LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Lost in the Marketplace of Ideas: A Case for Christian Apologetics as the Church's Defense
Against Youth Apostasy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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by

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Abstract

Abstract

The increasing polarization between the ideologies of Western culture and that of Protestant Christianity threatens the reception and retention of the gospel. The inability to biblically and reasonably assess these various cultural doctrines has revealed a great weakness in the church. This is demonstrated by the increasing apostasy of young Christians in the West. The youth are ill-equipped to reason about their faith and reconcile their beliefs with contradictory ideologies perpetuated by culture and held by the majority. Not only does the increasing secularity of education impose anti-Christian beliefs, but so do the recent advances in technology and subsequent access to information. Therefore, many are either rejecting their faith altogether or modifying their beliefs to fit within the overwhelming cultural opinion. Christian apologetics is necessary as a normative function in every local congregation in order to properly equip the church body to defend their faith against these false ideas. Just as certain types of ministers are essential for the functioning of the church body, the apologist should become a normative role in the local church. Apologetics should become a normal practice, not a separate/specialized ministry. Successful employment of apologetic thinking in the church will create an environment in which Christians think critically about their faith and are able to engage effectively with the Western culture of the 21st century. Implementing such a foundational change will cause a downstream effect on the youth. As parents are encouraged and equipped in reasoning about their faith, as well as given the skills to teach their children, the youth will become steadfast in their Christian beliefs despite the opposition from the secular West.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The rapidly changing culture of the West and the ease of access to information has created a bustling cultural climate often referred to as the "marketplace of ideas".[1] This presents a novel challenge for those who desire to determine what is true. Western culture exposes the population, whether explicitly or implicitly, to many ideologies and doctrines with each truth claim competing against one another. How does one discern truth from falsity?

Such a question is especially crucial when it comes to those who profess to be Christian. Given that Christianity is based solely upon the truth of salvation in the Son of God, or Jesus Christ, those who profess to be Christian, whether they know it or not, are making a truth claim. Such a truth claim, especially one as exclusive as Christianity, is innately in contradiction with all opposing claims to truth. The church, then, not only competes with these opposing truth claims, but is at war with them as they fight for the attention of the western population.

Due to the rapidly increasing access to information, these contradictory ideologies are not just present, but discreetly ushered into modern thinking on a grand scale. As a result, certain cultural doctrines have subtly made their home in the church's collective consciousness. Although these ideologies compete with Christianity, the lines between western culture and the Christian faith have begun to blur. In an attempt to avoid conflict with the culture, faith is regarded as a private disposition that remains separate from these competing truth claims. Christianity, then, is no longer a depiction of reality, but becomes a personal belief that remains

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[1] Paul Copan and Kenneth D. Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 11-15 and 161-162.

separate from the way in which one rationalizes the world. This marriage between western culture and Christianity produces a faith no longer proclaimed on the grounds of truth but rather offered as a personal opinion. Those who are of this seemingly religious opinion are either forced to sit quietly and submit to the authority of those with "real knowledge" (a concept arbitrarily decided by the culture) or abandon it altogether when the pressures of societal influence become overwhelming.

The abundance of these competing truth claims reduces the potency of the gospel and the Christian worldview, as it is dethroned from its claim to truth. Many Christians are minimizing the role of faith, if not rejecting it completely, because they are ill-equipped in addressing and rejecting these cultural doctrines. Professor of Sociology and Secular Studies at Pitzer College in Claremont, California, Phil Zuckerman published a work examining the growing secularism in America. He identifies the increase in those who claim to be religiously unaffiliated, from 8% in 1990 to 16% in 2010.[2] Since the time of this work this same statistic has increased to 22.8%.[3] Zuckerman correctly notes that this is not simply caused by non-religious people having children,[4] rather there exists an increasing rate of apostasy.[5] Among the 87 apostates interviewed by Zuckerman, the top two reasons why they left their religion was because of their parents and

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[2] Phil Zuckerman, *Faith No More: Why People Reject Religion* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

[3] "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics," *Pew Research*, accessed December 2, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.

[4] Zuckerman, *Faith No More*, 4.

[5] Bruce Hunsberger and L.b. Brown, "Religious Socialization, Apostasy, and the Impact of Family Background," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23, no. 3 (September 1984): 239–251, accessed December 2, 2020, https://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mlf&AN=EIS4893007&site=ehost-live&scope=site, 15.

education respectively.[6] He found that the greatest cause of apostasy was having parents who were unequal in their religious conviction or eventually rejected their religion altogether. He also observed that education, specifically college, was the second largest reason for leaving religion. In response to a specific interview he had with an individual named Elizabeth, a former Christian, Zuckerman comments:

> Many of the men and women I talked to found that going to college made them look at the world differently, forced them to ask questions that they had never wanted or even thought to ask, and caused them to scrutinize their own values and beliefs. Elizabeth's story is not uncommon, and previous research has consistently correlated increased educational attainment with increased secularity and apostasy.[7]

The issue here is not that college forces one to question his or her beliefs, but that it also implicitly provides the answers through the surrounding culture. The process of questioning is essential to a strong faith and should be encouraged. However, when Christians are ill-equipped in their questioning process, the overwhelming ideologies of culture, despite their validity, begin to take hold. Focused specifically on the western evangelical Christian community, an article titled Leaving the Church Behind: Applying a Deconversion Perspective to Evangelical Exit Narratives from the *Journal of Contemporary Religion* further establishes this point. This article discusses the findings of 20 different interviews with now apostate, former evangelical Christians in America. Many of the participants, when faced with competing truth claims, struggled in their questioning process of which "truth" to accept. "Trying to reconcile contradictions and discover which 'truth' was empirically correct required challenging the epistemological and moral exemplars of theism and science." In the same way, "Participants recognized contradictions between religious teachings and the information they were receiving in

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[6] Zuckerman, *Faith No More*, 153-154.

[7] Ibid, 154.

the classroom, which contributed to the simultaneous processes of learning and unlearning…".[8]

These students lacked the critical thinking skills to guide their reasoning process. In fact, several

other studies that survey the nature of apostasy note this correlation between education and the

rejection of Christianity. One survey conducted in the Netherlands records statistically

significant data concluding that "The higher one's education (up to the higher secondary level),

the greater the risk of leaving a church."[9] The same study found that the majority of apostasy

occurred between the ages 15 and 20, accounting for 52.2% of all apostates surveyed.[10] Director

of Lifeway Research, Scott McConnell, reported that "70 percent of young adults ages 23-30

stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between ages 18-22".[11] The alarming part

of this statistic is that only 20% of these church dropouts planned to leave in high school, while

the other 80% unintentionally left church as a matter of change in environment. Drew Dyck

published an article titled The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church in *Christianity Today*

compiling several surveys involving young Christians who have left the church. One of these

surveys records "young Americans are dropping out of religion at an alarming rate of five to six

times the historic rate (30 to 40 percent have no religion today, versus 5 to 10 percent a

generation ago)."[12] From the same article the president of Barna Group, David Kinnaman,

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[8] Lori L. Fazzino, "Leaving the Church Behind: Applying a Deconversion Perspective to Evangelical Exit Narratives," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (May 4, 2014): 249–266, accessed February 24, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2014.903664, 256.

[9] Ariana Need and Nan Dirk de Graaf, "'Losing My Religion': A Dynamic Analysis of Leaving the Church in the Netherlands," *European Sociological Review* 12, no. 1 (1996): 87–99, accessed February 24, 2021, https://www.jstor.org/stable/522776, 93.

[10] Need and de Graaf, "Losing My Religion," 94.

[11] "Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church," *Lifeway Research*, last modified August 7, 2007, accessed February 25, 2021, https://lifewayresearch.com/2007/08/07/reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church/.

[12] Drew Dyck, "The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church," *Christianity Today*, last modified November 19, 2009, accessed February 25, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/november/27.40.html.

powerfully illustrates, "Imagine a group photo of all the students who come to your church (or live within your community of believers) in a typical year. Take a big fat marker and cross out three out of every four faces. That's the probable toll of spiritual disengagement as students navigate through their faith during the next two decades."[13] Whether they are ill-equipped in questioning their faith or unable to discern the claims of modern education and society, it is clear that the youth are especially vulnerable to competing truth claims of culture. Due to the increased access to information through technology and social media, these competing claims are in greater abundance, provoking the need for a way in which these claims are responsibly addressed.

<div align="center">Justification of the Research</div>

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'" (Matthew 28:18-20).[14] The great commission to make disciples serves as the foundation of the church's purpose. In fact, the church's ability to make disciples should be the standard according to which success is measured. It is clear that the problem presented in the prior section directly hinders this core mission of the church. If the next generation cannot stand against the overwhelming friction caused by the ideologies of western culture, then the church will become increasingly ineffective in fulfilling her purpose. As the truth claims of surrounding culture and

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[13] Dyck, "The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church."

[14] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are from the New International Version (Colorado: Biblica, 1973).

those of Christianity further polarize, it is necessary that the church is prepared to handle any truth claim or argument "that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5). It is quite clear that the majority of the western church is currently unprepared for equipping the youth in such a task.

One of the 21st century's leading apologists, William Lane Craig, advocates for apologetics as the answer to the increasing divide between culture and Christianity. He correctly states that the gospel is never heard in isolation and will always be heard among the noise of surrounding culture, especially in this post-Christian western culture. Apologetics helps cut through this noise and it is the job of the church to address culture in such a way.

> It is for this reason that Christians who depreciate the value of apologetics because 'no one comes to Christ through arguments' are so shortsighted. For the value of apologetics extends far beyond one's immediate evangelistic contact. It is the broader task of Christian apologetics to help create and sustain a cultural milieu in which the gospel can be heard as an intellectually viable option for thinking men and women.[15]

The ideas presented by culture must be addressed to further the gospel, and apologetics is necessary in that task. Without first dispelling competing truth claims, it is difficult for one to regard Christianity as a viable worldview. J. Gresham Machen competently explains, "False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the Gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas which prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion."[16] Christian apologist, J. P. Moreland, discusses the increasing need for apologetics as he observes Christian efforts conforming to the

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[15] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 17.

[16] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Culture* (Cambridge, England: Ravenio Books, 1990), 7.

demands of culture. Having trained thousands of people in communicating the gospel to others and giving evangelistic talks all over the country, Moreland has observed the "steady erosion of apologetical reasoning and argument as part of the texture of our evangelism. Instead, evangelism is increasingly associated with the things Sowell bemoans: rhetoric, Christian buzzwords, and an overdone appeal to felt needs. In the very way we do evangelism, we have inadvertently let the world squeeze us into its mold."[17] Moreland is emphatic on his belief that local churches should be raising up apologists to serve the congregation in that focused capacity.

Because Western culture is so antithetical to the gospel, there is an increasing attempt to make the gospel relatable by addressing the "felt needs" of people. However, a foundation of met needs is subjective and unstable due to the constant shifting of what an individual believes he or she might need. What happens when individuals do not feel a need for the gospel? Meeting the needs of mankind is in the nature of the gospel, but it is not the foundation upon which it is believed. The truth of the gospel is its greatest appeal. Jesus overtly explains His relation to truth and its irreplaceable value throughout the course of his ministry (John 8:32, John 18:37, John 16:13, John 14:6). God is indeed a helper and comforter, but this would mean nothing if he were not true. When this needs-based gospel is faced with the conflicting truth claims of culture, it immediately diminishes in value. The impact of the church's deficiency in preaching the gospel on the grounds of truth is effectively demonstrated by the words of a now apostate, former Christian who was interviewed by aforementioned Phil Zuckerman:

> So what is faith? Faith is believing in something that you don't know anything about and yet you believe it happened. Well…faith is like idolatry. You're just believing just because you want to believe. But if you're going to believe something that is going to affect our lives, we should have evidence to support it.…So faith must be based on

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[17] James Porter Moreland and Dallas Willard, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 92.

evidence, and if you can't give me the evidence, I cannot believe in it. I'll say, "Show me the evidence and I'll believe it.[18]

It is crucial to understand that Christian apologetics, to a certain degree, is not just meant for the academic realm but is fundamental in the disciple-making process. In other words, it is relevant to the church as a whole, not just to a small subset. The aforementioned president of Barna Group, David Kinnaman wrote *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith* which compiles unmatched work in research among the young Christian community. Quoting this work in length is pertinent to this discussion.

> Those testimonies demanded further attention, so we focused our team on getting to know the next generation of Christians. We wanted to understand why they leave church. We wanted to hear about their difficulty with letting Christianity take long-term root. We wanted to discover how and why they are rethinking faith and whether this process is similar to or different from that of previous generations. We also wanted to identify areas of hope, growth, and spiritual vitality in the church's work with young adults. Over the last four years, we have done all of the above. Our team at Barna Group has poured over hundreds of generational studies and related books, consulted experts and academics, and probed the perspectives of parents and pastors. We have compiled and analyzed the Barna Group database of hundreds of thousands of interviews, conducted over a twenty-seven-year span, to understand the generational dynamics of faith formation. We have completed eight new scientific national studies, including nearly five thousand new interviews for this project alone. Our research has been tailored to understand eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds, asking them to describe their experience of church and faith, what has pushed them away, and what connective tissue remains between them and Christianity.[19]

In conclusion to this research, Kinnaman writes

> Like a Geiger counter under a mushroom cloud, the next generation is reacting to the radioactive intensity of social, technological, and religious changes. And for the most part, we are sending them into the world unprepared to withstand the fallout. Too many are incapable of reasoning clearly about their faith and unwilling to take real risks for Christ's sake. These shortcomings are indicators of gaps in disciple making.[20]

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[18] Zuckerman, *Faith No More*, 33-34.

[19] David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), accessed February 24, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=771364, 15.

[20] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 21.

Given that the core function of the church is to make disciples, she must address this blatant inability to reason about the faith and equip the youth in assessing the anti-Christian claims of culture. To neglect this problem is to fall short in fulfilling the Great Commission. It is clear that not only due to the increasing ease of access to these false ideas of culture, but also due to the incompetence of the modern church in addressing them, that the efforts to fulfill the Great Commission are greatly hindered by the lack of apologetics in the church.

