

**APOLOGIA PRAKTIKOS (*PRAGMATIC APOLOGETICS*): TOWARD A PRACTICAL-PASTORAL
THEOLOGY FOR CONTEMPORARY APOLOGETICS TRAINING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

**A PAPER PRESENTED TO
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In this paper I will focus on three main points of emphasis: (1) I will underscore the need for Church leaders to provide clarity for their congregants in the following areas: (a.) Our contemporary apologetical-historical landscape—our apologetical *Sitz im leben*; (b.) Explication of the varied taxonomies of apologetical systems (or approaches); (c.) Related to the aforementioned point, I will highlight various resources available to the layman – free & for purchase. (2) Emphasize the need for congregants to develop their *own* approach to apologetics; namely to think through their own *apologia* (ie., returning to the “heart of apologetics”); (3) Recognize and develop "the other side of apologetics" (ie., the praxis of defense-making).

I. MY JOURNEY INTO APOLOGETICS (AND APOLOGETICS TRAINING)

Before I dive into the main contentions of my paper, I want to help clarify my ministerial context, and how I came to my supposition here. So who am I (. . . and why should you care)? I am now in my twentieth year of ministry and fourteen of those years of been in pastoral ministry at Canby Foursquare Church. I was one of those people who, right out of high school, went to Bible College for four years and then decided to continue on three more years to complete a Master of Divinity. All I knew was that I wanted to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and to serve Him and His Bride. Little did I know that the first church to hire me would be my home church in Canby, Oregon (New Life Foursquare).¹ In particular, I was hired to be the College-age pastor. Nine months before I accepted this position I was asked to teach at the small Bible Institute

¹ For more information about New Life Foursquare Church visit www.canbyfoursquare.com.

the church had started in 1998 (originally called the Leadership Training Institute).² I taught N.T. Greek, hermeneutics and Church history for the Institute. Long story short— with respect to my own self-perceived pastoral ineffectiveness, I immediately recognized my need to refine (or address) some of my weaknesses.

I began reading books in the area of leadership, pastoral theology and ministry, and apologetics. I was introduced to the ministry of Ravi Zacharias³ and found myself listening to his daily podcasts. I read his book *Deliver Us from Evil*⁴ and it reminded me a lot of Francis Schaeffer's *A Christian Manifesto*.⁵ He challenged me to recognize that American culture was shifting in some notable and distinct ways. I began to appreciate the dangers of *secularism* and *pluralism* and how these two realities are antithetical the flourishing of the kingdom of God. I casted a vision for college ministry centered on personal discipleship and spiritual growth. I continued to read Zacharias's materials and listened to his talks. I also began to read and re-read some of Francis Schaeffer's works, notably *Escape from Reason* and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*.⁶ I actually went back and read some of my old college textbooks in apologetics (Van Til's *Christian Apologetics*).⁷ I have to be honest that I was not very interested in them at the time, but five years removed I found myself in deep need to better understand the Christian

² L.T.I., as it was called, existed as such from 1998 – 2005.

³ Cf. www.rzim.org.

⁴ Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us from Evil* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997).

⁵ Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981).

⁶ Both of these books were included in Francis Schaeffer's *Trilogy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990).

⁷ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1976). My other textbook was John Frame's *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995).

worldview and, certainly to a greater degree than before, to grapple with various methodological approaches to both evangelism and apologetics. What used to work did not seem to work anymore and I felt like I had to go back and read to re-tool for the task of sharing and defending the faith. That was over a decade ago.

In 2005 I was asked to be the director of the Leadership Training Institute, which eventually grew into a two-year church-based Bible college (Canby Bible College)⁸ offering an Associate of Ministry degree. I have been the Dean of Canby Bible College since 2005 (serving as an instructor as well since 2001); I am also an adjunct professor of Bible & Theology at LIFE Pacific College.⁹ I continue to serve as a pastor at New Life Church and have grown to appreciate Christian service both in the local church and in the Academy. I readily admit that my motivation for this paper comes out of a heart to see God's people better equipped to share, proclaim and defend the Gospel. I come at this as a pastor and as a practitioner, not merely as an academician or a theorist. I am not here to win you over with eloquent words or lofty ideas, but to exhort those of you who may be pastors, students, and/or academicians to not only appreciate and value the content (ie. theory) of apologetic arguments, but to equally value the act of

⁸ C.B.C.'s website is www.canbybiblecollege.org. The purpose statement of this small College is "*Equipping Laborers for the Harvest.*" Founded in 1998, Canby Bible College has national certification with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the State of Oregon's approval and recognition as a religious exempt degree-granting institution of higher learning, as well as articulation agreements and transfer arrangements with a number of accredited four-year Bible Colleges, Christian Colleges and Universities.

