MULTIPERSPECTIVALISM AND META-APOLOGETICS: PROBING THE MULTIVALENT NATURE OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

Philosophy Interest Group

Jeremy M. Wallace
Oral Roberts University

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Introduction

I'd like to begin this paper by stating the obvious: the intellectual discipline of Christian apologetics continues to bourgeon and find new life today despite its various challenges and misunderstandings. As my title suggests, the intention of this paper is to explore the connection between multiperspectivalism and meta-apologetics and consider whether apologetics is triperspectival. I shall first by define meta-apologetics and acknowledge its aims, then I will provide a broad overview of multiperspectivalism, and conclude with a brief consideration of apologetics as triperspectival in nature.

Meta-Apologetics

In a setting like this there's a strong likelihood I do not need to define apologetics. However, in the case that somebody isn't really sure what it is, scholars have variously defined it as either "that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith"[1] (William Lane Craig), or as "the rational defense of the Christian worldview as objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging"[2] (Douglas Groothuis). However, I share a deep affinity for John Frame's take on the discipline,

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

[2] Doughlas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 24.

wherein he describes it in the following way: "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*"[3] (John Frame). No doubt you've already noted a diversity of definitions here. Is it the work of theology as Craig suggests? Is it, rather, a matter of vindicating one's worldview as Groothuis claims? Or again, is it more practical in its orientation? What are we to make of the definitional diversity of the discipline? Does it suggest inherent discordance within the field? Or is this something we should expect? I shall return to these questions in due course.

If defining "apologetics" is not as straight forward as one might prefer, what about its subdiscipline of meta-apologetics. Here too I turn to a few scholarly definitions. In *Faith Has Its Reasons*, Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., define it as "the study of the nature and methods of apologetics." They point out that "[w]hile apologetics studies the defense of the faith, metapologetic[s] [sic.] studies the theoretical issues underlying the defense of the faith. It is evident, then, that metapologetics is a branch of apologetics; it focuses on the principial, fundamental questions that must be answered properly if the practice of apologetics is to be securely grounded in truth."[4] Alternatively, James K. Beilby, in his *Thinking about Christian Apologetics*, has defined it in the following way:

> Meta-apologetics is a second-ordered discipline. In other words, it is a discipline that analyzes another discipline. One engaged in meta-apologetics is interested in asking what apologetics is, how it should be done and what makes it effective . . . The value of meta-

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

[4] Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 4. Later in their work they contend that six meta-apologetical questions need to be addressed: (1) On what basis do we argue that Christianity is the truth?, (2) What is the relationship between apologetics and theology?; (3) Should apologetics engage in a philosophical defense of the Christian faith?; (4) Can science be used to defend the Christian faith?; (5) Can the Christian faith be supported by historical inquiry?; and (6) How is our knowledge of Christian truth related to our experience? (39-42).

> apologetics should be obvious. It is difficult to do apologetics well if you don't understand the task itself or if you have not thought through the various questions embedded within the task. Consequently, even though *meta-apologetics does not directly defend and commend the Christian faith*, it supports apologists who do so.[5]

Mark Hanna describes it as "the field of inquiry that examines the methods, concepts, and foundations of apologetic systems and perspectives."[6] Some excellent works have produced various taxonomies of apologetic systems. These would include *Five Views of Apologetics*, edited by Cowen, *Faith Has Its Reasons* by Boa and Bowman, Brian Morley's *Mapping Christian Apologetics*, and even Bernard Ramm's classic, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics*. While our English word apologetics is derived etymologically from the Greek word *apologia* (from the Greek verb *apologeomai*), its usage is replete throughout classical Greek literature and has appeared consistently in Christian literature ever since the days of Justin Martyr. But what about the word "meta-apologetics"? As far as can be determined, John Warwick Montgomery appears to be the first to coin the term dating back to 1978 in his *Faith Founded on Fact*.[7] In terms of pop culture, it appears we are in a bit of a "meta" boom, at least in terms of its increasing usage in our contemporary Western nomenclature. Look no further than Mark Zuckerburg himself. Other well-known fields of inquiry utilize the prefix *meta-*, such as metaphysics or metaethics. Matthew Sokoloski, from the Warren Christian Apologetics Center, sheds light on the task of meta-apologetics, arguing that it

