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TRAINING MEMBERS OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP A
CHURCH FOR ALL NATIONS TO BE EFFECTIVE
CHRISTIAN APOLOGISTS IN WEST PALM
BEACH, FLORIDA

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

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

by
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May 2024

APPROVAL SHEET

TRAINING MEMBERS OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP A
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Defense Date: March 20, 2024

I dedicate this project to my grandmother, Stella Jean Robinson, for her unwavering support and Christlike example which have been a source of inspiration and motivation throughout my life. And to my beloved bride, Jillian, who is my biggest supporter and best friend, along with our exceptional children, our daughter London and son Judah.

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PREFACE

I am deeply thankful to God for granting me the privilege to serve as both a member and a Pastor of Grace Fellowship: A Church of All Nations in West Palm Beach, Florida (GFCWPB). Within the scope of this doctoral project, my primary aim is to educate, equip, and empower the members of GFCWPB to become proficient Classical Christian Apologists. The central objective is to provide them with the necessary tools and knowledge to engage confidently with their neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family, presenting reasoned arguments and evidential support for the truth of Christianity. Ultimately, my hope and prayer are their persuasive discourse will play a role in leading others to trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

I am profoundly grateful to God for the opportunity to pursue my studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This esteemed institution stands as a beacon of unwavering dedication to spreading the gospel and exalting the glory of Christ. Throughout my time in the Doctor of Educational Ministry program, the faculty and support staff have shown unparalleled commitment to my education, for which I am deeply appreciative. As I near the culmination of my journey at Southern Seminary, I feel an increased sense of readiness and empowerment to serve Christ and my local church effectively.

Josh Robinson

West Palm Beach, Florida

May 2024

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Grace Fellowship: A Church for all Nations (GFCWPB) stands as a vibrant multiethnic ecclesiastical institution consisting of members from 73 different countries of origin.¹ GFCWPB is steadfastly committed to the divine mandate of making disciples of all nations. This sacred purpose finds expression through a resolve to distribute the transformative gospel of Jesus Christ to the residents of Palm Beach County, South Florida, and the world while committing to teaching them to adhere to all of Christ's teachings.

At the heart of this sacred endeavor lies the conscientious pursuit of ushering individuals into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. This pursuit is channeled through God's grace and the church's dedication to developing disciples of Jesus Christ. This commitment is made evident by GFCWPB offering a wide variety of theological, doctrinal, and apologetic developmental courses.

The courses equip members of GFCWPB to adhere to the teachings of Scripture and enable the leadership of GFCWPB to fulfill its Christ-ordained mission to make disciples. The church's unyielding pledge to deepen its members' theological and doctrinal understanding while also equipping them with the intellectual tools to articulate and defend their faith underscores the church's conviction that discipleship flourishes within the fertile soil of informed faith.

One of the primary goals of the educational ministry of GFCWPB is to develop disciples of Jesus Christ who can effectively defend the Christian faith. This holds

¹ Anel Iniguez, interviewed by author, West Palm Beach, May 1, 2024.

significance not only in light of the biblical imperative but also considering the cultural setting within which GFCWPB carries out its ministry. The West Palm Beach, FL (WPBFL) metroplex has been identified as the “most never-churched” area of the United States.²

Context

GFCWPB can trace its origins back to the establishment of Bible Baptist Church on Australian Avenue in WPBFL in 1958. Later, in 1961, it underwent a name change and became Berean Baptist Temple. The institution expanded its influence by starting a private Christian school called Lakeside Christian in 1964, which is now known as Berean Christian School.³

In 1972, Mike Kallap took on the role of lead pastor and faithfully served in this capacity until his retirement in 1990. During his time as pastor, the church relocated to its current site on Okeechobee Avenue in WPB, just a few miles away from its original founding location. After Pastor Kallap’s retirement, Dan Burrell assumed the position of senior pastor in 1990 and led the church through a name change to Berean Baptist Church in 1991.⁴

In the year 2000, David Nelms took over as the lead pastor, marking a significant transition into the new millennium. This brought about a period of rapid change for the church. Under Pastor Nelms’s guidance, there was a renewed sense of purpose with a focus on spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ both locally and globally. The church embraced a passion for outreach on both a local and worldwide scale, leading to its name change to Grace Fellowship in 2003. Jeff Robinson became the lead pastor in

² Barna Group, “Churchless Cities: Where Does Your City Rank?,” May 1, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/churchless-cities-where-does-your-city-rank/>.

³ Anel Iniguez, interview.

⁴ Anel Iniguez, interview.

2016 and continues to hold that position today, with a dedication to see his congregants flourish as disciples of Christ.⁵

The transformation of Grace Fellowship from a King James-only Baptist Church to a multi-ethnic congregation embracing individuals of diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic classes represents a profound journey of evolution and inclusivity. This metamorphosis reflects the church's commitment to embodying the expansive love of Christ for whosoever believes.

Initially rooted in a doctrinal tradition centered on a specific version of the Bible and a particular theological perspective, Grace Fellowship embarked on a transformative path guided by a vision of unity and diversity reflective of the broader Christian community. Recognizing the changing demographic landscape and cultural shifts within their community, the church leadership embarked on a deliberate process of introspection, dialogue, and engagement with the broader community.

The church's journey toward multi-ethnicity and an open embrace to whosoever believes was not without challenges and obstacles. It required humility, openness to change, and a willingness to confront biases. Yet, through God's grace, prayer, and a steadfast commitment to the principles of love, truth, and reconciliation espoused in Scripture, Grace Fellowship emerged as a beacon of unity and diversity in the community.

Today, Grace Fellowship stands as a testament to the transformative power of faith and the boundless grace of God. Its vibrant and diverse congregation reflects the rich tapestry of its cultural context and serves as a testament to the transformative power of love, acceptance, and unity. As the church continues to grow and evolve, it remains

⁵ Grace Fellowship: A Church for All Nations, "Forward: Strengthen. Build. Go.," accessed February 13, 2023, <https://www.gograce.church/forward>.

steadfast in its commitment to embodying the love of Christ and reaching people of all colors, backgrounds, and walks of life with the message of hope, grace, and redemption.

GFCWPB is located within the West Palm Beach-Ft. Pierce metropolitan area in southeastern Florida. According to Forbes’s 2017 analysis, this region is home to 27 of America’s 400 wealthiest individuals.⁶ Additionally, it proudly boasts six of the top twenty most luxurious “millionaire enclaves” in America.⁷ This locale is celebrated as a paradise and enchants visitors with its stunning beaches, constant sunshine, and pleasant climate throughout the year. Additionally, it is home to high-end nightclubs and stylish automobiles, while serving as residences for famous athletes and celebrities.⁸

However, beneath this glamorous surface lies another reality—many cities in South Florida have a significant population living below the federal poverty line. In fact, only St. Louis, Milwaukee, Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit surpass Southeastern Florida when it comes to citizens residing below this threshold set by the government.⁹

Regardless of their financial status or socio-economic background, whether they are prominent figures or remain unnoticed, one fact remains obvious: the inhabitants of South Florida need the transformative message of Jesus Christ. This geographical area accommodates a population exceeding 6 million individuals, among whom 78.8 percent do not align with the Christian faith, signifying an excess of 4.8 million non-Christian residents.¹⁰ Shifting our focus to the more specific West Palm Beach-Ft. Pierce metropolitan area, the statistics become even more disconcerting, with 17 percent of the populace “having never in their lives regularly attended a church”—an unparalleled

⁶ The North American Mission Board, “Send Network South Florida,” accessed February 20, 2023, <https://www.namb.net/send-network/send-city/south-florida/>. Hereafter, North American Mission Board will be referred to as NAMB.

⁷ NAMB, “Send South Florida.”

⁸ NAMB, “Send South Florida.”

⁹ NAMB, “Send South Florida.”

¹⁰ NAMB, “Send South Florida.”

concentration of individuals in this category within the United States.¹¹ Consequently, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) has classified this region as a SEND location, a designation reserved for locales facing an exponentially higher demand for establishing churches.¹²

Situated at the epicenter of a mission field characterized by a rich tapestry of ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds, GFCWPB finds itself uniquely positioned to interact with diverse global communities directly from Okeechobee Blvd. This distinctive advantage propels GFCWPB to consistently equip its members to reach out to their community with the message of Jesus Christ and provide evidential support for the truth of Christianity.

Rationale

GFCWPB is strategically situated within the most never-churched metropolitan area in the United States, WPB-FP, where 17 percent of the populace have never regularly attended church.¹³ The geographical placement of GFCWPB within the southeastern expanse of Florida from Miami to Ft. Pierce, positions the church within an area that has 78.8 percent of the population identifying as non-Christian.¹⁴ This is in stark contrast to the majority of America, where 63 percent of the population identifies as Christian.¹⁵

Hence, it stands as a region where millions are in dire need of encountering the gospel of Jesus Christ and reasons to embrace it. Nevertheless, statistics reveal a

¹¹ Barna Group, “Churchless Cities: Where Does Your City Rank?”

¹² NAMB, “Send Network South Florida.”

¹³ Barna Group, “Churchless Cities: Where Does Your City Rank?”

¹⁴ NAMB, “Send Network South Florida.”

¹⁵ Reem Nadeem, “How U.S. Religious Composition Has Changed in Recent Decades,” Pew Research Center, September 13, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/how-u-s-religious-composition-has-changed-in-recent-decades/>.

concerning trend: the proportion of Christian Americans who feel compelled by God to share the gospel has declined by 25 percent over the past three decades (1993 to 2022).¹⁶

As a result, numerous members of GFCWPB struggle not only with the act of sharing their faith but also with articulating compelling justifications for fundamental beliefs such as the existence of God, the historical accuracy of the Bible, and the evidence corroborating the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, there is an immense need for members of GFCWPB to be trained to be effective classical Christian apologists. The Classical Christian Apologetics approach “draws on the apologetic thought of Christian theologians and philosophers throughout church history.”¹⁷ From Justin Martyr to Augustine to Thomas Aquinas to Anselm, the classical apologetic method has been used to provide “philosophical proofs”¹⁸ for the existence of God for centuries. Modern apologist B. B. Warfield, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, took a two-step approach to classical apologetics, which is the approach of this project. Warfield would first establish “the truth of God’s existence and the possibility of knowing God.”¹⁹ Then Warfield would show “from the evidence that God is known in his revelation in Christ and in Scripture.”²⁰

By equipping members to use the classical method, members of GFCWPB will be able to make reasonable, articulate arguments for the existence of a God and provide substantial evidence supporting God being the God of Christianity who has revealed himself through Jesus Christ and the Bible.

¹⁶ Barna Group, “Sharing Faith is Increasingly Optional for Christians,” May 15, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/>.

¹⁷ Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 49, Kindle.

¹⁸ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 49.

¹⁹ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 53.

²⁰ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 53.

By equipping members of GFCWPB with a comprehensive understanding of rational arguments and supporting evidence that substantiates the authenticity of Christianity, in theory, their faith will strengthen, and their self-confidence in engaging non-believers of any persuasion will grow. Timothy Paul Jones, a Christian apologist, emphasizes this principle by stating, “The strongest faith is a faith that knows not only what we believe but also why How do you know that the Bible is God’s Word? Is it simply because the Bible claims to be inspired by God? Unless there is a more solid foundation for the truth of Scripture than its own claims about itself, relying solely on ‘the Bible says it’ does not provide conclusive answers.”²¹

Within this context, the responsibility vested in GFCWPB entails the preparation of their congregants to heed the directive articulated by the apostle Peter, who, divinely inspired, urges all Christians to “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).²² The local church, in this instance, GFCWPB, is divinely ordained to nurture and equip its members to provide cogent justifications for the existence of God and their faith to those encountered as they disperse throughout the city and region weekly.

Purpose

This project aimed to train the members of Grace Fellowship: A Church for all Nations to be effective Classical Christian apologists in West Palm Beach, Florida.

²¹ Timothy Paul Jones, *Conspiracies and the Cross: How to Intelligently Counter the Ten Most Popular Arguments against the Gospel of Jesus* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2008), 5-6.

²² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotation will be from the English Standard Version.

Goals

The following three goals measured the effectiveness of this project. The first goal measured the current apologetic acumen of GFCWPB members. The second goal involved developing and implementing an effective Christian apologetic training curriculum titled the Grace Fellowship Apologetic Training Curriculum (GFATC). The final goal measured the progress of GFCWPB members as Classical Christian apologists.

1. The first goal assessed the current Christian apologetic knowledge of GFCWPB members as it relates to theistic arguments for God's existence and the evidence supporting the historical reliability of the New Testament and the divinity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. The second goal developed and implemented the GFATC to increase the Christian Apologetic knowledge of GFCWPB members in logical arguments for the existence of God, the historical reliability of the New Testament, the divinity, crucifixion, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. The third goal increased the knowledge of GFCWPB members in communicating the logical arguments for the existence of God, the historical reliability of the New Testament, and the divinity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of these three goals. This methodology is described in the following section.²³

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these three goals. The first goal assessed the current Christian apologetic knowledge of GFCWPB members as it relates to theistic arguments for God's existence and the evidence supporting the historical reliability of the New Testament and the divinity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This goal was measured by administering a pre-survey to 12 members of GFCWPB.²⁴ This goal was considered successfully met

²³ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

²⁴ See appendix 1.

when 12 members of GFCWPB completed the survey and their performance was analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the current Christian apologetic competency of GFCWPB members in the said apologetic concentrations.

The second goal was to develop and implement a curriculum that increased the Christian apologetic knowledge of GFCWPB members in logical arguments for the existence of God, the historical reliability of the New Testament, the divinity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey, which was used to measure the change in Christian apologetic knowledge in the areas of logical arguments for the existence of God, defending the historical reliability of the Bible, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and His crucifixion and resurrection. The goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.²⁵

The third goal was to increase the competency and confidence of GFC members in communicating the logical arguments for the existence of God, the historical reliability of the New Testament, and the divinity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey which was used to measure the change in the GFCWPB member participant's competency and confidence level. Additionally, this goal was measured by interviewing the five members who demonstrated the greatest increase of competency and confidence between their pre- and post-survey scores in order to determine the factors that led to the change. The goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. The interviews were evaluated, and themes summarized, resulting in additional insights into the factors that led to the changes in confidence level.

²⁵ See appendix 2.

Definitions

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

Christian apologetics. Christian apologetics may be succinctly defined as “the defense of the faith.”²⁶ This project relies on Kenneth D. Boa’s more nuanced description: “Christian apologetics (which has nothing to do with “apologizing”) seeks to serve God and the church by helping believers to carry out the mandate of 1 Peter 3:15-16. We may define it as the discipline that teaches Christians how to give a reason for their hope.”²⁷

Classical apologetics. A branch of Christian apologetics comprised of natural theology and Christian evidences. The method of first establishing theism, a belief in a personal God, before providing the evidential arguments for the truth of Christianity.²⁸

Conclusion

God has equipped believers with logical arguments and historical evidence to uphold the truth of the Christian faith. The forthcoming chapters will illustrate how gaining an understanding of these logical arguments and evidential support will enhance the proficiency and assurance of the members of GFCWPB in defending Christianity. Chapter 2 will outline the compelling rationale behind the importance of acquiring the ability to defend one's faith as an integral aspect of Christian discipleship. Chapter 3 will delve into the enduring relevance of Classical apologetics in today's cultural landscape and its pivotal role in the discipleship journey. Chapter 4 will provide comprehensive details of the apologetic training experienced by the congregants of GFCWPB. Chapter 5 will culminate with an in-depth assessment of the project. The primary objective of this

²⁶ John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 1, Kindle.

²⁷ Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, 1.

²⁸ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 53.

project was to equip the members of GFCWPB to serve as proficient Classical apologists within their predominantly non-Christian cultural context.