⁹ LIFE Pacific College, formerly LIFE Bible College (and before that LIFE Bible Institute), was founded by Aimee Semple-McPherson and is the flagship college of the Foursquare Church and is located in San Dimas, California. For more information about L.P.C. visit www.lifepacific.edu.

defense-making. I suppose my exhortation is to begin to see apologetics as *practical theology*. How can we equip the Saints for the work of the ministry of defending the Christian faith? In what ways can we help them to think through theistic arguments as they have been presented through the centuries, as well as prayerfully and thoughtfully developing their own *personal* apologetic? This is what I will now seek to turn my attention to in the remainder of this paper.

II. Identifying Areas of Needed Clarification

A. Our Contemporary Apologetical Context

There is a great need for Christian leaders to shepherd their respective congregations toward a greater understanding of both our current apologetical context *and* the Christian-historical context in which we find ourselves today (perhaps we could call this our own apologetic *Sitz im leben*). After all, as the old axiom goes, “How do you know where you are unless you know where you’ve been”?

When someone in my local church approaches me and asks the question “Where should I get started in order to learn more about defending my Christian faith,” I find myself tempted to bombard them with a slew of my personal favorites; though I suppose certainly this would not hurt. I find that I am hesitant to simply list off different authors. Part of the reason for this, I suspect, is that I want them to understand our context, namely, that we are in a burgeoning season of apologetic growth—a veritable apologetics renaissance—and that there have been periods in the history of the Church

wherein the field of apologetics has been greatly advanced. It may be useful for this individual to understand a little bit of Church history before (or perhaps concurrently while) they dive into Alvin Plantinga's modal version of the Ontological argument¹⁰ or Norman Geisler's revised Thomistic Cosmological argument.¹¹ The inquirer should also probably know that the early Church had a certain approach to (and reasons for) drafting Christian apologies.¹² It may be helpful for them to know that apologetics has a consistent history of being intricately wedded to the field(s) of philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, and theology proper. It may even be helpful for this individual to understand the mere fact that some influential Christian figures have downplayed the need to defend the Christian faith, at times arguing there is neither the need to offer a defense of the faith nor such a thing as "proof" which can be offered for God's existence.¹³

B. Explicating Taxonomies of Apologetics

There also exists a significant need to simplify for our parishioners the various

¹⁰ See his *The Ontological Argument*, ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965) and *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979; reissue ed.).

¹¹ Specifically ch. 9 in *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).

¹² I have in mind the second century apologies of Aristides, Athenagoras and Justin Martyr.

¹³ I am specifically thinking of quotations attributed to Augustine ("The truth is like a lion; you don't have to defend it. Let it loose; it will defend itself." << <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/798196-the-truth-is-like-a-lion-you-don-t-have-to>>> accessed March 3, 2015), Charles Haddon Spurgeon ("Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion! Unchain it and it will defend itself." <<<http://reformedquotes.com/defend-the-bible/#sthash.sCAZCLs9.dpuf>>> accessed March 3, 2015; cf. Spurgeon's 1886 sermon "Christ and His Co-Workers") and Soren Kierkegaard ("To demonstrate the existence of someone who exists is the most shameless assault, since it is an attempt to make him ludicrous, but the trouble is that one does not even suspect this, that in dead seriousness one regards it as a godly undertaking." *Concluding Scientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong, [Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992], pp. 513-514).

approaches, methodologies, systems and/or taxonomies of Christian apologetics. One of the oft repeated colloquialisms my mother used to say was this: “*You can be so heavenly minded that you’re of no earthly good.*” Well, I am afraid that in some cases, if we are not careful, we can use terminology (without explanation) that goes right over the heads of our brothers and sisters in Christ, not to mention that we can often make the mistake of assuming they have a frame of reference about what we are addressing. It is not uncommon for someone at my Church with whom I am having a conversation about apologetics and they recognize that there are different “schools” or “kinds” of apologetics. They recognize that some apologists focus quite a bit on appealing to particular historical grounds or scientific “proofs” in seeking to corroborate the claims of the Christian faith. Others, they see, tend to appeal to abstract, philosophical syllogistic “proofs.” I have found it useful to first clarify for Church folks some of the basic systems or approaches to apologetics.

