appear in multiple literary forms, being found in annals, historiography, biography, letters, and tradition in the form of oral formulas and hymns. Some reports are very early and can be reasonably traced to the Jerusalem apostles. Finally, the probability of surviving the crucifixion was very low.⁷⁵

4. Conclusion

Jesus died on by crucifixion.

B. Bedrock Fact #2 – Very shortly after Jesus’ death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and appeared to them.

1. First Corinthians 15: 3-8

We discussed in our source evaluations, that at a minimum, most all scholars agree, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 is oral tradition. The verses end with Paul saying that Jesus finally appeared to him. Most scholars agree this was probably not original to the oral tradition but was added by Paul himself. But what is certain is that this oral tradition is very early and probably go back to the initial teachings from Jerusalem, meaning directly from the eyewitnesses, Peter, James, and John.

In summary, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 is a very early tradition about the resurrection of Jesus. It contains wording that can be traced with a high degree of probability to the Jerusalem apostles. Given this, we can claim it to be eyewitness testimony that Jesus died, was buried, was raised from the dead, and that He appeared to individuals and

⁷⁴ Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, 17.

⁷⁵ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 312.

groups. The chronological order of the appearances is Peter, the Twelve, more than five-hundred on one occasion, to James, to all the apostles, then last of all to Paul. Our second point of evidence from the sources comes in the form of women witnesses.

2. Women Witnesses

Women as the first eyewitnesses to the empty tomb and to the risen Jesus also gives strong evidence for the historicity of the resurrection claim. Early Christians would not have fabricated a story such as it appears in Matthew and John, for two reasons.⁷⁶

a) Mediterranean Society

Women in first century Mediterranean society were generally (not always) considered lower class people. In the Greco-Roman world educated men regarded women as “gullible in religious matters and prone to superstitious fantasy and excessive in religious practice.”⁷⁷ They were also considered unreliable witnesses to any event in society. Many Jewish sources as well as secular sources indicate the low view of women in ancient Mediterranean society.⁷⁸

The Jewish historian Josephus said of women’s testimony; “But, let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex...since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment.”⁷⁹ From the Jewish Talmud (Jewish civil and ceremonial law) we read: *Any evidence which a woman [gives] is not valid (to offer) This is equivalent to saying that one who is Rabbinically accounted a robber is qualified to give the same evidence as a woman.*⁸⁰ Even in the Qur’an, women are used as witness only if a man is not available and in those cases two women witnesses are considered equal to one man.⁸¹ If the empty tomb were a fabrication, why would Matthew and John write a woman as the first to whom Jesus appeared.

b) Embarrassment Factor

Secondly, women were the first to discover the tomb because all the disciples were in hiding having abandoned Jesus. Also, it is not as if there were no men who could have been better suited to find the empty tomb if the story were fabricated. If the account were a false story, it makes much more sense to have Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (the two who buried Jesus) to return to discover the empty tomb rather than women. This embarrassment factor gives credibility to the gospel version of Jesus’ first appearance.

3. Apostle’s Fate

Further support for the appearances of Jesus to the apostles as being a historical bedrock fact come from the fate of the apostles. Jesus told His disciples they would suffer for persecution because of Him. The strength of their conviction came not

⁷⁶ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 349-55.

⁷⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 270-271, quoted in Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 349-50.

⁷⁸ Wright, *The Resurrection of The Son of God*, 607-8.

⁷⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.8.15, in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 117.

⁸⁰ The *Talmud*, Rosh Hashanah 1.8.

⁸¹The *Quran*, Al-Baqarah 2:282.

through Jesus' teachings, not through His crucifixion, but by His appearance to them as the risen Christ. We will cover the fate of the apostles in more detail a little later.

a) First Clement

The book of 1 Clement, written about the time that John wrote Revelation, about 95 A.D., details the suffering of Peter and Paul found in 1 Clement 5.2-7. Again, 1 Clement is not Scripture, but it is a very important historical document about the early church. Clement wrote:

Because of envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars have been persecuted and contend unto death. Let us set the good apostles before our eyes. Peter, who because of unrighteous envy, not once or twice but endured many afflictions and having borne witness went to the due glorious place. Because of envy and rivalries, steadfast Paul pointed to the prize. Seven times chained, exiled, stoned, having become a preacher both in the East and the West, he received honor fitting of his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, unto boundary on which the sun sets; having testified in the presence of the leaders. Thus, he was freed from the world and went to the holy place. He became a great example of steadfastness.⁸²

b) Polycarp

Polycarp, like Clement wrote of the martyrdom of both Peter and Paul. In fact, aside from Judas, there is no evidence of any of the apostles recanting or walking away from their belief that they had witnessed the risen Jesus. To suggest that the apostles did not willingly suffer for this belief is without support. In summary, we can say that historians may conclude that after Jesus's death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and appeared to them. This conclusion is granted by a near unanimous consensus of modern scholars, and is therefore included as our second minimal historical bedrock fact.

C. Bedrock Fact #3 – Within a few years of Jesus' death, Paul converted after what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance to him.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus from Christian persecutor to an aggressive Christian missionary is a historical fact but, it must be accounted for by historical sources.

1. Testimony in Letters

Paul provides his own historical testimony in his letters to Galatia, Corinth, and Philippi in which he describes his persecution of the church. So, Paul's own words establishes himself as an ardent non-believer.

2. Luke in Acts

Then, Luke attests to Paul's life before his conversion in Acts 9 saying "Paul was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord." Acts 9 also attested to his conversion.

3. Believers in Judea

Paul's conversion is attested to by believers in Judea. This is evidenced by Galatians 1:23 where Paul says: "they did not personally know me; they only had a report that the man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."

4. Paul's martyrdom

Paul's martyrdom speaks to the veracity of his conversion experience.

⁸² First Clement 5:2.

a) Apostles Martyrdom

If one were to Google the martyrdom of the apostles, most non-scholarly works report *all* the apostles died as martyrs for their faith except John who died an old man.

These lists look something like this:

James (or James the Great, the brother of John) – Death by sword – 44–45 A.D.

Peter – Crucified – 64 A.D.

Andrew – Beheaded – 70 A.D.

“Professing” Thomas – Burned alive – 70 A.D.

Philip – Crucified – 54 A.D.

Matthew – Beheaded – 60–70 A.D.

Nathanael (Bartholomew) – Crucified – 70 A.D.

James the Lesser (brother of Jesus) – Clubbed to death – 63 A.D.

Simon the Zealot (not Simon Peter) – Martyred in Syria – 74 A.D.

Judas Thaddeus (aka Jude, the author of Jude) – Beaten to death – 72 A.D.

Matthias (the replacement apostle)– Crucified – 70 A.D.

John – Died – 95 A.D.

Paul – Beheaded (not of the original 12) – 67 A.D.⁸³

Here again, if we take a pure historical look at the evidence for the martyrdom of the apostles and we put the evidence through the rigors of the historical method (remember there are no absolute truths in history), we end up with a list of the apostle’s martyrdom like this:

Table A4. Fate of the apostles

Highest possible probability	Very probably true	More probable than not	More plausible than not	As plausible as not	Improbable
Peter	James (BoJes)	Thomas	Andrew	Philip	John (BoJs)
Paul				Matthew	
James (BoJ)				Thaddeus	
				Bartholomew	
				James the Lesser	
				Simon the Zealot	
				Matthias	

Note: Sean McDowell, *Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 264.

⁸³ Michael Patton, “What Happened to the Twelve Apostles? How Do Their Deaths Prove Easter,” *Parchment and Pen*, June 6, 2015, <http://credohouse.org/blog/what-happened-to-the-twelve-apostles-how-do-their-deaths-prove-easter>.

Although this seems to weaken the apologetic appeal to the apostle's martyrdom, in fact it very much reinforces that Paul was martyred for his faith. And, that faith was due in no small measure, to the experience Paul reports to have been the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to him.

Resurrection scholar Gary Habermas says of Paul's conversion, "virtually all scholars recognize Paul's testimony that he had an experience that he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus... Seldom is historical authenticity of any of these testimonies or the genuine belief behind them challenged by respected critical scholars, no matter how skeptical."⁸⁴

Though Paul's experience is not absolute proof that Jesus did rise from the dead, it is evidence that Paul staunchly believed that he had encountered the resurrected Jesus. Therefore, Paul's belief that he had encountered the risen Jesus is our third and final historical bedrock fact.

D. Summary

The three minimal bedrock facts:

1. Jesus did die on the cross.
2. Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and appeared to them.
3. Within a few years of Jesus' death, Paul converted after what he interpreted as a postresurrection appearance to him.

Going back to our roadmap to the resurrection, we are now ready to build a model by which we can compare different views of the resurrection. Whether people consciously recognize it or not, every worldview has a resurrection of Jesus theory. Every worldview provides some sort of answer to the question: "was Jesus raised from the dead?"

As Christians we claim that the Christian worldview is the one true worldview and that all the others are false. Michael has a false worldview because he does not believe the Bible is God's word. Our job as Great Commission Christians is to listen to Michael's worldview, then to present the Christian worldview as being the superior view. But to do that in a methodical way we need to build a model.

V. Weighing Hypothesis

A. Resurrection Theories

Different resurrection hypothesis or theories have been around ever since "on the third day." Ever since then, people have been putting forth one theory or another to explain the resurrection. In a purely historical sense, the Christian resurrection account is also considered a theory. We read about the first theory or hypothesis in a historical document written by Matthew where the elders of the Sanhedrin say to the Roman guards: "you are to say; His disciples came during the night and stole Him away while we were sleeping" (Matt 28:13).

Resurrection theories apparently started *immediately*.

Resurrection theories include:

- The stolen body theory
- The Passover plot
- Wrong tomb theory
- Swoon theory

⁸⁴ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 74.

- Hallucination Theory
- The Christian Resurrection narrative

Before we can begin to evaluate different resurrection theories, we need to establish our criteria. One of the best ways to evaluate any set of data is to develop a model to plug all the data into. In our case, we are building upon the historical sources we have evaluated, looking at resurrection theories and determining which one best accounts for the bedrock facts.

To do this, we will be looking at some theories considering not only what they say but also how well they fare in the following five categories:

B. Model Categories

1. Explanatory Scope

The first category is explanatory scope. This criterion looks at the *quantity* of facts available. The theory that includes the most relevant data has the greatest explanatory scope.

2. Explanatory Power

This criterion looks at the *quality* of the explanation of the facts. The theory that explains the data with the least amount of effort, vagueness and ambiguity has the greater explanatory power.

3. Plausibility

The theory must be implied to a greater degree and by a greater variety of accepted truth than other theories. This is where literature from various sources come into play.

4. Less *ad hoc*

A theory that relies too heavily upon none evidenced assumptions is said to be *ad hoc*. In other words, the hypothesis is fragmentary and the theorist fills in the blanks with his own assumptions.

5. Illumination

Finally, illumination. The theory's ability to shed light upon or provide a solution to other problems. An example would be if the resurrection of Jesus hypothesis provides illumination as to the physiological conditions that allowed for the rapid recovery of the Christian movement shortly after the death of its leader, Jesus.

That will be our model criteria.⁸⁵

C. Model Criteria Scorecard

We will be reviewing four different theories and ranking them using this scorecard:

⁸⁵ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 109-11.

Table A5. Model output

Decreasing Weight					
Weight	5	4	3	2	1
Hypothesis	Explanatory Scope	Explanatory Power	Plausibility	Less ad hoc	Illumination

Note: Table modified and adapted from Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 606.

1. David Mirsch Theory

Our first competing resurrection theory comes from David Mirsch.

a) Summary

(1) Jesus was not the Son of God

David Mirsch contends that Jesus was the literal son of Joseph of Arimathea who was in cahoots with Nehemiah, and was a member of the Jewish Council.⁸⁶

(2) Jesus Was Drugged

The Mirsch hypothesis contends that Jesus was drugged on the cross. Mirsch appeals to Mathew 27:34 where Jesus refused to drink of the wine and says that the wine had been tainted with a narcotic and that Jesus knew He had not been on the cross long enough to drink the wine. He knew if He drank it too soon, He would lose consciousness too soon and the gig would be up.⁸⁷

(a) Matthew 27:34

Mirsch refers later in the narrative to verse 48 where Jesus does drink, and immediately after loses consciousness. However, this is an argument from silence. Nowhere in Matthew’s account is an interval of time mentioned between Jesus’s drinking, and Him losing consciousness? It could it just as easily have been 30 minutes as three?

Mirsch also gives no evidence for his assertion that Joseph of Arimathea is Jesus’ biological father. These are purely *ad hoc* statements filled with conjecture. These are baseless assumptions made up by the writer to fill in the blanks

(b) Rejects First Bedrock Fact

But beyond all this, Mirsch fails to acknowledge the first bedrock fact. He does not acknowledge what is established bedrock fact. Remember, our bedrock facts are “virtually indisputable” foundational facts that most all scholars agree on. Since Mirsch’s hypothesis does not accept this very foundational fact, there is really no need to entertain his hypothesis any further. He is so far off from what is established, not only by Christian scholars but atheists as well. This is how Mirsch’s theory lines up:

⁸⁶ David Mirsch, *The Open Tomb: Why and How Jesus Faked His Own Death and Resurrection* (Bangor, MI: Booklocker.com, 2001), 371.

⁸⁷ Mirsch, *The Open Tomb*, 415-18.

Table A6. Model output—Mirsch

Decreasing Weight					
Weight	5	4	3	2	1
Hypothesis	Explanatory Scope	Explanatory Power	Plausibility	Less ad hoc	Illumination
David Mirsch	F	F	F	F	F

Now that we have Mirsch out of the way and you have a taste of how the model works, let us look at some serious resurrection theories. The next few resurrection theories are naturalistic in nature, that is that they use what we know about the world in order to attempt to explain the resurrection.

These theories may seem odd or funny to us however, they are presently being discussed in academic books and peer-reviewed journals, as well as being taught in some instances.

2. Michael Goulder

Goulder is an interesting case.⁸⁸ He died in 2010 as an atheist having spent most all of his career as a professor of religious studies at the University of Birmingham (England). Goulder seemed to drift further and further away from traditional Christian doctrine as his career progressed.