Definition of Key Terms

Apostasy: The act of leaving the church and/or rejecting the core claims of Christianity after once affirming them

Christian Apologetics: The discipline of defending the veracity of Christianity against contradictory ideas by employing philosophical thinking to form a logically coherent defense

Postmodernism: A prevailing ideology within Western culture that presupposes the impossibility to attain true metaphysical knowledge

Scientism: The belief that science is the highest form of knowledge and has authority over all other domains of knowledge

The Church: The aggregate of those who claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ

The Gospel: The truth claim that salvation is attained solely through faith in Jesus Christ

The West: Refers to the regions of North and South America, Europe, and Australia

Design of Study

The goal of this thesis is to accurately identify the cultural ideologies that not only compete with, but oppose, evangelical Christianity in the west. Successful research will mean identification of these foundational ideologies to which the majority of opposition to Christian ideas, at least in the west, can be traced. These ideologies will be thoroughly explored with regard to their impact on Christian doctrine, and ultimately apostasy, among the youth. It is important to establish the consequences of marrying western culture with Christianity to understand why there is a need to properly address and reject these ideas. Christian apologetics will then be defined and explored in detail to identify why it is necessary in equipping young believers with the ability to discern truth and reject these cultural ideologies. In light of the clear need for apologetics in the church, a plan to effectively implement this discipline in the church will be proposed. The degree to which apologetics should be taught, how and where in which it would fit, and its varying forms are examples for topics of discussion. A successful execution of this thesis will conclude with a functional model of apologetics in the church in order to better equip the younger generation, colloquially called "Generation Z", with the ability to address and reject the competing truth claims of western culture, resulting in reinforced faith and empowered evangelism.

In summation, chapter 1 introduces the content of this exposition. Chapter 2 focuses on the several mediums through which western culture influences the youth. Inevitably, one who lives in the West will come into contact with the surrounding culture at some point. With regard to the youth population, it appears that education, family, and technology are the largest mediums through which culture has an influence. Chapter 3 further explores the specific

ideologies of culture that oppose the Christian worldview. Although there are many ideologies available throughout western culture, it appears that postmodernism and scientism are among the most foundational philosophies that act as barriers to the reception and retention of the gospel. Chapter 4 introduces Christian apologetics from a biblical perspective. Apologetics will then be applied towards the ideologies of postmodernism and scientism to reveal their illogical nature and demonstrate why they should be rejected. Chapter 5 establishes why Christian apologetics is essential to the Christian faith and proposes a model through which apologetics would be implemented.

Literature Review

There is certainly a plethora of academic works regarding Christian apologetics. However, there are fewer that have focused their efforts on addressing the specific matter of apologetics within the context of disciple-making among the Christian youth. Ravi Zacharias' *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith That We Defend* covers a broad range of the cultural ideologies causing the apostasy currently experienced among the youth. Several authors contribute to the conversation such as Alison Thomas, who establishes the need for apologetics in preventing juvenile apostasy in chapter 3. Also, pertinent concepts such as postmodernism[21] and scientism[22] are explored in great detail. In the final chapter and conclusion, Zacharias offers his idea of what apologetics ought to be in the church. He outlines the form in which it should be done without proposing *how* it should be done. The latter will be the goal of this thesis.

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[21] Ravi Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith We Defend* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 3.

[22] Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, 112.

Another work worth mentioning is Phillip Eaton's *Engaging the Culture, Changing the World: The Christian University in a Post-Christian World*. Eaton focuses his attention on the modern university and the dangerous implications of the postmodern era.[23] In response to the idea of preaching the gospel despite the increased cultural barriers amongst the college community Eaton asks, "Are we equipping our students with such a voice?"[24] Eaton offers apologetic tools that contribute to the reception and retention of the gospel despite cultural barriers.

Sean and Josh McDowell's *The Beauty of Intolerance: Setting a Generation Free to Know Truth and Love* is similar to Eaton in its attempt to address the cultural implications of postmodernism with regards to preaching the gospel. This work addresses the concept of postmodern tolerance and how it has created a "cultural chasm that is almost impossible to bridge without first understanding the real nature of moral truth."[25]

David Kinnaman, aforementioned president of Barna Group, engages this subject across his two works *UnChristian : What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters* (also by Gabe Lyons and George Barna) and *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith* (also by Aly Hawkins). Barna Group's research among the youth apostate community is unmatched and cannot be understated. Both of these written works explore the reasons why the youth are leaving the church, some preventable and some not. They also present several methods to both save the lost youth and prevent apostasy.

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[23] Philip W. Eaton, *Engaging the Culture, Changing the World: The Christian University in a Post-Christian World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 36.

[24] Eaton, *Engaging the Culture*, 120.

[25] Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *The Beauty of Intolerance: Setting a Generation Free to Know Truth and Love* (New York, NY: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2016), accessed February 26, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4354809, 18.

Both of these works are clear in that they are not in favor of apologetics for evangelism, which will be a valuable perspective to add to this conversation.[26]

Selim Kesmez of Andrew University wrote his Master's thesis titled *A Wholistic Model of Apologetics for Equipping the Youth* which resembles the scope of this discussion.[27] Kesmez conducted his own research among the youth (ages 16-31) in Germany and establishes a strong need for apologetics in the church by identifying the various cultural hindrances of the West. He then proposes a detailed model to implement apologetics in the church specifically targeting the youth.

J.P. Moreland's *Love Your God with All Your Mind* broaches the concept of the "anti-intellectualism" that is prevalent in the western church.[28] Moreland argues that a lack of healthy Christian thinking is to blame and that implementation of apologetics, among other systemic changes, can help combat it.

Luke Moen of Liberty University wrote his Master's thesis titled *Pulpits and Pews—Professors and Pagans: A Grounded Theory on Worldview Development and Integration within Christian and Secular Culture.*[29] This thesis covers a wide-range of research done with regard to apostasy, belief systems, and worldviews among the western culture. He demonstrates how the

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[26] David Kinnaman, Gabe Lyons, and George Barna, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), accessed February 24, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=476497, 167.

[27] Selim Kesmez, "A Wholistic Model of Apologetics for Equipping the Youth" (M.A., Andrews University, 2016), accessed November 8, 2020, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1844148442/abstract/47020E4554A14EAAPQ/1.

[28] Moreland and Willard, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*.

[29] Luke Moen, "Pulpits and Pews—Professors and Pagans: A Grounded Theory on Worldview Development and Integration within Christian and Secular Culture," 2020, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/masters/666.

predominant secular beliefs of this culture has and is shaping the worldviews of the next

generation.

Methodology

The majority of the research involved in this thesis will be that of a library thesis

containing previously written literature on the various topics. Given that much of the material

being discussed consists of defining and exploring terms such as apologetics, postmodernism,

and scientism, the corresponding literature will be academic analyses of such. Most of the

discussion will be focused on what the current academic experts say with regards to these

subjects. The remaining content will be that of a descriptive study that reviews existing data and

analyzes it within the context of the thesis. The particular aforementioned study by Zuckerman is

an accurate depiction of the format of this data. Another example of such data includes polls by

Pew Research Center and Barna Group which include various questionnaires and interviews with

regards to religion and beliefs.

Limitations/Delimitations

Although culture will always present barriers to reception of the gospel, different cultures

will present different challenges. Due to the many different world cultures, this specific thesis

will focus on the Western culture observed in America. When assessing culture, mainstream

academics, media, and literature will be of the most significance. Although Western culture is

still a broad category, with many sub-cultures therein, there are several identifiable trends that

are evident. Furthermore, when referring to the church, the evangelical Protestant church will be

the corresponding form of Christianity as it is the most common in America. Although this form of Christianity still encompasses a wide range of denominations, the model of Christian apologetics to be discussed applies to all who accept the Bible as authoritative. This population will be further divided into the age group of generation Z which refers to those born between 1996 and 2010. This population is most relevant to this particular thesis because generation Z has access to the many ideologies of culture through technology while possibly not having yet been indoctrinated by them. It is this generation that has the potential to properly dispel dangerous ideologies from the church, if equipped with apologetic tools, and thus preventing further infiltration for future generations. This is not to say that other populations would not benefit from apologetics, however it would seem to be most effective to focus on equipping those who have not yet yielded to certain cultural truth claims.

Conclusion

The infiltration of western ideologies into the church is inevitable. However, apostasy resulting from these ideas is what the church must prevent to her fullest ability. Christian apologetics is necessary in defending against these ideas that contribute to the increasing youth apostasy of the 21st century. This thesis will explore the ways in which western culture influences the youth, the specific ideologies that it communicates, and propose a model of Christian apologetics as a normative function of the church to defend against the false truth claims of western culture.

Chapter 2: The Mediums of Ideas in Western Culture

The study of culture is an extensive science of its own kind. However, in order to properly understand the various ideologies that confront the Christian youth of western society, it is pertinent to explore the culture to some extent. The meshing of culture with the minds of the youth is inevitable, but there are several mediums through which this culture bleeds. If these ideologies remained in quarantine, then this conversation would not be important. However, this is surely not the case and there are several mediums through which western culture spreads its ideas to the population. These mediums increase in influence as the youth increases in age, which accounts for the high rates of apostasy during this period of life. Although this may be seen as stating the obvious, it is crucial to understand the severe reality of the "obvious". Many are aware of the conflicting ideologies of western culture, but few realize the long-lasting impact that "makes the process of secularization irreversible".[30] A brief analysis of the mediums of ideas and the resulting abundance of western ideologies will be the focus of this chapter. Due to their contribution to apostasy among the youth,[31] education, family, and technology are the mediums of interest.

It is impossible to live in a vacuum, and this is not innately a bad thing. The multi-cultural climate of the West is one of great beauty and diversity as each culture influences another forming the great "melting pot". In the same light, culture in itself is not a bad thing. However, the ideas of culture become dangerous when they interfere with the reasoning capabilities of its partakers. Consider a lost child in a busy supermarket. The abundant bustle and

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[30] Need and Dirk de Graaf, "Losing My Religion," 97.

[31] See research from Chapter 1, specifically Zuckerman, Need and Dirk de Graaf, and Pew Research Center.

motion caused by the many people make it difficult for the child to find his parent. If there is no

way for the child to differentiate between the chaos and the parent, then the child will most likely

remain lost. So it is with finding truth among the bustle of culture. Paul Copan, in *The Gospel in*

the Marketplace of Ideas, likens this reality to that of first century AD Athens in which Paul the

Apostle boldly proclaimed the gospel. Copan writes,

> As we move more and more into a post-Christian age, our neighbors, classmates,
> coworkers and even extended family members know less and less about what it means to
> believe in Christ. What they do know is often a caricature gained more from MTV or
> some television sitcom or from a hostile anti-Christian college professor than from the
> Bible.[32]

It is because of the various mediums of information, "Jesus Christ" to one person no longer

refers to the same "Jesus Christ" to another. The specific mediums of interest, with regard to

young Christians, are education, family (parents/guardians), and technology.

Education

Western education was not always a secular environment. For example, in the colonial

period of America the majority of classes were taught in the church by ministers who doubled as

schoolteachers.[33] The church considered teaching the basics of education a necessary duty as the

"pillar of truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). This practice is further established by the specific textbooks

used during that time period. For example, the *New England Primer* was the first highly

distributed textbook of early New England. This textbook taught early Christian doctrine,

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[32] Paul Copan and Kenneth D. Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 11.

[33] Tim LaHaye, *Faith of Our Founding Fathers: A Comprehensive Study of America's Christian Foundations* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, 1996), 78.

"promoted literacy, and proliferated compulsory education". As a result of the 1647 Old Deluder

Satan Act, which mandated teachers in every town, the 1688 *New England Primer* became the

principal textbook for education of children. It was used in this capacity for 150 years with an

estimated six to eight million copies sold by 1830.

> Of the millions printed, fewer than 1,500 copies remain, the earliest having been
> published in 1727. This relatively low number of surviving texts indicates the constant
> use the primer received and the impact its principles had on the development of American
> values. The multiple editions of existing copies serve as a valuable record chronicling the
> changes in early American philosophy of education.[34]

> Even more recently, Christian tradition in education is evidenced by the major American

universities. For example, the 1884 Harvard seal contained the Latin phrases *veritas* and *Christo*

et Ecclesiae, meaning "truth" and "for Christ and the Church". Julie Reuben comments on these

two phrases sharing a home on the iconic Harvard seal.

> In 1884 Harvard officials assumed that the two phrases on their new seal were
> compatible. They had inherited a world view that strongly associated truth and religion.
> The term *truth* encompassed all 'correct' knowledge; religious doctrines, common-sense
> beliefs, and scientific theories were all judged by the same cognitive standards. Religious
> truth was the most important and valuable form of knowledge because it gave meaning to
> mundane knowledge.[35]

However, Reuben notes that by the end of the 19th century this had drastically changed. She

blames this change on the arbitrary distinction between facts and values. What were once

considered harmonious under truth, the values of the university became separate from the facts

that they taught. Values were now of private matter and culturally relative, while facts were

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[34] "The New-England Primer | Textbook," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed March 2, 2021,
https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-New-England-Primer.

[35] Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the
Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

objective and authoritative.[36] This shift in philosophy was the result of the Enlightenment period and its consequent ideologies, such as Darwinism and German higher criticism.[37] Much can and will be said with regard to these ideologies later in this chapter. The main point here, nonetheless, is that the church, once the "pillar of truth" among society, was reduced to a community of feeling and opinion.

The explosion of scientific research brought about a tip in the scales on the balance of truth. George Marsden writes, "the crucial years were those between 1870 and 1914, when the modern research university emerged. The leading institutions - John Hopkins, Yale, California (Berkeley), Michigan, Harvard, Princeton, and Chicago - set the pace, initiating an academic culture that is with us still."[38] As the 17th and 18th century Enlightenment period came to a close, it left severe implications for western education in its wake. Any authoritative truth claims of religion were reduced to matters of subjective opinion. This meant that all matters of religion, including the philosophy of *Christo et Ecclesiae*, could not be taught as truth or even considered a relevant subject to study in college. Philip Eaton writes, "They air-brushed the need to understand religion right off the map of the educational enterprise."[39] Stanley Hauerwas notes, "...theology is thought to be at best not necessary for educating students and at worst a subject

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[36] J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 45.