The first taxonomy helpful for laymen to understand is that of Protestant theologian Bernard Ramm. In 1961 he wrote *Varieties of Christian Apologetics: An Introduction to the Christian Philosophy of Religion*.¹⁴ Ramm's taxonomy was threefold, signifying three basic streams (or systems) of defense-making: (1) systems stressing subjective immediacy,¹⁵ (2) systems stressing natural theology,¹⁶ and (3) systems

¹⁴ Bernard Ramm, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics: An Introduction to the Christian Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973; 4th printing).

¹⁵ This includes figures such as Blaise Pascal, Soren Kierkegaard, and Emil Brunner.

¹⁶ Represented by Thomas Aquinas, Joseph Butler, and F.R. Tennant.

stressing revelation.¹⁷ Ramm's presentation proved useful and this book was reprinted four times.

In 1976, Gordon Lewis offered an additional way to classify apologetics, namely into different epistemological¹⁸ approaches. In his work entitled *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics*,¹⁹ Lewis distinguishes six epistemological approaches to defending the Christian faith. These include (1) the Pure Empiricism approach of J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., (2) the Rational Empiricism approach of Stuart C. Hackett, (3) the Rationalism approach of Gordon H. Clark, (4) the Biblical Authoritarianism approach of Cornelius Van Til, (5) The Mysticism approach of Earl E. Barrett, and (6) the Verificationism approach of Edward John Carnell. I should say that it takes a certain type of person to delve into this sort of study, so I rarely suggest a congregant get right into this. However, I find that it is still helpful for folks to still gain a cursory overview set forth in Lewis' work. It is an important resource for more "advanced" study.

The last taxonomy to highlight here is that which was set forth fifteen years ago by Steven B. Cowan. He edited the Counterpoint Series book, *Five Views on Apologetics*,²⁰ distinguishing the following systems: (1) the Classical approach, represented by William Lane Craig, (2) the Evidential approach, represented by Gary

¹⁷ Represented by Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, and Abraham Kuyper.

¹⁸ Epistemology is a fundamental subset of philosophy which addresses the nature of truth and knowledge.

¹⁹ Gordon Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Chicago: Moody, 1976).

²⁰ Steven B. Cowan, gen. ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

Habermas, (3) the Presuppositional approach, represented by John Frame, (4) the Cumulative Case approach, represented by Paul Feinberg, and (5) the Reformed Epistemological approach, represented by Kelly James Clark. This work is an incredibly helpful resource for folks to see some of the great apologetical minds go back and forth, as it is a debate-style structure with critiques provided by each contributor of the others' presentations.

Now it does not serve the purpose of this paper to go in depth into these various taxonomies, but suffice it to say it is incredibly useful for our parishioners to become acquainted with and understand these systems and to know that it is okay for them to give critical analysis of the systems and to develop their own. When these taxonomies of apologetics (and others) are clarified it helps folks to get a frame of reference for further study, which in my view, is a responsibility I have as a pastor – to encourage them to learn and grow by their own initiative. Before I encountered Bernard Ramm's taxonomy of apologetics, I myself saw three basic appeals in defense-making: (1) Testimonial: appeal to personal experience, (2) Biblical: appeal to inscripturated special revelation, (3) Philosophical: appeal to logic/reason. By testimonial I mean that a person has an encounter with the Triune God of Scripture in such a way that grounds one's fundamental commitment to the King and to His Kingdom. This is the "I know because I've met him" approach. By "biblical" I mean an overt and/or clear appeal to a Scriptural text, grounding the authority in God's revealed Word. I like to think of this as the "Jesus

loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so" argument. Finally, when I say "philosophical" appeal I am denoting an "it just makes sense" approach. At this time I would like to highlight some notable resources I often recommend.²¹

C. Apologetical Resources: Free and for Purchase

The following websites are tremendous (free) resources to recommend to parishoners for personal and/or small-group research:

- www.veritas.org
- www.moralapologetics.com
- www.alwaysbeready.com
- www.carm.org
- www.equip.org
- www.rzim.org
- www.apologetics315.com
- www.garyhabermas.com
- www.reasonablefaith.org
- www.treesearch.org
- www.christianthinktank.com
- www.apologeticsguy.com
- www.bethinking.org
- www.christianapologeticsalliance.com
- www.apologeticsuk.blogspot.com
- www.ligioner.org
- www.leestrobels.com
- www.tektonics.org
- www.reasons.org
- www.answersingenesis.org
- www.xenos.org
- www.inplainsite.org
- www.discovery.org
- www.evidenceforchristianity.blogspot.com

²¹ It should go without saying, but for the sake of clarity, this list is by no means exhaustive; nor does it represent what I deem to be the "best" resources over against those unmentioned. I readily admit my knowledge of materials available to date is limited.

