

“Giving a Defense and Defending the Faith:  
Examining Historical Approaches to Apologetic Evangelism”

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As theologians, perhaps we could learn several lessons from the war in Iraq going on today. First, sometimes a significant war is going on in the world, which does not affect our daily lives very much, and of which we may be almost completely unaware were we not to listen to broadcasts of the news. Second, although a Muslim minority does exist in the U.S., various parts of the world face the Muslim foes on a daily basis in intense guerilla warfare.

Similarly, unless we are in tune to the Bible and involved in initiative evangelism, we as U.S. Christians may be completely ignorant of the war for souls that is going on all around us. Unless we, our pastor, or our church are directly involved in confrontational evangelism, we can be completely unaware that there is going on in the heavenlies a desperate war for the souls of men. Likewise, some parts of the world are more in tune to the war going on for souls, and just how desperate is the situation. Those parts of the world where the war for souls is most heated, and where Christians are taking the most casualties, are also those parts of the world that have faced much intimidation from the Evil One. We dare not isolate ourselves in our American subculture, where freedom of speech has won the day for almost 400 years.

Pilgrims and immigrants coming to America from Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries knew the tyrannies of the European states. Some were the children of eye

witnesses of the hundreds of heretics being burned at the stake under the brief reign of Mary I of England, aka “Bloody Mary” (1553-1558). Others were Huguenots and their children who had faced the brutality of Louis XIV and his wife Catherine de Medici, which included the St. Bartholomew Day Massacre on August 24, 1572 when between 50,000-100,000 Huguenots were killed, and by which the queen desecrated the pretended marriage of her daughter, Marguerite, to the Huguenot prince, Henry of Navarre. No, European history has not always been open to freedom of conscience, nor its corollary, freedom of speech.

Similarly today, some around the world heard news of the bloody massacre of three Christians on April 18, 2007 in Malatya, Turkey. Five Muslim youth pretended to be interested in a Bible study in order to “defend” the reputation of Muhammed by butchering a Turkish Pastor, a Turkish Christian worker, and a German Bible translator. Islam’s is still an apologetic by the sword.

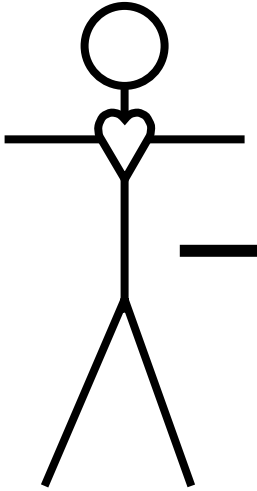
Our question is this: which scenario provides the Christian with a more realistic picture of the spiritual battle for souls, the three martyrs in Turkey or the suburban ease many of us enjoy in the U.S.? The theme of this paper begins with the thought that Solomon was correct when he wrote:

“It is better to go to a house of mourning  
Than to go to a house of feasting,  
Because that is the end of every man,  
And the living takes *it* to heart” (Eccl 7:2).

We may learn more about apologetic evangelism from the places where the church has had its struggles in the past, than from the places where the Gospel has been triumphant.

It was to the apparently wealthy Corinthian church that the Apostle Paul used

## CARNAL EVANGELISM



### Special Method of Communication

Cleverness of speech, 1:17  
 Superiority of speech, 2:1  
 [Superiority] of wisdom, 2:1  
 Persuasive words of wisdom, 2:3

### Special Adaptation of the Message to Human Wisdom

Wisdom of the world, 1:21  
 Wisdom, 1:22  
 Wisdom of men, 2:5  
 Wisdom of this age, 2:6  
 Wisdom of the rulers of this age who are passing away, 2:6

### Special Sign Accompanying Communication

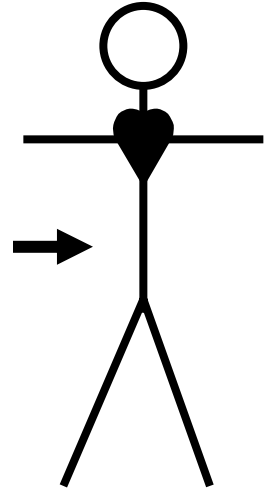
Signs (miracles or service), 1:22

### Outward Symbol of Salvation

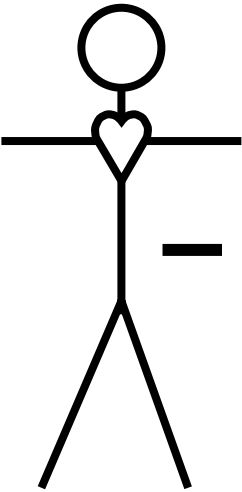
Baptism (adding ordinances or sacraments), 1:17

### Result

Cross of Christ made void, 1:17  
 Faith rests on the wisdom of men, 2:5



## SPIRITUAL EVANGELISM



### Terms Emphasizing Method

Evangelize, 1:17  
 Preaching, 1:23; proclaiming, 2:1; speaking, 2:6

### Terms Emphasizing Message

Cross of Christ, 1:17; Word of the cross, 1:18  
 Foolishness of the message preached, 1:21  
 Christ crucified, 1:23; Testimony of God, 2:1  
 Jesus Christ and Him crucified, 2:2  
 My message and my preaching, 2:3  
 Wisdom, not of this age... but of God, 2:6-7

### Terms Emphasizing God's Sufficiency

Wisdom of God, 1:21, 24; 2:5

### Terms Emphasizing God's Working

The power of God, 1:18, 24  
 Foolishness of God, 1:25; Weakness of God, 1:25  
 Demonstration of the Spirit and power, 2:5

### Terms Emphasizing Man's Response

Stumbling block, 1:23  
 Foolishness, 1:18, 23

### Terms Emphasizing Results

Are being saved, 1:18; To save, 1:21  
 Righteousness, and sanctification, and wisdom, 1:30  
 Faith rest in the power of God, 2:5

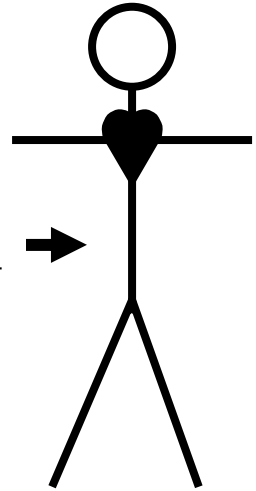


Figure 1: Two Approaches to Evangelism—A Look at 1 Corinthians 1-2.<sup>1</sup>

warfare imagery to provide an apologetic for his aggressive evangelism style. Some in the Corinthian church accused Paul of walking according to the flesh (2 Cor 10:2). Paul,

<sup>1</sup>Taken from Thomas P. Johnston, *Charts for a Theology of Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman, 2007), 32. Used by permission.

however, shot back, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Cor 10:3-4). It was rather the Corinthians who were walking according to the flesh by relishing in the miraculous powers of Christ (“I am of Christ”; “Jews ask for signs”), or by reveling in the academic prowess of Apollos (“I am of Apollos; “Greeks search for wisdom”), but Paul did neither.<sup>2</sup> Rather, Paul preached “Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 22-24). In this passage, Paul laid out for us two opposing approaches to evangelism, carnal and spiritual (See Figure 1). It is important for the theologian and the apologetic evangelist to remember the existence of carnal evangelism, as well as the sins of the mind (Eph 2:3), the boastful pride of life (1 Jn 2:16), and the arrogance that comes with knowledge (1 Cor 8:1). The weapons of our warfare, however, are not of the flesh, not even from the carnal mind.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, it may prove helpful to remember that France was privy to the largest number of martyrs for the Christian faith by other so-called Christians from the time of the Evangelist Henry of Lausanne to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era (1135-1789 A.D). This same country prides itself in its intellect. Theirs is the University of Paris and the Sorbonne; theirs was Peter Abelard (1079-1142); theirs was Peter the Lombard (1100-1160), Archbishop of Paris with his Book of Sentences; theirs was also Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), that great Angelic Doctor, and his *Summa Theologica*, who dined with the king of France. On their soil lived and taught Erasmus (1466-1536)

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<sup>2</sup>No miracles were listed as a part of Paul’s ministry in Corinth in Acts 18.