CHAPTER 2

LEARNING TO DEFEND THE FAITH IS A NECESSARY ASPECT OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

In a world characterized by an ever-evolving landscape of beliefs, ideologies, and worldviews, the task of upholding and sharing one's faith has taken on a new dimension of complexity and significance. The journey of Christian discipleship is one that extends far beyond personal spiritual growth; it encompasses the responsibility to stand firm in the face of challenges, to articulate the reason for one's beliefs with clarity, and to engage thoughtfully with a diverse array of perspectives. This chapter delves into a biblical examination of the significance of incorporating the practice of defending the faith (apologetics), within the context of Christian discipleship. R. C. Sproul defines Christian apologetics as "the reasoned defense of the Christian religion."¹ A reasoned defense because "Christianity is a faith, to be sure, but there are reasons for this faith. Faith is not to be confused with reason; but neither is it to be separated from it."²

Furthermore, Sproul adds that apologetics is the responsibility of all disciples of Jesus Christ, not only reserved for a few of the intellectually elite,

Apologetics . . . is the job of every Christian, always "ready to make defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15 NASB). As a science, it is a putting together of the data common to all Christians in a consistent and scientific whole. It explains why Christians are Christians and why non-Christians should be Christians.³

¹ R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 222, Kindle.

² Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, 275.

³ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, 275.

Furthermore, discovering that God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament provide themselves as examples of effective apologists along with the biblical mandate expressed by the apostle Peter, we uncover how mastering the art of defending the faith is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship. Through this chapter, we will come to understand that the journey of learning to defend the faith is not simply an intellectual pursuit but a dynamic and integral aspect of fulfilling the Great Commission and embodying the essence of Christian discipleship.

The Great Commission: Matthew 28:18-20

Embedded within the Scriptures, the Great Commission stands as a beacon guiding the endeavors of Christ's disciples in the establishment of His church and continues today in the expansion of the church. This divine directive transcends the mere act of conversion, summoning followers of Christ to embark on a profound journey of disciple-making as outlined in Matthew 28:18-20. For this project, the focus is on Jesus commanding His disciples to teach others "to observe all that I have commanded you" (v. 20).

Obedience to All Christ Commanded

In Jesus's directive, the verb "teach" is employed with the disciples as the ones taking action.⁴ This signifies a substantial transition that occurred after the death and resurrection of Jesus. It suggests that the disciples who were once learners under Jesus's instruction are now tasked with teaching and training the new disciples with the knowledge, they themselves received directly from Jesus. This knowledge was not merely for intellectual growth but rather for life change. As Grant Osborne contends, "the emphasis on obeying 'everything I have commanded you' shows that the discourse

⁴ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 1268, Kindle.

sections are not didactic material to be learned but more importantly practical injunctions to be lived.”⁵

Clearly, Jesus’s teachings extended beyond the verbal lessons and parables He delivered to His disciples and the masses. Although His sermons contained profound wisdom and guidance, Jesus’s instruction was not limited to words alone; His life served as a powerful teaching tool. Mere repetition of His sermons, detached from His actions, falls short of fulfilling His Great Commission. To authentically impart the entirety of Christ’s commands to others, we must do more than preach His words; we must also convey the life Jesus exemplified. In particular, His approach to reasoning and defending His divine identity and bodily resurrection.

Therefore, a crucial dimension of “teaching all that Christ commanded” involves becoming proficient apologists. As followers of Christ, it is imperative that we emulate this approach, arming ourselves with knowledge and skills to adeptly defend our faith.

Jesus’s Apologetic Example

Norman Geisler contends that Jesus skillfully used a wide range of evidence to confirm His deity and resurrection while using persuasive arguments to validate His truth claims. Geisler claims, “If apologetics is divided into two broad categories of evidential and non-evidential apologetics, then Jesus was an evidentialist for the same reason.”⁶ But Geisler does not stop there; he goes on to contend, “Further, within the two overall classifications of rational and non-rational apologetics, Jesus was on the side of reason.”⁷

⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1119, Kindle.

⁶ Norman L. Geisler, “The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance,” *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1.

⁷ Geisler, “The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance,” 2.

Jesus's Use of Witness Testimony

In the Gospel of John, Norman Geisler highlights how Jesus adeptly summoned a substantial lineup of credible witnesses to bolster His assertions.⁸ In the book of John, Jesus called upon five reliable witnesses in chapter 5: John the Baptist, His remarkable works, the Father, the Old Testament, and Moses. In chapter 8, Jesus referred to the testimony of His heavenly Father and included the endorsements of Abraham and His own blameless life. The persuasive strength of Jesus's argument hinged on the trustworthiness and integrity of these witnesses. His presentation featured compelling witnesses and an intelligent defense strategy that turned the tables on His accusers. Rational Jewish individuals had no sensible basis to disrepute the credibility of Jesus's witnesses. His apologetic approach was comprehensive and convincing, aligning His choice of witnesses with the concerns of His audience.

From these occurrences in the life of Jesus, we derive two essential insights. Firstly, in presenting His arguments, Jesus provided logical reasoning and evidence to support His assertions, avoiding mere reliance on blind faith or naive acceptance. Secondly, Jesus utilized a diverse array of witnesses to corroborate His statements, a crucial aspect of His apologetic strategy that involved testimony from credible sources. Consequently, within the context of His monotheistic environment, Jesus embraced an evidentialist position, distinct from fideism, as He advocated for the use of evidence to convince others of the validity of His teachings.⁹

Jesus's Use of Miracles

The Jewish people with whom Jesus conversed recognized that a recurring theme in religious texts was the miraculous validations of truth claims.¹⁰ Notably, in the

⁸ Geisler, "The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance," 2.

⁹ Geisler, "The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance," 2.

¹⁰ Geisler, "The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance," 2.

Gospel of John, Nicodemus, a Jewish Rabbi, acknowledged Jesus, saying, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can perform these signs [miracles] that You do unless God is with Him” (John 3:2). Geisler points out that a common practice of God was validating His chosen “spokespersons” through miraculous signs.¹¹ He adds that figures such as Moses (Exod 4) and the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 18) were similarly confirmed through sought signs from God as indicators of authenticity (Matt 12:39).¹²

Craig Blomberg provides valuable insight into the multifaceted purposes of Jesus’s ministry of performing miracles by contending they encompass evidence, evangelism, empathy, and eschatology, with the primary focus of His miracle-working ministry being Christological.¹³ It aimed to demonstrate that Jesus was the divine Messiah and signify that God’s kingdom was forcefully emerging within human history (Matt 11:2-6; Luke 11:20).

Geisler and Zukeran underscore the significance of these divine confirmations, by arguing, “Christ’s miracles demonstrated that what he claimed about himself was true and that God’s confirming hand was on the message he preached. Jesus performed a vast array of miraculous signs that demonstrated him to be God incarnate and confirmed his authority over every realm of creation.”¹⁴

A miracle serves as the ultimate validation of a declaration made in the name of God. It represents a distinct act of God that substantiates a prophet’s assertion of conveying God’s divine message to His people. This principle extends not only to the prophets of the Old Testament but also to the anticipated Messiah they prophesied. The

¹¹ Geisler, “The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance,” 3.

¹² Geisler, “The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance,” 3.

¹³ Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 275.

¹⁴ Norman L. Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), chap 2, “Authority Demonstrated in Jesus Miraculous Signs,” para. 1, Kindle.

miracles performed by Jesus hold a remarkable distinction: “Not only did he perform many miracles, but there were many witnesses of them. And the nature of many of the miracles he performed placed them beyond reasonable question.”¹⁵

Furthermore, the nature of many of these miracles placed them beyond reasonable doubt. Jesus not only healed ailments deemed incurable but also performed extraordinary feats like multiplying meager provisions, walking upon water, and even reviving the deceased. These extraordinary occurrences stand as the ultimate affirmation of the truth claims made by Jesus.

Jesus’s Use of Reason

According to Geisler, who points to John 8:32 for support, a significant aspect of Jesus’s mission was to teach, defend truth, and correct errors.¹⁶ In doing so, Jesus showcased His brilliant philosophical skills in utilizing the laws of logic to reveal truth, refute arguments, and highlight misconceptions. After studying Jesus’s arguments, it becomes evident that He was the most exceptional thinker to ever walk the earth. Modern philosopher Dallas Willard agrees by asserting,

We need to understand that Jesus is a thinker, that this is not a dirty word but an essential work, and that his other attributes do not preclude thought, but only ensure that he is certainly the greatest thinker of the human race: “the most intelligent person who ever lived on earth.” He constantly uses the power of logical insight to enable people to come to the truth about themselves and about God from the inside of their own heart and mind. Quite certainly it also played a role in his own growth in “wisdom.”¹⁷

Jesus used logic effectively when exposing the errors made by Pharisees and teachers of the law. Although He did not explicitly articulate the laws of logic as fundamental principles of thought, Jesus undoubtedly understood them and applied them

¹⁵ Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 2, “Conclusion,” para. 1.

¹⁶ Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 4, “Jesus’s Apologetic Use of Reason,” para. 3.

¹⁷ Dallas Willard, “Jesus the Logician,” *Christian Scholars Review* 28, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 610, quoted in Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, 584, Kindle.

during debates with Jewish authorities.¹⁸ Also, Jesus utilized various forms of reasoning in His discourses, encompassing the fundamental principles of logical thinking. Being the embodiment of God's Reason, it is unsurprising that He exemplified these principles in His presentation and defense of truth. In fact, as logic finds its foundation in God's nature as the supremely rational being from which all rationality stems, it is fitting to state: "In the beginning was Logic, and Logic was with God, and Logic was inherent within the very essence of God."¹⁹ Jesus used many logical and reasoning principles, below is a brief examination of one of each.

Jesus's use of the logical principle of noncontradiction is obvious. This principle is perhaps the most fundamental law of thought since all other laws can be derived from it.²⁰ This principle states that contradictory statements cannot be true at the same time and in the same sense. If one statement is true, its contradiction must be false. As a rational being, Jesus employed all laws of thought; they are inevitable. Specific examples where the law of noncontradiction emerges in Jesus's discourse can help clarify this point. Jesus implies the law of noncontradiction when He warns about false prophets as opposed to true prophets (Matt 7:15; 24:24). Similarly, He contrasts the children of light with those of darkness (John 8:12). He repeatedly reproaches those who reject truth and are in error (John 8:32). Jesus also highlights those who belong to the devil cannot be children of God (John 8:42-47). His disciple John later emphasizes this contrast²¹ by saying, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test them . . . because many false

¹⁸ Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 4, "Jesus's Apologetic Use of Reason," para. 5.

¹⁹ Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 4, "Reasoning," para. 1.

²⁰ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Bible* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 96-97.

²¹ Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 4, "Jesus's Use of the Principle of Identity," para. 1.

prophets have gone out into the world . . . by this we know which spirits come from God and which come from error” (1 John 4:1, 6 NKJV).

*Jesus’s use of the reasoning principal of a fortiori arguments carries substantial persuasive force, especially when the opposing party already accepts a similar conclusion with even less evidence.*²² An illustrative instance of this can be found in Matthew 12:9-14, where Jesus entered a synagogue and encountered a man with a withered hand. The Jewish leaders sought a pretext to accuse Jesus of violating the Sabbath, thus transgressing the fourth commandment. They confronted Him with the question: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Jesus responded with a thought-provoking counterargument, stating, “If any of you has a sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matt 12:10-12).

In this response, Jesus skillfully exposed the flaw in His critics’ reasoning using an *a fortiori* argument. He astutely pointed out that they would willingly engage in work to rescue a distressed sheep on the Sabbath. If this was deemed acceptable, then it logically follows that they should be even more inclined to restore a fellow human being, created in the image of God, on the same day.

Jesus’s Use of His Resurrected Body

The resurrection is the crowning miracle in Jesus’s ministry demanding unique consideration. In John 11:25, Jesus declared, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.” With this statement, Jesus asserted His role as the source of life and the conqueror of physical death. While many “saviors” have made similar claims throughout history, only Jesus substantiated His assertion through the unparalleled event of His

²² Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 4, “Jesus’s Use of A Fortiori Arguments,” para. 1.

resurrection.²³ This singular event underscores Jesus's uniqueness among all individuals. He not only foretold His own death, burial, and resurrection but also successfully accomplished it. Remarkably, founders of various religions have passed away, yet Christ stands alone in predicting and achieving His resurrection from the dead.

Within a theistic framework where miracles are conceivable, the resurrection endures as the most potent apologetic for the authenticity of Christianity. In John 20:25-28, Jesus's willingness to appear to Thomas in His resurrected form, providing the evidence Thomas required, serves as a powerful demonstration of both His grace and His readiness to offer empirical proof for His resurrection and His deity. Recall how initially Thomas expressed his skepticism, firmly stating that he would not accept Jesus's resurrection unless he could personally see and touch the wounds in Jesus's hands caused by the nails on the cross and place his hand in the wound on Jesus's side inflicted by the spear to confirm His death. Eight days later, Jesus fulfilled Thomas's request. As His disciples were gathered, Jesus appeared among them and greeted them with words of peace. Turning to Thomas, Jesus invited him to examine His wounds, saying, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve but believe." This gesture exemplified Jesus's recognition of Thomas's need for tangible evidence and Jesus's willingness to oblige.

In response to this profound encounter, Thomas's doubt transformed into a declaration of faith as he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" This moment revealed Jesus's compassion and willingness to provide concrete evidence to affirm His divine nature. The account of Thomas's encounter with the resurrected Jesus exemplifies how Christ, in His grace, is not only open to addressing our doubts and unbelief but also willing to provide the proof needed to transform doubters and unbelievers into believers.

²³ Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 3, "Conclusion," para. 1.

As modern disciples of Jesus, we bear the responsibility of continuing what Jesus began with Thomas, and that is presenting the evidential support for the reality of the miraculous event, which is the resurrection.²⁴

Jesus consistently demonstrated His mastery of apologetics throughout the Gospels. Yet, it's crucial to acknowledge that Christ's apologetic model wasn't the inaugural divine example documented in Scripture. Rather, He perpetuated a tradition already established by God in what present-day believers term the Old Testament. This sacred text abounds with instances where God and His prophets engaged in apologetic dialogue, furnishing evidence to affirm God's existence and divine attributes.

Therefore, when Jesus employed apologetic reasoning and provided evidence to support His teachings and divine claims, He was building upon this rich tradition of defending and explaining the faith. Christ's apologetic endeavors not only reaffirmed the continuity of God's revelation but also demonstrated the importance of rational discourse and providing reasons for faith.

In essence, Jesus's apologetic ministry in the New Testament can be seen as a continuation of the apologetic work that God initiated in the Old Testament, emphasizing the enduring significance of apologetics in conveying and defending the truth of the Christian faith.

God's Apologetic Example

The existence of a higher power has been a subject of debate throughout history. Many religions claim to have the truth, but how can one differentiate between them? In the case of the God of Israel, there are numerous accounts in which He provides demonstrative evidence and future prophecies to validate His claims as a truth-teller.

²⁴ Geisler and Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus*, chap. 4, "Jesus's Apologetic Use of the Resurrection," para. 2.