- www.letusreason.org
- www.gotquestions.org
- www.christiananswers.net
- www.godandscience.org
- www.str.org
- www.paulcopan.com
- www.ratiochristi.org
- www.theologynetwork.org
- www.thinkingchristian.net
- www.thinkingmatters.org.nz
- www.iloveatheists.com
- www.presup101.wordpress.com
- www.reformed.org/apologetics
- www.vantil.info
- www.epsociety.org

In addition to these free resources,²² the following is a small list of books (for purchase) from which I have greatly benefitted and often recommend:

- The Defense of the Gospel in the New Testament*, Revised Edition, by F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959). Reprinted 1977
- The Case for the Real Jesus* by Lee Strobel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007)
- The Case for a Creator* by Lee Strobel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004)
- Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* by J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987)
- He Is There and He Is Not Silent* by Francis Schaeffer (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972)
- Can Man Live Without God?* by Ravi Zacharias (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994)
- Jesus Among Other Gods*, youth edition, by Robbie Zacharias and Kevin Johnson (Dallas: Word Publishing, 2000)
- Mere Christianity* by CS Lewis (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952) copyright renewed 1980
- Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended* by Greg Bahnsen (Nacodoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2008)
- Christian Apologetics* by Cornelius Van Til (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1976)

²² I suppose they are not free if one does not have access to free internet services. I should not neglect to mention that www.youtube.com is a primary site to utilize; one can see lectures, debates, dialogues and the like from numerous popular and highly credentialed apologists from around the globe.

An Introduction to Systematic Theology, Second Edition, by Cornelius Van Til (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2007)

Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought by John Frame (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1995)

The Case for Christianity by CS Lewis (New York: McMillan Company, 1943)

Miracles by C.S. Lewis (San Francisco: Harper, 1974)

Christian Apologetics by Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976)

The Real Face of Atheism by Ravi Zacharias (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004)

101 Reasons You Can Believe: Why the Christian Faith Makes Sense by Ralph Muncaster (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004)

Apologetics to the Glory of God by John Frame (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994)

A Christian Theory of Knowledge by Cornelius Van Til (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969)

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism by Timothy Keller (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008)

Who Made God?: And Answers to Over 100 Other Tough Questions Ravi Zacharias and Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003)

Reason for the Hope Within, ed. by Michael Murray, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999)

If God, Why Evil? By Norman Geisler (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2011)

Escape From Reason by Francis Schaeffer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006)

Handbook of Christian Apologetics by Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994)

Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics by Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999)

Christian Apologetics: Past and Present, Vol. 1, edited by William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009)

Christian Apologetics: Past and Present, Vol. 2, edited by William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011)

Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources, edited by Khaldoun Sweis and Chad Meister, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012)

Faith and Reason by Ronald Nash (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988)

The Defense of the Faith by Cornelius Van Til (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2008)

Faith and Reason by Richard Swinburne (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) reprinted in 2005

The Forgotten Trinity by James White (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 1998)

The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters, by Norman Geisler and Patrick Zuckeran (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009)

Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith, by K. Scott Oliphint (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).
Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview by J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003)
Evidence for God by Michael Licona and William Dembski (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010)
Why I Still Believe by Joe Boot (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005)
Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007)
To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview, eds. Francis Beckwith, William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004)

II. Apologetics Through the Lens of Pastoral Theology

Pastors are concerned with many things. Not the least of which is the task of making disciples of Jesus Christ, as any pastor “worth his/her salt” will be greatly motivated by the Great Commission. “Gospel communication” is at the center of the Great Commission, and by extension, Pastoral ministry. When I consider “Gospel communication” at depth, I cannot help but notice that it comes in one of at least five different modes: articulation,²³ explication,²⁴ proclamation,²⁵ demonstration,²⁶ and vindication.²⁷ Pastoral theology values each of these modes of gospel

²³ What I have in mind here is something akin to evangelism in its more literal sense; namely, someone sharing, by means of articulation, the Good News of Jesus (ie., who He is, what he did, and why it matters).