> asks questions like: what is the basis for our arguments for the truth of Christianity? Is apologetics grounded in reason or faith? What is the relationship between faith and reason? Is our foundation for apologetics scripture, philosophy, science, or history? What role does our subjective experience have in our formulations of an apologetic? This list is

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[5] James K. Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics: What It Is and Why We Do It* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 31. Emphasis added.

[6] *Crucial Questions in Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 94, cited in "What is Apologetics?", Bible.org. n.d.

[7] Boa and Bowman, 4.

> not exhaustive but rather gives you an idea of the kind of inquiry that happens in meta-apologetics. It is an opportunity to "zoom out" on the big picture and see how we approach the fundamental pillars of Christian faith."[8]

In sum, assuming that Boa and Bowman, Beilby, and Sokoloski are right, meta-apologetics seeks to define "what apologetics is, how it should be done [, . . .] what makes it effective,"[9] and it deals with "questions that must be answered properly if the practice of apologetics is to be securely grounded in truth."[10] In brief, meta-apologetics centers on nature, purpose, methods, and preconditions of apologetics.

Multiperspectivalism

John Frame

The seeds for multiperspectivalism may well be found in the writings of Cornelius Van Til, but properly speaking, it is John Frame who is the first to formulate and articulate the view. Coterminacy, co-extensiveness, and co-determinacy are common notions in Van Til's work, but they mostly remain within the context of discussion about God's nature and operations. John Frame, who not only studied under Van Til, but is widely viewed to be the leading exemplar of Van Tillian presuppositionalism today, built upon Van Til's overall framework, developing what he first called "triperspectivalism."[11] "From an early point in his classroom teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary, John Frame deployed his key perspectival triads."[12] Within

[8] Matthew Sokoloski, "The Importance of Meta-Apologetics." Warren Christian Apologetics Center. April 11, 2019 https://warrenapologetics.org/articles-miscellanea/2019/4/9/the-importance-of-meta-apologetics accessed March 5, 2026

[9] Beilby, 31.

[10] Boa and Bowman, 4.

[11] In Poythress' account, the "work by Van Til laid the foundation for Frame's perspectivalism" and his "perspectivalism thus grew up within the soil of Reformed theology and the Reformed apologetics of Cornelius Van Til." Vern Poythress. "Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith." www.frame-poythress.org, 4. Initially published in John J. Hughes, ed., *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2009), 173-200.

[12] Poythress. "Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith." www.frame-poythress.org, 3.

the domains of ethics and epistemology, Frame noticed that each operates through a set of triadic relations. More than that, they pertain to the same thing, but reference that very thing from different angles, or aspects. For instance, with respect to ethics Frame argued that "[e]very ethical decision involves the application of the law (norm, principal) to a situation by a person (self)."[13] In other words, all moral decision-making is made by a subject, within an ethical milieu, grounding it in an ethical norm/law. Each of these Frame would proceed to call a "perspective." A similar situation arises in the field of epistemology. When we speak of knowledge, for instance, Frame says,

> We commonly distinguish between knowledge of facts "("knowing that..."), knowledge of skills ("knowing how..."), and knowledge of persons ("knowing whom..."). These three are related, but they are not identical with one another. Knowing a person involves knowing facts about him (contrary to some "personalistic" theologians), but one can know facts about someone without knowing him, and vice versa . . . all three kinds of knowledge are mentioned in scripture, and all are important theologically.[14]

Knowledge, therefore, is not monolithic or unidimensional. It's more complex than that. To state it another way, "human knowledge can be understood in three ways: as knowledge of God's norm, as knowledge of our situation, and as knowledge of ourselves. None can be achieved adequately without the others. Each includes the others. Each, therefore, is a perspective on the whole of human knowledge."[15] Elsewhere, Frame entertains both the unity and multiplicity inherent within knowledge.