The biblical accounts of God’s interactions with His chosen leaders, such as Elijah in 1 Kings 18, Gideon in Judges 6:30-40, Isaiah in Isaiah 41, and Moses in Exodus 4, serve as compelling examples of God providing evidential reasons to support His divine nature and guidance. These narratives illustrate not only God’s unwavering commitment to His chosen people but also His ability to provide reassurance through evidential signs when they face moments of doubt, uncertainty, or external challenges. In these instances, God’s interactions with these prominent figures reveal His willingness to provide evidential signs that strengthen the faith of His servants and to demonstrate His authority over false gods. By examining these stories, we can gain insight into the nature of God’s guidance and His profound role as an apologist for His own supremacy, affirming His unique position as the one true God. Sproul contends, “God Himself provides evidence for the claim that He is the true God, displaying His divine credentials openly.”²⁵

God’s Apologetic Example in 1 Kings 18

Elijah stood resolute atop Mount Carmel, presenting a pivotal question to the people gathered before him: “How long will you vacillate between two conflicting beliefs? If the LORD is indeed God, then follow Him wholeheartedly; but if you believe in Baal, then follow him” (1 Kgs 18:21 RSV). Elijah found himself at the crossroads of two irreconcilable truths, and his plea was not for a capricious or arbitrary choice, nor a blind leap into the abyss of subjectivity.²⁶ Instead, he demanded a decision grounded in evidence, imploring his God to manifest His presence. Elijah sought divine confirmation that he was indeed the prophet of the one true God. The dramatic display of heavenly fire,

²⁵ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “Apologetics: God’s Example and Command,” para. 1.

²⁶ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “Apologetics: God’s Example and Command,” para. 1.

which not only consumed the altars of Baal but also reduced the false claims of Baal to mere ashes, served as this confirmation.

God's Apologetic Example in Isaiah 41

Isaiah similarly records God's challenge to the so-called "gods" of the world, beckoning them to present their case and provide compelling evidence of their authenticity: "Make your case," says the LORD. "Bring forth your best arguments, O King of Jacob. Let them come and tell us what will happen in the future, or reveal to us the events of the past. Tell us what to look forward to, so we may acknowledge that you are indeed gods" (Isa 41:21-23 NASB).

However, the evidence put forth by these false deities is found to be hollow, and their actions lack substance, ultimately leading to emptiness (v. 24) and being unequivocally deemed worthless (v. 29). These verses underscore the stark disparity between the evidence-backed God of the Bible and the absence thereof from false deities, illustrating God's readiness and capability to offer tangible proof for the validation of His identity as the sole supreme God of the universe, contrasting with the inability of His competitors to do so.²⁷

God's Apologetic Example in Judges 6

In Judges 6:30-40, we witness Gideon encountering opposition from adherents of Baal. Upon demolishing Baal's altar, Joash issues a challenge to their faith, asserting that if Baal is genuinely a deity, he should be capable of defending himself when his altar is destroyed (v. 31). This sets the stage for Gideon's subsequent appeal to God for assurance that He will fulfill His promise to save Israel, using a wool fleece (v. 36). Gideon devises two tests involving the fleece—first requesting that dew be present solely

²⁷ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, "Apologetics: God's Example and Command," para. 4.

on the fleece while leaving the surrounding ground dry (v. 37). The next morning, Gideon verifies that this has occurred as he wrings enough water from the fleece to fill a bowl (v. 38). Despite this initial confirmation, Gideon still harbors doubts and requests another test with reversed conditions—asking for dryness on the fleece while surrounding ground should be covered with dew (v. 39). Remarkably, God fulfills this second request as well (v. 40), thereby affirming His promise and strengthening Gideon’s faith.

The story of Gideon’s fleece provides a compelling case for the validity of God’s promises and His ability to provide demonstrative evidence. This account showcases God’s willingness to accommodate human doubt and His patience in allowing individuals to seek validation.²⁸ By responding to Gideon’s request, God proves Himself as someone who can be trusted.

By giving such tangible signs, He bolsters confidence in His promises while affirming His role as the true God worthy of worship and trust. In essence, through God’s interaction with Gideon, we get a glimpse of the character and nature of God, one who desires a relationship with humanity and offers evidence for those willing to seek it out.

God’s Apologetic Example in Exodus 4

In a compelling display of divine authority, God communicated a sign to Moses and the court magicians using a staff (Exodus 4). Moses, as a firsthand witness, observed the miraculous occurrences of the leprous hand and the burning bush, providing unmistakable affirmation of the divine declaration.²⁹

The manifestation of divine power extended beyond these initial signs, as Pharaoh and the people of Egypt bore witness to a succession of plagues. The culmination of these catastrophes was the transformation of the Nile into a river of blood,

²⁸ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “Apologetics: God’s Example and Command,” para. 4.

²⁹ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “Apologetics: God’s Example and Command,” para. 3.

and the poignant symbolism of the firstborn children served as an evident indication of impending judgment. Through this methodically orchestrated series of events, the God of Israel not only validated His claims but also underscored the gravity of His divine authority and the consequences of resisting His will.³⁰

The biblical narratives depicting God's interactions with His chosen leaders, such as Elijah's confrontation in 1 Kings 18, Isaiah's challenge to other "so-called gods" in Isaiah 41, Gideon's fleece demands in Judges 6:30-40, and Moses's commissioning in Exodus 4, serve as compelling examples of God's practice of offering evidential support to affirm His identity as the sole true God of the universe, whose promises are reliable. These accounts highlight the enduring significance of apologetics within the biblical tradition and underscore the importance of providing reasoned explanations to fortify our faith and expose the falsehoods of rival deities.

God's Command (1 Pet 3:15-16)

God's apologetic example in the Old Testament is complemented by His command conveyed through the writings of the New Testament, emphasizing the significance of both His precedent and His directive. As believers, we are not only encouraged to follow God's example in providing reasoned defenses for our faith but also explicitly directed to engage in apologetics through His inspired authors in the New Testament through passages like 1 Peter 3:15.

This verse, authored by the apostle Peter under divine inspiration, admonishes believers to be consistently prepared to articulate the basis for their hope. This guidance emphasizes the significance of blending rational argumentation with a gentle approach when defending our convictions. It mirrors God's consistent pattern of offering evidence and participating in reasoned dialogue throughout the pages of Scripture.

³⁰ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, "Apologetics: God's Example and Command," para. 3.

By following God’s example in the Old Testament and His directive in the New Testament, believers are equipped not only to live out their faith with conviction but also to effectively engage with unbelievers, doubters, and skeptics in a gracious and compelling manner. Apologetics, grounded in God’s example and His guidance, becomes a vital aspect of sharing and defending the Christian faith in a thoughtful and gentle way.

Essential Traits of an Effective Apologist

This verse offers us insight into three essential traits that every Christian must cultivate to become an effective apologist, such as God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New. 1 Peter 3:15, which is considered “the charter verse of Christian apologetics,”³¹ 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; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” Peter lists three specific traits of an effective apologist: (1) reverence for Christ, (2) readiness to defend, and (3) reverent delivery.

Reverence for Christ is the first trait Peter mentions to his recipients who were enduring persecution for their faith at the time.³² Peter, fully aware of the hardships they faced, sought to redirect their focus away from fear and anxiety towards a different focal point—Christ the Lord. In this context, Peter writes, “But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy” (1 Pet 3:15).

The term “honoring” or “revering,” as found in various translations, is derived from the Greek word *hagiazō*. While typically associated with sanctification or holiness, in this verse, it takes on the meaning of “treating as holy” or “regarding reverently.”³³ A

³¹ John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, ed. Joseph E. Torres, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 44, Kindle.

³² Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 160, Kindle.

³³ Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, 160.

similar sense can be observed in Matthew 6:9, “hallowed be thy name,” which implies a deep reverence or sacred regard for God’s name.

Additionally, Peter’s phrase seems to draw inspiration from Isaiah 8:13, which reads, “But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” However, Peter does not emphasize the “fear of the Lord” as explicitly as Isaiah does in this context. Instead, “honor Christ the Lord as holy” signifies placing trust and belief in Christ’s sovereignty over life’s circumstances, even in the face of human persecution.

This act of honoring and revering Christ in one’s heart reflects a profound confidence that Jesus reigns as Lord and King over all aspects of existence, including the challenges of persecution. Furthermore, this reverence is not confined to one’s inner and private life; it manifests externally through words and deeds. As Thomas Schreiner aptly notes,

We should not understand the heart as our inner and private lives, which are inaccessible to others. The heart is the origin of human behavior (cf. 1:22; 3:4), and from it flows everything people do. Hence, setting apart Christ as Lord in the heart is not merely a private reality but will be evident to all when believers suffer for their faith. The inner and outer life are inseparable, for what happens within will inevitably be displayed to all, especially when one suffers.³⁴

In essence, Peter encourages believers to honor and revere Christ as Lord, not only in their hearts but also in their actions, displaying unwavering faith that Jesus reigns over all, even amid persecution.

Readiness to defend is the next trait Peter commands them to develop. His instruction continues, “Always be prepared to make a defense (apologia) to anyone who calls you to account (logos) for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15b). A readiness which is a result of consistently preparing their minds to effectively articulate the reason they have placed their hope in Jesus Christ. This articulation of their hope is aimed at

³⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 and 2 Peter and Jude*, Christian Standard Commentary (Brentwood, TN: B & H, 2020), chap. 3, “The Blessing of Suffering for Christ,” para. 1.

persuading their persecutors to reconsider their view of Jesus and contemplate trusting in Him as their Lord and Savior.³⁵

In this passage, Peter encourages believers not only to nurture their faith but also to consider the reasons behind their hope in Christ. They are urged to reflect upon these reasons, identify them, and equip themselves to convey them to those who inquire or raise objections. As Kenneth Boa aptly notes, Peter unequivocally advises believers to offer a reasoned defense of their beliefs,

Peter is definitely instructing believers to make a reasoned defense of their beliefs. Logos (the same word used in John 1:1 to refer to the preexistent Christ) is a very flexible word, but in this context, it clearly refers to a rational explanation or account. The word apologia, while not meaning “apologetics” in the modern technical sense, does indicate that Christians are to make the best case they can for their confession of Jesus Christ as Lord.³⁶

In essence, Peter underscores the importance of intellectual engagement and the ability to provide reasoned responses to inquiries or challenges regarding one’s faith. Christians are encouraged to develop a robust understanding of their beliefs, allowing them to effectively communicate the basis for their hope in Christ. This approach aligns with the spirit of apologetics, where faith is defended and communicated through rational discourse. Peter’s guidance serves as a timeless reminder for believers to be both spiritually rooted and intellectually equipped to share the reasons for their hope with gentleness and respect, as they engage with a world that seeks understanding and truth.

Reverent in delivery is the last trait Peter lists but is arguably the most important. Peter places significant emphasis on the way this defense is carried out. He encourages believers to season their reasoning with “gentleness and respect” (1 Pet

³⁵ Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 13, Kindle.

³⁶ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 13.

3:15c). The gentleness is directed towards people and is a result of a deep respect or reverence for God.³⁷ This point is eloquently argued by Schreiner,

Still, Peter probably has in view gentleness toward other people and fear before God. Such fear and humility are required for wives as well (3:2, 4), suggesting again that the instruction for the wives functions as a pattern for all oppressed believers. Those who fear God and live in humility will treat their opponents with dignity and refrain from lashing out against them. The relation believers have with God enables them to respond rightly to unbelievers.³⁸

In a world where discussions, especially on social media, can descend into harshness and hostility when confronting differing worldviews, Peter's admonition carries relevance.³⁹ He recognizes the temptation to respond in kind when faced with hostility, a challenge that the recipients of his letter likely encountered in their own cultural context.⁴⁰

Contemporary context can be marked by polarized debates and divisive rhetoric, Peter's guidance serves as a timely reminder of the importance of maintaining a Christlike spirit when engaging in discussions about faith and worldview. It underscores the notion that while defending one's beliefs is vital, the way this is done holds equal significance. By approaching such dialogues with gentleness toward others that results from a reverence for God, Christians can exemplify the love and grace of Christ, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to productive conversations.

A genuine reverence for God leads to a gentle approach when engaging with unbelievers. In a world filled with loud and contentious arguments, God calls for a calm and gentle defense of our hope. As the Creator who intimately understands the human heart, God knows a gentle defense has the potential to soften and be the catalyst for a transformed heart.

³⁷ Schreiner, *1 and 2 Peter and Jude*, chap. 3, "The Blessing of Suffering for Christ," para. 17.

³⁸ Schreiner, *1 and 2 Peter and Jude*, chap. 3, "The Blessing of Suffering for Christ," para. 17.

³⁹ Schreiner, *1 and 2 Peter and Jude*, chap. 3, "The Blessing of Suffering for Christ," para. 17.

⁴⁰ Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, 18.

Conclusion

In 1 Peter 3:15, we find a profound call to action for every believer. It encapsulates three key principles that should guide our Christian walk. Firstly, we are reminded to hold Christ in the highest reverence, acknowledging His sovereignty over all aspects of our lives, especially in the face of adversity. Secondly, we are challenged to be ever prepared to articulate our faith with reasoned defense, demonstrating that our hope is grounded in truth and understanding. Lastly, we are encouraged to convey this defense seasoned with of gentleness that results from a profound reverence for God, recognizing that our goal is not just to win arguments but to lead hearts toward the transformative power of Christ. This verse serves as a compass for our apologetic journey, reminding us to navigate the terrain of doubt and skepticism with unwavering faith in Christ, a well-prepared defense, and a spirit of gentleness, humility, and grace.

CHAPTER 3

CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS IS HIGHLY RELEVANT FOR DISCIPLESHIP IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL CONTEXTS.

Classical apologetics is highly relevant for discipleship in contemporary cultural contexts. In a rapidly changing world, where faith is often challenged and skepticism is prevalent, the need for solid reasoning and logical defense of the Christian faith has become increasingly important. Classical apologetics seeks to address these challenges by providing rational arguments for the existence of God and evidence to support the claims of Christianity. By engaging with classical apologetics in the context of discipleship, believers can deepen their understanding of their own faith, equip themselves with effective responses to objections and doubts raised by others, and engage meaningfully with those who are exploring questions about God's existence and the credibility of Christianity in our modern culture.

An Increasingly Secular World

In the book *Classical Apologetics*, the authors describe the current state of our culture as one that has been overtaken by secularism,

Western culture is not pagan; nor is it Christian. It has been secularized. Western man has "come of age," passing through the stages of mythology, theology, and metaphysics, reaching the maturity of science. The totem pole has yielded to the temple which in turn has given way to the acme of human progress, the laboratory. The contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal would not merit a press notice in the media, save possibly for a headline in a supermarket tabloid. Resistance to Christianity comes not from the deposed priests of Isis but from the guns of secularism. The Christian task (more specifically, the rational

apologetic task) in the modern epoch is not so much to produce a new *Summa Contra Gentiles* as it is to produce a *Summa Contra Secularisma*.¹

These words penned nearly forty years ago, ring true even more so today. Secularism is a post-Christian phenomenon that deliberately rejects the Christian worldview. It replaces the prevailing Christian consensus with its own structured perception of reality. Unlike paganism, which appears more savage in nature, secularism adopts a seemingly benevolent approach towards Christians who still hold on to their outdated faith. Masking themselves as tolerant, secularists proudly claim to advocate for religious acceptance on behalf of those who are unable or unwilling to confront an unfriendly or indifferent universe without the numbing influence of religion.²

The church is no longer subjected to brutal persecution at the hands of secularists; educated individuals have moved beyond engaging in public spectacles such as burning people at the stake or inflicting torture. In the Western world governed by secularism, there is no shedding of martyr's blood—provided that the church remains quietly confined within its modern boundaries and does not challenge societal norms.³

The youth may continue praying, singing hymns, and reading their Bibles while remaining intellectually stagnant; yet it is through irrelevance rather than through forceful means that the church will gradually fade away with little notice. Its demise will be marked by a quiet whimper rather than a resounding bang. However, if the church dares to step outside its confined space and once again engage with contemporary culture, secularism's friendly facade will transform into an aggressive snarl.⁴

¹ R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), chap. 1, "The Crisis of Secularism," para. 1, Kindle.

² Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 1, "The Crisis of Secularism," para. 2.

³ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 1, "The Crisis of Secularism," para. 2.