²⁴ By “explication” I mean the act of teaching and expounding upon the Good News, whether it is in a classroom, a living room Bible study, or at Sunday school.

²⁵ What I have in mind for “proclamation” is something along the lines of what occurs through the act of preaching, whether it is via pulpit ministry, a revivalistic meeting, or at a modern crusade. It is *declarative* in nature.

²⁶ Here I mean the act of encountering God’s people embodying fruits of the Gospel in daily life. Such activities may include beholding sacrificial giving, a genuine community of *apape* love, acts of altruistic kindness, etc. Such a dynamic calls to mind the well-known saying attributed to Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel at all times; use words when necessary.”

²⁷ “Vindication” would be the act of defending, “proving,” or providing rational justification of Christian truth claims. This clearly aligns with what is usually entailed in giving an *apologia*.

communication, for we are helping (or at least attempting to help) our congregants to understand the Good News, to accept the Good News, to embody the Good News, to in turn share the Good News with others, and when necessary to defend the Good News. When I speak of Gospel Communication as *vindication* I am here talking about apologetics. Certainly as pastors we need to not only think through these five dimensions of Gospel Communication, we need to engage in them through hands-on training, equipping of the Saints to share the good news, to live the good news, and to defend the good news.

Through the lens of pastoral theology I do not see apologetics as a mere discipline or study but rather as an expected practice of Christian discipleship. Acts 1:8 clearly states that the followers of Christ are to be his 'witnesses.' Certainly there is much to be explicated in this passage—more than I can address here—but at the very least we should be in agreement that Jesus himself expected of his followers to "testify to" and "bear witness of" his Lordship not only in their lives but over all of creation.

The “Other Side” of Apologetics

Assuredly, two distinct aspects of “being a witness” include (1) propositional content related to the positive assertion of the Lordship of Christ; this is done by means of predication, and (2) the very *act itself* of bearing witness. Perhaps a better way of putting it is to suggest that a 'witness' is simply a person presenting a Christian truth claim. Now on the one hand there is the *truth claim* being presented, and on the other

hand is the *presentation*—the very act itself—of presenting the truth claim. My contention is that, “pastorally speaking,” ministers should be concerned not only with providing their congregants “reasons to believe” but also with providing “practical (albeit personalized) training” regarding the presentation of his/her reasons (or personal apologetic). This is what I like to call “*the other side of Christian apologetics*.” Too often, in my view, apologetics is viewed as primarily (if not exclusively) an intellectual or academic enterprise—a compendium of “reasons” or “arguments” proffered by an apologist. A mere survey of how apologetics has been defined may, in fact, confirm my supposition:

Christian apologetics is the strategy of setting forth the truthfulness of the Christian faith and its right to the claim of the knowledge of God.²⁸ (Bernard Ramm).

Apologetics is that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.²⁹ (William Lane Craig)

Apologetics [is] the philosophical defense of the Christian faith.³⁰ (Ronald Nash)

Apologetics is concerned with the defense of the Christian faith against charges of falsehood, inconsistency, or credulity.³¹ (Steven Cowan)

Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.³² (Cornelius Van Til)

²⁸ Ramm, *Varieties*, 13.

²⁹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15.

³⁰ Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 14.

³¹ Steven B. Cowan, gen. ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 8.

³² Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), 1.

Apologetics is the discipline that deals with a rational defense of Christian faith.³³ (Norman Geisler)

Christian apologetics is the application of biblical truth to unbelief.³⁴ (K. Scott Oliphint)

As we consider these definitions of apologetics, the vast majority of them emphasize it to be a discipline focusing on the veridicality of the Christian worldview over against the fallacious contentions of unbelieving thought. Make no mistake; this certainly is an essential dimension of the discipline. We must not, however, divorce apologetics from the personal dimension of defense-making. The *art* of defense-making is just as much apologetics as the arguments utilized in the act of providing an *apologia*. This is why I much prefer to define apologetics as the “art and science of defending one’s faith.”³⁵ My conviction concerning this is also, no doubt, why I find it refreshing when I encounter an all-too-rare definition provided by John Frame: “Christian apologetics 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.*”³⁶ I believe that professor Frame is on to something here. He clearly sees something in 1 Peter 3:15-16 which guides his rationale in defining apologetics this way. Let us turn our attention briefly to this famous passage.