> Knowledge of God's law, the world, and the self are interdependent and ultimately identical. We understand the law by studying its relations to the world and the self—its "applications"—that its meaning and its application are ultimately identical. Thus, all knowledge is the knowledge of the law. All knowledge also is a knowledge of the world, since all our knowledge (of God or the world) comes through creative media. And all

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[13] John Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1989), 74.

[14] Ibid., 46.

[15] Ibid., 75; cf. Figure 2.

> knowledge is of self, because we know all things by means of our own experience and thoughts. The three kinds of knowledge, then, are identical but "perspectivaly" related; they represent the same knowledge, viewed from three different (angles) or "perspectives."[16]

Thus, human knowledge, for Frame, is always triperspectival: as normative, situational, and existential. The normative perspective, he says, "focuses on God's authority as expressed through his law. That authority is self-attesting; it cannot be tested by any higher criterion. Man was made to think in accordance with God's law, but he rebelled. Although fallen man seeks to repress his knowledge of the law, he continues to know it and even uses it to survive in God's world."[17] Alternatively, the situational perspective focuses "on the law as revealed both in Scripture and in the creation generally. God commands us to understand the creation well enough to apply scripture to all areas of life. Knowledge of creation is necessary if we are to apply scripture properly."[18] Finally, the existential perspective "focuses on the law as revealed in man as God's image. We get to know the law better as we come to know ourselves better. Furthermore, we learn how regeneration and sanctification (i.e., obedience) are essential to knowledge in the fullest sense and how these interact with law and situation to lead us into truth."[19]

In *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, Frame applied his multiperspectival methodology to apologetics and argumentation. With respect to apologetics, he claims that the *situational* perspective deals with the facts of the gospel, the *normative* perspective deals with the rules of apologetic thought, and the *existential* perspective deals with the actual process of

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[16] Ibid., Appendix A, 89.

[17] Ibid., 75.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

apologetic dialogue.[20] Regarding the discipline of logical argumentation, he maintains that "a good deductive argument in apologetics needs to have three qualities. It needs to be *valid* (i.e., it follows the laws of logic), *sound* (its premises are true and therefore its conclusion is true), and *persuasive* (it is effective in bringing people to believe the conclusion). Many arguments are valid and sound but not persuasive . . ."[21] In Frame's view, triperspectivalism can be applied to argumentation as well. Why? He contends that the matter of an argument's *validity* reflects the normative perspective because it is concerned with "following laws," *soundness* signifies the situational perspective, "stating true facts about the world," and *persuasiveness* expresses the existential perspective, "appealing to the hearts and minds of its audience."[22]

Since the topic of apologetics is central to this paper, it is germane to point out that Frame has long taught that apologetics be viewed as a triperspectival discipline. He speaks of apologetics as "proof," "defense," and "offense." Apologetics as "proof," relates to making "a rational basis for faith or proving Christianity to be true." Apologetics as "defense" addresses "answering the objections of unbelief." Lastly, apologetics as "offense" pertains to "attacking the foolishness of unbelieving thought." In his words, "these three types of apologetics are perspectivally related. That is to say, each one, done fully and rightly, includes the other two, so that each is a way of looking at (i.e., a perspective on) the whole apologetic enterprise . . . So in a way, the three forms of apologetics are equivalent. But it is good for us nevertheless to

[20] John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2015), 266n8.

[21] Ibid., 76.

[22] Ibid., 76n19.

distinguish these perspectives, for they certainly represent genuinely different emphases that compliment and strengthen one another."[23]

Frame would, over time, distinguish between perspectivalism as a general concept and perspectivalism as a method.[24] As a "general concept [it means] simply that because we are not God, because we are finite, not infinite, we cannot know everything at a glance, and therefore our knowledge is limited to one perspective or another…"[25] This use of perspectivalism as both a general concept as well as a method was picked up and greatly advanced by Frame's colleague and friend, Vern Poythress.