⁴ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 1, "The Crisis of Secularism," para. 2.

Atheistic and Agnostic Growth

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current cultural context of America as it relates to Christianity, Atheism, and Agnosticism, let us begin by examining how Americans engage with Christianity. Barna's research findings from the *State of the Church 2020*,⁵ a year-long project exploring the current challenges and opportunities facing the church, categorize individuals into three groups: practicing Christians, non-practicing Christians, and non-Christians.

Practicing Christians are those who identify themselves as Christian and strongly believe that faith holds significant importance in their lives. Additionally, they have attended church within the past month. Non-practicing Christians consist of individuals who identify themselves as Christian but do not meet the criteria for being classified as practicing. Non-Christians encompass US adults who do not identify themselves as Christian.

The first and arguably most noteworthy observation we will discuss is the decrease in the number of practicing Christians within the overall population. In 2000, 45 percent of those surveyed qualified as practicing Christians. However, this percentage has consistently declined over the past nineteen years. Currently, only one out of every four Americans (25 percent) identifies as a practicing Christian. Essentially, since 2000, there has been a nearly 50 percent decrease in the proportion of practicing Christians. It is not surprising that the impact of Christianity in the United States is diminishing. Rates of church attendance, religious affiliation, belief in God, prayer, and Bible reading have been declining for decades.⁶

Where have these practicing Christians disappeared to? The data suggests that their transition was equally divided. Half of them strayed from regular involvement in

⁵ Barna Group, "Signs of Decline and Hope among Key Metrics of Faith," March 4, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

⁶ Barna Group, "Signs of Decline and Hope among Key Metrics of Faith."

their faith and essentially became non-practicing Christians (35 percent in 2000 compared to 43 percent 2020), while the other half transitioned into the non-Christian category (20 percent in 2000 vs. 30 percent in 2019). This shift has also contributed to the growth of the atheist/agnostic/none group, which has nearly doubled in size over this period (11 percent in 2003 vs. 21 percent in 2018).⁷ Looking to the future of America, Generation Z, born between 1999 and 2015, represents the first generation that can truly be characterized as “post-Christian.”⁸

The term “atheist” is no longer considered taboo among Gen Z, as evidenced by the fact that twice as many teens (13 percent) identify as such compared to the general population (6 percent of all adults). Furthermore, the percentage of teens who identify as Christian decreases with each successive generation. While 75 percent of Baby Boomers identify as Protestant or Catholic Christians, only 59 percent of 13 to 18-year-olds claim to follow some form of Christianity.⁹

With the rise of atheism and agnosticism, the church must respond. The best response is providing a rational defense for a rational religion, steeped in love, gentleness, and respect. A rational defense is accomplished by the classical apologetic method due to its ability to bridge the gap between differing worldviews. By employing objective reasoning and evidential arguments, classical apologists can engage individuals from diverse religious or philosophical backgrounds, inviting them into a thoughtful discussion about ultimate truths.

Classical apologetics’ emphasis on respectful dialogue encourages this approach, fostering mutual respect and creating space for meaningful conversations that challenge belief systems while seeking truth together. Remember, Christianity is a

⁷ Barna Group, “Atheism Doubles among Generation Z,” January 24, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>.

⁸ Barna Group, “Atheism Doubles among Generation Z.”

⁹ Barna Group, “Atheism Doubles among Generation Z.”

reasonable faith. Thus, it demands a rational defense, and that is what the classical method offers.

A Rational Faith Demands a Rational Defense

Throughout history, Christianity has been described using different terms such as a “religion,” a “way of life,” an “experience,” a “faith,” and an “ideology.” These descriptions rightly highlight the complex nature of Christianity, but they also obscure its rationality. The profound emotional experiences associated with Christian belief can sometimes cloud the fact that reason plays a vital role in its framework.¹⁰

While Christianity is often viewed as a religion relying heavily on faith, emotion, and devotion rather than rationality, it is important to recognize that Christianity does possess a strong rational foundation. While Christianity may evoke intense passion, prayer, worship, and aspirations to obedience, these aspects should not overshadow its intrinsic rationality.¹¹ Despite advances in science and technology that have made reasoning an integral part of our lives today, there is still a prevailing sentiment that faith and reason are incompatible. Many skeptics argue against religious belief by asserting that it lacks rational grounding or evidence.¹²

Henry Dodwell expressed this anti-apologetic view in 1740 in his book *Christianity Not Founded on Argument* by arguing “one must choose between a religion of faith and a religion of reason.”¹³ And three centuries later, this stance is still taken by

¹⁰ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “The Task of Apologetics,” para. 1.

¹¹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 24, Kindle.

¹² Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “The Task of Apologetics,” para. 1.

¹³ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “Irrational Apologetics,” para. 1.

many.¹⁴ R. C. Sproul, on the other hand, emphasizes that Christianity is a faith with reasons behind it and he contends that faith should not be confused or separated from reason. Instead, he argues that they can coexist harmoniously within Christianity. He acknowledges that while faith is central to religious belief, there are legitimate reasons supporting this faith. Some argue that a person does not need to understand in order to believe, that belief precedes understanding. However, it can be asserted that apologetics is not derived from a new heart, but rather is used by God to lead others to a new heart.¹⁵

As humans, we are oxygen-breathing creatures who require this vital element for our existence. In the same way, because we are rational beings by nature, we must be approached with reasons and arguments.¹⁶ Our minds seek comprehension and logical explanations for what we believe in. Moreover, as creations of God, it is essential that we know about our Creator. Understanding our purpose and relationship with Him provides a foundation for our faith and guides us in navigating life's challenges. One of life's challenges is communicating, as James W. Sire says, "that Christianity is reasonable and thus (a) to assure Christians that their faith is not idiotic and (b) to clear away the obstacles and objections that keep nonbelievers from considering the arguments and evidence for the truth of Christianity."¹⁷

The question arises: why classical apologetics? R. C. Sproul answers, "Because we are rational creatures. Because we are by nature rational, we must be approached with reasons. Because, as creatures, it is essential that we know about

¹⁴ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, "Irrational Apologetics," para. 1.

¹⁵ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, "Irrational Apologetics," para. 1.

¹⁶ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, "A Return to Rational Apologetics," para. 7.

¹⁷ James W. Sire, "On being a Fool for Christ and an Idiot for Nobody," in *Christian Apologetics in the Post-Modern World*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Grand Rapids: IVP, 1995), 110-11.

our Creator. Because we are rational animals who need religion, we must be given reasons for believing the true religion.”¹⁸

As rational beings, we seek truth and meaning. Christianity satisfies this innate longing within us. However, blind faith without reason or evidence can leave us vulnerable to doubts, unbelief, and being easily swayed by opposing arguments. This is where classical apologetics comes into play, providing reasons for believing in God and evidence for Christianity’s veracity while equipping believers with intellectual tools to defend their beliefs against skepticism or objections raised by others. Boa and Bowman add,

No substantive conflict between faith and reason. The Christian worldview is a reasonable faith, a step into the light of reason and truth rather than a leap into the darkness of irrationality and subjectivity. To show this reasonableness, classical apologists stress the need to compare and evaluate conflicting worldviews by means of certain epistemological criteria, chief among which is logical consistency or rationality.”¹⁹

While some may argue that apologetics in any form is unnecessary or even detrimental to one’s faith journey since they never questioned their Christianity until someone tried to prove it,²⁰ it can be argued that this criticism overlooks an important aspect that apologetics can strengthen one’s faith through intellectual engagement of the arguments for the existence of God and the evidence supporting the authenticity of Christianity.

Classical apologetics serves as the intellectual foundation for our faith. It recognizes our inherent rationality and provides reasons for believing in Christianity. While salvation is ultimately a matter of God’s grace, apologetics helps to strengthen

¹⁸ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “A Return to Rational Apologetics,” para. 7.

¹⁹ Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 49, Kindle.

²⁰ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “Apologetics and the Laity,” para. 1.

one's belief and guard against skepticism or doubts. As oxygen is an essential component for human life, apologetics is an essential component for the Christian life, equipping us to understand and defend our faith in an increasingly skeptical world.

The classical method places significant emphasis on using logical criteria when evaluating different philosophical approaches towards religion overall and Christianity specifically. It aims to determine ultimate validity and reliability by subjecting competing ideas to rigorous analysis based on logic.²¹ This approach can be effective in engaging skeptics and those who hold opposing views about faith. By starting with natural theology and establishing a foundation rooted in reason, classical apologists create a strong platform from which they can present historical evidence supporting Christianity. This method has a rich history within the church, which is a significant reason it is still relevant to our contemporary culture.

The Historical Significance of Classical Apologetics

Prominent theologians and apologists from early to medieval times ascribed to the classical method. According to Boa and Bowman, the classical method “is the dominant approach to apologetics in church history, especially prior to the modern period.”²² The authors of the book *Classical Apologetics*, for instance, confidently assert that “theistic proofs” are a valid component of apologetics according to “the classic Christian view.”²³ They argue that this belief has been central to Eastern, Roman, and Protestant churches throughout history as well as being taught in creeds and by theologians.

²¹ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 71-72.

²² Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 71.

²³ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 3, “Natural Theology after Kant,” para. 14.

Classical apologists highlight various examples to support the continued use and superiority of classical apologetics. These include Paul’s apologetic in Acts 17, the development of classical methodology by Justin Martyr in the second century, Anselm’s formulation of the ontological argument during medieval times, and Thomas Aquinas’s presentation of multiple philosophical arguments for God’s existence. Additionally, Aquinas expounded on Christian teachings regarding the nature of God using Aristotelian philosophical categories. These instances serve as validation for the relevance and prominence of classical apologetics then and now.²⁴ With relevancy established, the questions beckon, “What is the classical method of apologetics?”

Classical Apologetics: A Deep Dive

According to William Lane Craig, the classical apologetic method is reasoning “in the form of rational arguments and evidence” that “plays an essential role in our showing Christianity to be true.”²⁵ Sproul opines that classical apologetics is “a reasonable modern response to reasonable modern people who want a reason why they should believe.”²⁶ Both agree that the classical method is a two-step approach beginning with natural theology followed by the presentation of historical evidences aimed at providing people sound reasons to believe in Christianity.

Natural Theology

Craig explains that natural theology focuses on providing logical arguments and evidence in support of theism without relying on authoritative divine revelation.

²⁴ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 71.

²⁵ William Lane Craig, “Classical Apologetics,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 43, iBook.

²⁶ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 2, “A Return to Rational Apologetics,” para. 3.

Classical examples of arguments within natural theology include the Cosmological, Teleological, and Moral arguments for the existence of God.²⁷ Sproul contends that, “Natural theology refers to knowledge of God acquired through nature. Classically, natural theology does not stand in contradiction to divine revelation, nor does it exclude such revelation.”²⁸ Natural theology makes reasonable arguments for the existence of God and is an important first step towards the veracity of Christianity.

However, Sproul recognizes two major hurdles that the classical apologist must overcome in our contemporary cultural context, “Any attempt to prove the existence of God by rational means faces two major obstacles at the outset. The first is cultural and the second is intellectual.”²⁹

In the current cultural landscape, the prevailing cultural difficulty is akin to the relentless tides of an anti-intellectual climate. Within what can be dubbed our modern “Age of Aquarius,” rational discourse finds itself adrift, cast aside as an unattainable ideal, and worse still, labeled as religiously indecent. This prevalent sentiment poses a poignant challenge, depicting a reality in which the art of reasoned argumentation struggles to find footing.³⁰

Yet, the culture’s reluctance to embrace intellectual engagement should not be mistaken for justification to evade our apologetic calling. Quite the opposite, it serves as a glaring signpost underscoring the pressing need for apologetics. Like a medicinal

²⁷ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 24.

²⁸ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 3, “Natural Theology after Kant,” para. 7.

²⁹ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 6, “The Incomprehensibility of God and the Ontological Argument,” para. 1.

³⁰ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 6, “The Incomprehensibility of God and the Ontological Argument,” para. 1.

remedy required for an ailing patient, apologetics is now more essential than ever to address the ails of a society prone to dismiss reasoned discourse.³¹

As we traverse the landscape of intellectual obstacles, a formidable challenge presents itself in the form of agnosticism. According to this notion, the finite nature of human beings inherently prevents them from gaining any insight into the infinite. If this premise held true and God’s essence was indeed infinite, the pursuit of understanding the infinite would be an exercise in futility.³²

While we concur that the nature of God is, indeed, infinite, we stand at a crossroads of disagreement with the assertion that finite beings are entirely incapable of attaining any knowledge about the infinite. This juncture encapsulates a pivotal divergence, where the boundaries of human cognition and the scope of divine transcendence intersect. By engaging in this discourse, we unravel not only the limitations of our understanding but also the potential expansiveness of human comprehension in matters divine.³³

Amid the cultural currents of skepticism and intellectual uncertainty, it is these twin challenges—resisting the anti-intellectual tides and challenging the confines of agnosticism—that beckon us to embark on a journey of robust classical apologetics. Through measured exploration and cogent argumentation, we endeavor to reclaim the lost art of intellectual engagement, affirming that within our quest to grasp the divine, the finite and the infinite can indeed harmonize.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument (KCA) was revived by Christian apologist William Lane Craig in his book *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, based on the

³¹ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 6, “The Incomprehensibility of God and the Ontological Argument,” para. 1.

³² Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 6, “The Incomprehensibility of God and the Ontological Argument,” para. 2.

³³ Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, chap. 6, “The Incomprehensibility of God and the Ontological Argument,” para. 3.

eleventh-century work of Muslim philosopher Al-Ghazali.³⁴ The Kalam Cosmological argument revolves around three simple premises.

The first premise, according to Al-Ghazali is, “Every being which begins has a cause for its beginning; now the world is a being which begins; therefore, it possesses a cause for its beginning.”³⁵ Craig explains that Ghazali was arguing the following, “Anything that begins to exist does so at a certain moment of time. But since, prior to the thing’s existence, all moments are alike, there must be some cause that determines that the thing comes to exist at that moment rather than earlier or later. Thus, anything that comes to exist must have a cause.”³⁶

This principle is grounded in our everyday experiences; everything we observe in the world around us has a cause or explanation for its existence. From trees growing from seeds to buildings being constructed by architects, there is always an underlying cause that brings about these effects.

The second premise asserts that the universe began to exist.³⁷ Meaning at one point in the past, the universe had a definite starting point, where all matter and energy came into being from an initial singularity. To support this premise, Craig points to Ghazali’s argument:

That it is impossible that there should be an infinite regress of events in time, that is to say, that the series of past events should be beginningless. He gives several reasons for this conclusion. For one thing, the series of past events comes to an end in the present—but the infinite cannot come to an end. It might be pointed out that even though the series of events has one end in the present, it can still be infinite in the other direction because it has no beginning. But Ghazali’s point may be that if the regress of past events were infinite, then it would be impossible for the present

³⁴ William Lane Craig, “Professor Mackie and the Kalām Cosmological Argument,” *Religious Studies* 20, no. 3 (September 1984): 367.

³⁵ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 94.

³⁶ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 96.

³⁷ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 96.

moment to arrive. For it is impossible to cross the infinite to get to today. So today could never arrive, which is absurd, for here we are!³⁸

From these two premises follows the conclusion: therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence. However, what sets apart this argument from others is Craig's assertion regarding the nature of this cause—he argues that it must be personal rather than impersonal or mechanical. The personal cause, Craig contends, is God.