³³ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 37.

³⁴ K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 14.

³⁵ It is an “art” in that it entails skill, ingenuity, and personal creativity; it is a “science” in the more traditional meaning of the Latin word *scientia*, ie., dealing with a claim to “knowledge.”

³⁶ John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 1. Emphasis here is mine.

Returning to the “Heart of Apologetics”

Without question 1 Peter 3:15-16 is the charter verse for Christian apologetics.³⁷ It is considered by most to be the *locus classicus* for Christian defense-making. This is not disputed. Upon further analysis, one could say this passage addresses "the heart of apologetics."

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 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, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.³⁸

First of all, notice Peter's admonition to the dispersed churches regards perseverance amidst being persecuted for righteousness' sake. The immediate context in which believers are to give "an answer back" appears, at least in this passage, to be one that is hostile. The apostle Peter recognizes that although we bear the message of hope, many will despise the very one we represent. Peter's counsel to be prepared at any moment to give witness to the Lordship of Christ flows from a heart upon which Christ rightly sits enthroned. Furthermore, one should notice that the apostle Peter expects a negative reaction to the very reasons set forth for one's hope in Christ, for he states "*when* you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ" (emphasis mine). Peter assumes, in a sense, that many, if not most, will reject the

³⁷ Cf. Greg Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated & Defended* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2008), 4.

³⁸ 1 Peter 3:13-16 ESV

Lordship of Christ. In this brief text I observe at least four entailments which follow from Peter's admonition.

Motive. That a person is offering "reasons for the hope within" should flow from a desire to honor Christ *as Lord* and *as holy*. This, one could say, is one's "reasonable act of worship."³⁹ The defense-making is part and parcel with what it means to be a disciple of Christ. To be a disciple is to worship the Lord with one's life, and this life includes "reasons" which ground one's personal faith in Him. One may give an *apologia*, but if his/her motives are askew in the process, such "worship response" is tainted.

Manner. Not only is there a motive behind our "reply," there is also an overall tone, or *way* in which we ought to give an answer back. In Peter's words we are to "do so with gentleness and respect." Such a qualification is insightful, for it demonstrates that the very manner in which we make a defense nonverbally communicates something about our message and the One about whom the message revolves. One could make the argument that *how* we say what we say is almost as important as the *reasons* we believe, or *why* we are contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Material. Our apologetic certainly posits truth content; that is, there are propositional truth claims we make regarding the Good News of Christ. Any (and every) worldview does the same. Indeed, we may have many reasons for the hope we bear in

³⁹ This phrase harkens back to Romans 12:1. The apostle Paul concludes this verse with τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν (lit. "the reasonable service of you" or "your rational worship/service.")

Christ, but apologetics cannot—*should not*—be reduced to "reasons" per se. Defense-making is much, much more than that. Please do not mistake what I am saying.

Certainly we should *affirm* only that which is in keeping with Scripture and sound doctrine, but we should also stress the apologetic power of a personal testimony. Our “reasons” should be personal and *personalized*. Theistic arguments *are* helpful at times; historical evidence concerning the historicity of the resurrection is significantly important; upholding the intelligibility of human experience as possible only through the triune God of Scripture is, in my view, immensely invaluable. And though these may in fact be some of the reasons which help to anchor our hope in Christ, the most important “answer back” to be shared *in the moment* is what the Holy Spirit, through us, intends for us to share, no matter how sophisticated or erudite it may seem. Indeed, the Spirit empowers that which He inspires. As Christian leaders, pastors, and academicians, we must be careful not to give the impression to our “peers in the pews” that to be effective in Christian defense-making we must be experts in the philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, or biblical studies (though praise God some of us may be).

Inasmuch as we ought to be vigilant to share and defend the Gospel, we must also, in turn, be careful not to reduce Christianity down to a set of principles, facts, or abstractions. Christianity is relational at its core, and so should be our defense-making. This, I reckon, is perhaps, in part, what folks are looking for from us in our *apologia*. This may be in fact what Peter is driving at: not “give reasons for faith” but “give *your*

reasons for *your* faith.” This individualized, personalized *apologia* carries tremendous value, as is what the Spirit may empower most in the act of defense-making.