Vern Poythress

Carrying on the work initiated by Frame, Vern Poythress has been prolific in his application of multiperspectivalism to a broad range of disciplines. He was a student of Frame in the seventies and the two of them collaborated ever since. Perspectivalism permeates much, if not most, of Poythress' scholarship. His first major publication employing the methodology was to the field of science in his *Philosophy, Science, and the Sovereignty of God*,[26] and later to theology in *Symphonic Theology*.[27] According to Poythress, "[a] perspective is a view of something from somewhere by someone . . . More precisely, a perspective is an analogical view of something from somewhere by someone."[28] This is, of course, because "any particular human being always

[23] Frame, *Apologetics*, 2.

[24] John M. Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism," May 14, 2008. www.frame-poythress.org

[25] Ibid.

[26] Vern Poythress, *Philosophy, Science, and the Sovereignty of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976).

[27] Vern Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987).

[28] *Redeeming Reason: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 127.

knows and experiences truth from the standpoint of who he [or she] is."[29] All our scholarly endeavors are (always and ever) done by us (someone), in a particular context (somewhere) about something we deem to be of importance.

Frame was not, however, the only influence upon Poythress in developing his own view of multiperspectivalism. Poythress reflects autobiographically, saying, "I received another influence [regarding multiperspectivalism]. Beginning in the summer of 1971, I studied for several summers at the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Norman, Oklahoma, where Kenneth L. Pike taught tagmemics, a linguistic approach with multiperspectival characteristics."[30] According to Poythress, Pike "developed his multiperspectivalism earlier than Frame, and independent of the influence of Westminster Theological Seminary. And yet at the bottom the two kinds of multiperspectivalism are virtually identical in spirit." Pike was a professor of linguistics at the University of Michigan, and his so-called tagmemic theory of linguistics led him to discover that there were various

> comparisons between patterns in sound and in grammar which led him to summarize the patterns in terms of three characteristic aspects of analysis of a linguistic unit: contrast, variation, and distribution. These formed a triperspectival triad, the first that Pike developed. The three aspects are interdependent and interlocked with one another. In actual phenomena in language use, they are not strictly isolatable, but are co-present dimensions in the total function of the language.[31]

Perhaps some of you are familiar with his 1959 ground-breaking article entitled, "Language as Particle, Wave, and Field."[32] Of course, the language he uses borrowed from the field of physics

[29] Poythress, "Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith," 1.

[30] Ibid., 10.

[31] Ibid., 11.

[32] Kenneth L. Pike, "Language as Particle, Wave, and Field," *The Texas Quarterly* 2/2 (1959) 37- 54.

and should not be conflated with it. However, this article was the first time he introduced the three "views" of language.

> Pike explained that linguistics could look at language as consisting of particles (a static approach oriented to distinguishable pieces), waves (a dynamic approach, looking at flow and mutual influence), and fields (a relational approach, focusing on systematic patterns of relations in multiple dimensions). Each of these approaches can in principle be applied to the same piece of language, and people notice different patterns by using each approach. These views are three perspectives.[33]

A form of multiperspectivalism can also be found in the work of Dorothy Sayers. In her well-known work, *The Mind of the Maker* (1941), she argues that "any act of human creation has three coherent aspects, which she names 'Idea,' 'Energy,' and 'Power.'"[34] She explains these more fully, stating

> "The Creative Idea" is the idea of the creative work as a whole, even before it comes to expression... "The Creative Energy" or "Activity" is the process of working out the idea, both mentally and on paper . . . Third is "The Creative Power," "the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul: . . . this is the image of the indwelling spirit" [*The Mind of the Maker*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941.] Sayers also observes that each of three aspects, Idea, Activity, and Power, is intelligible only in the context of the others. She affirms the coherence or indwelling of each in the others.[35]

In addition to the field of science, Poythress applied multiperspectivalism to logic and human reasoning as well. Regarding human reasoning he states, "We may apply the same reasoning to the law of noncontradiction, as one norm. (1) the law of noncontradiction has to have authority; (2) it has to hold true in particular cases in the world; and (3) it has to constrain people who are thinking. These three aspects hold together, but they are also distinct. They are one form of reflection of the trinitarian character of God."[36] Poythress advances his thesis further, saying,

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[33] Poythress, "Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith," 11.