But Goulder is credited with some very good work concerning the Synoptic problem and helping to establish Markan priority to the Gospel narratives. But his later writing reflected a belief that the Gospel writers took great liberties in their narrations, that Paul had an adversarial relationship with Peter and James, and he revived an old, long-settled theory. Goulder eventually resigned his orders as a priest and became involved in the Council for Secular Humanism.

Goulder takes an approach to the resurrection that relies upon a psychological condition to explain his theory. His theory is a derivation of the naturalistic assertion that the appearances of Jesus to observers were actually hallucinations and not Jesus Himself. This has been the most popular naturalistic type of theory over the last hundred years and falls into the broad category of hallucinations.

Goulder's theory can be summarized as follows:

a) Peter Hallucinated

Peter hallucinated the appearance of Jesus as he was in much grief and was guilt-ridden. Goulder says Peter was "prone" to these types of hallucinations and was inclined to believe such hallucinations.

(1) The Transfiguration

Goulder bases this predisposal of Peter to hallucinate upon the account given in Mark that: Peter hallucinated the Transfiguration. According to Goulder, Peter was present at the Transfiguration and thought that Moses, Elijah and Abraham were real.

⁸⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 479-95.

(2) Peter's Trance in Acts

Goulder also refers to Peter's trance in Acts 10:9-16. There as well, Peter experiencing a trance further indicates he was prone to these phenomena.

(3) Susan Atkins

Goulder cites Susan Atkins of the Charles Manson gang. After her conviction, Atkins was deeply troubled with guilt over her participation in the Manson murders. She thought her only options were to stay in prison, escape, commit suicide, or follow Jesus. She then had an experience that she described as Jesus coming to her in a bright light and telling her verbally that He was coming into her heart to stay.⁸⁹ Goulder believed much the same happened to Peter.

b) Communal Hallucinations

According to Goulder, Peter went and told the other disciples who then experienced communal hallucinations or group hallucinations like the modern mother Mary or UFO sightings.

c) Paul's Secret

Goulder then explains Paul's experience as being rooted in his own secret discontent with Judaism.

(1) Romans 8:15 and Galatians 5:1

Goulder references Galatians 5:1 and Romans 8:15 where Paul calls the law a yoke. Paul hallucinated Jesus on the road.

(2) Paul Prone to Hallucinations

He also adds that Paul, like Peter was prone to hallucinations and references 2 Corinthians 12:7 as evidence of Paul having multiple revelations (hallucinations).

d) Christian Narrative is *ad hoc*

Finally, Goulder says that over time, Christians filled in the gaps with the empty tomb and the resurrection to complete the story. The term *ad hoc*, remember is a term for "made up stuff."

That is Goulder's theory in summary. We need to look at this seriously and objectively. We may think this is absurd, but there are many people out there that believe this very thing. Remember, this has been the most popular naturalistic theory of the last 100 years. Looking at Goulder's theory as historians and systematically working thorough his argument using our historical sources and bedrock facts, we can determine:

First, Goulder meets all the bedrock facts.

1. He does not deny that Jesus was crucified.
2. He acknowledges that shortly after His death, several of His disciples experienced what they thought was the risen Jesus among them.
3. He does not deny that sometime later Paul experienced what he believed to be the risen Jesus and converted.

e) A Closer Look

(1) Peter hallucinated.

Goulder says Peter hallucinated at the Transfiguration. But he does not mention that James, John and Jesus were there also. With all three being present; that

⁸⁹ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 480.

would amount to a group hallucination. Group hallucination have been widely studied and there are some interesting facts we need to look at.

(2) Hallucination Facts

(a) False Sensory Perceptions

Hallucinations are defined as “false sensory perceptions.” These perceptions occur in the absence of external stimuli and can be experienced as auditory, visually, olfactory, kinesthetically, or tactilely. Basically, even though you think you perceive it, it is not there.

(b) Multimodal Hallucinations

Multimodal hallucinations are extremely rare. A multimodal hallucination would be one involving more than one sense; to both hear and see, or see and feel something in the hallucination.⁹⁰

(c) Women

Women experience hallucination more frequently than men.

(d) Elderly

The elderly experience hallucinations more frequently than the young.⁹¹

(e) Grief Trigger

Studies show grief is by far the greatest trigger for hallucinations with about 50% of all hallucination falling into this category.

(f) Mental Events

While hallucinations are “false sensory perceptions,” they are also mental events caused by no external trigger. William Lane Craig notes; “[i]n a hallucination, a person experiences nothing new because the hallucination is a projection of his own mind.”⁹² Since they are mental events, they *cannot be shared*. This is critical to remember, hallucinations cannot be shared with other people. They are *personal* events.

Those people with chemical dependency and mental illness are a separate group from what is here described. In those cases, the outcome or the product is the same; a false sensory perception, but the cause is something other; narcotic induced or neurochemical imbalance, brain disease. Keeping these facts about hallucinations in mind, we can look at how Goulder fares in the model categories.

f) Goulder Model Categories

(1) Explanatory Scope

Goulder has very good explanatory scope and covers all the elements. He acknowledges all the bedrock facts and speaks to each individually.

(a) Accounts for all three bedrock facts

Goulder’s theory gets a passing mark for explanatory scope.

(b) Pass

⁹⁰ A. Aleman, and F. Laroi, *Hallucinations: The Science of Idiosyncratic Perception*, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 46, quoted in Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 483.

⁹¹ J. J. McGrath et al., “Psychotic Experiences in the General Population: A Cross-National Analysis Based on 31 261 Respondents From 18 Countries,” *JAMA Psychiatry* 72, no. 7 (2015): 697-705.

⁹² Craig, *Knowing the Truth*, 110.

(2) Explanatory Power

Goulder's theory does not fare so well in explanatory power. As we discussed, communal hallucinations are all but impossible. Goulder appeals to communal hallucinations on a couple of occasions to support his theory. He uses it in the case of the Transfiguration, and he uses it in his theory of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples. However, although he does not mention it, he must also account for the appearance to the 500 in 1 Corinthians 15, and to "The Twelve." Goulder fails to account for these other group appearances.

(a) Fails

Because of his heavy reliance upon communal hallucinations, Goulder fails in the category of explanatory power.

(3) Plausibility

Just how plausible is Goulder's theory?

(a) Renews an Old Argument

To start, Goulder brings up an old, and long-settled argument that there was a split between the Jerusalem apostles and Paul in terms of what they were teaching about the resurrection. But he never provides any evidence for his side of the argument. This statement by Goulder counts against his plausibility.

(b) First Corinthians

Goulder positions himself in direct opposition to the oral tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. Remember, there Paul writes; "That I delivered to you as of first importance, what I also received..." This passage is perhaps the crown jewel of the oral traditions and it may very well be the strongest historical evidence that we have.

(c) Disputing Paul

Paul was preaching a bodily resurrection. Goulder's theory is disputing Paul.⁹³ This assertion by Goulder damages his theories plausibility.

(d) Communal Hallucinations

Again, Goulder bringing the prospect of communal hallucination also damages his theory's plausibility.

(e) Fails Plausibility

Goulder fails in the category of plausibility.

(4) Less *ad hoc*

Remember, *ad hoc* is a term used for "non-evidenced assumptions." This is where theorist sometime take liberties by adding information that makes the theory more coherent but is not substantiated. It's made-up stuff. If we look at Goulder's theory; he fails horribly here.

(a) Communal Hallucinations

His theory is highly *ad hoc*. That is, his theory is highly speculative with regards to communal hallucinations. His theories about the doubts Paul was experiencing about Judaism while on the road to Damascus is purely speculation and loaded with *ad hoc* assertions.

(b) Fails

Again, this is more *ad hoc*, not less. Goulder fails to show his theory is *less ad hoc*.

⁹³ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 360.

(5) Illumination

If Goulder's theory were true, it could provide valuable illumination to religious experiences in history and today.

(a) Passes

Goulder passes Illumination.

In tabular form, Goulder looks like this:

Table A7. Model output—Goulder

Decreasing Weight					
Weight	5	4	3	2	1
Hypothesis	Explanatory Scope	Explanatory Power	Plausibility	Less ad hoc	Illumination
David Mirsch	F	F	F	F	F
Michael Goulder	P	F	F	F	P

3. Gerd Ludemann Theory

Our next resurrection theory is from Gerd Ludemann.⁹⁴ Ludemann has an interesting perspective concerning Peter. Ludemann is a New Testament scholar who left Christianity for atheism. He is transparent about his position stating his intent to prove the resurrection wrong, and to encourage people to leave Christianity indicating he is not going to attempt to remove his bias. Even still, to do justice to our study, we need to look at his theory and attempt to grant it an unbiased review. To do that we need to keep in mind that Ludemann's theory is not necessarily an independent theory but an anti-theory or what we can say is the antithesis to the Christian held resurrection.

Unfortunately, Ludemann, is still teaching. His story is similar to Goulder's; he was a New Testament scholar at the University of Gottingen in Germany where he started publishing works calling into question Christian doctrine eventually publishing some very anti-Christian material. Rather than dismiss the professor, the university just changed his title from Chair of New Testament Studies to Chair of History and Literature of Early Christianity. And here is the frightening thing: this guy is actively teaching this resurrection theory we are about to read. He is writing about it, and speaking about it, and he is influencing countless young adults year after year.

a) Ludemann Hypothesis Summary

Ludemann's theory can be summarized as follows:

(1) Peter Hallucinated

Peter hallucinated Jesus. There is an interesting and very informative trend developing; all competing resurrection theories rely upon some type of hallucination

⁹⁴ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 495-519.

theory. Here, Luedmann adds his own nuance by claiming that hallucinations are more likely among the early Christians because they were, “members of the lower part of intellectual culture.”⁹⁵ We will discuss this point in more detail in a moment, briefly here we can say that Paul was a highly educated and well-schooled Roman citizen. Not your typical lower-class citizen. Likewise, Luke was a physician and no doubt highly educated. More importantly, Ludemann offers no data to substantiate his claim that the hallucinations are more common among the “lower part of intellectual culture.”

(a) Stimulated Others to Hallucinate

Ludemann tries to address the communal hallucination problem by arguing that Peter’s hallucination “stimulated” the subsequent hallucinations including the appearance to the 500. Ludemann cites Acts 2 at Pentecost as an example and says it was a type of “mass ecstasy” that was stimulated by just a few people that then spread to many.

(b) Mass Ecstasy

This mass ecstasy was so compelling that it even spread to James, the brother of Jesus.

b) Paul’s Doubts

Like Goulder, Ludemann contends Paul was having self-doubt about Judaism and refers to Romans 7 as his proof. He also contends that Paul’s hatred of Christians was the result of this internal conflict. Paul did not want to believe Christianity on one hand but was so compelled by the mass ecstasy on the other. Ludemann says Paul handled this conflict by lashing out at the source.... Christians.

What Ludemann is trying to describe without using the term is *Compensation Psychology*.⁹⁶ *Compensational psychology* is a psychological defense mechanism whereby a person overcompensates for what they perceive to be weaknesses. Here again, Ludemann is working well outside his domain; acting as a clinical psychologist performing an assessment of a patient whom he has never met, who lived 2000 years ago, in an ancient culture. Beyond that, *Compensational Psychology* may help explain why Paul so hated Christians however if appeal is made to it, then one would also have to hypothesize that Paul had doubts about Christ after his conversion and that led to the same type of compensation psychology to explain his zeal for spreading the message of Christ.

Ludemann cannot have it both ways. Paul was a zealot as a Pharisee. and as a Christian. Ludemann’s theory would necessarily mandate that Paul had doubts about both religions that caused him to over compensate in both cases. That seems highly unlikely.

c) Gospel Fabrication

Ludemann argues that the Gospels are a later fabrication in answer to Docetic assertions in Gnostic literature that Jesus did not rise bodily. Docetists held to the Greco-Roman perspective of the separation of the natural world and the supernatural world and

⁹⁵ Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry* (Amhurst, NY: Prometheus, 2005), 166, 175, 176, quoted in Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 498.

⁹⁶ William Lane Craig “Was Saul of Tarsus Compensating?” Weekly Q&A with Dr. William Lane Craig, *The Talbot School of Theology Faculty Blog*, Biola University, October 19, 2018, <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2018/was-saul-of-tarsus-compensating>.

that the two can never comingle. They contend that Jesus was not God incarnate as man because this was not allowed within Greek theology.

But Ludemann is in fact arguing that the Gospels are illogical from a circular reasoning perspective. And he is not alone in arguing that the Gospels are circular in that they were written after the fact to prove a prior event. That is what *circular* reasoning is. However, this is not a solid argument; all histories are written after the fact to explain an event in time past. So, by that logic, all histories could be accused of committing the logical fallacy of circular reasoning.

d) Christ Has Not Returned

Finally, Ludemann argues that since the return of Jesus has not happened, it is doubtful that any of the other beliefs in the resurrection are true either.

e) Ludemann Scorecard

Looking at Ludemann's Scorecard:

(1) Explanatory Scope

Ludemann accounts for all three bedrock facts, has very good explanatory scope, and covers all the elements. He acknowledges all the bedrock facts and speaks to each individually.

(a) Passes

Ludemann's theory gets a passing mark for explanatory scope.

(2) Explanatory Power

Ludemann's theory requires a substantial amount of speculation to explain the appearance of Jesus to Paul.

(a) Speculates Regarding Paul

He lacks explanatory power and attempts to make up for it by presenting a series of psychological conditions that lack the power to clearly explain his theory. Any theory that more simply and clearly explains a given set of data is always preferred (*Ockham's Razor*). The strain required for Ludemann's theory to work is too great to give him a passing score in this category. Here are some examples:

(i) Gentile Friend

Paul had a Gentile childhood friend who unconsciously drew him to Christianity.

(ii) Doubts About Judaism

Paul had doubts about Judaism and had a need to be accepted so he projected his negative qualities upon Christians and that is why he persecuted them. But there are no signs that Paul ever had doubts about Judaism when he was a zealot, nor did he have doubts about Christianity after his conversion. This is another argument from silene.

(b) Speculated About Peter

Peter's experience was his own manifestation to give him reconciliation for his denying Jesus.

(c) About The 500

The appearance to the 500 was "mass ecstasy" is highly speculative.

(d) Fails

All of these are baseless speculations. Using the historical method, his theory bears the burden of proof. Ludemann gives no evidence to back up his claims and so he *fails* to provide explanatory power.