Method. Finally, Peter does not offer directions for how the “reasons” ought to be conveyed by believers; rather, he simply gives a directive for believers to be ready to give reasons in a moment’s notice.⁴⁰ Peter gives no instruction as to what apologetical method should be utilized, but this may be implied, when he states that we are to “be ready.” Part of “being ready” may assume an approach or method of defense-making. We all would do well to be self-reflective in searching our own hearts with respect to the various reasons for the Hope in *us*. Few things could be more practical than that.

III. Christian Apologetics As Practical Theology:

As I begin to conclude my paper, I would like to suggest that Christian apologetics is not just theology or philosophy of religion, but is practical theology. At the risk of not assuming everyone knows what I have in mind by the term “practical theology,” allow me to provide a few definitions. James H. Railey, Jr. and Benny Aker define practical theology in the following way:

Practical theology is the division of theology that puts the truths of theological investigation into practice and the life of the community. Included in this division are preaching, evangelism, missions, pastoral care and counseling, pastoral administration, church education, and Christian ethics.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Recall that these “reasons” are to be given to *anyone* who inquires. This qualifier is instructive, for it negates the option of “personal selectivity” on the part of the believer.

⁴¹ Stanley Horton, ed., *Systematic Theology*, rev. ed., (Springfield, MO: Logion Press), 48.

Furthermore, Stephen Pattison and James Woodward explain that:

Practical theology is a term that emerged in the German protestant tradition as part of the academic theological curriculum in the late 18th century. Although pastoral care was seen as one important area of concern in practical theology, its concerns extended beyond this to specialist interest in worship, preaching, Christian education, and church government. The purpose of practical theology was to apply theological principles to these activities.⁴²

I would like to point out that I do in fact differentiate pastoral theology from practical theology. Pastoral theology, in my view, is assumed within practical theology; that is, pastoral theology is one of many expressions of practical theology. Admittedly so, "pastoral theology and practical theology are sometimes talked about as if they're completely different things; at other times as if they were exactly the same."⁴³ Pattison and Woodward proceed to point out that "nowadays, there's a lot of common ground between pastoral theology and practical theology. Ultimately, both are concerned with *how theological activity can inform and be informed by practical action in the interests of making an appropriate, effective Christian response in the modern world.*"⁴⁴

Ray Anderson, offering a helpful definition, describes practical theology as

a dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God's purposes for humanity, carried out in the light of Christian Scripture and tradition, and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge. As a theological discipline its primary purpose is to ensure that the church's

⁴² James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis mine.

public proclamations and praxis in the world faithfully reflect the nature and purpose of God's continuing mission to the world and in so doing authentically addresses the contemporary context into which the church seeks to minister.⁴⁵

These definitions, though limited in scope and number, at the very least help us to see three things: (1) Practical theology seeks to bridge (if not unite) theory and practice; (2) Practical theology utilizes and pulls from multiple fields of study; (3) Practical theology critically evaluates and critiques the methodologies employed in a wide range of ministries of the church in/to the Church as well as in/to the world.

In light of Anderson's comments, how might we think about contemporary Christian apologetics through the lens of practical theology? How might a practical theology assist in bridging the theory of apologetics with the efforts of the layman in the act of defense-making? How might practical theology's utilizing multiple fields of study broaden the discussion of apologetics?⁴⁶ Such questions, in my view, are both relevant and important, and they present us with clear potential for further exploration and research.

In conclusion, many folks in the pews are eager to get equipped in apologetics training, but regrettably many pastors, church leaders, and even academicians do them a disservice when these folks are not assisted in (1) surveying a brief history of

⁴⁵ Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 22.

⁴⁶ I recall a stimulating conversation with Dr. John H. Coe, director of the Institute for Spiritual Formation and faculty member at the Rosemead School of Psychology, wherein he mused at the potential for "therapeutic apologetics." His point (via experience) was clear: many, if not most, people have spiritual/psychological roadblocks behind much of their resistance to Christ and Christianity.

“apologetics,” (2) understanding our contemporary apologetic *Sitz im leben*, (3) comprehending major approaches and systems of apologetics, (4) being made aware of various resources available, and (5) thinking through their own personal *apologia*. Apologetics is not simply an abstract exercise but a crucial dimension of Christian discipleship – one that *any believer* can and should engage in. Apologetics is a two-sided coin: one side comprises the litany of *personal* “reasons” for Hope in Christ, and the other side is the very *act* of defense-making. Finally, the Christian academic community would do well to see apologetics as practical theology. Much potential exists for exploration and research in this area, and the results of which could gain the net effect of presenting a more potent, faithful, and effective Christian witness to the world.

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