[34] Ibid., 12.

[35] Ibid., 12.

[36] *Redeeming Reason*, 21-22.

> In fact, in all human reasoning, and not simply with the law of noncontradiction, God is there in three aspects. (1) He is there as authority; (2) he is there as *ruler* over the *world* to which reasoning applies; and (3) he is there in personal *presence* for the people who are reasoning. There are three aspects, namely authority, control (rule over the world), and presence. These three have a close relation to the three perspectives on ethics. Authority is closely related to the normative perspective; control is closely related to the situational perspective (because control is control over the situation); presence is closely related to the existential perspective (it is personal presence to us who are persons with our inward motives). God is authoritative, controlling, and present. God does these three things as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In *Redeeming Reason*, Poythress sets forth his case that human knowledge is triperspectival following the same line of reasoning as Frame. "Our human knowledge of God is limited, because we are finite," he states. "But it can still be true. And our human knowledge reflects God's knowledge of himself, though the reflection is a derivative reflection and we remain finite while God remains infinite."[37] Pulling from the deep-rooted Reformed tradition, Poythress denotes the triperspectival nature of human knowledge as *ectypal*, in contrast to the divine kind of knowledge possessed by the Triune God, who is the archetype of knowledge. Further, he associates the archetypal knowledge of God with his divine attributes. He writes, "We can see that, in our own thinking about God's attributes, each attribute functions as a perspective. This perspectival character of the attributes is an implication of God's being simple. Now, God is the ultimate source for all perspectives and for all analogies. He is the archetype."[38] Poythress begins to make the case that the ectypal knowledge of man as triperspectival is what it is precisely because God is the archetypal source of knowledge, and the knowledge God has is triperspectival in an ultimate sense because God is Tri-Personal.

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[37] *Redeeming Reason*, 148.

[38] Ibid., 148.

> Each person of the Trinity has a personal perspective associated with his divine knowledge. Each person is "analogous" to the other persons. In this form of analogy is the archetypal form of analogy. The simplicity has effects when reflected in the world. Human knowledge, and the structure of the world itself, is filled with perspectives and analogies. The perspectives can be expected to function as perspectives on the whole of truth. Truth originates in God, and any truth that we have comes as a gift from God (Psalm 94:10b), reflecting God's own infinite knowledge of the truth. In God the truth is simple, because God is simple, just as God is omnipotent and God is eternal. The three personal perspectives within the Trinity, one for each person of the Trinity, are perspectives on the whole truth, which is unified.[39]

The nature of God as triune—one God possessing three perspectives as Father, Spirit, and Son—satisfies the metaphysical preconditions for a triperspectival mode of knowledge and knowing.

Poythress' application of multiperspectivalism can be seen in his work on sociology. He applies Frame's "Lordship theology" triad of authority, power, and presence to human relationships, and these, he tells us, reveal a great deal about the covenantal nature of God.[40] As he puts it, humans "made in the image of God exhibit a kind of derivative of divine authority, control, and presence."[41] Here one may recall that Van Til used to speak of human beings as "finite replicas of the divine." Since God's Lordship encompasses authority, presence, and control, it follows from the doctrine of *imago Dei* that humans too would exhibit authority, presence, and control. In Poythress' words,

> Human beings can exercise authority when they are in a position of authority. They issue commands that they expect to be obeyed . . . Second, human beings exercise control . . . This control need not take the form of trying totally to dominate a relationship and control it unilaterally. Human beings exercise the power of control any time they actively

[39] Ibid., 148.