[37] Samuel Joeckel and Thomas Chesnes, "A Slippery Slope to Secularization? An Empirical Analysis of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities," *Christian Scholar's Review* 39, no. 2 (2010): 177–196, accessed March 3, 2021, http://search.proquest.com/docview/201279052/abstract/F379DD573DDB41D6PQ/1, 178.

[38] Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass, "Christianity and Academic Soul-Searching -- The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-Belief by George M. Marsden," *The Christian Century* (Chicago, United States: Christian Century Foundation, March 15, 1995), accessed March 3, 2021, http://search.proquest.com/docview/217196463/abstract/8412CE49A6CA49B1PQ/1, 3.

[39] Eaton, *Engaging the Culture*, 174-175.

that cannot pass the epistemological standards necessary to be an academic subject."[40] At the

close of the 20th century this academic philosophy flourished as it grew more traction among

these major universities. Hauerwas cites the words of President of Yale University Richard Levin

as he addresses the *incoming* 1993 class.

> We no longer consider rhetoric and theology, for example, to be indispensable subjects. Such subjects cannot be at the heart of a liberal education according to Levin because the essence of such an education is ''to develop the freedom to think critically and independently, to cultivate one's mind to its fullest potential, to liberate oneself from prejudice, superstition, and dogma.[41]

This was the immediate ideology impressed upon the freshmen as they entered college.

Unfortunately, this mindset continues into the 21st century as well. Stephen Pinker writes

in the *Harvard Crimson*,

> ...the juxtaposition of the two words makes it sound like "faith" and "reason" are parallel and equivalent ways of knowing, and we have to help students navigate between them. But universities are about reason, pure and simple. Faith—believing something without good reasons to do so—has no place in anything but a religious institution, and our society has no shortage of these.[42]

The confidence with which the universities proclaim their bias is certainly troubling to not only

young Christians, but anyone who values education in general.

If these are the voices of modern education, how does one reconcile academia with faith?

Does the kingdom of science simply rule over the kingdom of faith? J.P. Moreland competently

addresses this question. "The shift from the ideas that there are several ways of knowing and that

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[40] Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University*, 1st ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2007), accessed March 2, 2021, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470692516, 13.

[41] Ibid, 13.

[42] Steven Pinker, "Less Faith, More Reason | Opinion | The Harvard Crimson," accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2006/10/27/less-faith-more-reason-there-is/.

theology, science, and other fields provide us with genuine knowledge, to the acceptance of

scientism (that only science provides us with true knowledge) was not made on the basis of

arguments, facts, or discoveries that laypeople just didn't know about yet. Rather, it was merely

a *pragmatic sociological shift*."[43] In other words, it is not the information, or lack thereof, that

causes one to reject the faith. It is the overwhelming biased philosophy of the education system

that influences apostasy. Facts must be strung together by philosophical reasoning. However, it is

apparent that these universities do not only deliver the facts, but they also include their scientism

philosophy as if it was empirically observable and objectively true. The unaware Christian

student will slowly be influenced as the culture of education surrounds him. To the ill-equipped

Christian in this environment, it is simply a function of time before faith is severely affected. So

"secularization comes less from the heirs of Darwin, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and the other

bearded God-killers, or from clean-shaven federal bureaucrats, than from the "everydayishness"

of sorts students will not recognize unless our religious institutions provide means for teaching

discernment.[44]

Family

A second obvious, yet crucial medium of culture is family, specifically parents (or

guardians). The idea of culture here is not necessarily that of ethnic traditions. Rather it is the

ideologies that are, both implicitly and explicitly, communicated to children through the religious

behaviors of their parents. With regard to Christian families in the west, it is more about what is

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[43] Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 48. His emphasis.

[44] Douglas V. Henry and Bob R. Agee, *Faithful Learning and the Christian Scholarly Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 57.

not being taught rather than what is being taught. A culture that assumes a hands-off role in their

child's faith is a culture marked by apostasy.

The role of parents in the spiritual development of children cannot be understated as there

is an abundance of statistics and sociological findings that demonstrate the significance of this

relationship. The Pew Research Center conducted a survey of 1,891 pairs of American teens and

their parents and found that of the parents who identify as evangelical Protestant, 80% of the

respective teenagers also did.[45] Barna Group also interviewed pastors about their perspective on

the role of parents in the spiritual formation of their children. Of 650 pastors across Protestant

and Catholic denominations, 99% and 96% agree respectively that spiritual formation starts with

the parents.[46] This should come as no surprise given that these sociological environments are

impactful during early stages of life.

Furthermore, sociological studies examine the nature of this relationship and how

variances in parental consistency is a large factor in the religious development of the child.[47] For

example, Stephen Hunt found, "Religious socialization is most likely to be successful when

parents are openly committed to their religion, where they make a conscious effort to inspire

religious values in their children, and when relationships between child and parents are

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[45] "Religious Habits of U.S. Teens," *Pew Research*, last modified September 10, 2020, accessed March 3, 2021, https://www.pewforum.org/2020/09/10/u-s-teens-take-after-their-parents-religiously-attend-services-together-and-enjoy-family-rituals/.

[46] "Who Is Responsible for Children's Faith Formation?," *Barna Group*, accessed March 3, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/children-faith-formation/.

[47] Christopher Bader and Scott A Desmond, "Do as I Say and as I Do: The Effects of Consistent Parental Beliefs and Behaviors upon Religious Transmission," *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 3 (2006): 313–329, accessed March 3, 2021, https://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001547015&site=ehost-live&scope=site, 326.

cordial."[48] Similarly, religious heterogamy, or a religious spouse with a non-religious spouse, greatly increases apostasy in the youth. In fact, the aforementioned study of apostasy in the Netherlands found that religious heterogamy among parents was one of the greatest indicators of future apostasy, second to education.[49] Richard J. Petts and Chris Knoester found "that children with religiously heterogamous parents are more likely to engage in marijuana use and underage drinking than children with religiously homogamous parents. However, these associations occur only in families where parents' religious heterogamy is a product of greater religious distance (e.g., one parent is not religious or both parents identify with different religions)."[50] Consistency to religious commitment is crucial among parents for the proper spiritual development of their children. It is not enough to enroll a child in a weekly youth service. Neither is it enough to affirm belief in Christianity with no consequent behaviors such as teaching. Discipleship in the home is absolutely essential for a faith that withstands the cultural noise.

Unfortunately, very few parents are equipped for the task. The same Barna Group survey states,

> parents generally rely upon their church to do all of the religious training their children will receive. Parents are not so much unwilling to provide more substantive training to their children as they are ill-equipped to do such work. According to the research, parents typically have no plan for the spiritual development of their children; do not consider it a priority, have little or no training in how to nurture a child's faith, have no related

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[48] Stephen Hunt, *Religion and Everyday Life* (London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), accessed March 3, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=1112418, 64.

[49] Need and de Graaf, "Losing My Religion," 95-97.

[50] Richard J. Petts and Chris Knoester, "Parents' Religious Heterogamy and Children's Well-Being," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 3 (2007): 373–389, accessed March 3, 2021, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2007.00364.x.

standards or goals that they are seeking to satisfy, and experience no accountability for their efforts.[51]

Despite the dire need for pastoral assistance, only one out of five parents of the 1,010 interviewed said they were ever personally contacted with regard to spiritual training of their children. From a biblical standpoint it is clear that the church is responsible for equipping the body of Christ for good works and maturity (Ephesians 4:11-13). Teachers and pastors should have focused efforts on mentoring parents in child discipleship. In doing so "we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching" (Ephesians 4:14). It is the church's responsibility to teach fathers how to bring their children "up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1-4). However, the church is *not* primarily responsible for the discipleship of children. This dynamic is made explicitly clear as Moses addresses the Israelites.

> These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life… These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:1-2, 6-9).

It was not necessarily Moses's job to teach the children of Israel, rather to teach the fathers of Israel so that they would continue these teachings in the next generations. The same dynamic exists today. The household family is the primary institution for spiritual formation and

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[51] "Parents Accept Responsibility for Their Child's Spiritual Development But Struggle With Effectiveness," *Barna Group*, accessed March 3, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness/.

discipleship of the youth. It is the church's job to equip the household with the necessary tools to fulfill this biblical mandate.

Unfortunately, negligence in this area has allowed the winds of false doctrine to direct the youth in the way of apostasy. The aforementioned Pew Research Center survey highlights this negligence. Of the same 650 pastors interviewed "only about one in five clergy (20% Protestant, 17% Catholic, though this number is higher for larger churches) says they prioritize training for parents, and even fewer provide parenting guides or other resources (15% Catholic, 10% Protestant)."[52] The need is apparent, but not being met. This is the responsibility of the church. However, as long as the parents are not committed to child discipleship and the church fails at addressing this need, apostasy of the Christian youth will continue. Quoting Nancy Pearcey at length concludes this conversation effectively.

> As Christian parents, pastors, teachers, and youth group leaders, we constantly see young people pulled down by the undertow of powerful cultural trends. If all we give them is a "heart" religion, it will not be strong enough to counter the lure of attractive but dangerous ideas. Young believers also need a "brain" religion— training in worldview and apologetics— to equip them to analyze and critique the competing worldviews they will encounter when they leave home. If forewarned and forearmed, young people at least have a fighting chance when they find themselves a minority of one among their classmates or work colleagues. Training young people to develop a Christian mind is no longer an option; it is part of their necessary survival equipment.[53]

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[52] "Who Is Responsible for Children's Faith Formation?," *Barna Group*, accessed March 3, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/children-faith-formation/

[53] Nancy Pearcey and Phillip E. Johnson, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Pub, 2004), 28.

Technology

The third cultural medium pertinent to this conversation is perhaps the most obvious but deserves statistical attention. The "lure of attractive but dangerous ideas", as stated by Pearcey, becomes all the more dangerous when it is accessible at all times. The technological advancements and consequent access to information of the 21st century are unique from the past. The amount of information consumed by the average American in this century is unmatched by that of previous ones. This is not hard to apprehend. For example, according to a report published by researchers at the University of California, San Diego, "The average American consumes about 34 gigabytes of data and information each day, an increase of about 350 percent over nearly three decades."[54] Pew Research Center interviewed 1,058 parents with children between the ages of 13 and 17 as well as 743 teens with regards to cell phone usage. They found that 95% of these U.S. teens say they have access to a smartphone with 45% of them claiming to be "almost constantly" on the internet.[55] This demonstrates a 22% increase from the 73% of teens who said they had access to a smartphone in 2014-2015.[56] Barna Group researched the amount of time spent utilizing a screen among typical 15 to 23 year old churchgoers. They concluded that, among those surveyed, each one spends on average 2767 hours of screen time per year, with 291 of those hours dedicated to spiritual content among churchgoers and 153

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[54] Nick Bilton, "Part of the Daily American Diet, 34 Gigabytes of Data," *The New York Times*, December 10, 2009, sec. Technology, accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/10/technology/10data.html.

[55] "Most U.S. Teens Who Use Cellphones Do It to Pass Time, Connect with Others, Learn New Things," *Pew Research Center*, accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/23/most-u-s-teens-who-use-cellphones-do-it-to-pass-time-connect-with-others-learn-new-things/.

[56] "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018," *Pew Research*, last modified May 31, 2018, accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/.

hours of spiritual content among non-churchgoers.[57] That nearly equates to four months of screen time per year with only about two weeks dedicated to spiritual content, with the term "spiritual content" being quite ambiguous as to the content of information.

Social media accounts for much of this time. Of 13 to 17 year olds with smartphones, 85% are on YouTube, 72% are on Instagram, 69% are on Snapchat, 51% are on Facebook, and 32% are on Twitter.[58] In 2016, 90% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 claimed to use social media.[59] This is not unique among the youth population either. A 10-year Pew Research study revealed that the number of American adults who use social media increased from 7% to 65% between the years 2005 and 2015.[60] These social media accounts communicate various aspects of western culture, namely postmodernism. The lack of moral truth in society contributes to the various content found in the accounts of major influencers. For example, pop-star Ariana Grande has 225 million followers, or people who view her account.[61] A brief glance at her account demonstrates the sexually-driven nature of her content, which is available for anyone with no warning. Many parents are aware of the dangers of the internet with regard to pornography but are unaware of the pornographic nature of social media. It can be argued that social media is a more dangerous threat because accounts like Ariana Grande's normalize and

[57] "Digital Babylon: Our Accelerated, Complex Culture," *Barna Group*, accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/digital-babylon/.

[58] "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018," *Pew Research*, last modified May 31, 2018, accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/.

[59] "News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2016," *Pew Research*, last modified May 26, 2016, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/.

[60] "Social Media Usage: 2005-2015," *Pew Research*, last modified October 8, 2015, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/10/08/social-networking-usage-2005-2015/.

[61] "Ariana Grande (@arianagrande) • Instagram Photos and Videos," accessed March 11, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/arianagrande/?hl=en.

even encourage a hyper-sexualized lifestyle without being labeled with the taboo term "pornography". Considering the alarming amount of time spent on social media, it is likely that many of the Christian youth are influenced by such accounts.

Furthermore, many individuals utilize social media as news sites. For example, 62% of the total adult population claim to get news from social media.[62] Sites such as Reddit and Facebook report 70% and 66% of their users respectively get news from their sites.[63] However, regardless of if one is aware of the news content on social media, the user is still unknowingly being fed various truth claims. Social media doubling as news sites creates a wide range of "truth" like a supermarket with numerous options. Just as one without any knowledge of health cannot discern between what foods to buy and what not to buy, one without the ability to discern between various ideologies will be unable to choose what to accept and what to reject.

Conclusion

Education, family, and technology are three major mediums of cultural ideologies. Because these realms are ultimately unavoidable in current western culture, there is a need to equip the youth with the ability to discern truth from falsity among the various doctrines shuttled through these mediums. Unfortunately, many remain ill-equipped and have fallen victim to the bustling chaos of the marketplace of ideas. It is important to note that the issue is not the medium

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[62] "News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2016," *Pew Research*, last modified May 26, 2016, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/.

[63] "Reddit, Facebook and Twitter Users Most Likely to Get News on Each Site," *Pew Research*, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.journalism.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2016/05/PJ_2016.05.26_social-media-and-news_0-02.png.

itself, rather are the ideologies which it communicates. Education, family, and technology are simply the vehicles through which certain ideas are ushered into modern thinking. If it were not for the anti-truth nature of western culture, then these realms would not be a problem. They are reflective of a deeper issue, that is, the false ideologies of western culture. Therefore, further discussion of the specific ideologies that compete with the truth claims of Christianity must be established before apologetics can be offered as a viable method of defense.