(3) Plausibility

Ludemann's theory suffers from a lack of plausibility for several reasons:

(a) Communal Hallucinations

He relies upon communal, or group, hallucinations.

(b) Psychological Assessment

He relies upon psychoanalytical conjecture regarding Paul’s motives.

(c) Mass Ecstasy

He relies upon a “mass ecstasy” at Pentecost as an example of what also happened to the 500.

(d) James’ Travel to Jerusalem

He relies upon James’s rushing to Jerusalem to participate in the mass ecstasy rather than a more plausible position that James, early on, would have considered Jesus to have been a heretic. That probability is greater than that of James being eager to experience this communal hallucination and travel to participate.⁹⁷

(e) Ludemann fails in plausibility.

(4) Less *ad hoc*

The *ad hoc* nature of Ludemann’s theory is filled with “made up” information; namely group hallucinations and Paul’s psychological motives.

(a) Fails

Ludemann fails as it is more *ad hoc* rather than less.

(5) Illumination

If Ludemann is correct, his theory has the potential to provide much illumination into ancient religious experiences.

(a) Passes

Ludemann passes illumination

Ludemann’s theory tabulates like this:

Table A8. Model output—Ludemann

Decreasing Weight					
Weight	5	4	3	2	1
Hypothesis	Explanatory Scope	Explanatory Power	Plausibility	Less <i>ad hoc</i>	Illumination
David Mirsch	F	F	F	F	F
Michael Goulder	P	F	F	F	P
Gerd Ludemann	P	F	F	F	P

What we are seeing is a trend. None of the naturalistic models have a sense of *plausibility*. They lack *explanatory power* and they require quite a bit of *ad hoc* or added assumptions in order to function.

4. Christian Resurrection Narrative

⁹⁷ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 517.

But I want to move on to the Christian resurrection narrative.⁹⁸ One of the first things we need to realize is that the Christian resurrection story is, at its core, much different than all of the other theories that are put forward.

This is true in that the resurrection narrative quickly leads to a supernatural agent. All the other theories approach the resurrection from a naturalistic standpoint and that groups them as such, together. The inference of a Causal Agent regarding the Christian resurrection story makes comparison difficult. Even so, since we are conducting a historical investigation, it is important to understand that making supernatural claims are outside the domain of the historian. Historians cannot make supernatural claims, they can only argue the evidence of the past event, and in this case, not the *cause* of the event, but rather how well the Christian resurrection narrative accounts for the three bedrock facts.⁹⁹

The Christian resurrection story is also unique regards the others in that the presentation of the narrative necessitates counterarguing skeptical claims to a greater degree than any of the naturalistic theories. The Christian resurrection narrative also enjoys a primary position meaning it was the first proclamation to explain the evidence. As such, it enjoys a position of primacy, or as king of the hill. All other theories are competing and because of this they must dispute the Christian resurrection hypothesis. In light of this, we will approach the Christian resurrection story as a rebuttal to skeptical criticism.

a) Critical Objections

Let us begin by answering some key critical points:

Most all criticism of the Christian resurrection narrative falls into three general categories:

(1) Legend

The critics claim the resurrection is legend.

(2) Violates Ockham's razor

Critics claim the resurrection violates Ockham's razor.

(3) Deficient sources

And, critics claim that the sources we utilize are deficient.¹⁰⁰

Let us look at each of these a little closer.

b) Legend

Many scholars have accused the historical sources used for the Christian resurrection story of being stories that quickly developed, and were then added to by different people creating what amounts to a story laden with legend. From a purely historical perspective, there is some validity to this because we know that the bias of writers of history is inevitably a part of all historical writings.

(1) Theological Biographies

We also accept that much of the writing styles in the ancient world, including the Gospels, fall into a literary genre of *theological biographies*. This form of literary writing is not unlike modern historical writing in that it contains an element of bias

⁹⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 582-606.

⁹⁹ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 198.

¹⁰⁰ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 584-600.

(imagine if someone other than the “the apostle that Jesus loved” had written the Gospel of John).

(2) Kennedy

Another example is the legend that has grown out of the assassination of President Kennedy. But, regardless of the details, the fact remains that Kennedy was shot. In that same sense, when looking at the resurrection, Jesus was either resurrected or His appearances were hallucinations. To claim legend has infiltrated each and every source used to determine the historical bedrock facts is to claim no document in existence on any subject is valid.

(3) Gospel of Peter

To give you a taste of what a resurrection legend sounds like I want to read the resurrection scene from the Gospel of Peter.

But in the night in which the Lord’s day dawned, when the soldiers were safeguarding it two by two in every watch, there was a loud voice in heaven; and they saw that the heavens were opened and that two males who had much radiance had come down from there and come near the sepulcher. But that stone which had been thrust against the door, having rolled by itself, went a distance off the side; and the sepulcher opened, and both the young men entered. And so those soldiers, having seen, awakened the centurion and the elders (for they too were present, safeguarding). And while they were relating what they had seen, again they see three males who have come out from there sepulcher, with the two supporting the other one, and a cross following them, and the head of the two reaching unto heaven, but that of the one being led out by a hand by them going beyond the heavens. And they were hearing a voice from the heavens saying, ‘Have you made proclamation to the fallen-asleep?’ And an obeisance was heard from the cross, ‘Yes.’¹⁰¹

Soldiers, guards, Jewish elders, all just hanging out at the tomb. Two huge angels carrying Jesus. Jesus is huge too and their heads reach all the way to heaven. Then a talking cross is following them?

(4) Near East Legend

That is what ancient Near East myth and legend sounds like. Now compare that to the mundane resurrection narrative by Mark. For critics to claim that the Gospel accounts, especially Mark’s unpretentious account, is legend, is without basis. One can also see another reason why the Gospel of Peter was not canonized. Further, we need to remember that our bedrock facts are based upon an acknowledgement by a universal consensus of scholars. Remember, this was a group of scholars across all beliefs from atheists to Christian, liberal to conservative.

To argue that the resurrection sources are legend is invalid.

b) Ockham’s Razor

The second category of criticism involves critics claiming that the Christian resurrection hypothesis violates Ockham’s Razor. Ockham’s razor is a problem-solving principle that was developed in 14th century by a Franciscan friar named William of

¹⁰¹ The Gospel of Peter, 35-42.

Ockham. In a nutshell, Ockham's razor says that when comparing a group of theories on the same subject, the simplest theory with the fewest assumptions should be selected.

The principles of Ockham's razor are sometimes applied to aesthetics such as in various art forms. "The beauty of simplicity" is an example.

(1) The Golden Ratio

Remember we talked about the Golden Ratio and its relationship to aesthetics. That perfect ration that is aesthetically pleasing to the human eye; that ratio of 1:1.618. This ratio is said to be simple and the objects that follow that ratio are said to be "simply beautiful." This concept is carried over into logic; Ockham's Razor is one of the core tenets of sound philosophical reasoning and its principle is used in scientific reasoning as well. It has also been applied to the scientific method in evaluation competing hypothesis, and it has been used in architecture, philosophy and in religion.

Critics of the Christian resurrection state that the theory is more complex and requires a greater amount of assumption and keeping with Ockham's razor, a naturalistic theory of the resurrection like Goulder's should be favored. Here again, the critics argue that the Christian resurrection theory presupposes God. In other words, the Christian narrative cannot function without acknowledging a Causal Agent.

But again, we need not confirm or deny the existence of God to be able to methodically look at the resurrection as a historical event. In addition, it can just as easily be argued that the naturalistic explanation that relies upon a series of hallucinations, including several communal hallucinations is actually more complex and therefore violates Ockham's razor to a higher degree.

In addition, most all of the Altered State of Consciousness-based theories (ASC), rely upon the "psychoanalytical expertise" of non-trained historians psychoanalyzing people in abstention, from an ancient culture who lived over two thousand years ago, based solely on non-evidenced assumptions. Therefore, claiming the Christian resurrection model is in greater violation of Ockham's razor than the naturalistic resurrection theories is invalid.

c) Deficient Sources

The last of the three major criticisms is that the Christian resurrection narrative is undergirded by deficient sources. When it comes to skeptical criticism of the resurrection, criticism of the sources is usually one of the first topics to be discussed. After all, if our sources are the only evidences we have then it should be.

This criticism takes two forms:

1. not enough evidence
2. and deficient sources.

At first look, the claim of "not enough evidence" seems solid. After all, there were no eyewitnesses to the resurrection itself, and all we have are accounts of an empty tomb, and reports of later sightings. But, bear in mind that this is not as bad as critics would have you believe.

Think about this, most everyone agrees that Jesus died by crucifixion, likewise, a consensus of scholars believe that the disciples were convinced that Jesus appeared to them. The inference quite simply, is that He was resurrected from the dead. Deficiency of sources, however, is a long running discussion at the heart of which is the authenticity of the Gospel accounts. Specifically, critics generally point to four areas of dispute concerning the Gospels claiming:

- a. They were not written by eyewitnesses
- b. They were written late, 35-65 years after Jesus' death.

- c. Contain propaganda that was itself altered resulting in various discrepancies.
- d. No extra-biblical sources mention Jesus until 80 years after His death.¹⁰²

Taking a closer look:

(1) Gospels Lack Eyewitness Authorship

Critics often claim that the Gospels were not written by eyewitnesses.

(a) Many scholars disagree

It is important to know that to the contrary, many scholars oppose this position and argue that some of the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses. Even if it were true, it is not that uncommon to have histories written by non-eyewitnesses. For example, there are no extant (surviving) *histories of Alexander the Great* written by eyewitnesses.¹⁰³ The Roman historians which are held in such high esteem, Suetonius and Tacitus were not eyewitnesses to any of the events they wrote about. Some of the greatest histories of the American Civil War were not written by eyewitnesses. No one has living memory of Abraham Lincoln, or Robert E. Lee, but historians are still writing accurate accounts of irretrievable events surrounding those men.

Even given this position, virtually all scholars hold that Mark and Luke contain the testimony of eyewitnesses; Mark being the eyewitness account of Peter, and Luke being the account of Paul.¹⁰⁴ This is where the dating of the Gospels becomes a supporting element rather than a point of contention. Eyewitness testimony weighs large in the authentication of historical material and any work written in a timeframe that would allow for eyewitness testimony must also be given priority.

The argument that the accounts were not written by eyewitnesses is invalid.

(2) Written late

Critics also claim the Gospels were written too long after the event to be accurate. But the Gospel accounts document a story only 35-65 years in the past and the pagan writer Josephus actually mentions Jesus within 60 years.

(a) Not uncommon

This is not so uncommon with ancient historical figures. Augustus is considered Rome's greatest emperor and yet the earliest writings of him are dated at 50+ years after his death. By comparison, there are four biographies of Jesus written within 60 years of His life.¹⁰⁵

(b) Kerygma

One very important thing to remember here is that if we consider the *kerygma*, or the oral formula then we have an account going back to, quite possibly, within months

¹⁰² Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 588-600.

¹⁰³ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 588.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Bauckham argues that the Gospel of Mark is based upon the eyewitness account of Peter, the Gospel of Matthew is based upon the eyewitness account of himself, the Gospel of Luke is testimony of Paul as well as eyewitness testimony of Peter via Mark, and the Gospel of John is both the direct eyewitness testimony of and authorship by John the Elder. See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), 205, 229, 126, 550.

¹⁰⁵ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 589.

of the resurrection. We have talked about the oral formulas found in Roman, and Luke, and 1 Corinthians that predate Mark.

Additionally, the “other sources” Luke refers to in Luke 1:1-4 could be written material that predates Galatians. There is also the evidence of source documents such as the hypothetical “Q” which could very well have been written very soon after Jesus’ death. The argument that the Gospels are late is not a valid argument. Especially when considering that “irrespective of when the gospels reached their final form, the strong probability is that the Easter stories they contain go back to . . . [very] early oral tradition.”¹⁰⁶

This becomes even more apparent if we look at non-Christian biographies. If we look at the Roman emperor Tiberius who was a contemporary of Jesus. There are an equal number of non-Christian sources that mention Tiberius within 150 years of his life as there are that mention Jesus, at nine each. That gives us a ratio of 9:9. If we add in Christian sources to this number, the ratio goes from 9:9 to 10:42. There are over four times as many sources for the resurrection than there are for the history of Tiberius Caesar.¹⁰⁷ Here is another example; the closest source for the history of Alexander the Great is 500 years after his death. The interesting thing is that no one disputes the details of this 500-year-old account.

(c) Time Gap

This leads us to ask why there was not more written between the resurrection and the letters of Paul starting in 48-50 A.D. How helpful would it be to have a few documents written in 35 or 38 or 40 A.D. There could have been; possibly a “Q” document but you would naturally think that the resurrection was big news and the Jerusalem apostles would be writing the story of Jesus night and day. Why do you suppose that did not happen? It is like a post resurrection document gap right here. It is also important to stop for a moment and consider a couple of passages that shed some light on this document gap; why does it exist; how can it be explained?

(i) A Sense of Imminency

The testimonies of several eyewitnesses speak to a sense of imminency concerning the promised return of Jesus. In Matthew 10:23 Jesus tells the disciples that “you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man returns.” In Matthew 23:34, again Jesus telling His disciples, “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away.” Then Paul in his letter admonishing the Thessalonians about idleness. Some scholars interpret those passages to the Thessalonians quitting work and waiting on the soon coming return of the Lord.

This idea of a soon return of the Lord was ever present in the thoughts of the early Christians. With that mindset, why would there be a need to record anything for a posterity that was surly to be short lived?

(ii) Diocletian Destruction

There is one other event in history that we need to keep in mind as well. In February of 303 A.D the Roman emperor Diocletian ordered the destruction of Christian books, manuscripts, churches and the killing of Christians. Over the next eight years

¹⁰⁶ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 612.

¹⁰⁷ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 590.

hundreds of manuscripts were destroyed by the Romans. It is possible that some of those manuscripts could have predated the Gospels.

(3) Gospels of Propaganda

The claim that the Gospels contain propaganda is not without basis. As we have discussed, histories are most often written with a purpose in mind. This purpose does not negate the accuracy of the content. It could just as easily be argued the content of the naturalistic theories we have studied are also written with a propagandist twist.