[40] He writes, "God's covenantal arrangements with human beings naturally reveal many aspects of God's character. And by implication they often reveal aspects of human character because human beings are analogically related to God through being created in his image. God shows himself to be the Lord in his relations with human beings. John Frame has observed that God's Lordship expresses itself in three aspects, which he has denominated authority, control, and presence." Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Sociology: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 34.

[41] Ibid., 39.

> contribute to a relationship . . . Third, human beings exhibit presence. They are present to one another most obviously in the case of immediate bodily presence.[42]

This line of reasoning brings to mind Michael Heiser's commentary on what it means to "image God."[43] Whereas God is "Lord of heaven and earth," lordship (with a lowercase "l") of a certain kind is given to angels over the unseen realm and to humans to exercise dominion over the seen realm.

Lastly, I want to highlight Poythress' multiperspectival view on the subject of history. The specific triad he assigns to this discipline includes *events*, *people*, *meanings*. "[E]vents, people, and meanings cannot really be separated," he writes. "We may temporarily choose to focus on one of the three. But in the background, out of focus, are the other two."[44] History is triperspectival because the perspectives of events, people and meanings "interlock; they cohere, partly because they describe the very same meaningful events and partly because they have intrinsic coherence due to God being the ultimate source of all three. These three perspectives have a close relation to . . . the situational perspective, the existential perspective, and the normative perspective. . . [but] they can be reapplied for the analysis of history."[45]

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[42] Ibid., 39.

[43] Poythress pressing his point even further, noting: "Human relationships depend vitally on all three of these aspects—authority, control, and presence. Without authority, we have no standard for evaluating a relationship in moral terms . . . Second, consider the aspect of *control*. We need control. Without it, relationships do not do anything, and they would make no difference . . . Finally, consider *presence*. Without presence, relationships would be disconnected from the human participants and would lose their point . . . We depend on the fact that we are made in the image of God, with authority, control, and presence. The three aspects of authority, control, and presence all belong to God. But we can also see a loose association between these three aspects and the three persons of the Trinity. Authority belongs to God the father, control to God the Son, who executes the purposes of the Father, and presence with the Holy Spirit, who indwells believers and brings the presence of God intimately to bear on their lives." Ibid., 41.

[44] Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Our Thinking About History: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 35.

[45] Ibid., 35-36.

The Christian Resolution to the "Problem of the One and the Many"

At the heart of this entire discourse lies the relationship between the matter of multiperspectivalism one the one hand, and the age old "problem of the one and many," on the other. In *Redeeming Philosophy*, Poythress tackles this issue head on. He grounds the triune nature of God as the resolution to this so-called problem. "The character of God offers the ultimate explanation for the problem of the one and the many," says Poythress. "Since God is one in three and three in one, he is also capable of creating a world that has both unities and diversities in it, according to his will. His will has unity and diversity, according to the unity and diversity of God himself, and so the expression of his will within creation reflects the harmony of ono and many in God."[46] The age-old quest to determine whether unity or diversity most fundamental finds a decisive resolution in the God of the Bible. Neither unity nor diversity proves ultimate by themselves. Rather, both find their ultimacy in the very nature of the God who is both diverse yet one. Since God is both unified and diverse in His being, the fact that creation in marked by unity and diversity is not only not a problem, but may very well be something to be expected.

> The Trinity is the ultimate original for unity and diversity. Forms of unity and diversity within this world offer us created reflections of the original unity and diversity in the Trinity. This original character of God means that he is the *archetype*. An archetype is an original pattern that is reflected in something else for which it is a model. The reflection of the original is sometimes called an *ectype*. So God in his Trinitarian nature is the archetype for unity and diversity. Instances of unity and diversity within this world are ectypes.[47]

[46] *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 60.

[47] Ibid., 61.