Chapter 3: The Core Ideologies of Western Culture

Of the many philosophies abundant in western culture, there lie several ideologies that serve as its foundation. Due to culture's grounding in these ideologies all resulting ideas must stem from the source. In terms of the supermarket analogy, the type of store that it is dictates the type of products that it sells. In the same way, the underlying principles of western culture dictate the common ideas and beliefs abundantly available among societal thinking. With regard to Christianity, there are two ideologies that have given birth to a cultural atmosphere where the gospel struggles to take root and remain grounded. Postmodernism and scientism are two core ideologies of western culture that have subconsciously made their home in the majority of societal thought. Both of these philosophies, born out of the 17th and 18th century Enlightenment era, have proven to be obstacles for the reception and retention of the gospel.

Postmodernism

> Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me (John 8:43-45)!

The postmodern era, in which the 21st century lies, refers to a number of different subjects that influence culture. Because postmodernism can be reflected in areas such as art and science, it tends to be an elusive concept. In order to examine postmodernism with regard to Christianity, its history must be briefly explored.

The postmodern era is relative to the modern era. The modern era can be traced back to the philosophical and scientific contributions of Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton.[64] Predominantly marked by the scientific advancement of the enlightenment period of the 17th and 18th centuries, modernism "presupposed the power of rationality to discover objective truth."[65] Due to theories such as Darwinism,[66] metaphysical explanations of reality were removed from serious academic inquiry. In the pursuit of truth, emphasis was placed on universal rationality, objectivity, the development of science and the goal of historical progress.[67] No longer was religion a viable form of knowledge, nor was it an acceptable explanation of reality. It was in response to this newfound philosophy that Friedrich Nietzsche deemed that God was dead.[68] It was the philosophical death of God that paved the way for an abundance of modernist thought. Thomas Altizer in *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* writes, "If there is one clear portal to the twentieth century, it is a passage through the death of God, the collapse of any meaning or reality lying beyond the newly discovered radical immanence of modern man, an immanence dissolving even the memory or the shadow of transcendence."[69]

[64] John S. Feinberg, *Can You Believe It's True?: Christian Apologetics in a Modern and Postmodern Era* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), accessed March 11, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=1224600, 28.

[65] Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), accessed March 4, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=2036863, 35-36.

[66] Joeckel and Chesnes, "A Slippery Slope to Secularization?," 178.

[67] Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 35-36.

[68] Lissa McCullough and Brian Schroeder, *Thinking Through the Death of God: A Critical Companion to Thomas J. J. Altizer* (Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), accessed March 4, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3407736, 2.

[69] Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, Edition Unstated. (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1966), 22.

The death of God had its implications. It implied the death of all ontological grounding

for realities beyond the human mind, which included reason itself. Without a necessary true

reality outside of human existence, truth itself began to deteriorate. Many argue that this marked

the transition from modernism to postmodernism.[70] Douglas Groothuis notes the new mindset of

postmodernists. They

> reject the modernist view of universal human reason and objective truth but still
> (inconsistently) claim to be atheists or naturalists. Their worldview, however, ends up
> being more of a preference or prejudice than a philosophically argued position in the
> classical sense, given the postmodernist disparaging of reason as a way to ascertain
> objective reality.[71]

The postmodern era removed objectivity from reason and created a reality where nothing is

necessarily true. According to postmodernism, the human mind is incapable of apprehending any

forms of absolute truth, if it even exists at all. All claims as such are simply subjective preference

and cannot be established as authoritative, objective knowledge. Truth has become unattainable.

However, this has not rendered the term *truth* as irrelevant, rather it has forced a different

meaning altogether. In response to this new view of truth, Walt Anderson comments, "The newer

view regards any truth as socially constructed, contingent, inseparable from the peculiar needs

and preferences of certain people in a certain time and place. This notion has many implications;

it leaves no value, custom, belief, or eternal verity totally untouched."[72] In other words, truth is

synonymous with culture. Although the notion of absolute truth is dead according to

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[70] Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 37.

[71] Ibid, 38.

[72] Walt Anderson, *The Future of the Self: Inventing the Postmodern Person* (New York, NY: J.P. Tarcher, 1997), 27.

postmodernism, this oxymoronic notion of relative truth becomes the law of the land. No one is right, and therefore no one is wrong.

Moral Relativism and Religious Pluralism

The dangerous implications of relative truth cannot be understated. With no grounding in any objective truth, morality is reduced to subjective preference. This is largely due to the subjective evolutionary process implied by Darwinism. If there is no standard beyond human intervention to which one can refer, and morality is simply the product of mutated genes, then there is no measuring system that dictates what is good and what is evil. Many secular humanists attempt to unite the notions of postmodernism with objective morality. However, the two are irreconcilable. David Baggett explains that, "While secular theories can explain human acquisition of moral sensibilities and practices of reasoning, this does not tell us why those practices and sensibilities have the property of tracking the truth."[73] In other words, claiming that humans can be moral or reasonable does not demonstrate why they are *justified in being* moral or reasonable. Knowledge of morality or reason does not necessitate the authority of morality or reason. Without God or any transcendental reality, all morality loses objective authority over man and is reduced to opinion.

This is the harsh reality implied by postmodernism. Popular postmodernist, Richard Rorty writes, "The idea that one species of organism is, unlike all the others, oriented not just toward its own increased prosperity but toward Truth, is as unDarwinian as the idea that every

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[73] David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2016), 209.

human being has a built-in moral compass— a conscience that swings free of both social history and individual luck."[74] The implications of evolutionary theory prohibits human advancement towards truth or morality. Man is a slave to the same sexual drive by which he evolved. This means that everything that makes up the human being is a product of chaotic evolutionary processes. Bertrand Russell concludes, "That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms."[75] The existential despair this causes is undeniable. The worth of all religion and morality is quickly reduced to meaningless evolutionary tools. In the end, they are simply stepping stones that lead to the perpetuation of an individual's genes and maintain no value beyond that end.

This relativity leads to a universe that, as John Hick puts it, is religiously ambiguous.[76] Such ambiguity has justified the religious pluralism of this postmodern age. Reason and logic are no longer factors that contribute to the acceptability of certain religious behaviors. Religious theories that were once recognized as irrational and outmoded are afforded the same attention as those that are philosophically superior.[77] If there are no criteria by which one assesses religious claims, then there is no way to deem one more accurate than another. The implication of this

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[74] Richard Rorty, "Untruth and Consequences -- Killing Time: The Autobiography of Paul Feyerabend," *The New Republic* (Washington, United States: New Republic, July 31, 1995), accessed March 4, 2021, http://www.proquest.com/docview/212797231/abstract/5D585ABE396F4659PQ/1, 36.

[75] Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic: And Other Essays* (London, England: Longmans, Green and Company, 1919), 47.

[76] J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion : Human Responses to the Transcendent*, vol. 2nd ed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), accessed March 4, 2021, https://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=379580&site=ehost-live&scope=site, 124.

[77] Feinberg, *Can You Believe It's True?*, 50.

worldview on society is best demonstrated by J.P. Moreland's recounting of Oprah Winfrey's response to the terrorist attacks on the twin towers. "But this is how Oprah *did* respond to 9/11: She urged people to seek God, 'whatever he, she, it, or they mean to you.' We should not get hung up in the word we use for him, her, it, or them, she cautioned. The important thing is that we all seek our own truth with renewed vigor."[78] But what about the "truths" of the jihadists that hijacked those planes? One could argue that they were seeking their own truth with "renewed vigor". Winfrey's response epitomizes the pluralistic and relativistic nature of the postmodern era. The assumptions of postmodernism create a cultural atmosphere with no direction or reference for morality or religion. Everything is relative to the individual and therefore authoritatively true for no one.

<center>Tolerance</center>

The concept of tolerance has evolved due to this postmodern shift in culture. Traditionally, tolerance referred to the respect and protection of others' beliefs because they had the right to their own opinion. However, this definition of tolerance was grounded upon the freedom granted by God's design.[79] Violation of this right, for instance in the case of the Holocaust or slavery, meant that tolerance turned to intolerance and action was taken. This was all founded upon the innate value afforded to mankind by God. But without any moral direction

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[78] Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 34.

[79] McDowell and McDowell, *The Beauty of Intolerance*, 39-44.

or value apart from that which mankind assigns himself, the notion of tolerance has radically

shifted.

The acts of extremist groups such as the Nazis or ISIS are easily categorized as intolerant

acts, with violence as the measuring rod. However, intolerance is taking on a new appearance

because the notion of violence has evolved as well. In *Cults, Religion, and Violence*, David

Bromley and J. Gordon Melton propose a new way of viewing violence with regard to religion.

"We treat violence as relational and processual rather than as simply social action. We shall

argue that the violent outcomes analyzed in this volume are the product of an interactive

sequence of movement– societal exchanges, and these qualities mean that ultimate outcomes

remain contingent through the interactive sequence."[80] They consider violence a part of the series

of sequences that lead to the action and not the action itself. John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal

agree with this approach and believe that "By taking this approach, we can then analyze how

these different violent actions, whether ideas, words, or physical conflict, reinforce and

strengthen each other.[81] This means that violence, and therefore intolerance, can now take on the

form of ideas and words. Consider the following sociological study on religious intolerance. This

particular table compares religious education that leads to tolerance to that which leads to

intolerance.

[80] David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, *Cults, Religion, and Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), accessed March 11, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=202244, 1-2.

[81] John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, *Religious Intolerance in America, Second Edition: A Documentary History* (Chapel Hill, United States: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), accessed March 9, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5986238, 14.

Figure 1

TABLE 1: Contrasting education that leads to security and tolerant behaviour with education that leads to insecurity and intolerance of others.

Facet of the young person's life shaped through education	Education that leads to security, safety, personal integrity	Education that leads to insecurity, perceptions of others and their religions as a threat, lack of personal integrity
Religious commitment	Religiously deeply committed; accepts and respects the fact that other people might be as deeply committed to their respective religions.	Religiously deeply committed, even to the extent of an unhealthy and unbalanced commitment; suspicious of other people and their religions; respect only for the own religion.
Faith and belief aspect	Educated to believe in what is regarded as the deity and other key aspects of religion; belief leads to security and integrity of personality; accepts the right of others to believe and have faith in their deity and other aspects of their religion; prepared to allow adherents of all religions to erect faith structures and places of worship.	Educated to believe in what is regarded as the deity and other key aspects of religion; deeply suspicious of the truth value of other faiths, beliefs and religions; reluctant to allow adherents of other religions to erect faith structures and places of worship.
Ethical aspect	Educated to be caring, loving, nurturing, to look after the interests of all others, even those not belonging to the same religion; prepared to trust the bona fides of others and their religions; curious about the unknown.	Educated to be caring, loving, nurturing, to look after the interests of members of the own religion; prepared to act to the detriment of members of other religions; shows a deep distrust and fear of others and their religions; rejection of the unknown.
Moral aspect	Educated to form a personal value, norm and principle system; respect for the fact that others might entertain different value systems based on their religious and faith commitment; applies moral imagination.	Educated to form a personal value, norm and principle system; suspicious of the value and norm systems of others and their truth bases; unable or unwilling to apply moral imagination.

Source: Johannes L. van der Walt, "Religious Tolerance and Intolerance: 'Engravings' on the Soul," *In die Skriflig* 50, no. 1 (2016): 1–8, accessed March 9, 2021, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1797885541/abstract/17BFFEF3A94049C4PQ/1.http://search.proquest.com/docview/1797885541/abstract/17BFFEF3A94049C4PQ/1, 4.

Consider the "faith and belief aspect" and "moral aspect" rows under the column depicting behaviors that lead to intolerance. Both of these sections consider doubting the truth claims of other religions as a behavior that leads to intolerance. In other words, believing that another religion consists of a false worldview may be intolerant, and therefore violent. This study aims to understand and prevent the "radicalization" of young believers to prevent the perpetuation of these intolerant behaviors. This definition of tolerance, marked by moral relativism and a result of postmodernism, has serious implications on those who attempt to remain relevant to the culture while practicing Christianity. Dorothy Sayers warns of the dangers of this cultural notion of tolerance. "In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing,

hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for."[82]

The Postmodern Christian

Given the rejection of absolute truth by the current postmodernist culture, there are several implications on Christianity as it begins to merge with postmodern ideologies. These implications take on different appearances throughout the population. Nonetheless, they are detrimental to practicing biblical faith. Although the particular goal of this thesis is focused on equipping the younger generation, or Generation Z, it is important to see how this culture has affected the wider population in the west, especially given that education and family significantly contribute to the spiritual formation of the youth.

Confused

Executive director of Lifeway Research, Scott McConnell says, "most Americans still identify as Christians. But they seem to be confused about some of the details of their faith." This western culture has created Christianity wherein the participants are not sure what it means to be Christian. For example, according to a Lifeway survey published in 2016, 7 in 10 people say there is only one true God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—but two-thirds (64%) say God accepts worship of all faiths. Similarly, about two-thirds of Americans believe Jesus is God while half say Jesus is a being created by God. Both of these statistics imply overlap of a

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[82] Dorothy Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 28.

contradictory claim. This demonstrates that a majority of the population believes things that contradict each other. "Contradictory and incompatible beliefs are OK for most people," McConnell says.[83] Lifeway also found that of the one in four Americans who say they are evangelical Christians, fewer than half (45 percent) strongly agree with core evangelical beliefs.[84] Consider the following findings of another Lifeway survey of 3,000 Americans in 2018.