However, critics most commonly refer to what are considered as discrepancies in the Gospel accounts.

(4) Discrepancies

There are some “discrepancies.” We see them. How many have noticed discrepancies between the Gospels? How are these accounted for? We have looked at what is called the Synoptic Problem; the idea that the Gospels are not different, but that they are so similar.

Let us look at a few of the most common “discrepancies” that critics present: The first alleged discrepancy, we will look at is the confession of Jesus.

(a) Jesus’s Confession

Jesus’s confession of who He truly is before the High Priest in Luke, differs from the account in Matthew and Mark in that it is not so Jewish in its detail. The Matthew and Mark account emphasize Jesus affirming He is the apocalyptic Son of Man describes in Daniel chapter 7 and in the Jewish book, *Similarities of Enoch*.¹⁰⁸ This information is essential in Matthew and Mark as they are writing to a Jewish audience. Jesus’s professing and fulfilling the prophesy of Daniel 7 is hugely important to the Jews. This explains to the Jewish audience why the Sanhedrin considered the charge of blasphemy justified.

(i) Audience matters.

The answer is, audience matters. For a Gentile audience, about half of that would have gone over their heads. That level of detail is not needed and would have been wasted upon Luke’s Gentile audience.

(b) Mary

Critics often point to the apparent contradictions related to Mary at the tomb. Did she go to the tomb alone or did other women go with her? In John it reads as if Mary went to the tomb by herself. If we read closer, John focuses on Mary in 20:1 where he refers to her in the singular. But, in the very next verse he uses *we* in the plural sense. This is not an exclusive mixing of designations; he does the same thing with Peter when Peter runs to the tomb by himself in 24:12. Then a few verses later Luke writes that others went with Peter in 24:24.¹⁰⁹ But this is not a discrepancy, it was common in ancient writings to refer to the subject in the singular even if they were in the company of others. Especially if they are speaking.

(c) Angels at The Tomb

Another point critics point to is the “discrepancies” as to what was seen at the tomb. Was it one angel, one man, two angels? This too has a very simple solution; it is important to know that an angel can and is often referred to as a man. We see this here,

¹⁰⁸ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 593-94.

¹⁰⁹ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 595-97.

but we also see it used in this way in Genesis 19:16 where Moses says that when Lot hesitated to leave the city, the *men* grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters. So, referring to angels as men is not unique to the Gospels. This explains why Luke refers to *men* at the tomb, and then a few verses later refers to them as *angels*.

The one or two angels is not that uncommon either. Again, ancient writing styles often referred to the person speaking at the particular moment even if others were present. Additionally, the *setting /standing* discrepancies between the posture of the angels is not necessarily a discrepancy either. Setting and standing are used interchangeably in Greek. Standing is also used to simply mean “present” or “stationary” and does not conflict with setting.¹¹⁰

There are more discrepancies that are pointed out by critics but we would need another six weeks just to address those. The important thing to note is that the discrepancies claimed by critics, for the most part are easily resolved. Even so, all the details we have just mentioned are just that; peripheral details. None of them are pivotal points on which the authentication of the resurrection lies. That being the case, the critics claim of deficiency of sources is also invalid.

b) Model Categories

(1) Explanatory Scope

The Christian resurrection narrative accepts all three bedrock facts, has very good explanatory scope, and covers all the elements. It obviously acknowledges all the bedrock facts and speaks to each individually.

(a) Passes

The Christian narrative gets a passing mark for explanatory scope.

(2) Explanatory Power

If we look at explanatory power, the Christian resurrection narrative has good explanatory power, and engages well with all three historical bedrock facts. The other hypothesis we have looked at trail the Christian narrative in that they require acceptance of various sorts of ASC or hallucinations. In fact, atheist New Testament scholar; yes, that is correct, an *atheist New Testament scholar* at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill; you send your child to UNC to study New Testament, Bart Ehrman is there waiting for them. He is the most outspoken critic of the Bible over the last 20 years. And this is what Ehrman has to say: “There are only two options. Either Jesus really appeared to his disciples after the crucifixion, or they were seeing things.”¹¹¹ Hallucination theories all lack explanatory power.

As we have seen, hallucinations are rare, very rare in multimodalities, and extremely rare in multiple communal settings. The question comes down to which has the greater explanatory power, the theories of hallucinations or that Jesus rose from the dead? The Christian theory also better satisfies Ockham’s razor.

(a) Passing

Therefore, the Christian resurrection narrative is given a passing mark for Explanatory power.

¹¹⁰ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 596.

¹¹¹ Bart Ehrman, “Why I (Actually) Discuss Hallucinations,” *The Bart Ehrman Blog*, June 6, 2015, <https://ehrmanblog.org/why-i-actually-discuss-hallucinations/>.

(3) Plausibility

This is a tough category. The question is; does the Christian resurrection story better align with the bedrock facts by a greater degree and number of accepted truths than any of the other theories? The problem comes in the fact that the Christian narrative implies a supernatural Causal Agent. Even though we established that we are not asking if God raised Jesus but simply if Jesus rose from the dead, the answer yes implies a supernatural Causal Agent. And this is where the elimination of bias is all but impossible.

If we presuppose that there is no God, the Christian resurrection model fails miserably and the naturalistic models are by far the best fit. If God does exist and He wanted to raise Jesus from the dead, the plausibility of the Christian resurrection hypothesis is extremely plausible. This is why the order of our argument has been so important. We have every reason to believe (as does Michael at this point) that an almighty and all-powerful God exists. If He wanted to raise Jesus from the dead, that would not be something unexpected.

At any rate, in the interest and limitations of our historical investigation the only option is to continue to approach the evidence from a position of historical neutrality. A position that neither excludes nor presupposes a God. If we do that, the first thing we come up against is that dead people usually stay dead. However, if we do not exclude the possibility of God wanting to raise Jesus, then the plausibility of the resurrection theory goes up.

(a) Passes

Additionally, if we go back to the plausibility of Goulder and Ludemann's theories, the Christian hypothesis is more plausible by comparison. Based upon this, the Christian resurrection hypothesis is given a passing score for *plausibility*.

(4) Less *ad hoc*.

The *dependence* upon a supernatural Causal Agent rises again when assessing the *ad hoc* nature of the Christian resurrection narrative. While some argue that since the story relies upon a supernatural cause, it is more *ad hoc* than the naturalistic theories. However, naturalism in general relies upon a type of faith that is rooted in belief in evolutionary processes. This faith in and of itself is metaphysical in nature, and requires a considerable number of *ad hoc* assumptions; much like evolution, or an infinitely old earth, and especially concerning far-out theories like *transported panspermia*.¹¹²

(a) Passes

Since the model is a not only a score card of pass or fail but depends also upon the distance between competing theories, it is safe to say that both naturalistic and supernatural elements inherent in both approaches contain an aspect of *ad hoc* assumption, however, the Christian resurrection theory not only passes other theories regarding *ad hoc* assumptions but does so to a greater degree.

(5) Illumination

The Christian resurrection theory, if true, would provide an unlimited amount of illumination to all studies of world religion. I can think of no other finding that could provide such clarity to the entire existence of both mankind and nature.

¹¹² *Transported panspermia* is the theory that life on earth began when a simple, alien life form hitched a ride on a meteorite that ultimately crashed into the earth thereby seeding it with some primordial coacervates rich of life.

(a) Passes

The Christian resurrection theory *passes* the category of illumination.

Our model output looks like this:

Table A9. Model output—Christian narrative

Decreasing Weight					
Weight	5	4	3	2	1
Hypothesis	Explanatory Scope	Explanatory Power	Plausibility	Less ad hoc	Illumination
David Mirsch	F	F	F	F	F
Michael Goulder	P	F	F	F	P
Gerd Ludemann	P	F	F	F	P
Christian Narrative	P	P	P	P	P

Based on the historical evidence we can be assured that the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus is a **“Very Certain”** fact.¹¹³ Some may be wondering why the level of certainty is not at the very highest level; at “Certainly Historical.”¹¹⁴ The Christian resurrection narrative is by far the very best explanation for the historical evidence and the historical facts that exist. However, on a purely historical basis, it would be all but impossible to have both a high enough quality, and a high enough quantity of evidence from a 2000-year-old event to grant that event the highest possible ranking of “certainly historical.”¹¹⁵ Licona writes; “incontrovertible proof is both unattainable and an unreasonable expectation.”¹¹⁶ As it is we can say with great confidence that: “the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a historically certain fact.”

It bears repeating, critical scholar Bart Ehrman has said; “There are only two options. Either Jesus really appeared to his disciples after the crucifixion, or they were seeing things.” From what we have studied here, it seems certainly historical that the disciples were not seeing things,” but that Jesus has truly, historically certainly been raised from the dead.

VI. Christian Worldview Portrait

¹¹³ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 608.

¹¹⁴ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 619.

¹¹⁵ The author of this class series presented the question, “what would be needed to reach the highest level of historical certainty,” to Michael Licona during a conference “In Defense of The Resurrection,” June 19, 2018, Talbot Theological Seminary, Biola University, La Mirada, CA, June 19, 2018. His response to that question is captured here.

¹¹⁶ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 122.

Now that we have determined that the man Jesus was raised from the dead, the supernatural implication is unavoidable. Jesus had claimed to His followers over and over again that He was *from* God, and *was* God, and was returning *to* God. Since historians cannot determine who raised Jesus from the dead, it is here that we must take off our historian hats, and once again put on our reasoning hats. The resurrection bears irrefutable evidence that what Jesus had said about Himself was true; that He was raised by the same God that had long ago promised a Redeemer to His people; the same God who designed and created the universe and everything in it.

N. T. Wright said; “The resurrection was the sign to the early Christians that this living god had acted at least in accordance with his ancient promise, and thereby shown himself to be God, the unique creator and sovereign of the world.”¹¹⁷ And that is the same God that we have been slowly discovering as we have moved through this cumulative case apologetic argument, for the God of Christianity.¹¹⁸

There is much we can say about this and there is much weight we can add to our Christian worldview portrait:

By virtue of being raised from the dead, it can be said that Jesus was born of flesh, walked among men on earth, was crucified by the Roman's, died, was buried, and was raised from the dead by His supernatural Father, God. This is the God of Christianity. And by virtue of His resurrection from the dead, the divine nature of Jesus is affirmed, including His sovereignty, and divine authority regarding all matters.

Since the resurrection evidences Jesus's divine nature, it is reasonable to assume He possess divine authority as well. Therefore, the things that Jesus has said are authoritative by divine decree. In other words, Jesus has authority, and what Jesus said is authoritative as well.

So, what is it exactly that Jesus *said* that can contribute evidence to our case? What can Jesus add to our argument that “God exists, and Christianity is true?” That is the topic of the next and last two lessons.

Outline Lesson 6 – The Authority of Scripture

Sunday Morning Bible Class

August 6 - 13, 2023

I. Introduction

A. Review

We have looked at the evidence, screened and ranked these sources questioning each for its ability to provide “independent testimony” to the resurrection. We then established what are considered the three minimal bedrock facts; these are facts that nearly all scholars agree upon, including atheists:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.

¹¹⁷ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 726.

¹¹⁸ For a thorough and sustained argument that Jesus thought Himself to be God, see Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2016), 120-53.

2. Very shortly after Jesus's death, his disciples had experiences that led them to proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and appeared to them.
3. Within a few years of Jesus's death, Paul converted after witnessing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus.

A model was then constructed in order to compare competing resurrection theories using the categories of:

Explanatory Scope

Explanatory Power

Plausibility

ad hoc

and Illumination

Finally, three competing, non-Christian resurrection theories were compared against the Christian resurrection narrative. Comparing the different theories based upon the model output we determined from a purely *historical perspective* that Jesus's resurrection from the dead is a "very certain" historical fact.

II. Authority of Jesus

The resurrection confirmed Jesus as being exactly who He said that He was; that He came *from* God, that He was returning *to* God, and that He *was* God. If Jesus is God demonstrated by virtue of the resurrection, then Jesus has unlimited divine authority. New Testament scholar Timothy Paul Jones writes, "[t]o trust in the resurrected Jesus is to trust not only Jesus Himself but also the texts *He* trusted and the writings of the witnesses *He* commissioned to tell the world about Him."¹¹⁹

A. Old Testament

It is estimated that about 10% of Jesus's words in the New Testament are taken from the Old. Within the 1,800 verses in the four Gospels that report the words of Jesus, some 180 of those verses are either Old Testament quotations or allusions.

1. Quotes and Allusions

Jesus quotes from all the Torah, except Leviticus; He quotes from 1, and 2 Kings, 1 Samuel, and 2 Chronicles. He quotes from the prophets, Jonah, Isaiah, Daniel, Hosea, and Malachi and He quotes extensively from the Psalms¹²⁰ We get a good idea of what Jesus thought about Scripture by reading Luke 11:51: "so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary." Key here is "From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah." Abel was killed by Cain in Genesis 4:8, and Zechariah being killed between the altar and the sanctuary, is recorded in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. That is the "from the blood of Abel, to the blood of Zechariah." Jesus affirms the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures from Genesis to the end of 2 Chronicles.

¹¹⁹ Jones, *Why Should I Trust the Bible?*, 109.

¹²⁰ Harold Wilmington, "Old Testament Passages Quoted by Jesus Christ," 2017 *The Second Person File*, 71, accessed June 15, 2023, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/second_person/71/.

2. Tanakh

The *Tanakh* is the Jewish Bible and it is broken into three sections: The Law of Moses, or what is often called the Pentateuch, or the *Torah*. And it consists of the first five books. The second section is called “The Prophets,” and it consists of Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 & 2), Kings (1 & 2), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Book of the Twelve Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The third section is called “The Writings,” and it consists of Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles (1 & 2).

That is where the name Tanakh comes from:

Ta = Torah (Instruction, or Law, also called the Pentateuch),
na = Nevi'im (Prophets),
kh = Ketuvim (Writings).

The Tanakh is the “complete” Old Testament, it is just in a different order. Nothing is missing, and nothing is added. We have the exact same Old Testament that Jesus would have known. More importantly, based upon the Tanakh, from Abel to Zachariah includes the entire Old Testament as we know it, and as Jesus affirmed as authoritative.