<sup>3</sup>It would seem very likely that the transient and feeble nature of the words of men constitute the main message of the quote in 1 Peter 1:24-25.

and the Hebrew scholar Rashi (1040-1105). The Huguenots had to contend with the intellectualism of Bossuet (1627-1704), Voltaire (1694-1778), and even the antagonism of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662).<sup>4</sup> The 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Century French Albigenses were interred in walls of towns for their inability to clearly explain the Hypostatic Union, and for their disagreement with the ecclesial authority of the Roman church, or the divine nature of the host in the Eucharist. This last belief tagged them as Manicheans, as they did not believe that the *accidens* of the substance of the Eucharist could be holy. Likewise, Huguenots were burned at the stake for not accepting the tenets of the [tiny and prolonged] Council of Trent, and they suffered much from the pyrrhonic logic of the Jesuits.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Erasmus' *Enchiridion* was used as an apologetic to seek to convert the Reformed to Catholicism.<sup>6</sup> Reason was not a very good ally for French Protestants, whereas the Word of God was their comfort.

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<sup>4</sup>“Nous ne voulons donc pas que ceux que Dieu nous a commis s'emportent tellement dans la vue des exès des Jésuites, qu'ils oublient qu'ils sont leurs frères, qu'ils sont dans l'unité de l'Eglise, qu'ils sont membres de notre corps, et qu'ainsi nous avons intérêt à les conserver, au lieu que les hérétiques sont des membres retranchés qui composent un corps ennemi du nôtre; ce qui met une distance infinie entre eux; parce que le schisme est un si grand mal, que non seulement il est le plus grand des maux, mais qu'il ne peut y avoir aucun bien où il se trouve, selon les Pères de l'Eglise. ... Et enfin tous les saints ont toujours été unis en ce point, que les Calvinistes sont absolument sans excuse...” (Blaise Pascal, *Œuvres Complètes* [Macmillan, 1963], 483). Mt translation: “We do not want that those whom God has given us are carried away when they see the excess of the Jesuits, that they forget that they are our brothers, that they are in the unity of the Church, that they are members of our body, and because of this we have reason to conserve [unity] with them, instead the heretics are chopped off members who consist of a body that is an enemy to ours; which puts an infinite distance between them; because schism is such a great evil, that not only is it the greatest of all evils, but it is not possible that there be any good in it, according to the Fathers of the Church. ... And finally all the saints are always in unity on this point, that the Calvinists are absolutely without excuse....”

<sup>5</sup>One cannot afford to forget the passage in Ignatius Loyola's Rule for the Society of Jesus: “13. If we wish to be sure that we are right in all things, we should always be ready to accept this principle: I will believe that the white that I see is black if the hierarchical Church so defines it. For, I believe that between the Bridegroom, Christ our Lord, and the Bride, His Church, there is but one spirit, which governs and directs us for the salvation of our souls, for the same Spirit and Lord, who gave us the Ten Commandments, guides and governs our Holy Mother Church.” ([St.] Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, translated by Anthony Mottola; imprimatur, Cardinal Spellman [Garden City, NY: Image Books, Doubleday and Company, 1964], 140-41).

<sup>6</sup>“The French Catholics in the seventeenth century relied upon its message to convert Calvinists to the ancient faith” (John P. Dolan, Preface, in *The Essential Erasmus* [New York: Mentor, 1964], 24).

Somewhat as the Galatians began by the Spirit, and then sought to be perfected by the flesh, there seems to be a constant second generation drift toward intellectualism among Christians, to the detriment of the supernatural. Paul told the Galatians, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal 3:3). Having started by grace through faith in the Word of God (Luther’s three could be included here), are we now being perfected by human intellectual pursuits? Need we be reminded that the Stoics and Epicureans debated with Paul in Acts 17, having found his evangelizing Jesus and the resurrection to be idle discourse (σπερμολόγος). Luke’s language does not indicate that the Stoics and Epicureans were enjoying a kind conversation with Paul, they were challenged by him. Paul was evangelizing (εὐαγγελίζω) the death and resurrection of Christ, whereas they were disputing (συμβάλλω; lit. throwing back or volleying) with him. Ironically, Plato and Aristotle were said to hold the interpretive key of the Bible by Erasmus of Rotterdam.<sup>7</sup> The Stoics and Epicureans were aggressive with Paul. They “took” Paul and “brought” him to the Areopagus. The same word for “took” (ἐπιλαμβάνομαι) was used in preparation for and in Luke’s passion narrative three times (20:20, 26; 23:19). The similar aggressiveness is true for the strength of the word “brought” (ἄγω). For example, “Then the whole body of them arose and brought Him before Pilate” (Luke 23:1). While the only other use of these two words in one verse is of Barnabas bringing Saul before the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts

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<sup>7</sup>Thankfully, the names Stoic and Epicurean appear nowhere else in Scripture. We already have prominent theologians genuflecting to their teaching, such as Erasmus, “Literature shapes and invigorates the youthful character and prepares one marvelously well for understanding Holy Scripture, to pounce upon which with unscrubbed hands and feet is something akin to sacrilege. . . .

“However, just as divine Scripture bears no great fruit if you persist in clinging only to the literal sense, so the great poetry of Homer and Vergil is of no small benefit if you remember that this is all allegorical, a fact that no one who has but touched his lips with the wisdom of the ancients will deny. . . . I would prefer, too, that you follow the Platonists among the philosophers, because in most of their ideas and in their very manner of speaking they come nearest to the beauty of the prophets and the gospels” (*The Enchiridion of Erasmus*, Raymond Himelick, trans and ed [Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1970], 51).

9:27), there is a type of impatience on the part of Barnabas communicated in using such strong language. Acts 17:18-21 are often neglected in seeking to find a common ground between Paul and the supposed Natural Law expressed in the Sermon on Mars Hill, as we will discuss below.

But when the pendulum of revivalism swings back to the center, American Evangelicals remove their literalistic interpretation of Scripture and its corresponding revivalistic evangelism methodologies. Perhaps this is why Solomon repeated twice, “There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death” (Prov 14:12; 16:25; cf. Prov 3:5-6).

If intellectualism is our goal, perhaps the most intellectual culture in the recent Western world was that of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany. They originated and exported the university system. They were the propagators of theological intellectualism from Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) to Karl Barth (1886-1968). There is Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), with his Old Testament theories, and Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976), with his New Testament theories. There is still the language of Protestant higher learning. There is Tischendorf (1815-1874) and the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (German Bible Society) with its Hebrew *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and *Leningartensia*, its Nestle-Aland-Black-Martini-Metzger-Wikgren Greek New Testament, its Rahlfs Septuagint, and its Weber-Fischer-Gribomont-Sparks-Thiele Latin Vulgate [thus they control *all* of the original languages texts for the Western church!]. There are the immense archeological holdings in museums, as well as the numerous biblical and theological Zeitschrift. Ironically, there was also Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust. There is also the icy transcendentalism of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and the cold nihilism of

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). To any who have tried to evangelize in Germany, there exists a proud intellectualism which renders many a German mind deaf to the Gospel. The worship of the intellect has not been a friend of the Gospel in Germany.

What can we learn from the warfare for souls in these Continental countries? Having grown up in France, I lived in the midst of an intellectual and cultural pride (not myself being immune to it). In France I saw first hand the impact of intellectualism on the church and the work of the Gospel. Later, when I attended Wheaton College, I was shocked to learn that some in Evangelical academia had what seemed to be an unhealthy view of reason. Arthur Holmes, chair of Wheaton's philosophy department, was champion of "All truth is God's truth," a concept that seems obvious right at face value.<sup>8</sup> However, it has the result of raising empirical truth "equal" to the absolute truth of the Bible (John 17:17). It subtly usurps the absolute authority of the Bible by mixing it with truths found in the hard sciences and the social sciences.<sup>9</sup> Also Mark Noll, the Carolyn and Fred McManis Professor of Christian Thought, went on to write *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, where he opined that Evangelicals had "Manichean tendencies"—quite a statement for a Church historian to make!<sup>10</sup> That he wrote *Is the Reformation*

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<sup>8</sup>"In defending the faith we take back territory of the mind that is rightfully ours, or rather God's. All territory is God's. As Arthur Holmes said, 'All truth is God's truth'" (Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994], 22).