<u>Figure 2</u>
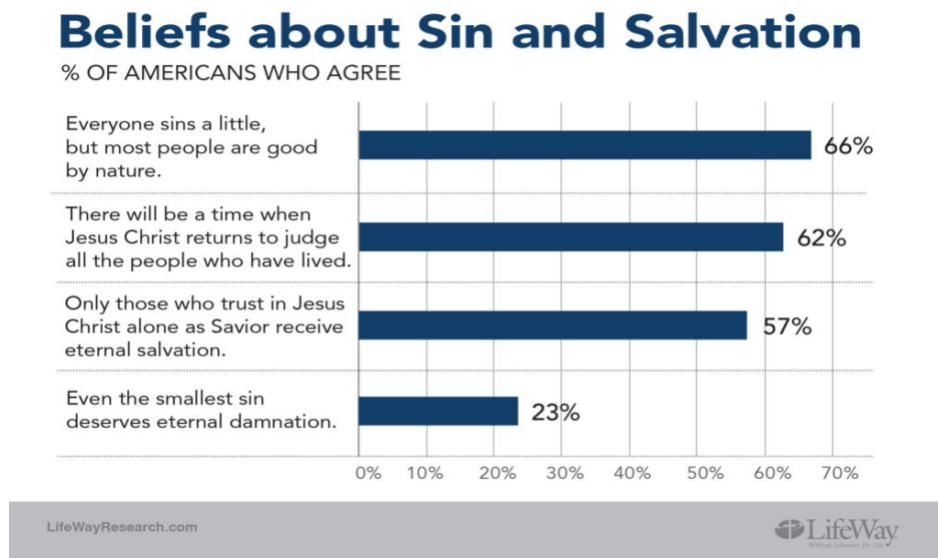
Source: "Americans' Theology Is a Mix of Orthodox Belief and Shifting Opinions," *Lifeway Research*, last modified October 17, 2018, accessed March 12, 2021, https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/10/17/americans-theology-is-a-mix-of-orthodox-belief-and-shifting-opinions/.

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[83] "Americans Love God and the Bible, Are Fuzzy on the Details," *Lifeway Research*, last modified September 28, 2016, accessed March 12, 2021, https://lifewayresearch.com/2016/09/27/americans-love-god-and-the-bible-are-fuzzy-on-the-details/.

[84] "Many Who Call Themselves Evangelical Don't Actually Hold Evangelical Beliefs," *Lifeway Research*, last modified December 6, 2017, accessed March 12, 2021, https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/12/06/many-evangelicals-dont-hold-evangelical-beliefs/. Evangelical beliefs that were considered: the Bible is the highest authority for what I believe, it is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin, only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.

62% of this population believe in the judgment day of Christ and 57% believe in salvation from faith in Christ alone, but only 23% understand that the "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Even more surprising is the 66% that believe most people are "good". These statistics represent a population that holds incoherent beliefs according to the biblical worldview.

There is great confusion among the western Protestant church. What is even more alarming is that these incoherent worldviews are widely held among pastors nationwide. Barna Group interviewed 601 senior pastors across four dozen different Protestant denominations. Barna Group defined a biblical worldview as believing that absolute moral truth exists, that it is based upon the Bible, and having a biblical view on the following six core beliefs: the accuracy of biblical teaching, the sinless nature of Jesus, the literal existence of Satan, the omnipotence and omniscience of God, salvation by grace alone, and the personal responsibility to evangelize. They found that only half, or 51%, of these pastors met the criteria for a biblical worldview. In response to this finding George Barna asserts,

> The most important point," Barna argued, "is that you can't give people what you don't have. The low percentage of Christians who have a biblical worldview is a direct reflection of the fact that half of our primary religious teachers and leaders do not have one. In some denominations, the vast majority of clergy do not have a biblical worldview, and it shows up clearly in the data related to the theological views and moral choices of people who attend those churches… Clearly, there are huge segments of the Christian body that are missing the benefit of such a comprehensive and consistent expression of biblical truth.[85]

He also blames the secular and pluralist culture of the 21st century for the increase in doubt among millennials, which is 38% of the Christian population. This is twice as much as past generational groups (23% Gen-Xers, 19% Boomers, 20% Elders) and expected to increase in

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[85] "Only Half Of Protestant Pastors Have A Biblical Worldview," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/only-half-of-protestant-pastors-have-a-biblical-worldview/
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future generations.[86] The postmodern implications of culture are contributing to doubt and confusion among the Christian population.

Relativist

The moral relativist thinking of postmodernism has also greatly impacted the church. According to Barna Group almost one-fifth (19%) of practicing Christians (defined as one who regularly goes to church and considers faith a large part of their life) strongly agree that "no one can know for certain what meaning and purpose there is to life." Almost one-quarter (23%) of practicing Christians strongly agree that "what is morally right or wrong depends on what an individual believes." In whole, more than half (54%) of practicing Christians embrace at least one of the following postmodern statements.[87]

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[86] "Two-Thirds of Christians Face Doubt," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/two-thirds-christians-face-doubt/.

[87] "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/.

Figure 3

Source: "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021,
https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/.
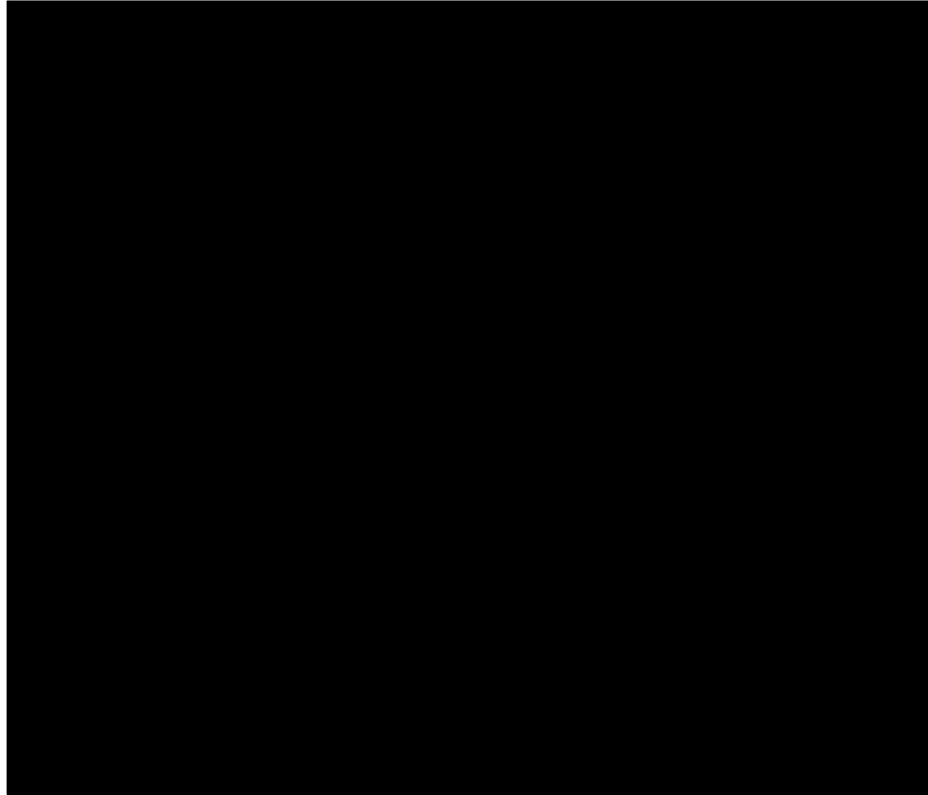
Another Barna Group study demonstrates that slightly less than half of adults claiming to be born

again (46%) believe in absolute moral truth.[88] Lifeway found that of 3,000 people in 2018, six in

10 Americans say religious belief is a matter of personal opinion. McConnell concludes that

"When the majority of Americans believe religious belief is more personal opinion than

objective truth, then we expect to see contradictory beliefs and beliefs that change over time..."[89]

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[88] "Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years/.

[89] "Americans' Theology Is a Mix of Orthodox Belief and Shifting Opinions," *Lifeway Research*, last modified October 17, 2018, accessed March 12, 2021, https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/10/17/americans-theology-is-a-mix-of-orthodox-belief-and-shifting-opinions/.

These beliefs completely undermine core tenets of the Christian faith. It is not hard to see how postmodern relativism is contributing to Christian cognitive dissonance.

It is this type of thinking that has led to an increased rate of atheism among Generation Z. Barna Group records, "The percentage of teens (13-17 years old) who identify as such is double that of the general population (13% vs. 6% of all adults). The proportion that identifies as Christian likewise drops from generation to generation." The report goes on to say "for many teens, truth seems relative at best and, at worst, altogether unknowable. Their lack of confidence is on pace with the broader culture's all-out embrace of relativism. More than half of all Americans, both teens (58%) and adults (62%), agree with the statement "Many religions can lead to eternal life; there is no 'one true religion.'"[90] This relativist mindset is further encouraging Christians to adopt the cultural definition of tolerance. "Almost half of millennials (47%) agree at least somewhat that it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith. (Though Gen Z teens were not included in this study, their thoroughly post-Christian posture will likely amplify this stance toward evangelism.)"[91] This study reflects a culture wherein almost half of Christian millennials oppose the Great Commission.

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[90] "Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/.

[91] "Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/.

Spiritual

The consequences of postmodernism have shaped western Christianity into a religious system of varying beliefs. It appears that there are no limits on what an individual can believe and still be identified as a Christian. For example, Barna Group found that practicing Christians find the claims of "New Spirituality" among the most enticing with 61% agreeing with ideas rooted in New Spirituality. This survey showed that 28% of practicing Christians strongly agree that "all people pray to the same god or spirit, no matter what name they use for that spiritual being." Additionally, 27% believe that "meaning and purpose come from becoming one with all that is". Brooke Hempell from Barna Group responds to these shockingly abundant beliefs.

> The call for the Church, and its teachers and thinkers, is to help Christians dissect popular beliefs before allowing them to settle in their own ideology… Informed thinking is essential to developing and maintaining a healthy biblical worldview and faith as well as being able to have productive dialogue with those who espouse other beliefs.[92]

Pew Research Center found similar statistics in 2017 with 62% of U.S. Christians believing in at least one of the following New Age beliefs.[93]

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[92] "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/.

[93] "'New Age' Beliefs Common among Both Religious and Nonreligious Americans," Pew Research, *Pew Research*, accessed February 18, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/01/new-age-beliefs-common-among-both-religious-and-nonreligious-americans/.

Figure 4

Six-in-ten Christians, 'nones' hold at least one New Age belief

	Believe spiritual energy can be located in physical things	Believe in psychics	Believe in reincarnation	Believe in astrology	NET Believe in at least one
All U.S. adults	42%	41%	33%	29%	**62%**
Christian	37	40	29	26	**61**
Protestant	32	38	26	24	**57**
Evangelical	24	33	19	18	**47**
Mainline	43	44	33	30	**67**
Historically black	41	43	38	34	**72**
Catholic	47	46	36	33	**70**
Unaffiliated	47	40	38	32	**62**
Atheist	13	10	7	3	**22**
Agnostic	40	31	28	18	**56**
Nothing in particular	61	52	51	47	**78**

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 4-18, 2017, among U.S. adults.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: "'New Age' Beliefs Common among Both Religious and Nonreligious Americans," *Pew Research Center*, n.d., accessed February 18, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/01/new-age-beliefs-common-among-both-religious-and-nonreligious-americans/.

It appears that the pluralist notions of culture are reshaping the definition of Christianity. Instead of adhering to the teachings of the Bible, western Christians are accepting the authority of other religious principles. In response to the statement that "the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths," 19% agreed strongly and an additional 22% agreed somewhat. 33% of those who positively affirmed this question (both strongly and somewhat) believe that the Bible is "totally accurate in its principles, even though

the three sacred books have very different ideas about truth, salvation, and the nature of God".[94]

This demonstrates a lack of critical thinking with regard to the core tenets of Christianity and

their relationship with other religions.

During his time in India, Francis Chan noted the radical devotion of the Indian Christians

whom he met and asked one of their leaders about their impressively consistent faith.

> Every believer seems so serious about his or her commitment to Christ. Aren't there
> people who just profess Christ but don't really follow him? He answered by explaining
> that nominal Christianity doesn't make sense in India. Calling yourself a Christian means
> you lose everything. Your family and friends reject you, and you lose your home, status,
> and job. So why would anyone choose that unless he or she is serious about Jesus?[95]

Unlike the culture of these particular citizens of India, the comfortable postmodern culture of the

West has created a society in which casual Christianity is possible. Because many can call

themselves Christian without risking social status, people profess to follow Christ without

actually understanding the implications. Postmodernism capitalizes on a church that rarely

experiences persecution and results in a false sense of Christianity. This comfortable state of

living in conjunction with western culture has created Christians who do not hold to Christian

doctrine. Rather, they customize their own religion, sprinkle the name of Christ on top, and call it

Christianity.

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[94] "Most American Christians Do Not Believe That Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist," *Barna Group*, accessed March 4, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist/.

[95] Francis Chan, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2013), 179.

Scientism

> Like it or not, we can't just bury our heads in the sand regarding the power and pervasiveness of scientism in our culture. It *will* affect Christians negatively if the leaders of the church and parents are not equipped to recognize when scientism is being promoted in a movie, on television, or elsewhere, and to know how to provide a reasoned response to it.[96]

Much like postmodernism, the philosophical belief of scientism was born out of the 17th and 18th century enlightenment era. This ideology is closely related to the religious perspective prevalent among postmodernists by removing epistemic authority from religion. To understand scientism as it is professed today, a brief look at its origin is necessary.

The prominent scientific community was not always secular. Established scientists of the 19th century, such as William Whewell, John Herschel, and William Buckland, were proponents of the idea that studying nature inherently fit within a religious framework.[97] In other words, to study the many facets of nature was to study God's creation. Popularly established by characters such as Thomas Aquinas and William Paley, this idea is known as natural theology. In short, their argument was that God's existence as a creator can be known based on what man knows about nature. What man does not know about God is irrelevant to what nature reveals.[98] This concept was the dominant approach to science until the early to mid-1800s. Men such as Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley "aimed to secularize nature, promote expertise, and obtain

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[96] Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 41. His emphasis.

[97] Bernard Lightman, "The 'History' of Victorian Scientific Naturalism: Huxley, Spencer and the 'End' of Natural History," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 58, Special Issue: Replaying the Tape of Life: Evolution and Historical Explanation (August 1, 2016): 17–23, accessed November 10, 2020, http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1369848615001776, 18.