3. Old Testament Accuracy

But, how can we *know* that the Old Testament in our hand is the same Old Testament that Jesus is referring to?

a) Qumran

In winter of 1947, a young shepherd discovered a cave filled with ancient manuscripts. What he had found was one of eleven caves used as an ancient library by the Jewish sect known as the Essenes. And these caves were located in an isolated desert community known as Khirbet Qumran.¹²¹ Over the next several years more than a thousand scrolls were discovered in the network of caves, and were designated *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. Two-hundred of the scrolls were copies of books in the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament. Manuscripts were found for every Old Testament book, except for Ruth. It is perhaps the greatest biblical manuscript find in history. It turns out that the Old Testament scrolls found at Qumran were older than any existing records of the Old Testament. Until this discovery the oldest Old Testament manuscript was of *Codex Leningradensis* which dates to 1008 A. D. The Dead Sea Scrolls, on the other hand, date back to between 250 BC to 50 AD.¹²² But here is the significance of this for us. The Dead Sea Scrolls are Old Testament scrolls that were copied between 250 BC and about 50 AD.

This is the text Jesus was familiar with. This is the text that was being read in the synagogues when Jesus was growing up, and during His ministry. This is the text that Jesus was reading in the synagogues. The Dead Sea Scrolls tell us exactly what Jesus affirmed as Scripture. But it also tells us just how accurate our Old Testament today really is. “When the Dead Sea Scrolls were rediscovered in the twentieth century it

¹²¹ Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson-Rose, 2015), 42.

¹²² Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translation*, 186-87.

became clear that the Old Testament had remained remarkably stable over the centuries.”¹²³ “In fact, a scroll of Isaiah found . . . was copied more than a hundred years before Jesus was born; yet, the wording of this scroll of Isaiah agreed almost completely with the Masoretic texts that were copied a thousand years later!”¹²⁴

The Old Testament that you have in your Bible is incredibly accurate, it has been handed down with extreme care, and we can say that the Old Testament text we have today, is *authoritative* precisely because the resurrected Jesus, the Son of God, confirmed it.

B. New Testament

But what about the New Testament? One of the things that these ancient people say is that YHWH would send a Redeemer who would propitiate the sins of all of those who would believe. Our historical investigation of the resurrection determined that the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus is “very certain,” and what we learn from all of this is that the story of the New Testament began long before Jesus was born.

1. Anticipation

There are *three good reasons* to believe New Testament canon was a natural aspect of the unfolding of redemptive history in Jesus Christ.¹²⁵

a) The story needed to be finished.

The first century Jews were waiting for God to finish the story of the Old Testament, and the earliest Christians believed that God was completing the story through the man sent from God, Jesus.¹²⁶ Resurrection scholar N. T. Wright said for the first century Israelites, “the great story of the Hebrew scriptures was . . . read in the Second Temple period as a story looking for a conclusion.”¹²⁷

The Israelites were looking for God to do something, they were looking for Him to fulfill the promises made to Adam and Eve (Gen 3:15), promises made through Daniel, (Dan 3:25; 7), through Isaiah (Isa 7:14, 53), and many, many more throughout the Old Testament; some have said as many as 456 prophecies about the coming Messiah. No doubt, the Israelites were looking for God to act in redemptive history.

The Israelites also knew that whenever God had acted in a redemptive way, He usually gave them a new revelation. We see this following the Great Flood, we see this following the Israelites rescue out of Egypt, and so on. Surly, the Israelites who converted to early Christianity likewise expected a new revelation, or a new covenant in light of the arrival of the arrival, death, and resurrection of the Messiah.

b) Expectation of written covenant

The second reason we can believe that the New Testament was part of the natural unfolding of redemptive history in Christ Jesus was that “*the earliest Christians understood that covenants in the ancient world were written documents and believed*

¹²³ Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 43-44.

¹²⁴ Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 43-44.

¹²⁵ Johnathan Morrow, *Questioning the Bible: 11 Major Challenges to the Bible’s Authority* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 60-64.

¹²⁶ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 60.

¹²⁷ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 217.

*Jesus the Messiah had inaugurated the New Covenant.*¹²⁸ Jesus had said at the Last Supper, “this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20), and Paul refers to himself as a minister of the “new covenant” (2 Cor 3:6).¹²⁹ No doubt, the early Christians, who were Jews, were expecting a written New Covenant with God.

c) The apostles recognized as authoritative

The third reason we can believe that the New Testament was part of the natural unfolding of redemptive history was that “*the earliest Christians believed that the apostles were uniquely authorized by Jesus to communicate the message of the New Covenant to the world.*”¹³⁰ Jesus had specifically given the disciples His authority to teach and preach and write the gospel and the New Covenant (cf Mark 3:14-15, Matt 28:19-20).

Given the Jewish heritage of the majority of the earliest Christians, it would be an expectation for the apostles to write down their eyewitness accounts of what they had seen and heard before they died; to capture and record that eyewitness testimony that would outlast the apostles themselves.¹³¹ Christian theologian Kavin Rowe said, “the resurrection is the central truth around which all other matters turn.”¹³² Rowe is exactly right. And since the resurrection of Jesus is the central truth around which all matters turn, a written covenant in light of the resurrection is a high expectation.

C. Gospel Accuracy

But we now find ourselves at a crossroads, we have been arguing for the last several minutes, presenting evidence, even quoting Jesus, making the claim that the New Testament was fully anticipated by the earliest Christians; but our argument is weak. And our argument is weak because we have said nothing about source. We have not said anything about the truthfulness of the source that tell us Jesus actually *did* come, that He *did* die on a Cross, that He *was* resurrected.

1. Meet Bart Ehrman

Bart Ehrman has been one of the most prolific critics of Christianity over the last 20 years. We have already dealt with several of his arguments when we were looking at the Christian resurrection narrative. It is Ehrman that claims the resurrection accounts in the Gospels are written long after the actual event, he claims Christian resurrection narrative violates Ockham’s razor, and he claims that the gospels are Christian propaganda and they are deceptive.

However, there is one criticism that he has made very popular in recent years. Ehrman says “there are more errors in the manuscripts than there are words in the New

¹²⁸ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 62.

¹²⁹ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 62.

¹³⁰ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 63.

¹³¹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 308.

¹³² Rowe, *Christianity’s Surprise*, 12.

Testament.”¹³³ But, New Testament scholar Timothy Paul Jones, commenting on Ehrman’s claim writes; “this statement is technically true but . . . it’s a bit misleading.”¹³⁴ To be exact, Ehrman claims there are some 400,000 errors in the Greek manuscripts.¹³⁵ And there are only 138,000 words in the Greek New Testament. But it is critical to understand that that number of variants comes from adding up every difference in every surviving manuscript from the Greek New Testament. For instance, take a misspelled word. Say there are 2,000 manuscripts that all have the same particular verse. “A misspelled word in a single manuscript that is different from 1,999 other manuscripts is counted as 2,000 variants[;]” not one.¹³⁶

There are about 5800 Greek New Testament manuscripts. With numbers like these it does not take long for the number of variants to add up. Nevertheless, “spread across millions and millions of words in more than 5,000 manuscripts, the variations represent a small percentage of the total.”¹³⁷

a) Spelling differences

Spelling differences make up the great majority of variants at about 320,000. That is about 75% of all of the variants observed.

b) Synonym differences

These variants involve whether the definite article is used with proper nouns or not, like “The Mary, or The Joseph.” Or, changes in the order of words. In the Greek language word order is not nearly as critical as it is in English. This group also includes variants derived from the flexibility of the language. For example, there are 16 different ways to say “Jesus loves John” in the Greek language.¹³⁸

c) Meaningful but not viable variants

This category of variants includes a reading that is different from other alternate readings. These types of variants generally do not have very good supporting textual evidence.

d) Meaningful variants

This includes variants like Romans 5:1. Some manuscripts say “let us have peace with God,” and others say “we have peace with God.” Among all the manuscripts of this passage, about half have it one way, and half have it the other. But it is important because there is a theological distinction between the two. But keep in mind, the Bible has a beautiful system of redundancy. There are several passages that support both readings. In other words, both are theologically sound statements.

¹³³ Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: the Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 90.

¹³⁴ Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 108.

¹³⁵ Ehrman states that there could be more than 400,000 “errors” since “no one has yet been able to count them all.” Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 89.

¹³⁶ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 98.

¹³⁷ Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 109.

¹³⁸ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 100.

In all, only about 1% of the variants, or 4,000 of the 400,000 variants are meaningful. Even still, *there are no variants that alter the core doctrines* of the New Testament.¹³⁹

2. Errors?

But didn't the Holy Spirit inspire the New Testament writers, and what they produced was without error? Yes, that is exactly true; the Holy Spirit did inspire the apostolic, and associate's writings. So, what about these alleged "errors" in our Bibles? As Christians we hold the Bible to be the authoritative, inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and final authority in all matters of faith and salvation. That has been Christian doctrine from the beginning of Christianity, and it was upon this foundation that Martin Luther *protested* the Romish church and Popery in his *95 Thesis*. And that started the Protestant Reformation beginning on October 31, 1517, which is a strong part of our heritage.

But what does all that really mean? It all comes back to what Michael rejects; biblical authority.

III. Is The Bible Authoritative?

All of this (around the room) eventually leads to this: is the Bible authoritative? Remember, we had said that all of this cannot get you to salvation. All of God's general revelation through nature, as grand as it may be, it cannot bring man to the saving grace of Christ. The *only way* to salvation is thorough Jesus Christ, and the only way to Christ is through God's special revelation in Scripture. And in that, we must have confidence in the *authority* of Scripture.

By authoritative Christians mean that Scripture alone (*sola scripture*) is authoritative precisely because it is God's Word "breathed out" (2 Tim 3:16). We have just argued that Jesus was raised from the dead by God the Father who by virtue of the resurrection of Jesus has divine authority confirming both backwards, that the Old Testament bears authority from God, and forward to the New Testament by the Holy Spirit of God through the apostles and associates who were eyewitnesses. Sinclair Ferguson once wrote, "the Father does not lie to his Son. The Son does not lie to the Spirit. The Spirit did not lie to the apostles . . . and the apostles did not lie to us."¹⁴⁰ For that reason it is said that "the God of truth has breathed out his Word of truth, and the results in nothing less than a *flawless* authority for the church."¹⁴¹

Now, in reflecting upon Michael, who we have carried along with us through this class series; Michael fails to recognize the Bible as God's special revelation. Ultimately, that means he fails to grant *authority* to the Bible. And he fails to grant authority because he fails to grant *inspiration*, *inerrancy*, and *sufficiency* to God's word. This is a critical juncture because if Michael can be assured of the inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency of God's word, then it goes a long way to helping solve Michael's dilemma.

¹³⁹ Morrow, *Questioning the Bible*, 101.

¹⁴⁰ Sinclair Ferguson, "Inerrancy and Pneumatology," *The Master's Seminary Summit*, session 15 (March 2015), quoted in Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 80.

¹⁴¹ Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 25.

And it is not just the unbelieving Michaels of the world, Christians, and not just a few, sometimes doubts about Scripture as well; specifically, about inspiration, inerrancy, sufficiency, and authority. Or, another way we could say that it is biblical authority itself that is dependent upon *inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency*.

A. Inspiration

We have said that Michael has an issue with inspiration. But in truth, Michael has an issue with authority; of which inspiration is a very important component. Although there are at least six theories of the mechanics of inspiration, *verbal plenary inspiration* is most commonly accepted as how the Holy Spirit interacted with the human authors of Scripture.¹⁴²

From the Latin *verbum* which means “word,” and *plenus*, which means “full;” verbal plenary inspiration argues that there is dual authorship to Scripture.¹⁴³ The authors were given freedom to write as they intended to write, but were also superintended by the Holy Spirit “so that what the human author said, God said, down to the exact words and phrases.”¹⁴⁴ This is not to be considered as mechanical dictation; the author’s particular style was allowed to manifest, but the words were God’s. In this way, the author’s words are without error because they are God’s words.

Jesus had told His disciples “when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority [there is the word authority], but whatever he hears he will speak, and will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:13). Again, Jesus told the disciples; “But the Helper, The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). “Bring to your remembrance” is exactly what inspiration is.

Surely if God can create the universe, and can raise Jesus from the dead, then He can “breath out” His word through inspired men.¹⁴⁵ If the Bible is not inspired then it cannot be inerrant, and if it is not inerrant, then the door is open to a vast array of interpretations. But it is more serious than that. Biblical scholar Matthew Barrett warns us; “if we reject inspiration, we are rejecting the Bible’s own testimony concerning itself. . . . it is difficult to ignore the evidence that the Bible does affirm its own inspiration. Scripture is not silent on its identity and origin.”¹⁴⁶ And let me just add, once again, based upon the historical fact that Jesus was raised from the dead by God, we should expect God to speak directly to us through His inspired Word. Barrett writes, “to reject inspiration is to abandon the authority of Christ and the apostles.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 225.

¹⁴³ Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 225.

¹⁴⁵ Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 234.

¹⁴⁶ Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 262.

¹⁴⁷ Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 262.

B. Inerrancy

Inerrancy naturally flows from a flawless God who “breathes out” Scripture. However, inerrancy is sometimes misunderstood as meaning that our Bible has *no* errors. But that is not exactly what inerrancy means. “Inerrancy means that Scripture, in its *original* manuscripts, does not err in all the biblical authors assert.”¹⁴⁸

That is how it is possible that the Bible is inerrant and at the same time has 400,000 variants. It is inerrant in the original autographs but again, the translations that we have are extremely accurate, and faithful to the originals. In that way we can say our Bibles are *sufficient*. Jones argues, “Since God does not ‘re-inspire’ the text each time it was reproduced, sometimes the copyists miscopied their sources.”¹⁴⁹

C. Sufficiency

Sufficiency of Scripture simply declares that what it contains is sufficient; it is enough. We may, and most of us very much do wish we had more. Some of us wish we could know more about God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit so that we might have a deeper relationship with God. We wish for those things so that we might love God more deeply. Anselm of Canterbury, the 11th century Christian theologian taught that the acquisition of knowledge of God begins with a love for God.¹⁵⁰ That love, then, drives one to seek more knowledge. In that way both love and knowledge of God are progressively deepened. But we are limited by “what can be known about God.” But I am often reminded of a quotation by the writer and professor Norman Maclean who said; “we can love completely what we cannot completely understand.”¹⁵¹ That *is* sufficiency.