<sup>9</sup>It is for this reason that the Baptist Faith and Message states of the Bible, "It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter" (Baptist Faith and Message, 2000, Article 1).

<sup>10</sup>"To make room for Christian thought, evangelicals must also abandon the false disjunctions that their distinctives have historically encouraged. The cultivation of the mind for Christian reasons does not deny the appropriateness of activism, for example, but it does require activism to make room for study. Similarly, it is conversionism along with a consideration of lifelong spiritual development and trust in the Bible along with a critical use of wisdom from other sources (especially from the world that God made) that will lead to a better day. Modifying the evangelical tendency to Manichaeism may cost some of the single-minded enthusiasm of activism, but it will be worth it in order to be able to worship God with the mind" (Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 245).



*Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* in 2005,<sup>11</sup> and then went to teach church history at Notre Dame is not a surprise. It seems that the contemporary Evangelical mind in the U.S. had forgotten the lessons from Second Millennium French and 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century German history.

In fact, the predominant view of history taught at the time was that of the pendulum swinging back-and-forth. In this view, revivalism becomes a necessary (and yet embarrassing) readjustment to offset second generation antinomianism. The true or proper view, they surmise, becomes an undefined centrist view, somewhere between faith and reason.

How do these views impact one's approach to apologetics and its corollary, apologetic evangelism? In every way. It is for this reason that this paper attempts to take a fresh look at apologetics and apologetic evangelism. First, by defining terms. Second, by looking at key Bible passages. Third, by briefly noting methods of apologetic evangelism. If we do not allow the mind of Christ to inform our thinking via His Word, we may fall into the dangers of the rationalism of the Medieval French and the Post-Reformation Germans. It is important to understand what is apologetic evangelism, as well as to know what are its strengths and weaknesses in order to make the best use of it in persuading the lost and establishing the saved. We begin by noting fourteen uses of the concept of apologetics.

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<sup>11</sup>Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Designation</b>	<b>Biblical <i>Apologia 1</i></b>	<b>Biblical <i>Apologia 2</i></b>	<b>Justin Martyr's Defense of Christianity</b>	<b>Restoring Wayward Adherents</b>	<b>Mittelberg's Necessary <i>Preparatio Evangelica</i></b>	<b>Aquinas' Five Proofs of God's Existence</b>	<b>Finney's Moral Consistency</b>
<b>Pos- ture</b>	<b>Apologetics as Judicial Defense</b>				<b>Apologetics and Proclamation</b>		
<b>Expansion of Concept</b>	Emphasizing protection of the church from false teaching	Emphasizing a legal defense before judges	Proving benefit of Christianity through social pragmatics	Teaching the distinctive doctrines in order to reabsorb the wayward	As a necessary worldview precursor to sharing the gospel	Proving God's existence from nature and reason	Proving God's existence from morality
<b>Relation to Evangelism</b>	Tangential to evangelism, part of pastoral ministry	Result of evangelism and persecution	Sociological and rational proofs of benefits of Christian worldview	As synonymous to evangelism; to reincorporate the wayward	To assure that world-views are compatible prior to sharing	Rational or scientific proofs of the existence of God	Sociological proofs of cross-cultural morality
<b>Impact on Gospel Presentation</b>	Reasoned arguments do not add power to gospel	Allows gospel proclamation to rulers	Focus on sociological benefits of Christianity to prove the power of the gospel	Gospel presentation may be tangential, if focus is distinct church doctrines	Adds a necessary steps prior to sharing the gospel	Scientific proofs logically precede or replace the need for the gospel proclamation	Appeal to cultural anthropology to affirm truth claims of Bible
<b>Sample Proponents</b>	Primary NT uses of <i>apologia</i> (8 NT uses) and <i>apologeomai</i> (9 NT uses); Calvin's <i>Institutes</i> were written to Francis I, king of France		Justin Martyr, <i>Apology</i>	French Jesuits used apologetics to reintegrate Huguenots into their faith	Mark Mittelberg, <i>Building a Contagious Church</i>	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i>	Charles Finney, <i>Systematic Theology</i> (1878)

Figure 2: Fourteen Approaches to Apologetics, Part One.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Johnston, *Charts for a Theology of Evangelism*, 94. Used by permission.

8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Dialogue	Zacharias' Apologetic Approach	Pascal's Vacuum	Pascal's Wager	Kierkegaard's Leap of Faith	Harnack's and Herrmann's Social Gospel	More's <i>Utopia</i> and Schaff's <i>Theological Propædeutic</i>
Proclamation (cont.)		Apologetics and a Call to Commitment			Results-Oriented Approach	
Finding truth in another religion or worldview to show links with gospel	Finding points of relevance between culture and thought and the gospel (esp. moral argument)	An inner longing for something to satisfy a God-shaped void, need for joy, etc	Proving belief in God is worth the risk of a wager	Belief in God takes a leap of faith	Emphasizing Christian Education to improve society	Rational superiority of Christianity noted in a triumphalist sense
To provide relevant context for and content of gospel	Apologetics as introduction to and affirmation of main points of the gospel	Inner longing drives the person to seek out God in some way	Appeal to benefit of Christian worldview	Whereas belief in God cannot be logically proven, it takes a leap of faith	Education is the <i>preparatio</i> for gradual conversion	Christian presence will result in its triumph as a religious system
May frame the gospel in a way that is not compatible with Scripture	Points of relevance add credibility and power to the gospel; thus, power not vested in Bible's words?	Challenges to gospel presentation: 1) reason may usurp need for gospel; 2) preach God, not Christ	Appeal to man's reason to show benefit of (1) belief in God, and (2) Christianity	Appeal to the need for a "Leap of Faith"—Give God a try	Education convinces of superiority of Christian worldview	Evangelism as a passive response (1 Pet 3:15; passive arrogance)
Newbigin, <i>The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society</i> ; Vatican II, <i>Lumen Gentium</i>	Ravi Zacharias, "The Touch of Truth," in Carson, <i>Telling the Truth</i>	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> ; Blaise Pascal, <i>Pensées</i> ; C. S. Lewis, <i>Surprised by Joy</i>	Blaise Pascal, <i>Pensées</i>	Sören Kierkegaard, <i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i>	Adolf Harnack and Wilhelm Herrmann, <i>Essays on the Social Gospel</i>	Thomas More, <i>Utopia</i> , and Philip Schaff, <i>Theological Propædeutic</i>

Figure 3: Fourteen Approaches to Apologetics, Part Two.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 95. Used by permission.

## DEFINING TERMS

In my *Charts for a Theology of Evangelism*, I have postulated fourteen approaches to apologetics (Please see Figures 2 and 3). These fourteen points fall into four main categories: (I) Apologetics as Judicial Defense; (II) Apologetics and Proclamation; (III) Apologetics and Calls for Commitment; and (IV) Results-Oriented Approaches to Apologetics. (1) In the first point apologetics is used to prove something to someone. It is used to teach and establish the church in the faith, so that Christians do not go after false teachers. (2) Apologetics is used in the Bible to describe giving a defense before a secular judge. (3) The term apologetics has been used to describe Justin Martyr's defense of the faith to the Roman Emperor,<sup>14</sup> something similar to John Calvin's defense of the Reformed Faith written to King Francis I of France, as noted in the preface of his *Institutes*.<sup>15</sup> Also, (4) the term apologetics is used of Roman Catholics to describe their efforts in seeking to reconvert Protestants, Evangelicals, and the Orthodox to the Roman faith. Similarly, the term apologetics is also used in reference to proclamation. (5) Mark Mittelberg admonished the use of apologetics as a necessary preparation for the Gospel in his *Building a Contagious Church*.<sup>16</sup> (6) Aquinas' five proof for the existence of God have been used to show (a) the reasonableness of Christianity, and (b) as

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<sup>14</sup>“To the Emperor Titus Ælius Adrianus Antonius Pius Augustus Cæsar . . . I, Justin, the son of Priscus Neapolis in Palestine, present this address and petition on behalf of those of all nations who are being unjustly treated and wantonly abused, myself being one of them” (“The First Apology of Justin Martyr [circa 152],” from Professor Wills, “A Reader for “Introduction to Church History, Part I,” The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 6).