The Moral Law Argument (MLA) argues for the existence of God from objective and absolute moral judgments to conclude that there must be a transcendent God as the foundation of morality. University of Colorado philosophy professor, Wes Morriston, contends that William Lane Craig has done more than anyone else to champion this argument by defending two theses: “If theism is true, we have a sound foundation of morality. If theism is false, we do not have a sound foundation of morality.”³⁹ Boa and Bowman add that the moral argument, “Reasons from the objectivity and absolute character of moral judgments to the existence of a transcendent God as the ground of morality regardless of time or culture, with a built-in concept of normative conduct, a universal sense of ‘ought’ and ‘should.’”⁴⁰ The moral argument is mapped out through the following syllogism: (1) If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist. (2) Objective moral values do exist. (3) Therefore, God exists.⁴¹

Furthermore, the Moral Law argument seeks to establish common ground between the Christian and the atheist by appealing to a shared understanding of objective moral values and duties. Typically, both Christians and atheists often agree that certain moral principles, such as honesty, kindness, and justice, are objectively good and

³⁸ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 96.

³⁹ Wes Morriston, “God and the Ontological Foundation of Morality,” *Religious Studies* 48, no. 1 (2012): 15.

⁴⁰ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 96.

⁴¹ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 97.

universally binding. These values are not dependent on individual beliefs or cultural norms but are perceived as inherent truths that govern human behavior.

Alongside recognizing objective moral values, there's also a recognition of moral duties or obligations. This means that individuals have a responsibility to uphold these moral principles and act in accordance with them.

The moral law argument posits that the existence of objective moral values and duties requires an explanation. Why do these moral truths exist, and why do we feel compelled to adhere to them? The argument suggests that the most plausible explanation for the existence of objective moral values and duties is the existence of a transcendent moral lawgiver—God.

Despite their theological differences, both Christians and atheists can find common ground in their acknowledgment of objective moral values and duties. While Christians attribute these moral truths to God's existence and nature as a moral lawgiver, atheists may appeal to evolutionary psychology, social contract theory, or other naturalistic explanations. Nonetheless, the recognition of objective morality provides a starting point for meaningful dialogue and ethical engagement between the two groups.

The Teleological Argument (TLA) argues for the existence of God from a design perspective. Rem B. Edwards writes,

The Teleological Argument or Argument from Design affirms that the observed order of the world provides powerful evidence both for the existence of God and for divine attributes like power, intelligence, and benevolence or good intentions. A well-designed cosmos implies not only that God exists but also something about what God is like. The Argument from Design expresses the deep religious intuition that the ultimate cause of the universe knew what it was doing and did it well from commendable motives.⁴²

Those who ascribe argue from the design of the world to the existence of a designer, which is God, who not only created but designed everything in the universe

⁴² Rem B. Edwards, *What Caused the Big Bang?*, Philosophy and Religion (Boston: Brill, 2021), 275, e-book.

with precise purposes and goals.⁴³ Traced to Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, this argument from design is framed with the following syllogism: “(1) Wherever complex design exists, there must have been a designer. (2) Nature is complex. (3) Therefore, nature must have had an intelligent designer.”⁴⁴ for the existence of God relies on observable design in the world. Advocates argue that since there is complex design present in nature, there must be an intelligent designer behind it all—namely God.

Alone, natural theology can lead a person to theism, a belief in God, but not to Trinitarian monotheism, the Christian belief in one God comprised of three persons. This is where the evidence takes over.

Historical Evidence

Norman Geisler argues that “history is objectively knowable.”⁴⁵ Christianity is a historical religion that “makes historical claims about miraculous events that allegedly confirm its truth claims.”⁴⁶ By demonstrating the necessary historical evidence for the reliability of the Gospels, radical personal claims of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ, one can make a powerful argument for Christianity’s reality.

Making a strong case for the trustworthiness of the New Testament is an important first step in “the overall apologetic of historical Christianity.”⁴⁷ Geisler contends that there are two significant steps in arguing for the historical reliability of the New Testament. They are establishing “the authenticity of the New Testament writings”

⁴³ Paul D. Feinberg, “Cumulative Case Apologetics,” in Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 170.

⁴⁴ Feinberg, “Cumulative Case Apologetics,” 170.

⁴⁵ Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 342.

⁴⁶ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 319.

⁴⁷ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 341.

and “the reliability of the New Testament writers.”⁴⁸ In the realm of historical research, these two crucial aspects demand meticulous scrutiny. These factors play a significant role in shaping our understanding of past events and statements recorded therein.

Authenticating the New Testament writings requires careful examination of the existing manuscript copies, comparing the New Testament manuscripts with those of ancient secular history and determining the dating of the original sources of these manuscripts.⁴⁹

From there it is necessary to show the signs of truthfulness that New Testament authors demonstrate, like the inclusion of embarrassing details about themselves, writing from eyewitness accounts, and their refusal to recant their claims in the face of death.⁵⁰ Establishing trust in the New Testament provides a solid foundation for apologists to argue that Jesus claimed to be God and was indeed God incarnate.

Orthodox Christianity firmly believes that Jesus of Nazareth was God manifested in human form. This belief is crucial for the authenticity of Christianity. If it holds true, then Christianity stands as a distinct and authoritative faith. However, if this belief is false, then Christianity loses its uniqueness and becomes comparable to other religions. Therefore, making a strong case for Jesus being God is imperative. And making a strong case begins by providing evidence that Jesus claimed to be God and continues by presenting the necessary evidence that supports His claims.

By establishing the New Testament as a trustworthy historical document that accurately details Jesus Christ’s life, teachings, death, and resurrection you build the case that Jesus himself claimed to be God and provided sufficient verification of his deity. Because the New Testament records Jesus claiming to be God incarnate, and Jesus

⁴⁸ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 341.

⁴⁹ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 343.

⁵⁰ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 355.

substantiating His claim of divinity by fulfilling prophecies from the Old Testament, leading a miraculous life, and triumphing over death through resurrection.⁵¹

While some will argue that Jesus did not claim to be God, Philip Payne contends that Jesus made several implicit claims to be God in His parables.⁵² Payne's logic is explained by Geisler:

The logic of the claim is this: (1) in the Old Testament God referred to himself by a certain image; (2) Jesus used this image to refer to himself; (3) therefore, Jesus used this image to claim that he was God. These images include (a) the Sower (Luke 8:5-8; cf. Num. 24:6-7; Ps. 80:8-15); (b) Director of the Harvest (Matt. 13:24-30; cf. Isa. 27:3-12; Jer. 51:33); (c) a Rock (Matt. 7:24-27; cf. Ps. 19:14; 28:1); (d) a Father (Luke 15:11-32; cf. Deut. 32:6; 2 Sam. 7:14); (e) Forgiver of Sins (Luke 7:41-50; cf. Exod. 32:32; 34:7); (f) Vineyard Owner (Matt. 20:1-16; cf. Deut. 8:8; Ps. 80:8-15); (g) the King (Luke 19:11-27; cf. 1 Sam. 12:12; Ps. 10:16); (h) Shepherd (John 10:1-18; cf. Ps. 23; Ezek. 34). Though these were indirect claims to deity, nonetheless, they were powerful because they involved a story, bypassed defenses to direct discourse, and allowed the listener to engage in self-discovery.⁵³

Therefore, it can be concluded that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed God in human form.

Making a strong case for Jesus being God incarnate is the final and most substantial in making an effective Christian apologetic. Throughout history, numerous individuals have claimed to possess divine attributes or even deity itself.⁵⁴ However, among these claims, one stands out as both remarkable and unparalleled, the assertion made by Jesus of Nazareth that He is the one and only true God. In Christianity, this belief lies at the very foundation of its faith. The following explores a compelling argument for Jesus's divinity through a convergence of His fulfillment of supernatural prophecy, His miraculous life, and His bodily resurrection from the dead.

One key element in establishing Jesus's claim to be God lies in how His life remarkably fulfilled numerous prophecies found in the Old Testament. Throughout time,

⁵¹ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 343.

⁵² Philip B. Payne, "Jesus's Implicit Claim to Deity in His Parables," *Trinity Journal* 2, no. 1 (1981): 3-23.

⁵³ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 380.

⁵⁴ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 380.

various prophetic writings foretold specific details about the coming Messiah who would embody divine attributes. These prophecies span across centuries and different books such as Isaiah and Micah. Jesus's birthplace in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), His lineage from King David (Isaiah 11:1-10), His virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14), betrayal by a close friend for thirty pieces of silver (Zech 11:12-13), crucifixion alongside criminals (Isa 53:12), burial with the rich (Isa 53:9) are but a few examples that demonstrate an extraordinary correlation between prophetic predictions and historical events surrounding Jesus's life.

Another crucial aspect supporting Jesus's claim to be God is found in the numerous miracles He performed. The Gospels recount numerous astonishing miracles performed by Jesus, such as healing the blind, raising the dead, casting out demons, and even controlling nature itself. These miraculous demonstrations serve as tangible evidence of Jesus's divine power and authority over the physical world.

The pinnacle of miraculous evidence affirming Jesus's claim to be God lies in His resurrection from the dead. The empty tomb stands as an undeniable testament to this marvelous event. Overcoming death itself not only validates Jesus's divinity but also demonstrates His authority over life, death, and eternal existence.

When it comes to discussing the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Gary Habermas and Mike Licona emphasize the importance of staying focused on the main topic, the resurrection itself. This means avoiding tangents about the reliability of the Bible. Although they believe in the trustworthiness and inspiration of the Bible, they understand that skeptical nonbelievers may not share this view. Therefore, to stay on track and prevent distractions from the main point, they propose employing a "minimal facts approach."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 255.

This approach only considers well-established historical data that are accepted by almost all scholars studying the subject, even those who are skeptical. The concept of minimal facts primarily relies on facts that meet two criteria: strong evidence supporting them and near-unanimous acceptance among scholars. By using this “lowest common denominator” of agreed-upon facts, we ensure that our argument remains focused on the central issue without getting sidetracked by irrelevant matters. This approach allows us to present a compelling and supportable case.⁵⁶

Before examining the evidential support, allow me to address the claim that ancient people were uber gullible, thus the reason they believed Jesus’s resurrection. Jesus’s own disciples initially met the news of an empty tomb and a resurrected Jesus with skepticism and doubt. This challenges the notion that ancient people were inherently more gullible or credulous about miracles compared to modern-day individuals.⁵⁷ Three passages of Scripture highlight the initial doubt and skepticism: (1) “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee And when they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted” (Matt 28:16-17). (2) “After this he appeared in another form to two of them And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them” (Mark 16:12-13). (3) “Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:10-11). (4) “[Thomas] said to them, ‘Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe’” (John 20:25).

The cited passages indeed challenge the notion that early Christians believed in the resurrection due to gullibility. Since people in ancient times were aware that dead

⁵⁶ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 255.

⁵⁷ Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2016), 180.

individuals typically remained deceased, it raises the question of why the disciples eventually embraced this belief.⁵⁸

Below is an examination of five evidences supporting the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

The reality of Jesus's crucifixion served as a common method of execution utilized by the Romans to punish individuals belonging to the lower class, slaves, soldiers, those who violently rebelled, and accused of treason.⁵⁹ According to Josephus, a Jewish historian from the first century, during the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, Roman soldiers harbored such hatred towards Jews that they crucified many in various positions.⁶⁰ This form of punishment was incredibly torturous and Cicero even referred to it as the most horrendous torture during the first century BC.⁶¹

Habermas and Licona argue the evidence supporting Jesus's execution by crucifixion is supported by its recording in all four Gospels and by several non-Christian sources of the same period, like Josephus and Tacitus.⁶² Josephus writes, "When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified."⁶³ Tacitus reports, "Nero fastened the guilt [of the burning of Rome] and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called

⁵⁸ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 41-63.

⁵⁹ Gerard S. Sloyan, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: History, Myth, Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 18-20.

⁶⁰ Josephus states, "When caught, they resisted, and were then tortured and crucified before the walls as a terrible warning to the people within. Titus pitied them—some 500 were captured daily—but dismissing those captured by force was dangerous, and guarding such numbers would imprison the guards. Out of rage and hatred, the soldiers nailed their prisoners in different postures, and so great was their number that space could not be found for the crosses." Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* 5.11.1, in *Josephus: The Essential Works, A Condensation of Jewish Antiquities and the Jewish War*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994), 358.

⁶¹ Sloyan, *The Crucifixion of Jesus*, 13.

⁶² Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 48.

⁶³ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 48.

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 Pilatus.”⁶⁴

Additionally, the point to Lucian of Samosata, a Greek satirist, wrote that the Christians worship a man who introduced their new rituals and was crucified because of it.⁶⁵ Along with the Talmud which states that “on the eve of Passover, Yeshu was hanged.”⁶⁶ Yeshu is Hebrew for Joshua, and its Greek equivalent is *Iēsous* or Jesus. Hanging on a tree was an ancient way to describe crucifixion.

It is evident that Jesus’s death by crucifixion is a historical fact with substantial evidence supporting it. John Dominic Crossan, a highly critical scholar from the Jesus Seminar, firmly states that Jesus’s crucifixion is as certain as any historical event can be.⁶⁷

The empty tomb of Jesus is supported by compelling evidence and is widely accepted as a historical fact by many critical scholars. According to Gary Habermas, approximately 75 percent of scholars who specialize in this subject acknowledge the reality of the empty tomb.⁶⁸ In light of this consensus, let us now examine three specific arguments in favor of the empty tomb.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 48.

⁶⁵ Lucian of Samosata, *The Death of Peregrine* 11-13, quoted in Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 221.

⁶⁶ Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a (probably late second century). Unless otherwise indicated, all citations from the Talmud are from *The Babylonian Talmud*, I. Epstein, ed. and trans. (London: Soncino, 1935-1952), quoted in Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 257, Kindle. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations from the Talmud are from *The Babylonian Talmud*.

⁶⁷ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 145; see also 154, 196, 201.

⁶⁸ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 69.

⁶⁹ Note that Habermas highlights three evidences in favor of the empty tomb out of twenty-three evidences discovered in support from 1975 to 2002.

Women discovering the empty tomb is what Brant Pitre emphasizes to argue for the reality of the resurrected Jesus. He believes it is crucial to recognize the unlikelihood of attributing the discovery of the empty tomb to a female disciple like Mary Magdalene if Jesus's other disciples had intended for others to believe it.⁷⁰

Scholars have demonstrated that in the first century AD, the testimony of women was generally considered unreliable.⁷¹ The Gospels themselves even mention that some male disciples dismissed the women's account of Jesus's resurrection as an "idle tale" or "nonsense" (Luke 24:10-11). However, despite initial skepticism, finding the empty tomb served as a pivotal moment for the disciples in coming to understand that Jesus had indeed been raised. This event marked their first step towards comprehending and accepting this reality.

Enemy admission concludes the argument is support for the empty tomb. If your grandmother tells me that you are a phenomenal teacher, I may have my doubts, due to her bias. However, if someone despises you states the same, then my doubts will be all but eliminated due to the lack of bias.⁷² The existence of the empty tomb is not solely supported by Christian sources. Even Jesus's adversaries indirectly acknowledged its emptiness. Therefore, this argument does not rely on silence but rather on the available evidence. Instead of presenting evidence of an occupied tomb, early critics of Christianity accused Jesus's disciples of stealing His body (Matt 28:12-13; Justin Martyr, *Trypho* 108;

⁷⁰ Pitre, *The Case for Jesus*, 180.

⁷¹ Josephus wrote, "Put not trust in a single witness, but let there be three or at the least two, whose evidence shall be accredited by their past lives. From women let no evidence be accepted, because of the levity and temerity of their sex." Josephus, *Antiquities*, 4.219, quoted in Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus a New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 349-58.

⁷² An adaptation of Habermas and Licona's illustration in *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 71.

Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 30).⁷³ This accusation would have been unnecessary if the body had still been present in the tomb.