And so, it is a Christian doctrine that what can be known about God through His special revelation in Scripture is sufficient. It is sufficient for our knowing God, and loving God, but more importantly, Scripture is sufficient unto the salvation of man. Paul told Timothy, “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16).

IV. Gospel Circularity

As we draw near the end of our class series, and so that we do not end with a circular argument, a brief summary for the truthfulness of the Gospels needs to be made. We have already covered several aspects of the reliability of the Gospels along the way, and time prevents us from presently digging deeper. However, at this point we have, to some extent, argued *from* the Gospels. Especially relating to things that Jesus said. Do you see how our argument is presently circular? It starts the argument with the thing it is trying to prove.

¹⁴⁸ Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*, 265.

¹⁴⁹ Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, 108.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Williams, “Saint Anselm,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/anselm/>.

¹⁵¹ Norman Maclean, *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2017), 117.

A. Circular Argument

We could summarize this way. Jesus affirms Scripture; how do we know this? The Gospels say so; why do I believe the Gospels? Because Jesus affirms the Gospels.

B. Non-Circular Argument

Rather, it is best presented this way: Eyewitnesses write their testimony that Jesus died and was raised from the dead; the resurrection validates Jesus's claims that He was God; Jesus is therefore authoritative; and Jesus affirms both Old and New Testaments as authoritative. If you notice, that is a linear, rather than a circular argument.

V. Final Christian Worldview Portrait

That brings us to our final Christian worldview portrait. For our final addition, we can say this:

“Exercising His authority, Jesus affirms both Old Testament and the New Testament as God’s Word *breathed out*. And what God’s Word says is that there *is* a Creator of all that exists; that there *is* design and intentionality present in the created world; that human beings *were* created with self-consciousness and that there *is* an innate moral law residing in the self-consciousness of man, created in the *imago Dei* Himself. Scripture says that Jesus of Nazareth *was* a man born of woman, but He *is* also the living Son of God who walked this earth, *was* crucified, died, *was* buried, and *rose* from the dead on the third day. Scripture tells us that His death *was* a propitiation of the sins of all people who would believe, and that God would remember their sins *no more*. And that God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, along with all our people who have died in Christ *are* there, in heaven, waiting for *you* to get there. Amen; come Lord Jesus, Amen.”

This concludes our class series. Thank you all so much! You have been an outstanding class, and it has been a pleasure to present this class series.

Next week we will have a short review, then we will take our final quiz, then I can set down and be quite for a while.

Thank You and May God Richly Bless You,

APPENDIX 9

SERMON—SCRIPTURAL WARRANT FOR UTILITY OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

The following sermon transcript from Job 38-41 and Romans 1:18-21 was preached before the first morning apologetics class lesson introducing the *Kalam* cosmological argument. The sermon is an appeal to Scripture for warrant from God to utilize natural theology in defense of the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity. This sermon was preached as part of the morning service on May 14, 2023, at the Waurika church of Christ in Waurika, Oklahoma, by the author. In the interest of space, the format has been compressed.

“Without Excuse”: A Sermon

Waurika church of Christ

Waurika, OK

Sunday AM Worship

May 14, 2023

Introduction

Once again please allow me to thank the eldership and this congregation for the opportunity to stand before you, and to stand most humbly before God, to preach *His Word* one more time. I am blessed beyond words by this privilege, and I thank you so much. This is a very exciting day as later this morning we will officially begin our extended study of Christian apologetics, and we will begin to prepare a defense for our faith as Peter commends us to do in 1 Peter 3:15. If we are to be ambassadors of Christ, if we are to be credible representatives for Christ, then we need to not only understand what it is that we believe, and why we believe it, but we also need to learn how to defend that belief.

Biblical Authority

Let me begin this morning by stating, unequivocally, that as Christians we hold the Holy Bible to be the inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and final authority in all matters of faith and salvation. No other source, religious, pagan, or profane, is to be placed in equality to, or elevated above the singular supremacy of God’s Holy Word **“breathed out”** (2 Tim 3:16). Since the Bible is our final authority, as Christians all our studies must begin, and end with God’s Word; our studies must be anchored in, and tethered to God’s Word.

Michael’s Dilemma

But there are times it is impossible for us to have a conversation about Bible things with individuals who do not believe that the Bible is God’s inspired Word. Remember *Michael’s Dilemma* from class last week? We said that Michael’s dilemma is that he does not believe the Bible is God’s Word. His worldview is not grounded in reality; it is not grounded in truth, that is a dilemma. And it is a dilemma that we as Christians are called to address. So how do we reach the Michael’s in the world? That is what we are going to focus on over the next three months; how do we reach people like Michael, and how do we help them solve their dilemma? And all along the way, hopefully, our own faith will be invigorated and strengthened?

Start and End

But, if we as Christians hold dear that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and final authority in all matters of faith and salvation, then we must begin and end that study with Holy Scripture. That is, all our studies of God must find warrant in Scripture.

Warrant for Apologetics

Last week we briefly looked at 1 Peter 3:15 in which Peter writes; **“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”** And it is this passage, among others, that gives us warrant, or, we can say it gives us authority to prepare that

defense. In other words, it gives us Scriptural authority to engage in the study and application of Christian apologetics.

Science, Philosophy, and History

There is much in the study and practice of apologetics that does not come from the Bible, but comes from *things* in the world. Apologetics often relies upon scientific discovery, philosophical reasoning, and the study of history. These things from the world, provide essential elements to the building of a Christian defense for the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity. Especially when engaging Bible skeptics such as in the case of *Michael's Dilemma*. But there is an apparent tension here; an apparent contradiction, or a conundrum. If, as Christians our studies of God must have warrant from Scripture, then how is it that we can use science, philosophy, and history in the study of the existence and nature of God, and the truthfulness of Christianity?

Scriptural Authority?

That is the question I would like to address this morning. And it is a hugely important question; if we are to always *begin* with Scripture, and to always *end* with Scripture, where do we find authority *from* Scripture to use science, philosophy, and history?

“Long Ago...”

Well, let us begin to answer that question..... *from* Scripture. The author begins the letter to the Hebrews writing; **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”** (Heb 1:1).

The Prophets

Certainly, God has spoken to mankind at many times, and in many ways. The prophets, the early prophets, and the latter prophets, and the minor prophets, some 17 prophets in all, had one singular purpose, and that was to serve as a medium through which God might speak to His people. And I have spoken at length from John's gospel that **“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,”** (John 1:14) that too is God speaking to His people. The fathers and the prophets, together with the apostles of Jesus, record the words of God, what Paul told Timothy were God's words **“breathed out”** (2 Tim 3:16).

Special Revelation

Then, all of God's Words, both Old and New, were assembled and canonized into this Holy Bible; that is God speaking to His people; speaking to us at many times, and in many ways. It is from within those sacred writings that we come to know something of what can be known about the character and nature of God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the precious Holy Spirit. In other words, God has revealed Himself to mankind through His Word in the Bible, and we are mightily blessed because of it. In biblical studies, or in theology this is called God's *special revelation* to mankind. Special revelation is one of two general means by which God has revealed Himself to mankind.

General Revelation

The other medium of God's revelation of Himself is termed *general revelation*, and is sometime called "**the light of nature,**" and it is vividly described in numerous places in the Bible. One very fine example of God's general revelation can be found in Job chapter 12.

Job 12:7-10

Read along with me; Job 12 verses 7 – 10. The ESV translates the Hebrew of Job in this manner; **"But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind."**

No One Left Out

Job says in verse 9; **"who among all of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this.?"** That is an all-inclusive declaration, no one is left out; the beast, the birds, the fish, even the plants and bushes are held accountable; *everybody* knows that the Lord has done this. That would tend to leave anyone who *does not* look at the world around them and quickly deduce that God created all that we see, well, they are pretty much *without excuse*.

Summary of Job

Job is a fascinating study in so many ways. Most often Job is cited when considering the question of why God allows evil. That is one of the major reasons why God revealing Himself to mankind in Job, is a hugely significant writing. We are all familiar with the story, righteous Job is tormented by Satan; and in the midst of his torment three of his friends come and try to help Job through his ordeal. The friends *help* by encouraging Job to confess that he actually deserves to be tormented because he must have done something to offend God and Job is ultimately responsible for his own misery.

Eavesdropping

As readers we get to eavesdrop on the conversation between Job and his friends. And that conversation turns out to be a repeating cycle of Job complaining, then one of his friends trying to defend God and at the same time convince Job to repent, then Job complains, then another friend tries to get Job to repent, and the cycle goes on; just like that for 34 chapters! Thirty-four chapters!

God Speaks

Finally, God puts a stop to it in a powerful way. Beginning in the 38th chapter God says to Job, essentially, **"who are you to question me?"** Then God said, **"dress for action like a man: I will question you, and you will make it known to me"** (Job 38:3). The NKJV translates it, **"Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me."** Can you imagine? **"Prepare yourself like a man, I will ask, and you will answer."** I do not know about you, but that is a bit intimidating to say the least; standing before God, Him asking and I answering.

Job Questioning God's Character

But I want you to notice the argument that God presents to Job. Job was questioning God for letting all this torment befall him. This is serious, and it provokes God to respond, because at the heart of his argument, Job is questioning the character and foundational attributes of God; these foundational attributes possessed perfectly by God, and God alone. Those core attributes that make God, God; like goodness and justice and mercy in the absolute, and the perfect sense.

God's Apologetic

Understandably, God responds in a powerful way. In truth, God builds His own apologetic of Himself. In other words, God prepares, and then delivers an *apologia* to defend Himself against Job's acquisitions. God is playing the role as an apologist. But, since we are all Christian apologists, or we are in the process of becoming apologists; I want you to notice what God uses as evidence to support His argument? Nature. In His defense God calls upon a multitude of witnesses from nature to testify on His behalf regarding *His* character and nature.

God Calls on Nature

All throughout chapters 38, 39, 40, and 41, God calls upon Job to consider the evidence provided by creation; evidence that He is the creator God, and is supremely sovereign, then, that He is a good, wise, and just God. At its core this is what apologetics does. It looks at God's general revelation from nature, then the evidence from nature is utilized to craft a defense for the existence of God, and the truthfulness of Christianity.

"Great Cloud of Witnesses"

Listen to the **"great cloud of witnesses"** from nature that God calls to testify on His behalf: From the cosmos God calls forth Orion and Pleiades, and all the constellations of stars to testify on His behalf. Regarding the earth, God calls on its measurements, and its cornerstones; He calls upon its seas and its rivers. And its great expanse. From the atmosphere God calls as witnesses to His divine nature; light and darkness; wind, dew, and hail. Frost and ice; rain and snow; clouds and lightning. He calls forth the testimony of the grain of the fields; the Lotus plants and the grass. He calls the willow trees and cedars. From the animal kingdom God calls to bear witnesses, the hawk, and the horse; the eagle and the lion; the mountain goat, the donkey, and the wild ox; the raven, the ostrich, and the locust. He calls forward Behemoth, and He calls Leviathan.

Wisdom and Understanding

But, in the middle of all this, in chapter 38 something almost goes unnoticed. In verse 36, in that short little verse, God calls upon Job to use his God-given wisdom and understanding to reason from the evidence of nature; from testimony of such **"a great cloud of witnesses,"** that God *is* sovereign. In verse 36 God asks Job if he knows; **"Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?"** God is asking Job if he knows where the capacity of the human mind came from; how we think, how we use logic and reason. God calls upon His creation of our minds to bear witness as well.

“Were You There?”

Notice in chapter 38 that from the outset God refers to the creation of the world asking Job if he was actually there when *He* created the world. And from there God over and over again references *created things, observable things, observable evidence* from nature to bear witness to His existence, and to His holy attributes. Things that can be clearly seen. In rapid-fire fashion God pummels Job with rhetorical questions: **“Who determine the measurements of the earth? Can you cause the sun to rise? Who shut up the seas? Do you know where is the dwelling of light? Can you send forth the lightning? Do you give the horse his might, and clothe his neck with mane?”**

1,960 Words

On it goes, 4 chapters. Some 1,960 words in the ESV. The longest continuous communication from God to man recorded in the Bible and every word of it is God using general revelation from nature to present an argument to Job defending Himself and His **“eternal power and divine nature”** (Rom 1:20). In a word; God uses apologetics and tells Job that nature speaks to mankind of God in such a profoundly clear sense, that if anyone denies God, they really have **“no excuse.”**

Romans 1

The apostle Paul, in a most powerful way, takes this same lesson from God in Job, and he presents it boldly and sharply to the Romans. If you would turn with me to Romans chapter 1. Beginning at verse 18 and we will read through verse 21. Romans 1:18-21.

Romans 1:18-21

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Nothing New

Now do not get me wrong; I love Paul, but this is nothing new. What Paul says here in Romans 1 is not novel. He is taking the exact same lesson taught by God. He is using the same apologetic approach that God used to defend Himself against the accusations of Job. And he is presenting it to the Romans as a warning against what Paul terms **“suppressing the truth”** (Rom 1:18) concerning knowledge of the existence of God. The Greek word *katecho* we translate; “suppress,” is not a passive word, it is not a word that just sets there on the page, it is an active verb in both the Greek, and in English. It is an action word; it denotes that an intentional action is required for its execution. It requires the *intentionality* of suppressing the truth about God. And it is directly because of the intentionality required in suppressing the truth, that God in His justice can hold those same people **“without excuse.”**

Corrupting Relationships

But God's indictment here is far reaching and goes much deeper than a failure to acknowledge God as creator. It inevitably lies within a sequence of false relations of man toward God, of man toward their fellow men, and man toward creation itself.¹ It is wholesale corruption both vertically, and horizontally. Suppressing the truth about God ultimately corrupts the relationships between *everything* that exists. This is a serious offense. The suppressing of the truth about God is a far-reaching offense that touches every aspect of existence; God, our fellow man, and creation itself. Paul says of this offense, there can be no excuse. Why? Because the truth of God is so obvious that everyone knows it. In verse 19 Paul declares; **“for what can be known about God is plain to them”** (Rom 1:19).

Not Everything Can be Known

Obviously not everything can be known about God. It cannot be determined from His special revelation in Scripture, and it cannot be known from His general revelation from nature. Even by our most diligent attempts, what can be known about God has great limitations.