<sup>15</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; trans by Henry Beveridge (London: Clarke, 1957).

<sup>16</sup>“Value #4: People Need Answers. Today people require more than to merely have the gospel declared to them. They also need to have it *defined* and *defended*. . . . If we want to help people move toward Christ, we are going to have to proactively address the issues and show that the Christian faith is built on a foundation of truth and can be trusted wholeheartedly” (Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 42-43).

validating proofs of Christianity to the lost mind.<sup>17</sup> (7) Charles Finney's system of theology was based on moral law, moral obligation, and moral government. He used the common denominator of moral government both as a unifying factor for his theology, and as an apologetic to apply the Gospel to the lost mind.<sup>18</sup> This approach of the later Finney leans toward the moral philosophy of the Socinians of a Century before him. (8) Lesslie Newbigin, former General Secretary of the International Missionary Council and Associate General Secretary of World Council of Churches, used dialogue as an apologetic to build bridges of understanding between Christianity and other world

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<sup>17</sup>“The stronger the intellectual light the deeper the understanding we derive from images, whether these are received in a natural way from the senses or formed in the imagination by divine power. Revelation provides us with a divine light which enables us to attain a more profound understanding of these images” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Section I, Question 12, Article 13, Conclusion 2 [London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963], 3:45). “Natural theology declares a Creator of man, of the heavens and the earth. He declares himself to be *Almighty*, which we know from the laws of our belief must exist. We seek for that cause of what we see, and cannot stop till we find one adequate and necessarily eternal” (P. A. Chadbourne, “Natural Theology,” in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, And Ecclesiastical Literature*, ed. By John McClintock and James Strong (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981). “Among them intelligent creatures are ranked under Divine Providence the more nobly because they take part in Providence by their own providing for themselves and others. Thus they join in and make their own Eternal Reason through which they have their natural aptitudes for their due activity and purpose.[c] Now this sharing in the Eternal Law by intelligent creatures is what we call ‘Natural Law.’” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Section 2, Question 91, Article 2, 28:23). Footnote [c] in the previous text reads: “Rational creatures move themselves with reference to the end in view, and therefore can live with God and be associates in his Providence, 1a. 18, 3 & 4; 22, 2 ad 4 & 5. This sharing of God’s law is the theme of *CG III*, 111-46. This association is taken into a new dimension by the friendship of charity; Ia2æ. 109, 3. 2æ2æ. 23, 1.”

<sup>18</sup>“Moral law [from which Finney posits moral government] . . . is the law of nature, the law which the nature or constitution of every moral agent imposes on himself and which God imposes upon us because it is entirely suited to our nature and relations, and is therefore naturally obligatory upon us. It is the unalterable demand of the reason, that the whole being, whatever there is of it at any time, shall be consecrated to the highest good of universal being, and for this reason God requires this of us, with all the weight of his authority” (Charles G. Finney, *Systematic Theology* [E. J. Goodrich, 1878; South Gate, CA: Porter Kemp, 1944], 4).

“Moral government consists in the declaration and administration of moral law” (Ibid., 6).

“The moral government of God everywhere assumes and implies the liberty of the human will, and the natural ability of men to obey God (Ibid., 325).

“Let it not be said then, that we deny the grace of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, nor that we deny the reality and necessity of the influences of the Holy Spirit to convert and sanctify the soul, nor that this influence is a gracious one; for all these we strenuously maintain. But I maintain this upon the ground, that men are able to do their duty, and that the difficulty does not lie in the proper ability, but in their voluntary selfishness, in an unwillingness to obey the blessed gospel” (Ibid., 352).

religions.<sup>19</sup> (9) Ravi Zacharias used apologetics by finding points of relevance between biblical Christianity and culture, and then he preached these points of relevance.<sup>20</sup>

Apologetics has also been used in the call of the Gospel. (10) Pascal's vacuum has sometimes been used to describe the emptiness of man without God,<sup>21</sup> and therefore prove man's need for God (Eccl 3:11). (11) Pascal's wager has sometimes been used to call people to commitment. "Give God a try. If it doesn't work, what have you lost?"<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, this method does not seem to include repentance for the forgiveness of sin, as an indispensable part of the Gospel. (12) Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" was similar to Pascal's wager, though slightly different. Because of inability to prove the existence of God, Kierkegaard proposed that it demanded a leap of faith. Lastly, two results oriented approaches to apologetics includes (13) the enhancement of society through Christian education, as encouraged by Adolf von Harnack and Wilhelm Herrmann in their 1907 *Essays on the Social Gospel*.<sup>23</sup> (14) Thomas More<sup>24</sup> and Philip Schaff<sup>25</sup> individually took

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<sup>19</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, rev ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, 1995).

<sup>20</sup>"In the first step of identification [with postmodern culture], it is critical that we find a point of reference. . . . Where does one go to find common ground? I refer to the *moral argument*, which argues for God from morality" (Ravi Zacharias, "The Touch of Truth" in *Telling the Truth*, D. A. Carson, ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 33-34). Zacharias continued, "The Scriptures are filled with such points of relevance whenever God speaks to a nation or to individuals. . . . Where is the point of relevance in our time? I believe it is a hunger for love. . . . We proclaim on way to God—Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We lay claim to truth in such radical terms, it is imperative that such truth be undergirded by love. If it is not, it makes the possessor of that truth obnoxious and the dogma repulsive. I believe it is vital that we understand this" (ibid., 38).

<sup>21</sup>"Infinitely far from grasping the extremes, the end of things and their origins are completely hid from him [man] in impenetrable mystery; he is equally incapable of seeing the void whence he comes and the infinite in which he is engulfed" (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. L. Lafuma [Paris: Delmas, 1952], 390, *Pensée* 72).

<sup>22</sup>"There is more advantage to believing, than in disbelieving the Christian religion. . . . Nay, but there is a necessity to wager," (Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Thoughts on Religion* [London: Samuel Bagster, 1806], 129). Here is an excerpt of the French original: "Il faut parier. Cela n'est pas volontaire, vous êtes embarqués. Lequel prendrez-vous donc? Voyons; puisqu'il faut choisir voyons ce qui vous intéresse le moins. . . . Oui il faut gager, mais je gage peut-être trop. Voyons puisqu'il y a pareil hasard de gain et de perte, si vous n'aviez qu'à gagner deux vies pour une vous pourriez encore gager, mais s'il y en avait 3 à gagner?" (Blaise Pascal, *Œuvres Complètes*, 550).

<sup>23</sup>"Evangelical Faith, a heart sensitive to the wants of others, and a mind open to the truth and the treasures of the intellect—these are the powers on which our Church and nation rest. If we are but true

a similar approach in their view that man's mind would eventually submit to the rational superiority of Christianity. Hence, if properly exemplified and taught, the Christian worldview would be acknowledged as rationally superior, most coherent, and the greatest of all worldviews. Likewise, is not our current fascination with "worldview" merely a revisiting of Immanuel Kant's *Weltanschauung*?<sup>26</sup> [My mother told me that when she attended Wheaton College from 1948-1950, the word *Weltanschauung* was uttered with an air of intellectual significance—isn't it amazing that thoughts and ideas cycle through every 20 to 50 years]. Therefore, when one brings up the term apologetic, at least fourteen different meanings could be in the mind of the hearer.

## TOWARD UNDERSTANDING APOLOGETICS

The definitional concepts in select books on apologetics allow us to discern from which of the fourteen approaches to apologetics is in vogue in today's scholarship.