[98] William Paley, *Natural Theology, Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity: Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (London, England: R. Faulder, 1803), 13.

independence for scientific investigators from theological dogma."[99] This thinking became popular as the modernist era presupposed the authority of science over other disciplines in light of theories such as Darwinism. Spencer coined the term "survival of the fittest" as an extension of Darwin's ideas and thus introduced a philosophical basis for all of life. Though Darwin's and Spencer's ideas were strongly opposed by the immediate scientific community, they became popular among the general public.[100] These ideas, both scientific and philosophical, became the exalted form of knowledge and regarded as having the greatest explanatory power, "thereby marginalizing supernatural accounts of phenomena."[101]

In short, this exaltation of science over other forms of knowledge characterizes the belief system of scientism. "Most central is the belief that science and its methods provide the only fully valid route to gaining knowledge and for answering questions, to the exclusion of other methods and disciplines."[102] Strong scientism excludes all other forms of knowledge as credible. Bertrand Russell was an advocate for this form. He writes, "Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know."[103] Weak scientism allows for other disciplines to hold some epistemic authority, but "scientific knowledge is vastly superior to what we can know from any other discipline."[104] This

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[99] Lightman, "The 'History' of Victorian Scientific Naturalism," 18.

[100] L. Russ Bush, *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 29.

[101] Jon H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2000), 53.

[102] Richard N. Williams and Daniel N. Robinson, *Scientism: The New Orthodoxy: The New Orthodoxy* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), accessed March 9, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=1827007, 42.

[103] Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1997), 243.

[104] Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 26-30.

philosophical position appears to be the preferred doctrine among the current academic community.[105]

Tension between Science and Religion

The implications of scientism meant exclusion of religion as viable knowledge. This has put science and religion at odds with each other. This philosophy deemed "science as a symbolic vehicle for advancing 'reason' - juxtaposed as the light to the darkness of 'superstition.'[106] There is no attempt to unite these two disciplines to create a coherent worldview, rather they are pitted against each other with science as the obvious victor. This has led to the secularization of the modern university as outlined in Chapter 1. Not only is this the predominant doctrine among higher level education, but it is also invading the grade school system. For example, the state of California issued the "Science Framework" in 1989 meant to guide the curricula forming process. It reads

> At times some students may insist that certain conclusions of sciences cannot be true because of certain religious or philosophical beliefs they hold… It is appropriate for the teacher to express in this regard, 'I understand that you may have personal reservations about accepting this scientific evidence, but it is scientific knowledge which there is no reasonable doubt among scientists in their field, and it is my responsibility to teach it because it is part of our common intellectual heritage.[107]

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[105] Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 188.

[106] Joseph O. Baker, "Perceptions of Science and American Secularism," *Sociological Perspectives* 55, no. 1 (2012): 167–188, accessed March 9, 2021, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sop.2012.55.1.167, 168.

[107] Mark Hartwig, *Invitation to Conflict: A Retrospective Look at the California Science Framework* (Access Research Network, 1992), 20.

This statement portrays scientism. It is not being taught as a personal philosophical position, rather taught implicitly as the true way of obtaining knowledge. Students with religious beliefs must shelf their private beliefs and allow science to do the talking. Voices such as David Hume and Auguste Comte are being echoed throughout current academics.[108] The sociological sciences determine the ethical code of society, per Comte.[109] Miracles are regarded as unhistorical myths, per Hume.[110] Evolutionary theory describes the human condition and history is to be viewed through a strictly secular lens. Proponents of Christianity are then forced to either modify their beliefs so that they submit to the dictatorship of science or oppose the philosophical biases of the scientific community altogether.

Scientism and Christianity

The tension between science and religion caused by scientism has forced an attempt by the Christian to ease the opposition from secular authorities. Barna Group found that nearly half of all teens (46%) say, "I need factual evidence to support my beliefs" which "helps to explain their uneasiness with the relationship between science and the Bible. Significantly fewer teens and young adults (28% and 25%) than Gen X and Boomers (36% and 45%) see the two as complementary."[111]

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[108] Baker, "Perceptions of Science and American Secularism," 168.

[109] Michel Bourdeau, "Auguste Comte," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2021. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2021), accessed March 16, 2021, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/comte/.

[110] David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (London, England: J.B. Bebbington, 1861), 87.

[111] "Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/.

Figure 5
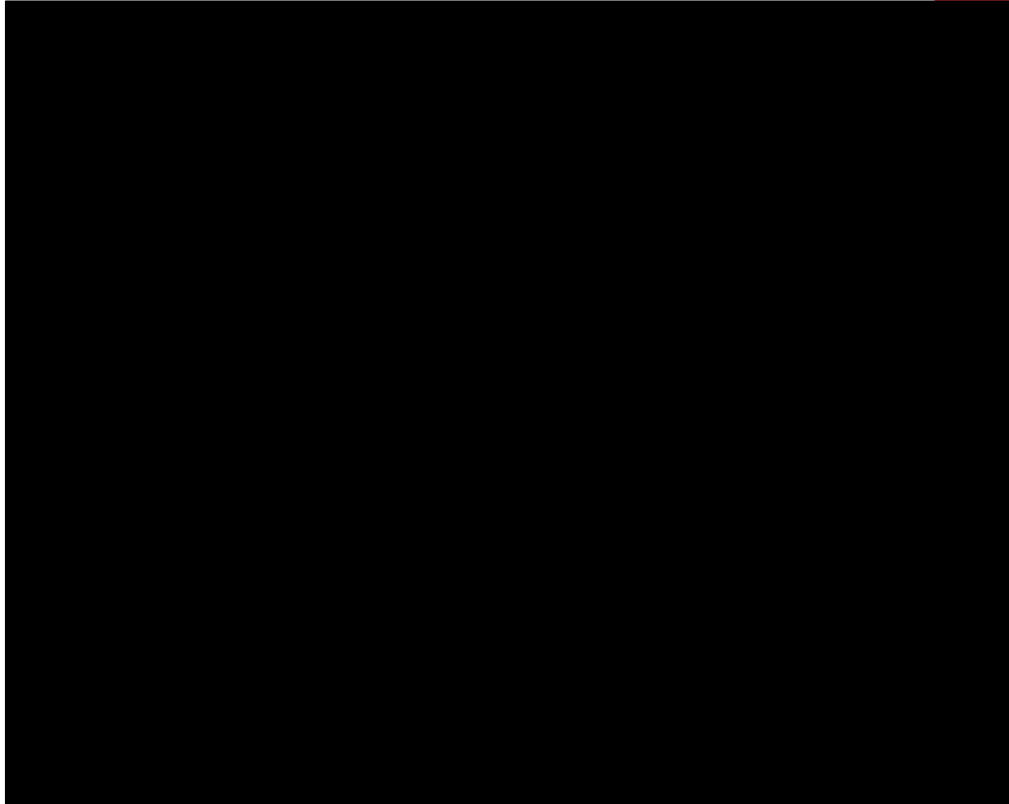
Source: "Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/.

Only 28% of Generation Z and 25% of millennials consider the Bible and science as complimentary. The same survey demonstrated that half of churchgoing teens (49%) say "the church seems to reject much of what science tells us about the world." The tension between the two realms is undeniable. Perhaps this is why one-quarter of the particular population (27%) claimed that "the church is not a safe place to express doubts."

Scientism is also forcing Christians to adopt a pragmatic view of Christianity. Fewer are believing in the veracity of supernatural realities and replacing them with notions of symbolism. Four out of ten Christians strongly agreed that Satan "is not a living being but is a symbol of

evil" with an additional two out of ten Christians (19%) agreeing somewhat. This reflects a total

of 59% of Christians who at least somewhat agree with this statement. Similarly, 38% strongly

agreed and an additional 20% agreed somewhat that the Holy Spirit is "a symbol of God's power

or presence but is not a living entity", totaling to 58% at least agreeing somewhat. These beliefs

represent a willingness to reject the truth claims of the Bible in an attempt to unite Christianity

with scientism. Furthermore, more than one-fifth (22%) strongly agreed that Jesus Christ sinned

when He lived on earth, with an additional 17% agreeing somewhat.[112] The core claims of

Christianity are being replaced by what is deemed acceptable by the scientific community.

Notions of the supernatural and the miraculous are unacceptable under scientism and are

therefore being replaced by pragmatic Christianity by a large portion of the population. Such

false beliefs are encouraging an increase in materialistic views among Christians as well. Barna

Group found that 29% of practicing Christians believe at least one of the following secular

statements: 10% believe in the authority of science, 13% believe your life has value only if

society gives it, and 20% believe meaning comes from working hard and making the most of

life.[113] These unbiblical views reveal the underlying doctrines of culture beginning to bleed into

the Christian faith.

Scientism is also generating an increased rate of skepticism among the younger

generations. For example, a 2015 Barna Group study revealed that at the end of the 20th century

only 18% of skeptics were under 30 years old. However, as of 2015 that number has doubled to

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[112] "Most American Christians Do Not Believe That Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist," *Barna Group*, accessed March 4, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist/.

[113] "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/.

34% which is almost one-quarter of the U.S. population. In the same light, this study notices, "Today's skeptics tend to be better educated than in the past. Two decades ago, one-third of skeptics were college graduates, but today half of the group has a college degree."[114] They also note, according to their research, that the three primary components that lead to disbelief in God's existence are rejection of the Bible, a lack of trust in the local church and cultural reinforcement of a secular worldview. David Kinnaman, president of Barna Group, says,

> The data show that some cities—and younger generations—are more gospel-resistant than others. It is increasingly common among Millennials to dismiss religion, God, churches, authority and tradition. For years, some observers have claimed colleges and universities are a breeding ground for anti-God sentiment. The data does lend support to the notion that college campuses are comfortable places for young people to abandon God and assume control of their own lives.[115]

Although there are various reasons for abandoning faith, scientism is one of the leading contributors. The perceived authority of science over other areas of knowledge has rendered faith irrelevant in the academic community. This means that those with this "authoritative knowledge" dictate what is true and the Christian is forced to submit in order to remain relevant.

Conclusion

Postmodernism and scientism significantly diminish the potency of the gospel. The data presented in this chapter has demonstrated the various implications of these cultural ideologies on Christianity. Many Christians are falling victim to these doctrines and are therefore

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[114] "2015 State of Atheism in America," *Barna Group*, accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.barna.com/research/2015-state-of-atheism-in-america/.

[115] Ibid.

integrating them into their worldview. The following table categorizes the data presented throughout this chapter. Any percentages of beliefs that "agreed" or "agreed somewhat" were combined.

Table 1

Belief	%	Population	Population Size	Year	Generation	Survey Company
God accepts worship of all faiths	64%	Americans	3,000	2016	Adult	LifeWay
There is only one true, God that is triune	70%	Americans	3,000	2016	Adult	LifeWay
Jesus is God	66%	Americans	3,000	2016	Adult	LifeWay
Jesus was created by God	50%	Americans	3,000	2016	Adult	LifeWay
Claim to be an Evangelical Christian	25%	Americans	1,000	2017	Adult	LifeWay
Strongly agree with Evangelical beliefs	45%	Evangelical Christian Americans	250	2017	Adult	LifeWay
Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature	66%	Americans	3,002	2018	Adult	LifeWay
Jesus Christ will return to judge all people who have lived	62%	Americans	3,002	2018	Adult	LifeWay
Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone	57%	Americans	3,002	2018	Adult	LifeWay
Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation	23%	Americans	3,002	2018	Adult	LifeWay
Maintain a biblical worldview	51%	American Protestant Senior Pastors	601	2003	Adult	Barna Group
Doubt their faith	38%	American Christians	888	2017	Millennial	Barna Group
Doubt their faith	23%	American Christians	888	2017	Gen X	Barna Group
Doubt their faith	19%	American Christians	888	2017	Boomers	Barna Group
Doubt their faith	20%	American Christians	888	2017	Elders	Barna Group
No one can know meaning or purpose for certain	19%	American Christians	1,456	2017	Adult	Barna Group
Morality is up to the beliefs of an individual	23%	American Christians	1,456	2017	Adult	Barna Group
Morality is absolute	46%	American Christians	1,000	2009	Adult	Barna Group
Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion	60%	Americans	3,002	2018	Adult	LifeWay
Atheist	13%	Americans, 13-18 years	1,997	2016-2017	Gen Z	Barna Group
Atheist	6%	Americans, over 19 years	1,517	2016	Adult	Barna Group

Belief	%	Population	Population Size	Year	Generation	Survey Company
There is no one true religion	58%	Americans, 13-18 years	1,997	2016-2017	Gen Z	Barna Group
There is no one true religion	62%	Americans, over 19 years	1,517	2016	Adult	Barna Group
Evangelism is wrong	47%	American Christian Millennials	992	2018	Millennial	Barna Group
All people pray to the same god regardless of the name	28%	American Christians	1,456	2017	Adult	Barna Group
Meaning/purpose comes from becoming one with all that is	27%	American Christians	1,456	2017	Adult	Barna Group
Adopt a belief characterized as New Spirituality	61%	American Christians	1,456	2017	Adult	Barna Group
Adopt a belief characterized as New Age	62%	American Christians	28,056	2014	Adult	Pew Research
The Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths	41%	American Christians	1,871	2009	Adult	Barna Group
Need factual evidence to support beliefs	46%	Americans, 13-18 years	1,997	2016-2017	Gen Z	Barna Group
The Bible and science are complimentary	28%	Americans, 13-18 years	1,997	2016-2017	Gen Z	Barna Group
The church seems to reject much of what science teaches	49%	Americans, 13-18 years	1,997	2016-2017	Gen Z	Barna Group
Satan is not a living being but a symbol	59%	American Christians	1,871	2009	Adult	Barna Group
The Holy Spirit is not a living being but a symbol	58%	American Christians	1,871	2009	Adult	Barna Group
Jesus sinned when he was on earth	39%	American Christians	1,871	2009	Adult	Barna Group
Adopt materialistic views	29%	American Christians	1,456	2017	Adult	Barna Group
Skeptical of Christianity	34%	Americans	31,220	2015	Under 30 years	Barna Group

Although rates of apostasy secularization in the West are at all-time high, the data presented here demonstrates a high percentage (in some cases a majority) of individuals who, although claiming to be Christian, do not actually believe in biblical Christianity. Therefore, the practical definition of apostasy can shift from the denouncing of faith to the denouncing of essential Christian beliefs. Given this broadened definition, rates of apostasy are much higher than actually being reported.