Apologetics as Triperspectival

Having addressed meta-apologetics and multiperspectivalism, it is time for me to drive home a central and concluding point. If Boa and Bowman are correct in asserting that meta-apologetics is "the study of the nature . . . of apologetics," and Mark Hanna is correct that it "examines the methods, concepts, and foundations of apologetic systems and perspectives," I am persuaded that it is reasonable to consider the nature of apologetics as multiperspectival. When we consider the variety of definitions for apologetics offered by top-rate scholars, instead of being frustrated at the lack of unanimity, we can understand why this would be the case if apologetics is multiperspectival. In other words, if the nature of apologetics is multiperspectival, this would provide a resolution to the apparent problem of definitional discordancy. Of all the definitions of apologetics I have surveyed, the vast majority of them focus on the propositional content involved in the discipline. This is, after all, the *apologia* ("defense") provided by the apologist. But after examining how the Scriptures speak of apologetics, the emphasis centers more on the act of defense-making more than a string of propositions. Perhaps my background as a minister and my training in practical theology predispose me to resonate with Frame's definition for apologetics as the "discipline that *teaches Christians how to give a reason for their hope.*"[48] Decades ago, while teaching at Canby Bible College, I began speaking of apologetics in terms of a triadic enterprise that included ***Content*** (contained within the *apologia*), ***Praxis*** (i.e., the act of defense-making itself), and (3) ***Method*** (related to meta-apologetics). And while I do still see these dimensions to it, it seems to me that the multiperspectival approaches of Frame and Poythress offer a compelling framework through which we can see apologetics as a multivalent discipline. Poythress spoke of a perspective as "something viewed from somewhere by

[48] Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 1. Emphasis mine.

someone." The triperspectival schematization of the normative, the situational, and the existential fits impeccably. Recall that the normative perspective deals with norms and laws. Applied to apologetics, the propositional content of a person's *apologia* should correspond to reality. In other words, it should be true. Obviously, the apologist has no ground to stand on if what he is commending or defending is not true. In terms of the something/somewhere/someone formulation, the normative perspective of apologetics grounds the "something"; it grounds the *apologia*. To colloquialize here, "it's the *it*." The situational perspective is, at its root, contextual. It is the *somewhere* piece in the something/somewhere/someone scheme. For the apolog*ist* to give an apolog*y*, there must be a situation within which it occurs. Apologetics takes place is space and time, and this space and time is context. It is *sitz im leben*, right? It is setting, it is occasion, it is the arrangement of engagement. It is here that the content of apologetic methodology takes form and expression, where facts and feelings grow feet. Apologetics happens some*where*. Finally, the existential perspective puts the "someone" in the something/somewhere/someone procedure. Apologetics doesn't happen in a vacuum, even if plenty of believers think it sucks. Apologetics is inherently *personal*. What occurs in the mind and soul of the apologist informs his/her apology. Indeed, it may constrain it, or it may empower it. The existential perspective of apologetics is where the adventure takes place. This is, perhaps, why many find study of apologetics not only useful, but even devotional. For years I have defined apologetics as the "art and science of defending the Christian worldview." All three perspectives are present in this definition. "Science" and "worldview" speak to the normative perspective, "art" points to the existential, and the participle "defending" represents the situational. Apologetics is a triadic, multivalent endeavor. Frame was on to something when he wrote, "God has created us as people who learn [and act] through multi-perspectival

experience."[49] I believe he is correct and that this holds true for a number of different domains. Apologetics is no different.

Conclusion

As I draw this paper to a close, I hope you have found the thought-provoking work of Frame, Pike, Sayers, and Poythress to be helpful in providing a potential resolution to the triadic nature of knowledge, ethics, logic, argumentation, sociology, history, language, and, of course, apologetics. The work of meta-apologetics is a noble undertaking and worthy of further refinement. Viewing apologetics through the lens of multiperspectivalism can help us to see that apologetics is grounded in the triune God of Scripture, and each perspective is vital for a holistic understanding of the discipline.

[49] Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism."

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