Norman Geisler explained, "The heart of the apologetic approach is that the Christian is interested in defending the truths that Christ is the Son of God and the Bible is the Word

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to them, we shall realize more and more the truth of the promise expressed in your brave hymn of faith: 'Now is there peace unceasing; All strife is at an end'" (Adolf Harnack and Wilhelm Herrman, *Essays on the Social Gospel* [London: Williams & Norgate, 1907], 90-91).

<sup>24</sup>"By degrees all the Utopians are coming to forsake their own superstitions and to agree upon this one religion that seems to excel the others in reason. . . . We told them of the name, doctrine, manner of life, and miracles of Christ, and of the wonderful constancy of the many who willingly sacrificed their blood in order to bring so many nations far and wide to Christianity. You will hardly believe with what favorably disposed minds they received this account, either because God secretly incited them or because this religion is most like the belief already strong among them. . . . Whatever the reason, many came over to our religion and were baptized. . . . Those among them that have not yet accepted the Christian religion do not restrain others from it or abuse the converts to it" (Thomas More, *Utopia* [1516; Arlington Heights, IL: AHM Publishing, 1949], 70-71).

<sup>25</sup>"The extraordinary progress of missionary zeal and enterprise is phenomenal, and one of the greatest evidences for the vitality of Christianity, and an assurance of its ultimate triumph to the ends of the earth. . . ." (Philip Schaff, *Theological Propædæutic: A General Introduction to the Study of Theology*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902], 522).

<sup>26</sup>"There is virtually universal recognition that the notable Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant coined the term *Weltanschauung*, that is, worldview in his work *Critique of Judgment*, published in 1790" (David K. Naugle, "Worldview: History, Theology, Implications"; available at: <http://www.leaderu.com/philosophy/worldviewhistory.html>; accessed 31 May 2007; Internet).

of God.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm approached apologetics as providing evidences of the plausibility of Christianity’s presuppositions:

“Rather than placing our apologetic bets on the evidences for Christianity’s credibility, we must first persuade nonbelievers of the plausibility of Christian presuppositions. Christian apologists are not confined to the old apologetic bag of evidences. They must branch out and meet nonbelievers where they are, not remaining within their own social world but uncovering beliefs and concerns shared with the nonbeliever. Using that newly discovered common ground, the apologist can then persuasively show the credibility of Christian belief. . . . Simply put, evangelical apologetics *must* attend to both reason *and* rhetoric, with as much emphasis on the latter as the former in order to make reason relevant and help people see the truth.”<sup>28</sup>

Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, while providing no clear definition, identified apologetics as viewing faith and reason as allies:

“We do not believe reason should usurp the primacy of faith, hope, and love. We agree with classical Christian orthodoxy as expressed in medieval formulas like *fides quaerens intellectum* (“faith seeking understanding”) and *credo ut intelligam* (“I believe in order that I may understand”). That is to say that when faith comes first, understanding necessarily follows, and is vastly aided by faith’s tutelage. But we also agree with the classical position’s contention that many of the things God has revealed to us to be believed, such as his own existence and some of his attributes, can also be proved by human reason, properly used. We would not have written this book if we did not believe that. After we believe, we can and should ‘be ready to make [a] defense’ for our faith (1 Pet 3:15).”<sup>29</sup>

Kreeft and Tacelli, therefore, saw apologetics as a tool to coalesce faith and reason, much like the Aristotelian methodology of Thomas Aquinas. Their view is primarily described by Column 6 in Figure 2. Geisler sought to prove by the intellect the person of Christ and the truthfulness of the Bible. His approach may be akin to Mittelberg’s necessary preparation, as noted in Column 5, Figure 2. Phillips and Okholm, however, used the term apologetics more closely to the methodology of Ravi Zacharias, in which he looks for common ground with culture for the purpose of stimulating questions and redemptive discussion (Column 9, in Figure 3). However, it is important to note that each definition has its emphasis, and will have its corollary method for apologetic evangelism.

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<sup>27</sup>Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 7.

<sup>28</sup>Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 19.

<sup>29</sup>Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 15-16.



A brief analysis of the several approaches to apologetics may be in order here. If man's reasoning is needed to "defend" the truthfulness of (1) the Gospel, (2) Christianity, or (3) the Christian worldview, then it follows that man's reasoning has greater rational weight than do the divine words of the Bible. Something natural (earthly, human), then, becomes necessary to add intellectual or spiritual weight to something supernatural (heavenly, divine).<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the argument follows, the Gospel must be authenticated by something other than the Gospel or the Bible. The Gospel is not self-authenticating, and apparently neither are the words of the Bible. This conclusion is surprising to the reader of the Bible, as it tells us in many ways that its words have power. For example, Jeremiah taught of the power of God's words in Chapter 23, verses 28-29:

"The prophet who has a dream may relate *his* dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have *in common* with grain?" declares the LORD. 'Is not My word like fire?' declares the LORD, 'and like a hammer which shatters a rock?'" (Jer 23:28-29).

The author of Hebrews professed the same inherent power in the Word of God:

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:12-13).

Moses himself affirmed the power of his words:

"Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As the droplets on the fresh grass And as the showers on the herb. . . . When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, 'Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, *even* all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you shall prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.'" (Deut 32:1-2, 45-47).

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<sup>30</sup>This reasoning is beginning to sound like the argument of Peter the Lombard for the "signs" and "things" in the Sacraments: "Every doctrine is of things, and/or signs. But even things are learned through signs. But here (those) are properly named things, which are not employed to signify anything; but signs, those whose use is in signifying" (Peter the Lombard, *Four Books of Sentences*, Book 1, Chapter 1 [available from <http://www.franciscan-archive.org/lombardus/opera/l1-01.html>; accessed 16 May 2006; Internet]; Lombard is quoting Augustine, although the exact reference is unclear).

The Book of Proverbs even explained the unique quality of each word of the Bible.

“Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar” (Proverbs 30:5-6).

Similarly, the Gospel is inherently powerful, with no need of self-authentication:

“I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel [εὐαγγελίζω] to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous *man* shall live by faith’” (Romans 1:14-17).

However, these verses may be considered to apply only to those who believe the Bible.

Unbelievers will likely call this circular reasoning. Yet, the Scripture addresses the heavens and the earth as its audience (Isa 1:2). The Bible says that Satan (not ignorance) has blinded their minds of those who, although they hear the Gospel, are perishing.<sup>31</sup>

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:3-4).

This blindness is why God must give His people to Christ (John 6:37), why he must appoint them to eternal life (Acts 13:48), why Christ must reveal the Father to His disciples (John 17:6), and why it is necessary to hear the Gospel and believe (John 5:24).

Paul wrote:

“And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thess 2:13).

Chart 39 in my *Charts for a Theology of Evangelism* includes five Old Testament and 25 New Testament verses on the role of the Word of God as providing the basis upon which genuine faith is founded (see 1 Cor 15:1-2 for the place of the Gospel in salvation).

The discussion leads us to the question: if neither the Gospel nor the Bible need self-authentication, then what is the role of apologetics? This question brings us to our

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<sup>31</sup>Satan is also the one who snatches the seed of the Word of God from the hearts of people, lest they believe and are saved (Luke 8:12 and parallels).

next section, a look at biblical texts which use the noun ἀπολογία, and the verbs ἀπολογέομαι and ἐπαγωνίζομαι.

### PRELIMINARY BIBLICAL ANALYSIS

Three words provide a quick analysis of New Testament term apologetics. First, the Greek noun ἀπολογία (defense).<sup>32</sup> Of the eight uses of ἀπολογία all of them, but one, speak of defense in a judicial sense. They speak of Paul defending himself before the courts, or defending himself to the Corinthian church. Interestingly, Acts 22:1-21 actually exemplified what the NT meant by ἀπολογία. It was Paul giving the testimony of his conversion, without even mentioning anything about bringing the presumably uncircumcized Trophimus into the Temple. The only unclear use of ἀπολογία is 1 Peter 3:15, which is often used as a proof-text for the need to defend the faith. This verse is taken to imply that “the faith” is an object of defense, even though the word faith is not found in the verse. It would be more clear to translate the text, “eager to always give an answer to all that ask.” To make this verse the foundation for the link between faith and reason is a real stretch.