It is important to note that these statistics have their limitations. Such data can only represent the entire population to a point before it communicates a false reflection. Nonetheless, these percentages reflect a trend of increasing postmodernist and scientistic ideologies in the West and in the church. If these trends were to continue, the up and coming generations will only be further led astray from the sound teaching of the gospel. This issue falls onto the laps of church leaders everywhere. There is a clear need to address the abundant confusion among the western church.

Chapter 4: Christian Apologetics and Culture

What is Apologetics?

"Apologetics is all about seeing… Clearing the obstacles in someone's spiritual journey."[116]

The term *Christian apologetics* implies a number of disciplines under it. Because of the breadth of this subject, it is easy to be quickly overwhelmed and confused by what it entails. However, apologetics is, in principle, a simple concept despite its many applications. Understanding the essential nature of apologetics is necessary before it is put into practice.

Definition

Apologetics has nothing to do with the American notion of the term *apologizing.* It was derived from the Greek term *apologia* which means defense. This term typically refers to a defense being made in response to an accusation, like that of a court setting. For example, the plaintiff would respond to a claim by attempting to "speak away" the accusation (*apo* or "away," *logia* or "speech") to show that the accusation was false.[117] The term can be broken into apó, meaning "from" and lógos, meaning "intelligent reasoning".[118] Apologetics simply refers to the idea of a spoken defense. How one would go about making that defense is where apologetics

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[116] Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, xvii.

[117] James K. Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics: What It Is and Why We Do It* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 11.

[118] "Strong's Greek: 627. Ἀπολογία (Apologia) -- a Speech in Defense," accessed March 19, 2021, https://biblehub.com/greek/627.htm.

gets its range of topics. Francis Schaeffer proposes, "There are two purposes of Christian

apologetics. The first is defense. The second is to communicate Christianity in a way that any

given generation can understand."[119] Schaeffer correctly identifies the Christian call to not only

defend, but also communicate the gospel of Christ. This task of communication is essential in

preaching the gospel. Apologetics involves defending the truth claims of Christianity while also

communicating these claims to others. There will always be ideological hindrances in the minds

of those hearing the gospel, and apologetics attempts to remove as many of these as possible. In

other words, it is the attempt to create a clear view of God in the eyes of another.

This means that there is never a "one size fits all" approach to apologetics, and thus

adding to its variety. For example, the person who believes God is immoral for allowing evil

requires different attention than the one who struggles to reconcile evolution and creation.

Groothuis identifies that

> This definition of apologetics invokes both rational legitimacy (objective truth) and
> emotional appeal (subjective attractiveness)...[Apologetics] is to defend Christianity's
> core claims ration-ally in order to show that Christianity is indeed objectively true. But
> more than this, apologetics needs to demonstrate that Christian truth is winsome because
> it explains who we are and how we can flourish as creatures in this life and beyond, if we
> are reconciled to our Creator.[120]

It is not simply about the facts and evidences; it is about the heart of man. Just as the Pharisees

were not persuaded by the miracles of Christ, though these functioned as powerful apologetic

tools, so are people not always moved by empirical evidence. Apologetics *must* appeal to the

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[119] Francis A. Schaeffer, James W. Sire, and Steven Garber, *The God Who Is There* (Westmont, US: InterVarsity Press, 2020), accessed March 17, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6001881, 169.

[120] Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 25.

mind *and* heart of man, which is both a reasoning and feeling being. It is this combination that creates an effective apologetic.

James Beilby writes, "Done well, apologetics can draw people closer to the kingdom of God. Done poorly, apologetics can reinforce negative stereo-types and drive people away."[121] Unfortunately, there are stereotypes regarding the apologetic method. Many of the objections to the apologetic method are the result of its reckless use. Apologetics is absolutely vital to Christianity, but it has its limitations. Beilby summarizes three limitations that are necessary to understand in order to responsibly practice apologetics:

1. It does not revise Christianity so that it is appealing to culture and/or its critics

2. It cannot compel belief in Jesus Christ. "Even if one's arguments and presentation are flawless, one's conversation partner might be completely unmoved. And that is because neither belief nor unbelief is brought about solely by intellectual arguments."

3. It cannot create faith. It can contribute to and support faith, but it can never function in the place of faith.[122]

One can research the statistics regarding the safety of skydiving (rate of death, reliability of the parachute, etc.), but this knowledge is of little use when it is time to jump from a plane 10,000 feet in the air. So it is with apologetics and faith. However, this does not by any means render apologetics useless. Just as one is not rationally justified in jumping from a plane about which he

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[121] Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics*, 10.

[122] Ibid, 24-26.

knows nothing, so is one not justified in placing his faith in a God of whom he has no knowledge.

There are apologetics for various topics such as religion, politics, and science. However, not all of them defend on the grounds of truth or, rather, some of them adhere to different definitions of truth. For example, one might argue that a theory's usefulness relates to its truth value (pragmatic theory of truth).[123] Others may argue that the coherence between its contents relates to its truth value (coherence theory of truth).[124] But it appears that defending Christianity is synonymous with defending truth according to the correspondence theory of truth, or that a claim's truth value is dependent on how it relates to reality.[125] Christianity is not only coherent and pragmatic, but ultimately it is objectively true.

Reasoning with regard to the objectivity of Christianity and its correspondence to reality is essential for all Christians. Groothuis argues that "too many Christians hold their beliefs in an uninformed and precarious fashion. Instead of pursuing answers to the toughest questions an unbelieving world can marshal, they attempt to preserve certainty through ignorance and isolation, relying on platitudes rather than arguments."[126] The Christian who believes that Christ is the savior of the world must integrate this belief into reality. Faith cannot be held in isolation if indeed one professes it to be objectively true. Thinking about faith and how it relates to the external world is guided by Christian apologetics and establishes a foundational faith. However,

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[123] J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 131.

[124] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 130.

[125] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 52. See also Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 110.

[126] Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 26.

in order to understand this concept as it applies to the Christian life, it is important to identify instances of Christian thinking throughout the Bible.

Apologetics in the Bible

The term *apologia* appears 19 times in the New Testament, in noun and verbal forms.[127] For example, Paul's preaching of the gospel to a Jewish mob is considered an *apologia*: "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense" (Acts 22:1). This is also seen in in his letter to Philippi: "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me" (Philippians 1:7). Paul considers the defense of the gospel closely related to its confirmation among the Gentiles. Peter also encourages believers to "Always be prepared to *give an answer* (*apologia*) to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). When apologetics is understood within this context, its pervasiveness throughout the New Testament is undeniable. The majority of Paul's ministry, and early Christian evangelism for that matter, involved apologetics.

Effectively preaching the gospel requires some level of apologetics to bridge the gap between Christ and nonbelievers. Although an integral part of the gospel, it is not just confessing the love of Christ. Paul understood that the gospel was never heard in a cultural vacuum. Throughout the book of Acts Paul is seen refuting various false ideologies:

Acts 17:8: "A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him."

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[127] Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics*, 12.

Acts 18:27-28: "When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had

believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from

the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah."

Acts 17:2-3: "As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath

days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah

had to suffer and rise from the dead."

Acts 19:8: "Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing

persuasively about the kingdom of God."

Furthermore, it is clear that Paul did not expect this to be a practice that only he did. For

example, when explaining the necessary qualifications of an elder to Titus he wrote, "He must

hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by

sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). There is no lack of biblical evidence

of Christian apologetics. It is not only normative, but also required of those who want to preach

the gospel.

Although less explicit, another example of apologetics can be seen in the Gospels. For

example, the Apostle John made it clear that the reason for writing his Gospel was so that its

readers "may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may

have life in his name" (John 20:31). He goes on to say, "This is the disciple who testifies to these

things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). John is

attempting to convince his readers of the gospel message by recounting the events of Jesus'

ministry. Even within that context, the miracles of Christ also served as an apologetic. For

example, Jesus said, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at

least believe on the evidence of the works themselves" (John 14:11). Among other reasons,

Jesus' working of miracles functioned as an apologetic. This was further established by Peter's

first sermon when he proclaims, "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man

accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through

him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22). The establishment of Jesus' divinity, as a testimony

to the veracity of his own words, happened by way of miracles, wonders and signs. The greatest

of these was the resurrection. Paul boldly asserted that if the resurrection did not happen, or was

not objectively true, then Christianity is useless. "And if Christ has not been raised, our

preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14). Paul pinned the entire validity of

Christianity on the truth of the resurrection.

Jesus also utilized the basics of logic throughout his ministry. For example, consider the

following passage from Matthew.

> While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about
> the Messiah? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How
> is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, "'The Lord
> said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."'' If then
> David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and
> from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:41-46).

Jesus reasoned with his listeners about the meaning of Scripture. Although subtle, notice how

Jesus utilized basic logic in deducing that the Messiah could not be David's son because David

also called him Lord. Jesus employed this same technique in other instances, like when he was

accused of driving out demons by the power of demons (Matthew 12:22-29). Jesus utilized the

laws of logic to not only prove his point but cut to the heart of the issue. Noticing the form in which Jesus approached these conversations revealed his great thinking capabilities. Norman Geisler claims, "...Jesus showed himself to be a brilliant philosopher who used the laws of logic to reveal truth, demolish arguments, and point out error. When we analyze the arguments of Jesus, we soon realize that he was the greatest thinker who ever set foot upon the earth."[128]

God is the great mind behind the universe. It should not come as a surprise that the establishment of his kingdom on earth involved the minds of men. Many of these biblical characters were great thinkers as well as passionate disciples. Although some of the original disciples were uneducated men (Acts 4:13), this does not mean that they did not reason about their faith. In fact, the nature of the New Testament writings reflects authors who attempted to inspire this thinking in their readers. Cardinal Avery Dulles writes,

> While none of the New Testament writings is directly and professedly apologetical, nearly all of them contain reflections of the Church's efforts to exhibit the credibility of it message and to answer the obvious objections that would have arisen in the minds of adversaries, prospective converts, and candid believers. Parts of the New Testament -- such as the major Pauline Letters, Hebrews, the four Gospels, and Acts --reveal an apologetical preoccupation in the minds of the authors themselves.[129]

Faith and Reason

Many theologians and apologists throughout history have wrestled with the relationship between faith and reason. Given the nature of apologetics as presented in this chapter and its

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[128] Norman L. Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 66.

[129] Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005), 23-24.

close relation to logic and reason, it is important that several of these Christian thinkers are briefly surveyed.

Martin Luther's perspective on faith and reason is perhaps on the far end of the spectrum. Luther boldly asserted that "reason is the devil's whore" and should not be trusted prior to the regeneration of the mind by the Holy Spirit.[130] He believed that reason prior to faith "could only raise objections and engender doubts."[131] Reason, according to Luther, was tainted due to the effects of sin on the human heart and mind. This view was similar, though less extreme, in St. Augustine who argued that one must believe first before they can properly understand.[132]

This is certainly a biblical doctrine. Paul writes that nonbelievers "are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts" (Ephesians 4:18). There are detrimental effects of sin on the reasoning capabilities of mankind. However, the term *reason* can be quite broad. It is apparent that unsaved people can apprehend certain truths about reality while relying on their unregenerate reasoning capabilities. For example, a nonbeliever can certainly solve a logic proof that is necessarily true. It is most likely that Luther and Augustine were not referring to simple faculties of reason, rather the corrupted reasoning that concludes false spiritual doctrines. Paul demonstrates this in the first chapter of Romans.

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature— have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave

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[130] Steve Wilkens, *Faith and Reason: Three Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 160.

[131] Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, 147.

[132] Wilkens, *Faith and Reason*, 22.

thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles (Romans 1:18-23).

"God has made it plain to them" implies that they know something about reality, namely that there is a creator. William Paley echoes this example with his famous watchmaker thesis. In short, Paley likens creation to a watch found in nature, implying an intelligent mind as the cause for the complex invention.[133] However, the truth is suppressed by the wicked hearts of man. It is not that they cannot know, it is that they do not want to know. Blaise Pascal in no. 430 of *Pensees* writes that God "so regulates the knowledge of Himself that He has given signs of Himself, visible to those who seek Him, and not to those who seek Him not. Enough light for those who desire only to see, and enough obscurity for those who have the contrary disposition."[134]

Reason, much like any tool, was designed for a specific use: to know God through the experience of life. However, just like a hammer can be used to murder someone, reason can be used to reject God. This does not mean that the "hammer" is useless or innately evil. For example, the laws of logic, firstly popularized by Aristotle in *Metaphysics,*[135] demonstrate the foundational and transcendental nature of logic. Thomas Aquinas believed that Christian's use of revelation corrected and completed what Aristotle saw in a deficient manner.[136] Aquinas theorized that God gives revelation in accordance with our senses and basic faculties of the

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[133] Paley, *Natural Theology, Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*, 9-20.

[134] Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts* (New York, NY: P.F. Collier & son, 1910), 149 and 144.

[135] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (Boston, MA: Gould and Lincoln, 1859), 679.

[136] Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, 113.

human mind. There are things knowable apart from God, yet revelation is necessary to communicate divine truth.[137] John Locke competently expands on this relationship between faith and reason.

> Revelation is natural reason enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately, which reason vouches the truth of by the testimony and proofs it gives that they come from God. So that he that takes away reason to make way for revelation, puts out the light of both; and does much the same as if he would persuade a man to put out his eyes, the better to receive the remote light of an invisible star by a telescope.[138]

In other words, reason and revelation work together to experience God. It is crucial that this is understood so that reason is not cast aside as some inferior faculty of humanity. It is man's God-given way of discovering truth.[139]

There are many nuances to the various theories of Christian faith and reason throughout history. Regardless of the many variations, it is clear that reason contributes to the development of Christian faith. The art of thinking needs a resurgence within the church so that reason and faith can be reunited in a harmonious, biblical relationship. Once they are, the unbiblical ideologies of culture can be properly addressed.

Apologetics and Postmodernism

The purpose of Christian apologetics is to defend the truth as it corresponds to reality. The mechanism through which one defends the truth is reason. This is a simple concept

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[137] Saint Thomas (Aquinas), *The "Summa Theologica* (London, England: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1922), 40-41.

[138] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, England: T. Tegg and Son, 1836), 533.