Divine Hiddenness

Theologians often speak of “divine hiddenness,” or “the hiddenness of God,” to describe the limitations of what can be known about God because of the epistemic distance, or knowledge gap that exists between what God knows about man, and what man knows or can know about God. Even so, God has revealed enough of Himself to mankind through both general revelation in nature, and special revelation in Scripture so that, in the words of Paul to the Athenians, **“they should seek God, and feel their way toward him, and perhaps find him”** (Acts 17:27).

Invisible Attributes

But as it concerns the study and practice of Christian apologetics, what is it that we can we **“come to know”** about God from nature? Verse 20, Paul writes that we can come to know some of God's **“invisible attributes, namely His eternal power, and divine nature”** (Rom 1:20). That is what we can learn about God from nature. Not only can we come to know these things about God, but they are impossible not to see. Paul says that the eternal power and divine nature of God can be **“clearly perceived, in the things that have been made”** (Rom 1:20).

The Intellect

Paul is talking about intellectual ascent; he is talking about using the intellect that God has gifted to each and every person, and using that intellect to deduce from the evidence that God does in deed exist.² This sounds an awful lot like what God said to Job; God said **“look at the created world around you, look at the things that I have made, and from those magnificent things in creation, you should clearly see evidence**

¹ James D. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Bible Commentary, vol. 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 56.

² Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 57.

not only that I exist, but clearly see evidence of my eternal power and divine nature.”

“They Will Teach You”

Again, in chapter 12 Job speaks with great clarity of the evidence for God found in nature; **“you can even ask the beasts, they will teach you, or the birds, they will tell you, or the fish of the sea will declare to you, the hand of the Lord has done this”** (Job 12:7-9). There is a strong sense of intentionality here. Paul writes in the definitive; **“God has shown it to them”** (Rom 1:19). This is not a game of smoke and mirrors, there is intent on the part of God to make these things known about Himself. And it is because of God’s intentionality to “show” us these things that we call God’s intentionality; revelation. This is a revealing of Himself with simplistic clarity, and directed intentionality, toward mankind.³ After all, Job had said **“even the bushes of the earth can tell you that God has created all things”** (Job 12:7-8).

Without Excuse

In fact, the truth of God can be so clearly perceived that those who refuse to look for it, are **“without excuse”** (Rom 1:20). That is a frightening thing: to stand before the same God you denied in this life, and there to find yourself **“without excuse.”** I think this is what the Hebrew author means when he says **“it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Heb 10:31). To stand there naked and bare; **“without excuse.”** Ultimately because you are without Christ.

Salvation

It is important to understand that while God’s revelation of Himself in nature provides enough evidence that if a person denies that evidence they are **“without excuse.”** But, there is no salvation to be found in God’s general revelation. While the evidence of nature, and general revelation can get you to some knowledge of God, salvation only comes through Jesus Christ as revealed by God through special revelation in Scripture.⁴ You have to start, and you have to end with Scripture.

Important for Us to Learn

But it seems to me, if at a minimum, God holds people accountable for not clearly recognizing His existence through the evidence that He presents in nature, then there is something important for all of us to learn here. God tells us there is something crucial to be learned about the nature of His intentionality; that intentionality that is on grand display in nature.

Image of God

And perhaps it is this; all people, by virtue of being created in God’s image, have the notion written upon their heart that there is a Higher Being; a Creator and Sustainer of

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 115.

⁴ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 117.

all life. And that the existence of this Superior Being compels our worship. This includes the unbeliever; this includes Michael and his dilemma.

It is these people who intentionally “**suppress the truth,**” who are foolish, *whose hearts are darkened*; those are the people we have been commissioned by Christ to witnesses to.

Common Ground

But, since they have suppressed the truth, and their foolish hearts are darkened, the only way to reach many of those people is to find some bit of common ground from which to begin a conversation. That is what apologetics does, it finds common ground between the Christian and the unbeliever so the conversation about the Good News of Christ has a place to begin. Common ground is from where we begin the conversation with those like Michael who refuse the authority of the Bible. We have to start somewhere. We have to find common ground.

With All Your Mind

Jesus was once asked what the greatest commandment was. In Mark 12:30 Jesus answers that questions saying; “**you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.**” Notice Jesus repeats the phrase; “*and with all your...*” before each item. All your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Literary Devise

This is a literary and a grammatical devise used to emphatically show that each item listed here; heart, soul, mind, strength, are equally supreme. They are of equal importance in our loving of God. We should love God with our hearts just as much as we should love God with our strength. Not only that, but Jesus says we are to love God using each, and all of these; heart, soul, *mind*, and strength.

Closing

So how do we love God with *all* our mind? Quite obviously both God and Paul instruct us to begin and end with Scripture. But loving God with all our minds, and in searching for a bit of common ground to stand on with the unbeliever, both God and Paul also instruct us to look about at the things that have been created; to further our understanding of God’s clearly perceived invisible attributes, and to help the Michael’s of the world solve their dilemma by starting on common ground.

In just a few minutes we will begin a three-month journey to do just that.

Wisdom in the Inward Parts

To utilize the things that have been created, including observations in nature, discoveries from science, the records of history, and, we will be utilizing the logic and reasoning capacity of our minds. After all, our minds are a gift from God. God asks Job in the 38th chapter if he knows, “**who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?**” (Job 38:36). God blessed us with a particular mental capacity so that we could dig deeper, to ask ultimate questions, to see the handiwork of God in the things that have been created, and to prepare a defense for anyone who asks us the reason for the hope that they see within us.

Virgil

Virgil Trout wrote, if Christianity **“is true, it will not be harmed by careful examination. The Christian invitation is one which is directed to your heart and your head.”**⁵ This morning we follow in Virgil’s footsteps; to examine Christianity with both our heart, and our, head. And we will do this in honor to God, as God, using the gift of our *minds*, so that our hearts will not be darkened, but that we might be further filled with the light of Christ, and shine forth as credible witnesses to His love; **“in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation”** (Phil 2:15). That is what Christian apologetics is all about; loving the Lord our God with all our minds. Otherwise, we are **“without excuse.”**

Invitation

Luke tells us in Acts chapter 22 that a time came when Saul of Tarsus became **“without excuse”** as well. Paul had been confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and was blinded by the glory of Christ. Later, at Ananias house we are told that **“the scales fell from Saul’s eyes and he could see”** (Acts 9:18). Then Ananias asked Paul a very critical question: You have seen the evidence; you know Jesus has been raised from the dead, **“and now why do you wait? Arise and be baptized washing away your sins calling on his name”** (Acts 22:16). Paul reached a point to where he was without excuse. He was overwhelmed by what he had seen and heard. If he had not responded the way that he did, then he too would have been **“without excuse.”** This morning if you are at that point, if you have looked at the evidence and you are convinced that Jesus Christ is your Lord and your God, why do *you* wait, arise, and be baptized, calling on His name.

This morning if we can pray with you or for you, if we can do anything at all, please come forward as we stand and sing.

⁵ Virgil Trout, *Quest for Truth in a Scientific Age* (Lubbock, TX: Key, 1965), 39.

APPENDIX 10

SERMON—SCRIPTURAL WARRANT FOR UTILITY OF PHILOSOPHY

The following sermon from 1 Corinthians 15:12-22 was preached after the first morning apologetics class lesson introducing the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. The sermon is an appeal to Scripture for warrant from God to utilize the philosophical method in defense of the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity. This sermon was preached as part of the evening service on May 14, 2023, at the Waurika church of Christ in Waurika, Oklahoma, by the author. In the interest of space, the format has been compressed.

Philosophy According to Paul: A Sermon

Waurika church of Christ

Waurika, OK

Sunday PM Worship

May 14, 2023

Introduction

This morning marked the official beginning of our Adult Bible Class series on Christian apologetics, and we began by looking at one of the first apologetic arguments when presenting a cumulative case in defense of the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity. And that is the *kalam* cosmological argument. And even though we are only about half way through that initial argument, those of you who were not familiar with the mechanics of philosophy, should be getting an idea of how classical philosophy works to arrive at truthful conclusions.

Truisms

As we said, the discipline of philosophy has its own universally recognized truisms; Something cannot be both true and false at the same time; $2 + 2 = 4$; if $A=B$ and $B=C$, then $A=C$ as well, and so forth. These rules of logic are universal in that they apply to all people in all places, and at all times. The truisms of philosophy from 3,000 years ago, are still truisms today.

Ancient Philosophers

Philosophy has been presented since the days of Thales who lived in Miletus in Asia Minor in 700 BC. Of course, it was the later Greeks Socrates and Aristotle, and Plato, among others who are most often remembered from antiquity. And it was against the Epicurean and the Stoic philosophers that Paul argued against on Mars Hill in Acts 17. Paul even quotes the Greek philosopher Aratus in verse 28 saying; **“In him we live and move and have our being”** (Acts 17:28).

Wait a Minute

But we say; “wait a minute!” Paul is very clear in Colossians 2:8 ff. Turn with me to Colossians 2:8. There, Paul warns the reader; **“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”**

That seems to be pretty clear. Philosophy is here linked by Paul with *captivity*, *empty deceit*, and a *cunningness* of human invention.¹ They all are one and the same, and they are one and the same kind of bad news. But it turns out that this little verse is packed full of significance. And understanding that significance begins in determining who is Paul’s audience here, and what is the occasion?

¹ For this sermon, Pauline authorship is assumed.

Scripture Genre Considerations

This is a short passage so allow me to read it one more time: **“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ”** (Col 2:8). This is an interesting passage, and one can almost hear Paul pleading with the Colossians; **“see to it.”** Paul is saying this is important, make absolutely certain to be cautious, to be diligent.

Epistle

Paul’s correspondence to the Colossians is, of course, an epistle. In other words, it is an ancient letter written to the Christian church at Colossae. But epistles are much more than letters, they are instruments used by the apostles, and others, to teach the early church members theology, as well as ethical instructions.² Epistles are also the most occasional of all the writings in the Bible. That means that generally, the authors of the epistles of the New Testament are dealing with very specific occasions, or issues occurring within a body of believers. The epistle to the church at Colossae is no different. In fact, here, Paul is primarily addressing a particular kind of heresy that is threatening the church by devaluing the person and redemptive work of Christ.³

Cultural Setting

One feature that is significant here is that the Lycus river valley, as well as Colossae itself, was home to a “substantial Jewish minority.”⁴ And there was no doubt many Jewish Christians in the church itself. So, there is a strong Jewish culture; a strong Jewish presence that no doubt has constant, and significant influence on the Christians in the area.

And it is an influence that Paul is concerned will threaten the church. But what is it that Paul is actually warning the church about? Is Paul expressing a position of anti-intellectualism? Is he, in the words of one modern critic, “waging war on philosophy”?⁵

Unique word structure

In light of our study this morning there is perhaps one word that especially jumps out in this passage, and that is the word *philosophy*. So a good place to begin is to make sure *we* understand, how *Paul* understood the word philosophy. In the time of Paul, the

² William W. Klein, Craig L. Bloomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 541-42.

³ Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 456.

⁴ Robert D. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 20.

⁵ Charles Freeman, *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason* (New York: Vintage, 2002), xviii.

discipline of “philosophy” had to do with all the theories of God, the world, and the meaning of life, and was taught in both Jewish, and pagan schools in Greek cities.⁶

Broader Definition

But that really does not sound much like a tight, cohesive definition of Greek philosophy to me. So, what this means then, is that there exists in the mind of Paul, when he is writing this passage, a much looser and broader definition of philosophy than that which many critics force upon him. And Paul is not alone in this understanding of how the word “philosophy” was used in first century Judea. In fact, among most New Testament scholars it is well known that “[i]n Paul’s day, the Greek word *philosophia* (GK 5814) which appears only here in the NT, was used broadly to depict all sorts of speculations, inclinations, and movements.”⁷

Josephus

The Jewish historian Josephus, as well as the Jewish philosopher Philo saw both “**biblical teaching and Jewish piety as a kind of philosophy.**”⁸ Even the Christian Justin Martyr considers Christianity as a type of philosophy. And that is precisely the point; Paul’s attack on false teaching in Colossians 2:8 is not specifically focused on philosophy, but rather he is actually attacking a particular kind of religious speculation.

Dunn

New Testament critical scholar James Dunn writes, “[t]he term [*philosophy*] as it is used here [and he is talking about Colossians 2:8]. . . is in no way disparaging or specific in its reference to itself.”⁹ So Paul does not see the word “philosophy,” as he uses it in our passage, as tightly defining Greek philosophy, but rather includes “all sorts of speculations, inclinations, and movements.”

***Merkabah* Mysticism**

So, if Paul is not attacking Greek philosophy, what is he talking about? What is the danger Paul is warning the Colossian church about? Consistent with Paul’s broader definition of *philosophia*, the issue at hand is not some sort of corrupting pressure from traditional Greek philosophy, but is actually a “form of Jewish thought being presented as a ‘philosophy’ by Jewish apologists.”¹⁰ More exactly, a “philosophy” that was being exported out of one of the Jewish synagogues in Colossae, “promoting itself as a credible

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 98.

⁷ Todd D. Still, *Colossian*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Ephesians-Philemon*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 270.

⁸ Dunn, *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 147.

⁹ Dunn, *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 147.

¹⁰ Dunn, *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 148.

philosophy.”¹¹ But the fact of the matter is, this “philosophy” was actually a form of Jewish Gnosticism known as “*merkabah* mysticism.”

***Philosophia* Appears Only Once**

Now remember, the word *philosophia* appears only one time in the Bible, and it is in the Colossian 2:8 text. And it turns out that this *philosophia* more precisely describes a certain type of Jewish mysticism that involves “**speculation into the nature and classes of the angels . . . the ritual of Mosaic law, and . . . regulations of Jewish tradition.**”¹²

***Merkabah* Salvation**

Radically contrary to the gospel, *merkabah* mysticism held that salvation was found in the “**ascent of the soul from earth, through the spheres of the hostile planet-angels and rulers of the cosmos, and its return to its divine home in the ‘fullness’ of God’s light, a return which, to the Gnostic’s mind, signified Redemption.**”¹³

There is little doubt that in the context of Colossians 2:8ff, Paul is not condemning philosophy in general, but specifically the efforts of Jewish apologists who are enticing the Colossian Jewish Christians to turn away from Christianity, and to return to an age-old *merkabah* mysticism.