Second, the NT uses of the Greek verb ἀπολογέομαι (to give a defense) are even less affirming of using apologetics to coalesce faith and reason in some way. Of the ten uses of ἀπολογέομαι,<sup>33</sup> six are in the Book of Acts directly related to judicial process, one refers to Paul defending his actions to the Corinthians, one refers to the conscience defending, and two contain commands of Christ. These two admonitions are:

“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you should say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:11-12).

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<sup>32</sup>Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 7:11; Phil 1:7, 16; 2 Tim 4:16; 1 Pet 3:15.

<sup>33</sup>Luke 12:11; 21:14; Acts 19:33; 24:10; 25:8; 26:1, 2, 24; Rom 2:15; 2 Cor 12:19.

“But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute” (Luke 21:12-15).

In both cases we are told *not* to prepare ourselves for a defense, clearly in a judicial context (as exemplified in Acts 22). Therefore, the role of the entire field of apologetics, especially as it was explained by Kreeft and Tacelli, has not found a Scriptural basis in the Greek words ἀπολογία and ἀπολογέομαι.

Third, a last chance word may be the use of ἐπαγωνίζομαι in Jude 3. This verb is often translated “contend earnestly” and is followed by “for the faith.” In this verse there are five Greek words between ἐπαγωνίζομαι and πίστις, corresponding to “which was once delivered unto the saints.” Some have taken this verse to mean that the faith needs to be defended, it is not self-authenticating. Quite to the contrary, the emphasis of this verse is catechetical in nature. The next verse, verse four states that “certain men have crept in unnoticed,” referring to false teachers coming into the church. Therefore, in this verse, the earnest contending is a part of discipleship and the teaching ministry of the local church, rather than evangelistic in context. It is in this verse, however, that the true foundation for apologetics is found. The main thrust of biblical apologetics is not to convince the unsaved of the truthfulness of the Bible, the Gospel, or a Christian worldview, nor to seek to merge faith and reason, but rather to protect the church from false teachers. New Testament apologetics, then, consists primarily of Columns 1 and 2 in Figure 2. To stretch the meaning of 1 Peter 3:15 to include the need (1) to authenticate the Gospel to the lost mind by means of human logic, or (2) to merge faith and reason, is difficult, and contradicts 1 Corinthians 1-2. However, flowing from a desire to

authenticate the faith through reason, combined with a NT role for apologetics, a variety of evangelism methodologies have been communicated.

## APOLOGETIC EVANGELISM METHODOLOGIES

Flowing from one's presupposition as to the definition and purpose for apologetics comes apologetic evangelism. It seems natural to assume that with each differing view of apologetics proceeds a differing view of apologetic evangelism. However, for the sake of this paper, eight (rather than fourteen) approaches will be noted, as found in Figure 4: Dialogue Evangelism, Apologetic Evangelism, Narrative Evangelism, Analogical Evangelism, Dialogical Evangelism, Telling Our Story, Telling His Story, and Chronological Storying. It is difficult to find biblical backing for Dialogue Evangelism, wherein there is an equal and mutual sharing of ideas to find points of agreement by: (1) acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit in all world religions; and (2) not desiring to "convert" the other to one's ideas. In Luke's Great Commission, the message is repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47). This corresponds to Old Testament prophecies in which the people of Israel were urged to "turn" (Heb *shuv*):

"Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'" (Ezek 33:11).

The kind of dialogue evangelism taught by Lesslie Newbigin, however, lacks the aspect of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Regrettably, the equivocal concept of dialogue was inserted into the 1974 World Congress on Evangelism in Lausanne's definition of evangelism, as was also Christian presence, "Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen

94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101
<b>Dialogue Evangelism</b>	<b>Apologetic Evangelism</b>	<b>Narrative Evangelism</b>	<b>Analogical Evangelism</b>	<b>Dialogical Evangelism</b>	<b>Telling Our Story</b>	<b>Telling His Story [and Parabolic Evangelism]</b>	<b>Chronological Storying or Story-Boarding</b>
Preparing for evangelism, by listening to show respect, honor their humanity, or acknowledge truth in their religion	Framing the gospel or the truth to meet perceived questions or worldview issues, using culture and/or Scripture	Relating truths about God through culture or life experiences; often indirectly evangelistic; considered "relevant"	Finding and using redemptive analogies in culture to relate the gospel with relevance	Engaging persons in conversations about relevant topics leading to a gospel presentation	Telling our story, either of conversion or God's working in a specific situation	Sharing the gospel through parable, Bible stories, or through directly sharing the gospel	Sharing the gospel beginning with the OT: to emphasize the themes of sin/ sacrifice, creation/ kingdom, or something else
Inter-religious conversation with the view to learn and share truth; the warm sharing of ideas is often deemed sufficient, without a call to turn to Christ	Developing an awareness of the person's worldview to shape the gospel; Lee Strobel, <i>Inside the Mind of the Unchurched Harry and Mary</i> (1993)	Relating truths of the Bible to life experiences; often associated with postmodern evangelism	Missionary anthropologist Don Richardson's <i>Peace Child</i> (1975)	In John 4, Jesus and the Woman at the Well provides an example of dialogical evangelism, Darrell Robinson, <i>People Sharing Jesus</i> (1997)	Often this may be called a testimony; the difference lies in the emphasis on eternal life (substitutionary) or life here-and-now (reconciliation model)	Example of parable may be C. S. Lewis' <i>Chronicles of Narnia</i> ; story may be anti-propositional truth; Jesus' parables hid the message, Matt 13:11	New Tribes Mission's chronological method for unreached tribal groups; Matthias Media's "2 Ways 2 Live" tract (kingdom-oriented)

### Food for Thought

Can the gospel be savingly communicated through story (C. S. Lewis, *Chronicles of Narnia*, J. R. R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*)?

Must some truths of the gospel necessarily be expressed as propositional truth?

Are not biblical truths regarding man's sin and the death of Christ on the cross propositional truth claims?

Did Jesus use parables [stories] to hide his message, rather than making it accessible (Matt 13:10-17; Mark 4:10-12; Luke 8:9-10)?

Was there not a continual misunderstanding of spiritual metaphors in the Gospel of John 3:4; 4:11, 15; 6:52?

Is not the gospel foolishness to Gentiles (1 Cor 1:18, 23)? Can this foolishness be removed through story?

Can a spiritually blind person truly understand a Christian worldview, propositional truths related to Christianity, or the gospel?

What is the role of apologetics in seeking to bring understanding to blinded hearts and minds (2 Cor 4:3-4)?

What is the role of God, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit in bringing sight to blind spiritual eyes (2 Cor 3:15-16)?

Figure 4: Apologetic Evangelism.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Johnston, *Charts for a Theology of Evangelism*, 90. Used by permission.

sensitively in order to understand.”<sup>35</sup> Bassham included helpful summaries of the origins of the concepts “Christian presence” and “dialogue” in his *Mission Theology: 1948-1975 Years of Worldwide Creative Tension Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic*.<sup>36</sup> Their insertions into the Lausanne statement on evangelism muddied the water for later Evangelical definitions of evangelism.

Likewise, Parabolic Evangelism (a type of Storying), where the Gospel is shared in parable, like the *Chronicles of Narnia*, lacks biblical support. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus and the Woman at the Well, they both misunderstood his analogies. Several times in the Gospels, Jesus explained that He spoke in parables so that the masses would not understand what He said. For example, here are two excerpts from Mark, chapter 4:

“And as soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, *began* asking Him *about* the parables. And He was saying to them, ‘To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, in order that while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand lest they return and be forgiven.’ ... And with many such parables He was speaking the word to them as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples” (Mark 4:10-13, 33-34).

Interestingly enough, the word parable is not found in the Book of Acts (nor in the Book of John), nor is there use of hidden language as to the Gospel in Acts, as was earlier the

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<sup>35</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 20.