The eyewitnesses, predominantly Jesus's disciples, attesting to the resurrection of Jesus are corroborated by nine early and independent sources, which can be classified into three categories. Firstly, we have the testimony of Paul regarding the accounts of the disciples. Secondly, there exists an oral tradition that was transmitted within the early church. This oral tradition encompasses carefully crafted creeds (1 Corinthians 15:3-5), hymns, narrative summaries (as seen in Acts), and poetry. These oral traditions are of particular significance, as they predate the composition of the New Testament writings and are included by the New Testament authors. Lastly, there are written works from the early church that also validate these assertions. Our primary sources include select letters of Paul, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the book of Acts, Hebrews, 1 Peter, as well as writings attributed to Clement of Rome and Polycarp. While Hebrews, 1 Peter, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp affirm the proclamation of Jesus's resurrection, they do not provide detailed accounts of the event or the nature of Jesus's resurrection. Conversely, Paul's letters, the Gospels, and Acts offer explicit details, affirming that Jesus's resurrection involved his physical body and that he appeared to others. Furthermore, Paul's letters provide compelling evidence that this was also the message proclaimed by the apostles in Jerusalem.⁷⁴

Conclusion

A convergence of unique miracles provides compelling evidence supporting Jesus's claim to be God—substantiating what He proclaimed during His earthly ministry. Through fulfilled supernatural prophecies, a sinless and miraculous life, and an

⁷³ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 71.

⁷⁴ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 50.

unprecedented resurrection from the dead, Jesus stands apart from any other religious figure in history.

These extraordinary events serve to confirm His divinity beyond reasonable doubt. Prompting believers throughout centuries to place their faith in Him as both Lord and Savior. The significance of these miracles goes far beyond mere historical anecdotes; they challenge humanity's perception of reality while inviting us into a deeper understanding of our relationship with God Himself.

By exploring historical evidence surrounding Jesus's life, the prophecies fulfilled, His performing of the miraculous, and His supernatural bodily resurrection and linking it with philosophical arguments like the Cosmological, Moral Law, and Teleological arguments; classical apologists present compelling reasons to believe in Christ. This two-step approach offers an effective way to engage in conversations with those skeptical of Christianity.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The ministry project consisted of eight classes aimed at equipping the participants with the skills and confidence to effectively defend the Christian faith, focusing on their ability to construct logical arguments for the existence of God and provide historical support for the notion that God is the God of the Bible.

The research was structured to align with the project's objectives, which encompass the following: (1) evaluating the current level of Christian apologetic knowledge among GFCWPB members, particularly in their ability to defend the existence of God, the historical reliability of the Bible, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and His subsequent resurrection, (2) developing and implementing a curriculum tailored to enhance the Christian apologetic knowledge of GFCWPB members in the area of logical arguments supporting the existence of God, the historical reliability of the New Testament, the divinity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, (3) elevating the competence and confidence of GFCWPB members in effectively communicating, with gentleness and respect, the logical arguments supporting the existence of God, the historical reliability of the New Testament, as well as the divinity, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Scheduling and Recruitment of Participants

In January 2023, I received authorization from Jeff Robinson, the lead pastor of Grace Fellowship: A Church of All Nations in West Palm Beach, Florida, to initiate my Doctor of Educational Ministry project. Following this approval, I engaged Grace Fellowship West Palm Beach members by disseminating project details through various

communication channels, including the church’s social media accounts, monthly newsletters, and announcements during worship services.

The project officially commenced on February 22, 2023, marking the beginning of an eight-week course. To gather insights and data, participants were tasked with completing a comprehensive twelve-question survey. The project successfully concluded on April 19, 2023, with an average attendance of fifty-six individuals actively participating throughout the duration.

Participants

As detailed in the Research Methodology section of chapter 1, the assessment survey was administered to participating GFWPB members to evaluate their progress in key apologetics topics.

The pre-assessment survey¹ was meticulously structured and comprised two main components. First, a basic demographic section consisting of four questions provided essential background information. Secondly, participants responded to eight apologetically focused statements presented on a six-point Likert scale. These statements were thoughtfully aligned with the primary subject matter covered in each weekly class, serving the crucial purpose of gauging participants’ knowledge levels both before and after attending the classes.

To enhance accessibility, participants were given the option to access the class through Google Classroom through video recording, complete with a slideshow and listening guide.

A total of sixty-six members from Grace Fellowship enrolled in the course, with forty-eight successfully completing it. This comprehensive approach to assessment

¹ See appendix 1.

allowed for a thorough examination of participants' understanding and growth in apologetics throughout the duration of the course.

Class Material Development

During the initial phase of this extensive project, my primary focus was on the development of class materials for the eight-week course. These materials were carefully curated with the overarching intention of equipping participants to become proficient apologists, adept in employing the classical approach. This developmental phase extended over a period of four weeks.

At the core of this phase was the creation of teaching materials composed in manuscript form. To enhance the learning experience, each teaching session was thoughtfully complemented with a Keynote slideshow. Recognizing the importance of a guided learning experience, participant listening guides² were tailored to each class. These guides served as invaluable resources, assisting participants in comprehending and retaining the information presented during the sessions. They were designed with care to facilitate note-taking and active engagement, ultimately contributing to a more profound and lasting educational experience.

In addition to the substantive teaching materials and accompanying slideshows, assessing participants' knowledge and growth was imperative. To achieve this, a pre- and post-survey³ was devised to gauge the development of participants' understanding and proficiency in apologetics throughout the course. This comprehensive approach ensured a well-rounded and effective educational journey for all participants involved.

² See appendix 4 for Listening Guide Example.

³ See appendixes 1 and 2.

Implementation of the Eight-Week Course

The course convened weekly on Wednesday evenings for 90 minutes, beginning on February 22, 2023, and culminating on April 19, 2023. The following section offers a succinct summary of the eight sessions that contributed to a marked improvement in the participants' understanding of Classical Apologetics. This enhancement is evidenced by the significant increase in knowledge over an 8-week period which saw the average score of 48 participants on a 6-point Likert Scale rise from 1.74125 in the pre-test to 5.74623 in the post-test, indicating a substantial advancement in the participants' comprehension.

Class 1

The class explored the profound notion that every Christian carries a solemn duty to be discipled, and part of that process involves becoming proficient in defending their faith. This responsibility is rooted in the exemplary apologetic instances of God in the Old Testament, Jesus in the New Testament, and the explicit directive conveyed by God through the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 and the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:15.

First, the class participated in an in-depth exposition of Matthew 28:18-20 and 1 Peter 3:15. The teachings of Jesus and the inspired writings of Peter unequivocally emphasize the imperative for Christians to cultivate a robust apologetic competence as part of their continuous discipleship. The divine directive to those who hold Christ as their Lord is to diligently adhere to His commands, encompassing the readiness to articulate well-founded justifications for their steadfast hope in Christ. Moreover, the communication of these reasons should be marked by a gentle demeanor emanating from a profound reverence for Christ. The goal is the glorification of God and Him using our arguments to help lead the lost to faith in Christ and grow the faith of existing believers.

Then, class participants examined the biblical narratives that underscored God's apologetic interactions with His chosen leaders. Examples such as the dramatic

confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, Gideon's transformative encounter with God in Judges 6:30-40, Isaiah's recording of God's challenge to the alleged "gods" of the world to substantiate their authenticity with compelling evidence and Moses's dialogue with the burning bush and the staff transforming into a snake in Exodus 4 served as compelling illustrations. These narratives showcased how God consistently provided evidential reasons to reaffirm His divine nature and guide His chosen servants. In moments of doubt, uncertainty, or external challenges, these evidential signs became powerful sources of assurance, highlighting God's unwavering commitment to His people and His authority over false deities. Through these narratives, profound insights were gained into the nature of God's guidance and His role as an apologist for His own supremacy, firmly establishing His unique status as the one true God.

The class transitioned to a thorough examination of Christ's apologetic example, a The class transitioned to a thorough examination of Christ's apologetic example, analyzing His compelling apologetic strategies: the use of witness testimony, miracles, reasoned arguments, and His resurrected body. A poignant moment of reflection centered on His post-resurrection interaction with the doubting disciple Thomas, as narrated in John 20. This interaction illuminated Christ's profound willingness to provide the necessary evidence to produce saving faith.

Class 2

The session commenced with a thorough review of the material covered in the initial class. Following this, the class participated in a detailed exploration of the apologetic method that is classical apologetics and the rationale behind its recognition as the most effective approach within their cultural context.

The exploration of classical apologetics began by defining Natural Theology according to the definition espoused by J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, which is

“the branch of theology that seeks to provide warrant for belief in God’s existence apart from the resources of authoritative, propositional revelation.”⁴ Participants were introduced to the following key theistic arguments: the Kalam Cosmological Argument, the Moral Law Argument, and the Teleological Argument. Each theistic argument is presented independently to support the reasonableness of believing in God’s existence.

The remaining class period was dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the Kalam Cosmological Argument, a concept revitalized by the Christian apologist William Lane Craig in his book *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*. This argument is rooted in the eleventh-century work of the Muslim philosopher Al-Ghazali. The KCA is centered on three straightforward premises.⁵

The initial premise, as articulated by Al-Ghazali, posits, “Every being which begins has a cause for its beginning; now the world is a being which begins; therefore, it possesses a cause for its beginning.”⁶ Craig further elucidates Ghazali’s argument, stating, “Anything that begins to exist does so at a certain moment of time. But since, prior to the thing’s existence, all moments are alike, there must be some cause that determines that the thing comes to exist at that moment rather than earlier or later. Thus, anything that comes to exist must have a cause.”⁷

This principle finds grounding in our everyday experiences, where everything observed in the world has a cause or explanation for its existence. Whether it is trees growing from seeds or buildings constructed by architects, there is always an underlying cause bringing about these effects.

⁴ J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 494.

⁵ William Lane Craig, “Professor Mackie and the Kalām Cosmological Argument,” *Religious Studies* 20, no. 3 (September 1984): 367.

⁶ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 96, Kindle.

⁷ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 96.

The second premise theorizes that the universe began to exist, signifying a specific starting point in the past when all matter and energy originated from an initial singularity. To support this premise, Craig refers to Ghazali's argument, emphasizing the impossibility of an infinite regress of events in time. Ghazali contends that the series of past events cannot be beginningless, as it comes to an end in the present, and an infinite regress would make the arrival of the present moment impossible.

From these premises, the logical conclusion emerges: the universe has a cause for its existence. Notably, what distinguishes this argument is Craig's assertion regarding the nature of this cause—he argues that it must be personal rather than impersonal or mechanical. According to Craig, the personal cause is none other than God.⁸

Class 3

The class began with an extensive review of the KCA from class 2. Then the focus shifted to the exploration of the final two arguments for God's existence. Students participated in a deep study of the Teleological and Moral Law Arguments for the existence of God.

Beginning with the Teleological argument, also known as the argument from design. This argument attributes the intricacies of the world to the existence of a deliberate designer—identified as God. This viewpoint asserts that God not only created the universe but also intricately designed every element within it with precise purposes and objectives. Originating with Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, the argument from design is structured as follows: “(1) Wherever complex design exists, there must have been a designer. (2) Nature is complex. (3) Therefore, nature must have had an intelligent designer.”⁹ The foundation of this argument for God's existence hinges on the

⁸ Paul D. Feinberg, “Cumulative Case Apologetics,” in Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 170.

⁹ Feinberg, “Cumulative Case Apologetics,” 170.

discernible design observed in the world. Advocates hypothesize that the presence of intricate design in nature necessitates an intelligent designer, namely God.

The class period concluded with a study of the Moral Law Argument for God's existence. This argument theorizes the existence of God based on objective and absolute moral judgments. This line of reasoning concludes that a transcendent God serves as the foundation of morality. Wes Morriston, a philosophy professor at the University of Colorado, underscores William Lane Craig's significant role in championing this argument. Morriston outlines Craig's two theses: "If theism is true, we have a sound foundation of morality. If theism is false, we do not have a sound foundation of morality."¹⁰

Expanding on this, the moral argument reasons from the objectivity and absolute character of moral judgments to assert the existence of a transcendent God as the grounding force of morality, irrespective of time or culture. This argument incorporates a built-in concept of normative conduct and a universal sense of "ought" and "should."

The structure of the moral argument is presented through the following syllogism: (1) If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist. (2) Objective moral values do exist. (3) Therefore, God exists.

Furthermore, students explored the common ground the Moral Argument can establish between Christians and Atheists.

Students were also instructed that while natural theology can lead an individual to Theism—a belief in God—it does not inherently lead to Trinitarian monotheism, which is the Christian belief in one God comprised of three persons. This is where additional evidence comes into play.

¹⁰ Wes Morriston, "God and the Ontological Foundation of Morality," *Religious Studies* 48, no. 1 (2012): 15.

Class 4

The class delved into the assertion made by Norman Geisler that “history is objectively knowable.”¹¹ In the context of Christianity, a religion inherently intertwined with historical events, this perspective becomes crucial. Geisler emphasizes that Christianity “makes historical claims about miraculous events that allegedly confirm its truth claims.”¹² The class aims to illustrate the essential historical evidence supporting the reliability of the Gospels, the radical personal claims of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ. Through this examination, participants can construct a compelling argument substantiating the reality of Christianity.

The class focused on the foundational importance of establishing the trustworthiness of the New Testament. This serves as a pivotal step in presenting a robust defense for historical Christianity.

Norman Geisler outlines two significant steps in arguing for the historical reliability of the New Testament. The first is establishing “the authenticity of the New Testament writings” and the second is proving “the reliability of the New Testament writers.”¹³ Both steps demand meticulous scrutiny in the realm of historical research.

To authenticate the New Testament writings, we delved into a careful examination of the existing manuscript copies. This involved a rigorous process of comparing the New Testament manuscripts with those of ancient secular history, drawing parallels and distinctions. Additionally, we explored the crucial task of determining the amount and the dating of the original sources of these manuscripts. Participants discovered the preservation of over 5,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament as a

¹¹ Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 342.

¹² Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 319.

¹³ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 341.

whole or in part.¹⁴ This is more manuscript copies than any other ancient writing. Furthermore, they were introduced to the dating of the New Testament manuscript copies which reveal “the core textual tradition of the New Testament remains remarkably stable over time.”¹⁵

To validate the trustworthiness of the New Testament authors, the class examined the signs of honesty displayed by the authors. The signs involved the authors including embarrassing details about themselves like falling asleep when they were called to pray by Jesus in Mark 14:32-41, Peter denying knowing Jesus in Mark 14:66-72, and Peter being called “Satan” by Jesus in Mark 8:33.¹⁶ Secondly, the authors did not deny their claims under threat of death as recorded in Acts 4, 5, 7, and 10.¹⁷ Lastly, the authors claimed to write from eyewitness accounts which stands in contrast to most historical writing from the ancient world.¹⁸ These signs of honesty displayed by the authors of the New Testament provides substantial support for the reliability of their writings.

These systematic steps are essential not only for establishing the historical reliability of the New Testament but also for shaping our understanding of past events and statements recorded therein. The class provided a comprehensive exploration of the rigorous processes involved in historical research, shedding light on the foundational aspects of Christianity’s historical claims.

Class 5

In class 5, the focus shifted to a crucial step in Christian apologetics—making a compelling case for Jesus claiming to be God and for Jesus displaying the necessary

¹⁴ Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible*, (Torrance, CA: Rose, 2015), 144, Kindle.

¹⁵ Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Curry, *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 131, Kindle.

¹⁶ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 355.

¹⁷ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 356.

¹⁸ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 356.

signs to be God incarnate. This aspect holds significant importance for Orthodox Christianity, which firmly believes that Jesus of Nazareth was God manifested in human form. The authenticity of Christianity hinges on this belief, as it distinguishes the faith as distinct and authoritative.