Authority of Christ

The evidence that Paul is addressing this particular “philosophy” of *merkabah* mysticism, is compelling. After this direct warning from Paul concerning philosophy in verse 8, then goes on in verse 10 to remind the readers of the authority of Christ. In verse 12 of our identity in Christ through baptism, and in verse 13-14, our reconciliation with God through Christ’s death on the Cross. Paul then goes on in verse 18 to warn the reader to “**let no one disqualify you**” by insisting on certain practices, then Paul lists some of those practices.

Mystical Practices

It is here that we can see that Paul has *merkabah* mysticism specifically in mind: particular food and drink is mentioned in verse 16, festivals and new moons and the Sabbath mentioned in verse 17, ascetism and the worship of angels in verse 18, the elemental spirits of this world in verse 20, “things according to human precepts and teachings” in verse 22. Finally, things giving the “**appearance of wisdom,**” which promote “**self-made religion,**” and ascetism in verse 23. Paul’s rhetoric is sharp and direct; these are all essential elements of *merkabah* mysticism. And that ends the chapter.

¹¹ Dunn, *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 35.

¹² Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Coded with Strong’s Concordance and Numbers*, Strong’s Greek 5385, 14th printing (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019), 655.

¹³ G. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem 1941, 1955/New York, 1971), 48, quoted in Bruce, *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 24.

Heart of the Chapter

So, you can see that our passage is at the heart of the chapter. It introduces the problem, and offers a singular warning to let no one pull you away from the Christ Jesus in which you were taught, and were received. The rest of the chapter reinforces, and elaborates the warning.

Scripture Application

So, what does this mean for us today? When we look at applying Scripture in our lives today, there are two kinds of passages. Looking at our passage in 2:8, since it is not very likely that we are going to be **“taken captive”** by Jewish mystics here in Waurika, Oklahoma, we would have to say that our passage in Colossians 2:8 is descriptive, and not directly prescriptive. So, if that is the case, what is the significance of this passage for us? If the passage is not directly prescriptive to us, how do we apply this passage to our lives?

Apologetic Class Series

Well, one way we can apply this passage to our lives today is through the study and practice of apologetics. As I mentioned at the start, our Adult Bible Class series on apologetics began in earnest this morning. And the class series is designed, I hope, to teach us how to defend the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity.

Methodical Curriculum

But the class curriculum is laid out in a methodical way. That is, it starts with an argument for the existence of God based upon science and philosophy, then it works through several other arguments ultimately ending with an argument for the inerrancy, and authority of Scripture. But in the beginning, and all along the way, we will be using our God-given abilities to use logic and reason. In other words, to engage in, and with philosophy. Now, hopefully, we have just seen that Paul is not telling us that the use of philosophy is evil, but rather he is saying the use of any philosophy that contradicts Scripture is, to use Paul’s words, **“empty deceit.”**

Paul Uses Philosophy

One way that we know this to be true is that Paul often used philosophy himself. Rather than being hostile toward philosophy, Paul himself was known to have relied upon elements of the Greek rational tradition in crafting his own logical arguments.

First Corinthians 15

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul structures a logical argument in the classic style arguing that Christ has been raised, and that the day is coming when the dead “in Christ” will be raised as well. Paul lists 8 premises to make his argument. Remember our argument this morning? We had only two premises and a conclusion. Paul’s argument here has 8 premises. Read along with me keeping in mind what we learned about philosophical arguments this morning. I think you will see Paul’s philosophy at work in these verses. First Corinthians 15:12-22. I *will not* be reading word for word but I will be reading the premises that Paul has listed in this text as you follow along.

Paul's Argument

- Premise 1.** If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised.
2. If Christ has not been raised, our preaching and your faith are in vain.
3. And, Christians are misrepresenting God because testimony is given that God raised Christ, whom He did not raise if the dead are not raised.

Premise 4. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

5. Also, those who have died in Christ are destroyed.

6. And, Christians are to be greatly pitied.

7. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the from the dead.

Premise 8. From a single man came death, by a single man has come the resurrection of the dead.

And the conclusion: [Therefore,] as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

This is Greek philosophical methodology in its purest and simplest form. It is nothing less than the exercise of reason in order that a logical conclusion might be reached. Paul's argument is pure, rational, intellectual discourse; it has all the elements of classical philosophy.

“Without Excuse”

From the sermon this morning, we saw where Paul tells the Romans in chapter 1 beginning in verse 19 that mankind can, and should use their God-given capacity to reason and to use logic in order to deduce that God exists. And anyone who *does not* use this God-given capacity to recognize God's eternal power and divine nature, are “**without excuse.**”

Paul Quotes

This is not an isolated case. Paul often used philosophy and the philosophical method in arguing for the existence of God, and the truthfulness of Christianity. We have already mentioned Paul's discourse with the Epicureans and the Stoics in Acts 17 where he argues for the existence of God and the truthfulness of Christianity from both nature, and from Scripture. In his argument Paul even quotes two Greek philosophers in his speech; **Seneca**, and **Aratus**. But Paul often quoted Greek philosophers. In 1 Corinthians 15:33 Paul quotes **Thais** when he says “**Bad company ruins good morals.**” In Titus 1:12 Paul quotes **Epimenides** when he says that “**The Cretans are all liars.**” Paul paraphrases **Aristotle** in Galatians 5:23, and in Romans 2:14. He paraphrases **Plato** in 1 Corinthians 9:24, Romans 7:22-23, Philippians 3:19, Romans 8:5, and Galatians 6:8. **Plato** is very much present in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:4, in Philippians 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:6, 1 Corinthians 13:12, and in 1 Thessalonians 5:15. Paul paraphrases

Socrates in 1 Corinthians 8:2, Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:14-17.....and many more.¹⁴ Paul knew philosophy well, and he used it in the defense of Christianity.

Paul Used It

Paul recognized the power of philosophy; good philosophy, correct philosophy. We can hardly look upon Paul and his work without having some deep appreciation for the use of classical, God-honoring philosophy. Ultimately, that is all that philosophy is; logical reasoning to the truth. Paul knew it, Paul used it, and we should use it as well. Paul once said; **“I have become all things to all people, that by *all means* I might save some”** (1 Cor 9:22). If Paul used the means of philosophy over and again so that he might save some, should we refuse his example?

Invitation

“By all means that I might save some.” Paul is talking about **“Salvation full and free.”** There is only one way to Jesus Christ, only one way to be **“quickened from the dead;”** that is to surrender your life to Christ in baptism. To cast upon Him every burden and care. If you need to be baptized this evening, we can do that.

Maybe you need prayer this evening. There is a lot of healing in prayer, there is a lot of power in prayer. If you need prayer this evening, if there is anything that we can do, please come as we stand and sing.

¹⁴ For more information concerning Paul’s quoting and paraphrasing various Greek philosophers, see Ramesh de Silva, “Paul and His Use of Greek Philosophy,” Bible Things in Bible Ways, July 14, 2013, <https://biblethingsinbibleways.wordpress.com/2013/07/14/paul-and-his-use-of-greek-philosophy/>.

APPENDIX 11

THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW PORTRAIT

The progressive, and cumulative “brushstrokes” of the Christian worldview from each lesson created the portrait that appears below.

Christian Worldview Portrait

There exists an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe, who in relation to the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful.

The design, unity, order, and complexity of creation itself implies the Creator of the universe is a highly intelligent Designer who purposefully designed and brought the universe into being. This Creator and Designer is the God of theism.

The human beings that God freely chose to create consist of two substances; one material, and one immaterial; one body being uniquely human, and one spirit being similar in substance to God, who is Spirit.

Further, the Purposeful, Spiritual, Creator and Designer of the universe, God, is a Moral and Just Being who imparted moral values into the spiritual consciousness of human beings whom He created, with the expectation that they embrace and fulfill His Moral Law.

But man failed to uphold God's Moral Law. To redeem mankind, God provided a propitiation for mankind in His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. By virtue of being raised from the dead, it can be said that Jesus was born of flesh, walked among men on earth, was crucified by the Roman's, died, was buried, and was raised from the dead by His supernatural Father, the God of Christianity. And by virtue of His resurrection from the dead, the divine nature of Jesus is affirmed, including His sovereignty, and divine authority regarding all matters.

Exercising His authority, Jesus affirms both Old Testament and the New Testament as God's Word breathed out. And what God's Word says is that there is a Creator of all that exists; that there is design and intentionality present in the created world; that human beings were created with self-consciousness and that there is an innate moral law residing in the self-consciousness of man, created in the imago Dei Himself. Scripture says that Jesus of Nazareth was a man born of woman, but He is also the living Son of God who walked this earth, was crucified, died, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. Scripture tells us that His death was a propitiation of the sins of all people who would believe, and that God would remember their sins no more. And that God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, along with all your people who have died in Christ are there, in heaven, waiting for you to get there. Amen; come Lord Jesus, Amen.

APPENDIX 12

POST-CURRICULUM SURVEY COMMENTS

“Additional comments” of the respondents from the forty-four qualified post-curriculum surveys appear in this appendix.

POST-CURRICULUM SURVEY COMMENTS

- “Great class. May have been easier to understand some subjects if we had more time to get into them more. So much information and I know there is so much more we didn’t get to touch on. Really do appreciate the class and it has started an interest to study apologetics more.
- “I did have a difficult time following along in the binder. I felt that most of the material would need to be simplified for most people I come in contact with. I think ‘Michael’ is more intelligent than a lot of the general public.”
- “I was hoping for more nonbiblical sources.”
- While I found the study interesting, my interest is in Scripture, and I may not be an effective teacher/sharer of this type of approach. It was well presented, though and I do understand how it would appeal to those who have a different understanding of Christianity than I do. I am grateful for every means of persuasion.”
- “Loved the class, love the professor. Excellent presentation.”
- “I felt like more discussion topics would have aided in my ability to retain the information. Sometimes it gets hard to not tune out a 45-minute lecture that early in the day. It was a great presentation of material.”
- “It was great information with good graphics to aid the understanding of the material. The biggest downfall of the class is the time limit did not allow for deep enough study. As a result I have a basic grasp of the material but am not confident that I could completely defend the faith outside of the Bible.”
- “Overall, I enjoyed the class. It was refreshing to be taught, shown, how to use science and other sources to defend the faith. If time were to allow it, I would have loved to be able to discuss some of the topics more deeply. Or, to have discussion with the class.”
- “Some of the scientific arguments seemed like a nonbeliever could poke some holes. I think they could argue against the design of the universe argument by saying it could happen eventually or humans adapted to conditions. Also moral argument seemed like it could be as well. An argument could be made morals would be developed, and have changed slightly over time. Also one of worldviews was discounted because mass hallucinations don’t happen, an atheist could argue their more likely to happen than rising from the dead. A good class, I would enjoy more studies on it.”
- “I agree with the fine tuning of the universe but an atheist would say that could just be how the universe creates itself. I think the argument of math is better. Math is infant [sic] and you cant [sic] make it up so since math is infnnent [sic] it must be outside of the universe meaning it can only be in Gods [sic] brain.”
- “Great topic to learn about! Might be difficult to deliver this lesson to a non believer [sic] unless I rehearsed/studied for quite some time. Without the thorough

education to present this material, it seems intimidating. I feel that it has made me stronger in my faith.”

- “Human beings are created beings (created by God). It’s the only way — material & immaterial, physical & spiritual. Only created beings created to be like the Creator!!! In every way . . . Consider the moral argument also!!!”
- “I really enjoyed the class and look forward to additional study.”
- “Ty is very knowledgeable in the study of Christian apologetics, and he did a great job of presenting the material too us. Very well prepared.”
- “Phenomenal, thought-provoking experience. The most interesting Bible class I have attended.
- “It has been helpful understanding how a non-believer thinks so that I can have a smart and factual argument for the existence of God and authority of the Bible.
- “Very interesting course study. Much was learned about the existence of God apart from the Bible. Very helpful to understand and engage with the Michaels of the world.”
- “More than I could have expected.”
- “Hearing the different aspects of beliefs and nonbeliefs was educational not knowing some of the arguments brought to life and a better understanding. Great class.”
- “Ty you did a very good job.”
- “This class was extremely informative and eye opening for me. Having these points presented to me in a way I never considered before I can honestly say this class has given me a lot to think about and I have taken a deeper look into my faith. Also has spurred a desire a desire to learn more and have more conversations about the truth and existence of Christ our Lord.”
- “Excellent – need deeper, longer study.”
- “I really appreciate Ty’s effort in presenting this course.”
- “Having always been a believer (or always churched) this is such a new concept of apologetics. The obvious to me must be explained to the non-believer starting with the worldview of “the world.”
- “We appreciate you teaching this very informative course.”
- “Wonderful – I really never knew what apologetics was.”
- “Awesome class!! I really enjoyed. I really learned a lot. Thanks.”
- “Ty is a wonderful Bible teacher! He makes difficult concepts east to understand.”

- “This instructor was very well prepared as well as knowledgeable. It was a great class and the material was presented very well.”
- “I am sad the study has ended. Very interesting and informative.”
- “Found it to be very informative and interesting.”

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING FOUNDATIONAL APOLOGETICS AT WAURIKA CHURCH OF CHRIST IN WAURIKA, OKLAHOMA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
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The purpose of the project was to teach foundational apologetics in a cumulative case format to the saints at Waurika church of Christ to enhance their apologetic knowledge. To that end, chapter 1 established the context, rationale, and goals of the project. Chapter 2 established the scriptural foundation (Eph 4:1-16) for the thesis that the three mandates of the church—to worship God, to edify one another, and to evangelize the lost—are all strengthened and advanced through learning and application of Christian apologetics. Chapter 3 established that in light of the churches of Christ holding some degree of Campbellite traditionalism, a cumulative case approach to apologetics was necessary to enhance and broaden the tool set to engage in the three dynamics in a manner more consistent with church of Christ theology. Chapter 4 provided methodological justification and details of the cumulative case curriculum including theoretical teaching methodology. This project then culminates in an assessment of legacy Campbellite traditionalism, and of the increase in apologetic knowledge of the Waurika church of Christ adult Bible class in chapter 5.

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