<sup>36</sup>Bassham located the origin of the concept of “Christian presence” to the “worker-priest movement” in France from 1944-1945. This then led to the “Christian Presence Series” of M. A. C. Warren, used by the World Student Christian Federation in the 1960s (Rodger C. Bassham, *Mission Theology: 1948-1975 Years of Worldwide Creative Tension Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic* [Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979], 70). Bassham added, “Through its adoption of *The Church of Others*, the term [Christian presence] became practically a slogan for ecumenical mission strategy and was obvious in the preparatory documentation for the Fourth Assembly at Upsalla” (ibid., 71). “Presence” then appeared in Johannes Blauw’s *The Missionary nature of the Church*, and “became a central component in later ecumenical mission theology” (ibid., 72). Bassham also traced the concept of “dialogue” to the report on evangelism by D. T. Niles at the Second Assembly of the WCC in Evanston, Illinois, in 1954. He recommended a “new approach in our evangelizing task” (ibid., 84). According to Bassham, dialogue was encouraged at the Third General Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi, 1961. “Dialogue” was then picked up by Paul VI in his 1964 encyclical “*Ecclesiam Suam*,” where he introduced the concentric circles, encouraging dialogue with those in “the circle of Christianity” (“But we must add that it is not in our power to compromise [in dialogue] with the integrity of the faith [Catholic doctrine] or the requirements of charity [the sacraments]” (Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 6 August 1964, section 109). This encyclical came out four months prior to Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964).

case when Christ sought to prepare His disciples for his death and resurrection, and yet His disciples did not understand:

“And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, ‘Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.’ But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement” (Luke 9:43-45).

Yet there are some who see storying in parable as a “back door” method to share concepts of the Gospel.<sup>37</sup> However, rather than reveal the truth, the parables of Jesus actually hid the truth from those who heard. We are not greater than our Master in storying, are we (John 15:20)? So we find two levels of lack of understanding in the Gospels: (1) the crowds receiving everything in parables, so that they would not understand; and (2) the disciples did not understanding Jesus’ predictions of His death and resurrection. One was in parables, an the other was outright explanation of what was going to happen, the 1 Corinthians 15 Gospel!

Yet we live in a time when storying is the preferred methodology, both in apologetic evangelism and for postmodern evangelism. In this discussion, it is important

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<sup>37</sup>“The hidden presentation of the Gospel is on of the beauties of storytelling. It is possible to teach people about Jesus through stories, even when those people are not yet eager to know about Him. Again, C. S. Lewis is a wonderful example of this. His Narnia stories about the lion, Aslan, have introduced many people to Jesus, people who would normally not go to church or read the Bible or attend an evangelistic meeting. People are entranced with Aslan and through loving him come to worship the Lion of Judah, Christ Himself” (Jerram Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001], 227).



	“Postmodern”	Vs.	“Modern”
Preparation	Worldview <sup>38</sup>	Vs.	General revelation
	Service <sup>39</sup>	Vs.	Irrelevant/Inauthentic
	Relationship <sup>40</sup>	Vs.	Stranger-to-stranger
	Culturally Relevant <sup>41</sup>	Vs.	Eternal orientation
	Prolonged time <sup>42</sup>	Vs.	Instantaneous
Method	Incarnational <sup>43</sup>	Vs.	Proclamational
	Dialogue <sup>44</sup>	Vs.	Us/them mentality
	Narrative <sup>45</sup>	Vs.	Outline
	Community <sup>46</sup>	Vs.	Individual
	Worship <sup>47</sup>	Vs.	Abstract cognitive
Message	Storying <sup>48</sup>	Vs.	Biblical propositional statements
	Here and Now <sup>49</sup>	Vs.	Eternal Life
	Relational <sup>50</sup>	Vs.	Judicial
	Love (emotional) <sup>51</sup>	Vs.	Gospel principles
Decision	Converted to community <sup>52</sup>	Vs.	Converted to Christ
	Converted to the Christ of community <sup>53</sup>	Vs.	Converted to the Christ of the cross
Duration	Process <sup>54</sup>	Vs.	Punctiliar or instantaneous

Figure 5: Postmodern Evangelism Methodologies.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 43.

<sup>39</sup>Ardith Fernando, “The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ,” in D. A. Carson, ed., *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 125-26; Steve Sjogren, et al., *Irresistible Evangelism Natural Ways to Open Others to Jesus* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2004), 90.

<sup>40</sup>Ardith Fernando, “The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ,” in *Telling the Truth*, 124; Jones, 122; and Brian McLaren, *More Ready Than you Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 55, 58, 61, 67, 135-137.

<sup>41</sup>“Where does one go to find common ground? I refer to the moral argument, which argues for God from morality” (Ravi Zacharias, “The Touch of Truth,” in *Telling the Truth*, 33, 34).

<sup>42</sup>Mittelberg, 59. Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Church: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 67.

<sup>43</sup>“We need to incarnate the truth” Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 315.

<sup>44</sup>Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 99; Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 78; Nash, 68-69; Sjogren, 139.

<sup>45</sup>Kevin Graham Ford, *Jesus for a New Generation* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 218-39; and McLaren, *More Ready than You Realize*, 135.

<sup>46</sup>Erickson, 289-305; Jones, 103-09; Jimmy Long, “Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation” in *Telling the Truth*, 334; Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 112-18; Webber, 61-63.

<sup>47</sup>Fernando, 136; Long, “Generating Hope,” 334; Nash, 69-72; Sweet, 43-45, 72-73.

<sup>48</sup>Bauckham, 90-98; Erickson, 317-19; Leighton Ford, *The Power of Story: Recovering the Oldest, Most Natural Way to Reach People for Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 14, 50, 52; Jones, 27; McLaren, 135; Alvin Reid, *Radically Unchurched* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 128-41; Sweet, 123-25.

<sup>49</sup>Grenz, 163-65; Nash, 58-63.

<sup>50</sup>Sjogren, 149.

<sup>51</sup>Nash, 72, 119; Sweet, 31.

<sup>52</sup>Long, 334; Webber, 55-69.

<sup>53</sup>Long, 334.

<sup>54</sup>McLaren, 137-40; Webber, 13.

to remember that storying has been in vogue ever since 1973<sup>56</sup> and 1977.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Postmodern Evangelism methodologies look surprisingly like the Relational Evangelism strategies of the 1970s and 1980s. Figure 5 charts some of the major Postmodern strategies, some of them being community, worship, storying, and relationship.

Now, with that corrective regarding the use of story to communicate the propositional truths of the Gospel, story as personal testimony *is* found in the Gospels, as well as in the book of Acts. The cleansed demoniac of Gerasenes was told to “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and *how* He had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19; cf. Luke 8:39). The Woman at the Well apparently shared her story with people of her town, and they came to faith in Christ through her word and testimony:

“And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all the things that I *have* done.”<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to Him, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.<sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of His word;<sup>42</sup> and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world”” (John 4:39-42).

In the Book of Acts we find the account of Saul’s conversion in Acts 9, then we read a repetition of this same account by way of testimony in Acts 22 and 26. An example of testimony is also noted during the revival in Ephesus. People were confessing their sins, “Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing [ἐξομολογέω] and

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<sup>55</sup>Thomas Johnston, *Toward a Biblical-Historical Theology of Evangelism* (Liberty, MO: Evangelism Unlimited, 1997), 487.

<sup>56</sup>“The Decade [1970s] is full of new challenges. One of them is to learn a new love—to love—to *do and tell* the story” (Gabriel Fackre, *Do and Tell: Engagement Evangelism in the ‘70s* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973], 15). “If we do, it will be a great time to be alive and in mission. For it will mean that the church-centered and the world-centered will have moved beyond their present impasse to find each other at the rendezvous point out ahead—a place where they have learned together to *tell* and *celebrate* the Tale, and to *do* and *be* it” (ibid., 29). Fackre then explains God’s Story in a chapter entitled “Catechism for Skye [his teen-age daughter]: Telling the Tale” (ibid., 30-45).