Beginning with Jesus's claim that He was God incarnate, the class examined the explicit claims of Jesus Himself in John 8 and John 14. From there, the class was shown Philip Payne's contribution¹⁹ to the argument that Jesus made implicit claims to be God in His parables. Payne's logic, as explained by Geisler, involves drawing parallels between Old Testament images used by God to refer to Himself and Jesus's use of the same images to indirectly claim deity. These include various metaphorical roles such as the Sower, Director of the Harvest, a Rock, a Father, Forgiver of Sins, Vineyard Owner, the King, and Shepherd.²⁰

Continuing, the class began to explore the evidence supporting Jesus' claim of deity. Beginning with the miracles Jesus performed. The class studied His healing of ailments deemed incurable, his multiplying of meager provisions, his walking upon water, and his power in bringing the dead back to life. These extraordinary occurrences provide affirmation of the truth claims made by Jesus including His explicit and implicit claims of being God incarnate.

In conclusion, the class presented a comprehensive argument, combining explicit claims, fulfilled prophecies, miraculous deeds, and parabolic imagery, to establish that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed God in human form. This assertion is foundational to Christianity, setting it apart from other faiths and emphasizing Jesus's unparalleled divinity.

¹⁹ Philip B. Payne, "Jesus's Implicit Claim to Deity in His Parables," *Trinity Journal* 2, no. 1 (1981): 3-23.

²⁰ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 380.

Class 6

The class began by addressing the argument that early Christians believed Jesus was supernaturally resurrected because ancient people were inherently more gullible, and thus more likely to believe in such miraculous events. The class was shown that this assertion is flawed due to the initial skepticism and doubt exhibited by Jesus's own disciples when confronted with news of an empty tomb and the resurrection.

Participants were shown three specific passages from Scripture which underscore this initial doubt and skepticism among the disciples:

1. Matthew 28:16-17 recounts how, upon seeing Jesus in Galilee, some disciples worshipped Him, but others harbored doubts.
2. In Mark 16:12-13, it is narrated that Jesus appeared in another form to two disciples, but when they shared this with the rest, they were not believed.
3. Luke 24:10-11 tells of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women informing the apostles about the resurrection. However, their words were deemed an idle tale, and the apostles did not believe them.
4. John 20:25 highlights Thomas's explicit skepticism, stating that he would not believe in Jesus's resurrection unless he personally saw and touched the wounds.

This exploration of the disciples' initial doubt challenges the notion that ancient people were inherently more credulous about miracles compared to individuals in the modern era.²¹ It sets the stage for a careful examination of the evidential basis supporting the reality of Jesus's resurrection.

Then the class began to explore the evidential support for the resurrection of Jesus Christ being the most plausible explanation for what occurred after His death and burial. The teaching focused on establishing the historical reality of Jesus's crucifixion and the subsequent evidence for the empty tomb.

²¹ Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: Image, 2016), 180.

The discussion began by contextualizing Jesus's crucifixion within the Roman practice of using it as a method of execution, particularly targeting individuals from the lower class, slaves, rebellious soldiers, and those accused of treason. Historical accounts, including those from Josephus and Tacitus, were cited to emphasize the widespread and torturous nature of crucifixion during that time.²²

Habermas and Licona's argument presented the evidence supporting Jesus's crucifixion, pointing to its consistent recording in all four Gospels and corroborating accounts from non-Christian sources like Josephus, Tacitus, and Lucian of Samosata.²³ The Talmud's reference to Jesus being "hanged" on the eve of Passover was also highlighted as another historical confirmation.²⁴

Moving to the empty tomb, the class explored the substantial evidence supporting this argument. Habermas indicated that around 75 percent of scholars specializing in the subject acknowledge the reality of the empty tomb.²⁵ The class then began in an in-depth examination of two specific arguments supporting the empty tomb which are enemy verification, and female testimony.²⁶

Class 7

The class commenced with a review of the previous class with a focus on the evidence presented in support of the resurrection of Jesus which included the reality of

²² Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 48, Kindle.

²³ Lucian of Samosata, *The Death of Peregrine* 11-13, quoted in Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), Kindle.

²⁴ b. Sanh. 43a (probably late second century). Unless otherwise indicated, all citations from the Talmud are from *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. and trans. Isidore Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935-1952), cited in Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 257.

²⁵ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 69.

²⁶ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 69-73.

his crucifixion and the empty tomb. Then a continuation of the evidence in support of the resurrection commenced.

The first piece of evidence explored was the significance of women discovering the empty tomb and the resurrected Jesus first. Participants studied the work of Brant Pitre, in which he argues that it would be unlikely for the disciples to attribute such a crucial event to a female disciple like Mary Magdalene if they intended to convince others because, in the first century AD, women's testimony was generally considered unreliable. Such an argument is supported in the Gospels where some male disciples initially dismissed the women's account of Jesus's resurrection.

The argument for the empty tomb was further supported by enemy admission, as adversaries of Jesus indirectly acknowledged the tomb's emptiness. This support, derived from non-Christian sources, adds weight to the evidence and negates the possibility of the tomb still containing Jesus's body.²⁷ Early critics accused Jesus's disciples of stealing the body, indicating that the tomb was empty and necessitating an alternative explanation.²⁸

The class then delved into the eyewitness accounts of the resurrected Jesus, mainly from Jesus's disciples. This evidence was supported by nine early and independent sources, categorized into the testimony of Paul, oral traditions within the early church, and written works from the early church.²⁹

Furthermore, the class explored the transformation of Paul from an overseer of the first martyrdom of a Christian in Acts 7 to becoming a church planter and predominant inspired author of the New Testament after his encounter with the resurrected Jesus in Acts 9. Additionally, the course examined the evolution of the

²⁷ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 71.

²⁸ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 71.

²⁹ Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 50.

Apostle Peter, transitioning from a fearful denier of his affiliation with Jesus before His death to a courageous proclaimer of the Gospel and adept responder to critics' assertions in Acts 2 following his encounter with the resurrected Jesus. These multiple sources contribute to a compelling case for the disciples' claim of seeing the resurrected Jesus.

Class 8

The final class served as a comprehensive review of the previous classes. Time was spent reinforcing the divine mandate for Christians to engage in apologetics, the importance of the Classical apologetic approach, and the evidence supporting the Christian faith through theistic arguments and historical evidence surrounding the reliability of the Bible, Jesus's claim to divinity, and the evidence supporting His resurrection.

Conclusion

The execution of the ministry project unfolded as outlined throughout the span of 8 weeks. Following the conclusion of this eight-week implementation phase, the evaluations and surveys completed by participants were collected for thorough analysis. The ensuing chapter delves into a comprehensive discussion of the outcomes derived from this analysis.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive assessment of the project's efficacy in fulfilling its intended purpose. An evaluation of the project's outcomes was conducted to determine the extent to which its objectives were reached. Furthermore, a thorough analysis of the project's strengths and weaknesses were undertaken along with theological and personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The primary objective of the project was to train the members of Grace Fellowship: A Church for all Nations to emerge as proficient Christian apologists within the secular landscape of West Palm Beach, Florida. This objective was successfully realized through the completion of a structured curriculum consisting of eight 90-minute classes.

Throughout these classes, participants were systematically equipped with compelling reasons for why all Christians should train to be effective apologists. The curriculum focused on providing participants with rational arguments supporting the existence of God and presenting an extensive array of historical evidence affirming the historicity of the New Testament and the life of Jesus Christ.

By instilling in participants, the ability to articulate theistic arguments and effectively communicate the historical foundation of Christianity, the project prepared them to adhere to the command found in 1 Peter 3:15. This biblical directive emphasizes the importance of believers being always ready to offer a rationale for the hope that they possess to anyone who seeks understanding.

The success of the project is marked by the accomplishment of its goals through the completion of the eight classes. Participants emerged equipped with a robust understanding of Christian apologetics, armed with sound reasoning, and poised to fulfill the scriptural mandate of effectively communicating the foundations of their faith.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The project aimed to achieve its objectives through three goals, and this section assesses the achievement of each one.

GFCWPB Apologetic Assessment

The first goal was to assess the current Christian apologetic knowledge of GFCWPB members as it relates to apologetic terms, theistic arguments, and the historical reliability of the Bible and Jesus Christ. To establish the initial knowledge baseline prior to beginning the project, I administered a pre-assessment survey. A total of sixty-three pre-assessment surveys were collected. The pre-assessment survey was considered successful when at least twelve GFCWPB members returned the survey as this class was promoted as one of the many small group opportunities on Wednesday nights. The pre-assessment survey focused on the confidence level of participants in articulating an understanding of Christian apologetics and the classical method of apologetics, along with communicating theistic arguments and providing sound evidential reasoning for their trust in the Bible and Jesus. The pre-assessment survey revealed an average score of 4.67 on a Likert scale of 1 through 6 of confidence in defining Christian apologetics.¹ The average significantly declined over the next seven questions that focused on the classical method of apologetics, theistic arguments, and providing evidential reasons for their trust in the Bible and Jesus, with an average score of 1.32.²

¹ See appendix 3.

² See appendix 3.

I was not surprised to see a high average rating for understanding Christian apologetics in the mid-week class, as the definition and concept of the term were clearly communicated during the promotion of the class. However, I was not alarmed by the low number of individuals who understood the classical method, theistic arguments, and arguments for the historical reliability of the Bible and Jesus, as this is the first time a class on this topic has been offered at GFC.

Develop and Implement the Curriculum

The second goal was to develop and implement a curriculum to increase the Christian Apologetic knowledge and confidence of GFCWPB members in communicating theistic arguments, the evidence supporting the historical reliability of the New Testament, Jesus's claim of divinity, His crucifixion and resurrection. This goal was accomplished through the development and subsequent implementation of the curriculum as part of a class that met over the course of eight Wednesdays. The curriculum consisted of a teaching manuscript, presentation slides, and fill-in-the-blank listening guides for each participant. Additionally, the presentation slides and listening guides were made available via Google Classroom.

A post-assessment survey was conducted at its conclusion to assess the effectiveness of the eight-week curriculum and determine if this goal was met. This post-survey replicated the questions from the pre-survey, utilizing the same six-point Likert scale to gauge participants' growth. Throughout the eight weeks, an average attendance of fifty-six was recorded, and forty-eight post-surveys were collected. Notably, confidence levels in relation to all statements experienced a significant increase. For instance, statement 1 improved from 4.67 to 5.94, marking a 27 percent increase.

Additionally, statements 2 through 8 collectively rose from 1.32 to 5.72 on average, representing a remarkable 333 percent increase.³

Enhancing Apologetic Effectiveness

The third objective aimed to enhance the confidence and proficiency of GFCWPB members in presenting logical arguments affirming God’s existence, the historical reliability of the New Testament, and the validity of Jesus’s assertions regarding divinity, as well as the evidence supporting His crucifixion and resurrection. A post-assessment survey was conducted at its conclusion to assess the effectiveness of the eight-week class and determine if this goal was met. This post-survey replicated the questions from the pre-survey, utilizing the same six-point Likert scale to gauge participants’ growth. Throughout the eight weeks, an average attendance of fifty-six was recorded, and forty-eight post-surveys were collected. Notably, confidence levels in relation to all statements experienced a significant increase. For instance, statement 1 improved from 4.67 to 5.94, marking a 27 percent increase. Additionally, statements 2 through 8 collectively rose from 1.32 to 5.72 on average, representing a remarkable 333 percent increase.⁴

Strengths of the Project

Although the assessment of the goals indicates a certain level of success, the merits of this project extend well beyond quantitative measurements. Three noteworthy strengths of the project include its establishment of the need for the Classical Apologetic approach in an ever-increasing secular world that is America, its robust biblical and theological foundation, and the incorporation of the Grace Fellowship Apologetic Training Curriculum (GFATC).

³ See appendix 3.

⁴ See appendix 3.

One pivotal strength of the project involved instilling in participants a profound awareness of the imperative to be well-versed in employing the Classical Apologetic method. This crucial need was substantiated through a comprehensive educational approach, enlightening participants about the prevailing secular culture that continues to shape their daily lives. The educational process included a thought-provoking exploration of a disconcerting study, which underscored a noteworthy trend: a substantial shift among practicing Christians toward atheism and agnosticism. This compelling revelation prompted participants to grapple with the urgency of acquiring the skills necessary to construct convincing arguments supporting the existence of God and to provide compelling evidential reasoning affirming God as the divine entity within the context of Christianity. In this way, participants not only acknowledged the need for apologetic proficiency but also comprehended the vital role it plays in addressing the challenges posed by a shifting cultural landscape.

The second crucial strength of the project involved a comprehensive exploration of God as an apologetic example in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament, providing participants with a nuanced understanding of the rich apologetic tradition embedded within the Scriptures. Commencing with an in-depth analysis of Jesus, participants delved into the significant commissioning outlined in Matthew 28, wherein believers are directed to “observe all He commanded,” implicitly incorporating an obligation to emulate Jesus as an apologist. This exploration extended to a thorough examination of the Scriptures portraying Jesus as an effective apologist through employing witness testimony, miracles, and logical arguments to convincingly communicate the truth behind His claims.

Subsequently, the focus shifted to the Old Testament, where participants engaged with Scriptures illuminating God’s role as an apologetic example. Noteworthy instances such as God providing demonstrable evidence of being the one true God of the universe through interactions with chosen leaders like Elijah in 1 Kings 18, Gideon in

Judges 6:30-40, and Moses in Exodus 4 were scrutinized. This multifaceted exploration not only broadened participants' perspectives on the historical roots of apologetics but also prompted thoughtful reflections on the unexplored concept of God and Jesus as apologetic exemplars.

Remarkably, participants expressed that the notion of God and Jesus serving as apologetic examples had not been previously contemplated, emphasizing that this revelation significantly reinforced their conviction regarding the imperative need to cultivate proficiency in defending the Christian faith. This comprehensive examination not only deepened their theological insights but also underscored the timeless relevance of apologetics as an integral aspect of Christian discipleship.

The GFATC was exceptional in several ways. One of its noteworthy strengths was its content. The curriculum was designed to motivate students to become apologists and equip them with the necessary skills to do so effectively. Specifically, chapters 2 and 3 were transferred into teaching form, where students were encouraged to grow as apologists by understanding and communicating both the common logical arguments for God's existence and the evidence supporting this God being the God of Christianity.

What made the curriculum stand out was its unique combination of rich biblical and theological exploration of apologetics along with the tangible evidence supporting the veracity of Christianity. This approach helped students to grow in their understanding of Classical Christian Apologetics, while also equipping them to apply it effectively in their everyday lives. The curriculum was able to demonstrate the relevance of apologetics to everyday life and allowed students to see how they could use it to defend their faith in a practical way.

Overall, the Grace Fellowship Apologetic Training Curriculum (GFATC) was exceptional in how it equipped students to take the two-step apologetic approach to defending their faith. The combination of rich biblical and theological exploration, coupled with tangible evidence, allowed students to grow in their understanding of

Classical Christian Apologetics and equipped them to apply it effectively in their daily lives.

Weaknesses of the Project

The project had some noteworthy weaknesses that need to be addressed to improve its effectiveness. One of the main issues was the length of each class, which was scheduled for ninety minutes but often extended beyond that due to the amount of material being covered and the size of the class. This caused a strain on both me, the teacher, and the students, resulting in lower engagement and retention of the material. Considering this, it would be prudent to increase the number of class meetings from 8 to 12 and reduce the class time to 60 minutes. This will allow for a more manageable pace and ensure that each topic is covered thoroughly without compromising on time.

Another issue was the large class size, which added to the challenge of keeping the class within the allotted time frame. With more students, it became difficult for me to provide individual attention to each participant, resulting in a less personalized and engaging learning experience. It would be helpful to cap the class size at twenty to address this. This would allow the teacher to engage with each participant more effectively and increase the likelihood of participants retaining the material.

By increasing the number of class meetings to 12, reducing the class time to 60 minutes, and capping the class size at 20, the project can be improved significantly, resulting in a more effective and engaging learning experience for all participants.

Due to the large size of the class and the limited number of classes, the opportunity to engage in role-playing and practice articulating theistic arguments and evidential support for the truthfulness of Christianity was unfortunately eliminated. This hindered participants from gaining the experience that leads to the confidence to effectively communicate and defend their beliefs. As a result, they may have missed out on valuable opportunities to develop their critical thinking and persuasive communication

abilities, which are essential for success in apologetics. It is crucial to ensure that future classes provide sufficient time and resources for participants to engage in these important activities.

In conclusion, while the project exhibited notable strengths in cultivating awareness of apologetics and exploring biblical and theological foundations, it faced significant challenges that demand attention for enhanced effectiveness. Addressing these weaknesses will contribute to a more effective and engaging learning experience for all participants, aligning with the overarching goal of fostering proficiency in Classical Christian Apologetics.

What I Would Do Differently

After carefully reviewing the identified weaknesses within the course, several strategic adjustments have been identified as necessary to enhance the instructional approach. One crucial modification is expanding the course duration from eight classes to twelve classes while reducing the length of each class period from 90 minutes to 60 minutes. The aim of this adjustment is to create a more effective and engaging learning experience for all participants.

This proposed change addresses a specific challenge that a subset of participants faced, particularly among the twelve individuals over age 65. The extended 90-minute class periods posed a significant engagement hurdle for these participants, highlighting the necessity for a more tailored approach to accommodate diverse learning needs. By shortening the class duration, the intent is to create a more manageable and focused learning environment, ensuring sustained participant engagement throughout the session.

Furthermore, this adjustment aims to optimize the cognitive load and attention span of participants, fostering an environment conducive to effective learning. The potential benefits of this modification extend beyond the challenges posed by age,

impacting the entire participant cohort by mitigating fatigue and enhancing overall receptivity to the course material.

Ultimately, this nuanced adjustment in the course structure aligns with the overarching goal of the project to equip participants with a comprehensive understanding of apologetics. By acknowledging and addressing the specific challenges faced by certain demographic groups, the proposed adjustment aims to create an inclusive and adaptable learning environment, maximizing the impact and effectiveness of the course for participants of diverse backgrounds and ages.

Lastly, I would make time for participants to effectively practice the articulation of theistic arguments and evidential support for the truthfulness of the Christian faith. This missed opportunity prevented the participants from gaining a deeper understanding of the subject matter and developing their communication skills in this area. The lack of role-playing activities also prevented the participants from engaging with the material more interactive and immersive, which could have enhanced their learning experience and improved their ability to apply the concepts in real-world situations.

In conclusion, a careful review of the course's weaknesses has prompted strategic adjustments to enhance the instructional approach. The key modification involves extending the course from eight to twelve classes while shortening each class period from 90 to 60 minutes, aiming to create a more effective and engaging learning experience for all participants. This change specifically addresses the challenge faced by participants aged over 65, for whom extended class periods posed engagement hurdles. By tailoring the approach to diverse learning needs and optimizing cognitive load, this adjustment seeks to foster a focused learning environment.

Theological Reflections

Engaging in theological reflection has been integral to every stage of this project's development, prompting a profound consideration of the theological underpinnings that define Christian beliefs. The initial reflection underscores the theological significance of recognizing Jesus as God incarnate—a central tenet of Christianity. This belief transcends viewing Jesus merely as a wise teacher or moral leader, affirming Him as the divine Son of God, a concept firmly rooted in biblical narratives that portray Jesus as the Word made flesh, bringing salvation from sin and death.

A subsequent theological reflection delves into the profound importance of Jesus's sacrificial death on the Cross—an ultimate act of love and selflessness, redeeming believers from sin. This sacrificial act serves as a demonstration of God's boundless love and the lengths to which He goes to reconcile humanity to Himself. Trusting in Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb on the Cross becomes a crucial belief for salvation, emphasizing the profound impact of this pivotal event on the Christian faith.

The final theological reflection centers on the resurrection of Jesus, an indispensable belief for salvation that symbolizes the ultimate triumph over sin and death. This transformative event highlights God's power to conquer death, offering eternal life to those who trust in Jesus as God incarnate, the crucified Savior, and the resurrected Lord. Together, these core beliefs distinguish Christianity from other religions and worldviews, encapsulating the essence of the Christian faith in Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior, and the risen Lord.

In the development of the curriculum, the theological reflections reaffirmed the necessary constructing of a clear and compelling evidential case from a Christological perspective. Identifying and trusting Jesus as God, the crucified Savior, and the resurrected Lord constitute indispensable beliefs for salvation. It was crucial for participants in the class to gain a robust understanding of Jesus's identity and the

implications of “faith in Jesus.” This knowledge equips them to effectively communicate these profound truths to their neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family.

Personal Reflections

Undoubtedly, this doctoral project has posed the most significant academic challenge I have encountered to date. Engaging in meticulous study and research amidst the continual demands of life, that included notable seasons of pronounced family, teaching, coaching, and pastoral responsibilities that often took precedence over the project, made it remarkably challenging to allocate time for research and writing.

As a husband, father, high school basketball coach, teacher, chaplain, and pastor, there were moments when I questioned if I had the bandwidth to complete the project. Nevertheless, I persevered, recognizing that my wife and children made significant sacrifices as well, transforming the completion of this project into a family accomplishment.

Amid discouraging and overwhelming seasons, I found myself compelled to reflect on the potential significance of this project for the kingdom of God. You see, when I began my doctoral studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, I had just been forced to resign from my pastoral position because I had stood against the heresy of Kenotic Christology, a belief that Jesus laid aside some of His divine attributes when He became man.⁵ Therefore, developing a curriculum that builds an evidential case for His rightful biblical identity became a deeply personal endeavor.

Furthermore, a concern for my own lost family members and friends loomed large in my mind, serving as a persistent reminder that this project may hold eternal significance. Most significantly, throughout the journey, God sustained and encouraged me through the Scriptures. His unwavering strength enabled me to pour passion and

⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 551-52.

energy into the extensive research, writing, and teaching associated with this project. I am confident that the curriculum will contribute to the kingdom in the days to come, and I am grateful for the sense of accomplishment and relief my family feels as the project reaches its conclusion. Above all, my fervent prayer is that God finds pleasure in this labor of love and sees it as a work of worship that honors and glorifies His name.

Conclusion

This doctoral project has been meticulously designed to revolve around the core objective of empowering believers to advance their proficiency in Classical Christian Apologetics, positioning it as an integral component of their comprehensive discipleship training. The overarching goal is to cultivate individuals who emerge as adept and effective defenders of the Christian faith. The imperative nature of this apologetic training becomes increasingly evident in the contemporary landscape of an ever-expanding secular world, where the ability to articulate and defend one's faith is not just relevant but crucial.

In envisioning the impact of this project, my aspiration is that both past and future participants are not only equipped with the requisite knowledge but are also empowered to confidently, clearly, gently, and respectfully articulate sound arguments for the existence of God. Additionally, the training seeks to enable them to present compelling evidence affirming Jesus as the exclusive pathway to eternal life. This dual emphasis on confidence and clarity in apologetic engagement reflects the project's commitment to nurturing individuals who can navigate the complexities of contemporary discourse with poise and conviction.

In an era marked by increasing skepticism and diverse worldviews, the need for believers to stand firm in their faith with a well-grounded understanding of apologetics is paramount. The hope is that participants, armed with the insights gained from this project, will not only uphold the tenets of their faith but also engage in

meaningful dialogues that contribute to the broader discourse on Christianity. Ultimately, the project endeavors to leave a lasting impact by fostering a community of believers who, through their knowledge of Classical Christian Apologetics, become stalwart defenders of the Christian faith in a world that increasingly demands a thoughtful and well-reasoned defense of the gospel.

APPENDIX 1
PRE-SURVEY

This appendix is the pre-assessment survey used to measure the apologetic knowledge of participants as they began the eight-week course.

Pre-Survey

Agreement to Participate

This research aims to assess your understanding and beliefs regarding apologetics, specifically focusing on why you believe in Biblical Inerrancy and the moral, scientific, historical, and archaeological teachings derived from Scripture. Joshua Keith Robinson is conducting this research as part of a ministry project. You will be asked to answer a series of questions both before and after the project. Rest assured that any information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality, and your name will not be associated with your responses. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you have the freedom to withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project. The methodology employed adheres to the ethics protocols set by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Name _____ I agree to participate I do not agree to participate.

Section I: Demographics

Directions: Answer the following questions by filling in the blank space provided.

1. What is your age?
 - A. 18-24 ____
 - B. 25-34 ____
 - C. 35-44 ____
 - D. 45-54 ____
 - E. 55-64 ____
 - F. 65 and over ____
2. Do you consider yourself a Christian?
 - A. Yes ____
 - B. No ____
3. Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior?
 - A. Yes ____
 - B. No ____
4. How long have you been a member of Grace Fellowship Church?
 - A. 0-5 years ____
 - B. 6-10 years ____
 - C. 11-15 years ____
 - D. 16-20 years ____
 - E. 21 or more years ____

Directions: Answer the following questions by placing a check mark in the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,

AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

#	Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5	I understand the meaning of Christian apologetics.						
6	I understand the meaning of Classical Christian Apologetics.						
7	I can communicate the Moral Law Argument for the existence of God.						
8	I can communicate the Kalam Cosmological Argument for the existence of God.						
9	I can communicate the Teleological Argument for the existence of God.						
10	I can communicate the historical evidence supporting the historical reliability of the New Testament.						
11	I can communicate the historical evidence supporting Jesus Christ's claim of deity.						
12	I can communicate the evidence supporting Jesus Christ's supernatural bodily resurrection.						

APPENDIX 2
POST SURVEY

This appendix comprises the post-assessment survey used for gauging the growth in apologetic knowledge among participants in the eight-week course.

Post-Survey

Agreement to Participate

The purpose of this research is to assess your current understanding and beliefs regarding apologetics, specifically focusing on why you believe in Biblical Inerrancy and the moral, scientific, historical, and archaeological teachings derived from Scripture. Joshua Keith Robinson is conducting this research as part of a ministry project. You will be asked to answer a series of questions both before and after the project. Rest assured that any information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality, and your name will not be associated with your responses. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you have the freedom to withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project. The methodology employed adheres to the ethics protocols set by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Name _____ I agree to participate I do not agree to participate.

Section I: Demographics

Directions: Answer the following questions by filling in the blank space provided.

1. What is your age?
 - A. 18-24 ____
 - B. 25-34 ____
 - C. 35-44 ____
 - D. 45-54 ____
 - E. 55-64 ____
 - F. 65 and over ____
2. Do you consider yourself a Christian?
 - A. Yes ____
 - B. No ____
3. Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior?
 - A. Yes ____
 - B. No ____
4. How long have you been a member of Grace Fellowship Church?
 - A. 0-5 years ____
 - B. 6-10 years ____
 - C. 11-15 years ____
 - D. 16-20 years ____
 - E. 21 or more years ____

Directions: Answer the following questions by placing a check mark in the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,

AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

#	Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5	I understand the meaning of Christian apologetics.						
6	I understand the meaning of Classical Christian Apologetics.						
7	I can communicate the Moral Law Argument for the existence of God.						
8	I can communicate the Kalam Cosmological Argument for the existence of God.						
9	I can communicate the Teleological Argument for the existence of God.						
10	I can communicate the historical evidence supporting the historical reliability of the New Testament.						
11	I can communicate the historical evidence supporting Jesus Christ's claim of deity.						
12	I can communicate the evidence supporting Jesus Christ's supernatural bodily resurrection.						

APPENDIX 3

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY RESPONSES

The subsequent appendix presents an in-depth examination of Likert-scale responses obtained from both pre-assessment and post-assessment surveys, delineating the percentage augmentation for each statement as well as the overall percentage increase.

Statement	Pre-assessment	Post-assessment	Difference	Percent Increase
5. I understand the meaning of Christian apologetics.	4.67	5.94	1.27	27.19%
6. I understand the meaning of Classical Christian Apologetics.	1.25	5.90	4.65	372%
7. I can communicate the Moral Law Argument for the existence of God.	1.28	5.69	4.41	344.53%
8. I can communicate the Kalam Cosmological Argument for the existence of God.	1.15	5.58	4.43	385.22%
9. I can communicate the Teleological Argument for the existence of God.	1.15	5.56	4.41	326%
10. I can communicate the historical evidence supporting the historical reliability of the New Testament.	1.75	5.77	4.02	229.71%
11. I can communicate the historical evidence supporting Jesus Christ's claim of deity.	1.22	5.72	4.50	368.85%
12. I can communicate the evidence supporting Jesus Christ's supernatural bodily resurrection.	1.46	5.81	4.35	297.95%

APPENDIX 4

T-TEST ANALYSIS

The following appendix contains the t-test analysis described in goal three. The analysis measures the curriculum's effectiveness after the apologetics curriculum. The t-test analysis showed a very low statistical variance, thereby proving that the curriculum's effectiveness was both statistically reliable and significant.

T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	1.74125	5.74625
Variance	1.44024107	0.01885536
Observations	8	8
Pearson Correlation	0.62610478	–
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	–
df	7	–
t stat	-10.12084	–
P(T<=t) one-tail	9.8822E-06	–
t Critical one-tail	1.89457861	–
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.9764E-05	–
t Critical two-tail	2.36462425	–

APPENDIX 5

LISTENING GUIDE EXAMPLE

Grace Fellowship Apologetic Training Curriculum

Basics of Christian Apologetics

Class #1

A. The Biblical Mandate for Discipleship

Matthew 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

B. The Biblical Mandate for Apologetics

1 Peter 3:15

But in your hearts **revere** Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer** (apologia) to everyone who asks you **to give the reason for the hope that you have.** But do this with **gentleness** and **respect.**

C. Defining Christian Apologetics?

D. Three Marks of an Effective Christian Apologist

1. **Reverence** for Christ (CHARACTER)
2. Always **prepared** to provide sound reasons (KNOWLEDGE)
3. Reasons seasoned with **gentleness**. (WISDOM)

E. What are the three primary purposes of being an effective Christian Apologist?

1. **Glorify** God.
2. **Bolster** faith.⁶
3. **Birth** faith⁷

F. God’s Apologetic Example

1. 1 Kings 18

⁶ Five Views on Apologetics, 11 ² Five Views on Apologetics, 11

⁷ Five Views on Apologetics, 11 ² Five Views on Apologetics, 11

2. Isaiah 41

3. Judges 6

4. Exodus 4

G. Jesus's Apologetic Example

1. Witness Testimony

2. Miracles

3. Reason

4. His Resurrected Body

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING MEMBERS OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP A CHURCH FOR ALL NATIONS TO BE EFFECTIVE CHRISTIANS APOLOGISTS IN WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy P. Jones

This doctoral project focuses on empowering members of Grace Fellowship in West Palm Beach, Florida, to become proficient Classical Christian apologists. The initiative involves the development of a comprehensive eight-week apologetic curriculum, enabling participants to articulate logical arguments for the existence of God and the evidence supporting the triune God of the Bible. Chapter 1 provides a thorough exposition of the project's context and rationale. Chapters 2 and 3 offer exegetical, cultural, and methodological justification for the undertaking. The analysis of Matthew 28:16-20 and 1 Peter 3:15 in chapter 2 underscores the biblical support for integrating apologetic training into discipleship, drawing on apologetic examples from God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New. Chapter 3 underscores the importance of using the Classical Apologetic method in addressing the growing secularization in Southeastern Florida. Chapter 4 outlines the implementation of the apologetic curriculum, while chapter 5 conducts a data analysis based on the weeks of implementation. During the eight-week course, an average attendance of fifty-six participants was maintained, with forty-eight post-surveys collected. A significant increase in confidence levels across all statements was observed.

VITA

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