<sup>57</sup>Leighton Ford quoted David Hubbard, “God knew what He was doing when He told the most significant things about Himself, not in proverbs, nor in sonnets, nor in chronological lists, nor in theological propositions, but in a story” (Leighton Ford, *Good News Is for Sharing: A Guide to Making Friends for God* [Elgin, IL: David C. Cook, 1977], 130).

disclosing [ἀναγγέλλω] their practices” (Acts 19:18). Therefore there is a New Testament role for the personal testimony as related to both confession of sin and conversion.

As to the other methodologies of “Apologetic Evangelism” in Figure 4, they seem to lie in three areas: relevance, bridges, and chronology. All of them are interrelated. We have already addressed that the Gospel is self-authenticating, but a question follows, is the Gospel asking the right questions? Are people really interested in hearing about sins being forgiven by the atoning work of Christ (or eternal life). For Sjogren, Ping, and Pollock, “not-yet-Christians” are [apparently] not that interested in the substitutionary atonement, but they are [presumably] interested in relationship. So, say Sjogren et al., speaking about the atonement is [irrelevant and] “unnecessarily confusing,” one must rather exemplify truly loving relationships<sup>58</sup>—sounds like hard work to me, in fact, it sounds like “good works” to me! This leads us to the question: is the primary task of the evangelist to (1) preach the Gospel, or (2) parse culture seeking to find bridges and points of relevance? Or to ask it another way, is the Gospel’s message self-evident to those to whom God wishes to reveal Christ (2 Cor 4:3-4)? It would seem that Romans 1:16-17 again speaks to this issue:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous *man* shall live by faith.’”

Notice that it is the Gospel that is powerful, in and of itself. Also notice that this Gospel “reveals” the righteousness of God. In other words, knowledge of the Gospel is part of

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<sup>58</sup>“Many Christians talk about developing an intimate *personal relationship* with God, but the message they present to not-yet-Christians focuses almost exclusively on explaining how the atoning death of Jesus satisfies the requirements of God’s justice. ... Talking about doctrines such as justification by faith and atonement by the substitutionary death of Jesus is usually unnecessarily confusing.

“...Relationship is the true heart of the matter. ... Following Jesus is more than just a handy way to gain admittance into heaven or to avoid hell. It’s more than a magic formula for salvation. It is *at least* as real and dynamic a relationship as marriage is” (Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, and Doug Pollock, *Irresistible Evangelism* [Loveland, CO: Group, 2004], 149).

the revelatory process used by God, and hence proclamation of the Gospel is part of the order of salvation. On the other hand, it is difficult to find NT commands for and examples of “parsing culture” as the main need of the evangelist. So then, if the Gospel is not only self-authenticating, but also self-evident, then why did Paul seem to frame the question differently as he shared the Gospel to a Gentile audience in Acts 14 and 17?

## TWO DISCOURSES TO GENTILES IN ACTS

Both Acts 14 and 17 are sermons of Paul to Gentile audiences. In the case of Acts 14, Paul stopped the people from including him in their “Redemptive Analogy.” He did not approve of the people calling he and Barnabas gods, Jupiter and Zeus respectively—although it may have afforded him a significant crowd for launching the new church, as well as the cash necessary for a church building. In his discourse he told them that he was “evangelizing you that from these worthless things you turn” (Acts 14:15, trans mine). Paul was referring to Jupiter, Zeus, and the activities of the priest of Zeus (who was merely riding the waves of his culture and his latest sociological survey), as worthless things. Paul’s was a message of repentance, turning from worthless things, something the crowds did not want to hear. Paul, therefore, was not contextualizing or syncretizing the Gospel with Greek philosophy. After the Jews won over the crowds, they ended up stoning Paul and leaving him for dead. He went from being called Zeus to capital punishment without a trial, all in one day, and all because he was [apparently] not culturally sensitive enough—he should have learned a lesson or two from the Priest of Zeus (not!). Paul’s being raised from the dead (2 Cor 12), shows that, far from disapproving or Paul’s boldness or method, God approved of his testimony in Lystra. Thus, there is no cause to merge faith and reason from Paul’s Acts 14 ministry in Lystra.

Acts 17 provides the second and last discourse to Gentiles in the Book of Acts. In Acts 17 Paul spoke to Greek philosophers in the Areopagus. This discourse has long been a favorite for proponents of the need to coalesce faith and reason. Several items need to be kept in mind, as regards this discourse:

- The sermon was interrupted by hecklers. Thus it was not a completed sermon. Therefore the lack of use of the name Jesus, needs to bear in mind the abbreviation of the sermon and the context of 17:18, wherein Paul was “evangelizing Jesus and the resurrection.”
- The sermon included a clear exposition of Isaiah 42:5-8 (with quotes from Jeremiah 10:9 and allusions to Isaiah 40:18-31), wherein Paul quoted from this passage several times, which referred directly to the idolatry found in the city of Athens

Isaiah 42:5-8	Acts 17:24-29
<p>“Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison. I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images”</p>	<p>“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined <i>their</i> appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring.’ Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man</p>

Notice the quotations and allusions to God, maker of heaven and earth, and its offspring, who gives breath and spirit to all mankind. Human hands making idols is found in Jeremiah 10:9. God’s watchcare over people and His supernatural governance of the world is found in Isaiah 40.

- The sermon included a call to repentance, from the mouth of God.
- The sermon also included an eschatological warning of coming judgment, along with proof of the resurrection [of Christ, as in Acts 17:18].

Some scholars find bridges and contextualization from Paul's quotation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C. Sicilian poet Aratus. The quote is five words long (in Greek), "For we also are His offspring" (Acts 17:28). It is preempted with an introductory statement, wherein Paul acknowledged the use of his source (which was not the case when he quoted to them from the Bible). The quote of Aratus is illustrative of the teaching of Isaiah 42. (1) Paul did not add new theological truth from the quote of Aratus into the mix of the Bible<sup>59</sup> (The imminence of God is taught in all theology classes when dealing with the doctrine of God). (2) Paul was not appealing to some form of illumination or intuition theory of inspiration on the part of Aratus, (3) nor was he appealing to some type of Natural Theology as exemplified by some divine unction upon Aratus. (4) Neither was Paul denying the innate sufficiency of the Scriptures (Deut 30:11-14; 2 Tim 3:16-17). Rather, in his use of the Aratus quote, we have Paul seeking to get into the Greek mind, and seeking to apply Scripture in as clear and forceful a way possible. This form of persuasion was exemplified in Acts 28:23-24, and is taught in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22.

What can we learn from the two messages of Paul in Gentile contexts? He did preach the Gospel. He was aware of the belief patterns of those to whom he was preaching. He did call them to turn from their worthless ways. He did not merely provide them a paradigm shift. He called for repentance. Therefore, our brief walk through some aspects of apologetic evangelism and the two passages in which Paul spoke to Gentiles in the Book of Acts brings us to make some conclusions.

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<sup>59</sup>Again the concept of admixture fits here in relation to biblical authority: "without any mixture of error, for its matter" (Baptist Faith and Message, 2000, Article 1).

## CONCLUSIONS

Several concluding comments emanate from the thoughts expressed in this paper. First, the primary task of apologetics is to educate and equip God's people against the false teachers that creep into the church unnoticed. This role of apologetics is a daunting task, as, "many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many" (Matt 24:11). Second, there is no biblical warrant from Scripture to use the "wisdom of the world" (1 Cor 1:21), the "wisdom of men" (1 Cor 2:5), or the "wisdom ... of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away" (1 Cor 2:6) to authenticate the Gospel, the Bible, or a Christian worldview. Third, we ought to know as much as we can about those we are seeking to reach, so that we can persuade them from the Scriptures as lovingly and forcefully as possible. Fourth, there is no warrant from Scripture for seeking to amalgamate, merge, or find common ground between faith and reason, as a part of apologetics. Rather, this was the methodology of the false prophets during the time of Jeremiah. Therefore, let us use apologetics to prepare God's people for the many false prophets that have arisen and will arise, and to help our people learn to persuade others to repent and believe the Gospel. There is a war for souls going on, and apologetics has an important place in this fight.