[139] Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 63.

subconsciously utilized by people every day. For example, if you hear your alarm clock beep in the morning you conclude that it is time to get ready for work. This reasoning can look like this:

1. Your alarm clock is set to beep at 6:00 AM

2. 6:00 AM is when you get ready for work

3. Your alarm clock beeps

4. Therefore, it is time to get ready for work

Although people do not typically make this computation consciously, it is done subconsciously to interact with reality. This is called logic, or the "study of the rules of reasoning".[140] Logic is an involved science and tends to become rather complex. However, apprehension of basic logical argumentation allows for one to properly address the ideas available in the marketplace of culture.

Firstly, postmodernism is logically self-refuting. Postmodernist claims defy reason when assessed by the laws of logic. Consider the following argumentation.

1. One cannot know truth

2. (1.) is a truth claim

3. Therefore, (1.) must be false

This is known as *reductio ad absurdum*. The very claim that "one cannot know that which is true" is a claim to know that which is true. Therefore, it refutes itself. Another example would be

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[140] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 29.

the statement "I do not know how to form a sentence" because that claim itself is a sentence. The postmodernist attempt to remove truth from its proper authority undermines any attempt to say anything. The same case can be made against the postmodern relativist. It takes two possible forms:

1. Truth is relative
2. (1.) is an objective truth claim
3. Therefore, (1.) must be false

or

1. Truth is relative
2. (1.) is relative
3. Therefore, (1.) is not objectively true for all individuals who make a truth claim

Objective truth must exist. Truth, and therefore the laws of logic, are justified in and of themselves. It appears that certain articles of knowledge are knowable without justification. In philosophy this is known as particularism.[141] Questioning why these things are justified forces one to refer to some transcendental reality, or God, for their ontological grounding. This is the nature in which God has placed man. It is impossible for truth to be nonexistent because it is grounded in the permanent nature of God. Even the atheist philosopher is forced to abide by the transcendental laws of logic.

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[141] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 87.

Addressing Relativism

The implications of evolution and the eventual postmodern era have rendered morality to relative preference. One cannot claim to know that which is moral and, therefore, cannot deem something good or evil. It is simply subjective opinion. The philosophical death of God removed the grounding upon which objective morality existed. No philosopher is able to remain logically coherent while maintaining this philosophical death of God.

Atheist philosopher William Rowe is well-known for his evidential argument from evil. Rowe refers to the apparently unnecessary suffering experienced in the world to demonstrate that God does not exist. In response to one who might claim that suffering can lead to a greater good, he writes, "For we must not confuse the intense suffering in and of itself with the good things to which it sometimes leads or of which it may be a necessary part. Intense human or animal suffering is in itself bad, an evil…"[142] Rowe recognizes suffering as intrinsically evil. But, how does he make this claim? To which standard of good and evil is he referring? If a transcendental law maker, or God, does not exist, then there cannot exist an objective standard of morality. This argumentation takes the following form.

1. God does not exist

2. There is objective evil

3. Morality cannot be objective without God

4. Therefore, either (1.) or (2.) must be false

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[142] Marilyn McCord Adams, Robert M. Adams, and Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53.

According to Rowe's own atheistic presuppositions, he must adopt moral relativism. If he is unwilling to admit the existence of God, then the claim that suffering is evil can only be his opinion. Therefore, Rowe loses all credibility that an objective instance of evil would have maintained. His case is undermined by subjectivity.

N.T. Wright recognizes this dilemma caused by the philosophical death of God. "Postmodernism, in recognizing that we are all deeply flawed, avoids any return to a classic doctrine of original sin by claiming that humans have no fixed "identity" and hence no fixed responsibility. You can't escape evil within postmodernity, but you can't find anybody to take the blame either."[143] Those who recognize evil yet reject the origin of good cannot remain logically consistently nor justify their beliefs. However, some are willing to suffer the implications of postmodern thinking and embrace moral relativism. This is the only other option for those who reject an absolute transcendental reality. Aforementioned postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty recognizes these implications.

> Philosophers on the other side try to find ways of preserving most of common sense while keeping the faith with Darwin: with the realization that our species, its faculties and its current scientific and moral languages, are as much products of chance as are tectonic plates and mutated viruses. They try to explain how social democrats can be better than Nazis, modern medicine better than voodoo, and Galileo better than the Inquisition, even though there are no neutral, transcultural, ahistorical criteria that dictate these rankings.[144]

The consequences of Darwinism render the ideas that lead to the Holocaust as nothing more than an unfavorable opinion. Rape and torture are not objectively wrong, rather they are an unpopular preference. Rorty goes on to describe the task of the philosopher in light of this reality.

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[143] N. T. Wright and Tom Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (London, England: SPCK, 2012), 41.

[144] Rorty, "Untruth and Consequences," 36.

"Rummaging through common sense, trying to figure out what to keep and what to throw out, is what they [philosophers] do. Somebody has to, or else we shall suffocate, like the scholastics, under a pile of shriveled husks of once fruitful ideas."[145] However, the death of God does not only remove the ontological grounding for morality. It also means that logic and reason have no objective presence. They are arbitrarily suggested as a result of the individual's genetic makeup.

So then how does one, in Rorty's words, "figure out what to keep and what to throw away", according to their own biased, genetically predetermined thinking? What then, is a "fruitful idea" other than that which one subjectively deems it to be? Logic and reason are no longer authoritative over mankind. They do not rule over the individual's mind, rather the individual's mind rules over them. Without an objective, transcendental standard that is necessarily true, the ideas of man cannot be validated or falsified. One who claims that an idea is good is no more justified than one who claims that a certain food is tasty. Thus, along with the death of God comes the death of philosophy.

Christ Among Other Gods

The implications of postmodernism mean that no religious or moral theory can be right or wrong. This even applies to those who advocate for postmodern tolerance. The one who accuses another of intolerance is operating on the assumption that intolerance is objectively wrong. If it is not, then that person is not justified in enforcing his subjective opinion. Ideas must be true and/or

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[145] Rorty, "Untruth and Consequences," 36.

false in order to accuse someone of intolerance, but believing ideas to be false, specifically those of other religions, is precisely what postmodernists claim to be intolerant.[146]

This unwillingness to reject religious claims has forced the acceptance of all religions by relating them based on their similarities. Groothuis reiterates a popular parable to illustrate this postmodern religious pluralism.[147] In short, the parable consists of several blind men attempting to identify the animal (an elephant) that they are touching. However, they are all touching different parts and are therefore describing different aspects of the same elephant. In this parable, the elephant represents "God" and the blind men are the attempts of religion to describe the same God. This notion, that all religions lead to or are based on the same God, is popular among postmodern culture.

However, the exclusive truth claims of Christ, and other religions for that matter, destroy the accuracy of the elephant parable. Christ makes exclusive truth claims that are not reconciled by this illustration. For example Jesus claimed, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). One cannot believe in the claims of Christ while adopting the elephant analogy. Either Christ is true or false. The argumentation can take this form:

1. Christ is the only way to God

2. There are multiple ways to God

3. Therefore, (1.) and (2.) cannot both be true

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[146] Johannes L. van der Walt, "Religious Tolerance and Intolerance," Table in Chapter 3.

[147] Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 569.

This exclusivity is echoed in John 17:3 where Jesus says, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." There is only one true God and Jesus claims to reveal this God (John 14:9). So the question that remains is: is Jesus justified in making these claims? Answering that question requires a deeper dive into Christian apologetics. However, the point is that one is not logically justified in claiming to be Christian while maintaining belief in the elephant analogy. Many New Age beliefs are born in the minds of Christians when they entertain this analogy and are unwilling to falsify the claims of other religions, but basic logical argumentation demonstrates the exclusive claims made by Christ and the inability to coherently maintain contradictory beliefs. If one claims to be a Christian, or submits to the authority of Christ and his teachings, then he must also reject that which contradicts the Word of God.

Apologetics and Scientism

The *reductio ad absurdum* committed by postmodern philosophy is repeated in the beliefs of scientism. The claims of scientism exalt science as the highest form of knowledge. It presupposes that physical empirical evidence maintains more epistemic authority than metaphysical theories. However, "One of the greatest ironies of all of this is that *scientism is not a doctrine of science*; rather, it is a doctrine of philosophy."[148] The attempt to remove the metaphysical practice of philosophy from its proper position actually undermines scientism. For example, consider the strong scientism advocated by Bertrand Russel: "Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind

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[148] Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 23. His emphasis.

cannot know."[149] One is forced to ask Russel how he made this claim. Did science discover this

claim? Did he use the scientific method to analyze and validate it? Unfortunately for Russel, the

claim itself is philosophical and therefore unobservable by scientific methods. The

argumentation can take this form:

1. That which is true can only be attained by the scientific method

2. (1.) was not attained using the scientific method

3. Therefore, (1.) must be false

Even weak scientism, or the belief that other areas of knowledge can be true but must submit to

science, is self-refuting. Weak scientism supposes the authority of science over philosophy, but it

is philosophy that determines scientific inquiry. The argumentation can look like this:

1. Scientific claims have the highest epistemic authority

2. (1.) is a philosophical claim

3. Therefore, philosophy is epistemically authoritative over science making (1.) false

The beliefs of scientism have ushered in the death of first philosophy. First philosophy

refers to the idea that philosophy is independent of other subjects being justified in itself

(autonomous) and is more foundational than other realms of knowledge (authoritative).[150] This

definition of philosophy is not new and "it is safe to say that throughout most of our intellectual

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[149] Russell, *Religion and Science*, 243.

[150] Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism*, 98.

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history they have constituted the dominant view. In contemporary thought, however, this traditional view has lost ground, perhaps reflecting the general scientism prevalent in contemporary culture."[151] Etienne Gilson comments on the detrimental effects of Darwinism and the scientific revolution on postmodern philosophy.

> Philosophy is the only rational knowledge by which both science and nature can be judged. By reducing philosophy to pure science, man has not only abdicated his right to judge nature and to rule it; but he has also turned himself into a particular aspect of nature, subjected, like all the rest, to the necessary law which regulates its development.[152]

The irony of the scientific revolution was that it reduced its foundation of philosophy to the products of random chaotic forces, thereby removing its authority and autonomy, and undermining any consequent theories of science. Science needs first philosophy, but if philosophy, namely reason and logic, are not grounded in an objective ontology, then everything is merely meaningless speculation. Ultimately, scientism is reduced to the subjective opinion resulting from the undirected functioning of biology. This irony of scientism gives new meaning to the words of Albert Einstein: "the man of science is a poor philosopher."[153]

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[151] George Bealer, "On the Possibility of Philosophical Knowledge," *Philosophical Perspectives* 10 (1996): 1–34, accessed March 19, 2021, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2216234, 1.

[152] Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999), 223.

[153] Albert Einstein, "Physics and Reality," *Journal of the Franklin Institute* 221, no. 3 (March 1, 1936): 349–382, accessed March 10, 2021, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016003236910475.

Philosophy and religion are two sides of the same coin. If philosophy is the art of thinking well[154] and religion is the attempt to know things about the divine realm, then there eventually comes a point of contact. In other words, when pondering the metaphysical reality, one must begin with philosophy but will eventually form religious conclusions. Even the atheist philosophers pose religious theories, such as that God does not exist. Therefore, it is not necessarily that science and religion are at odds as many claim them to be, rather it is that the philosophical presumptions of many scientists form their interpretation of scientific findings. In other words, atheistic presumptions will always form atheistic conclusions. The empirical observations of science, such as DNA and the laws of physics, are the same tools used by Christian apologists to demonstrate God's intelligence revealed in nature. The difference between the atheist and the apologist is in the philosophies employed by each.

The problem here is that the philosophical presumptions of scientists are not based on scientific findings. However, whenever these presumptions are introduced it is called science as if it were empirically observable and necessarily true. Therefore, the true tension is not between science and religion, rather it is between presupposed philosophies of the atheist and the Christian. Unfortunately, the atheist philosophy is well-funded and comprises the academic majority, but even the scientists admit to the bias behind their atheism. Thomas Nagel in *The Last Word* discusses his fear of religion.

> I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and,

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[154] Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 28.

naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.[155]

He goes on to assert that this fear of "cosmic authority" is not unique to him but is prevalent among the scientific community. This is not to say that the Christian is free from emotional biases such as these. However, the one who thinks that the atheist scientist is free from these biases and reaches conclusions based purely on objective reasoning and empirical evidence is misguided.

Consider the following analogy. Detective Bill comes to a crime scene already convinced that he knows who did the crime. Therefore, he uses the evidence he finds to shape the narrative of what happened, and thus supports his initial theory. Suppose detective John comes to the crime scene also convinced that he knows who did it. However, the same evidence that Bill used to prove his theory better explains an alternate theory not proposed by either of them. John follows the evidence where it leads, forcing him to abandon his initial theory and adopt a new one. This is known as a paradigm shift. Scientific findings are merely the empirical evidence in the crime scene, not the explanation for why they are there. Any reasonable thinker who holds to an initial metaphysical theory, Christians and atheists alike, must be willing to abandon their presuppositions in light of the evidence.

Atheistic astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle and agnostic mathematician Chandra Wickramasinghe demonstrated such a paradigm shift while studying enzyme development. The once agnostic (now theistic) scientists

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[155] Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, n.d.), accessed March 22, 2021, https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/10.1093/0195149831.001.0001/acprof-9780195149838, 130.

"found that the likelihood of spontaneous processes accounting for the chance formation of the information content in life, such as the development of enzymes, is only one chance in 10^40,000! Since it is highly unlikely that spontaneous generation could account for life, it is much more likely that 'life was assembled by an intelligence.' These scientists concluded that, 'Indeed, such a theory is so obvious that one wonders why it is not widely accepted as being self-evident. The reasons are psychological rather than scientific."[156]

Science, namely empirical observations, cannot in themselves establish theories and laws. It takes a thinking mind to form a theory based on the evidence available. The atheistic conclusions of many scientists reflect a philosophical bias and not necessarily evidence that proves atheism. The same facts are used to argue either side. The question is: whose philosophy is logically sound?

This is why first philosophy is crucial for all thinking minds attempting to form a coherent worldview. Proper logic and reason are necessary in the process of sifting through personal beliefs to discern that which is true or false. Christian apologetics involves basic logic and reasoning that allows the individual to think as objectively as possible. Apologetics simply encourages reasonable thinking as it guides a questioning process, allowing the scientific evidence to be united with healthy philosophical reasoning.

Scientism has caused many people to think that if a scientist believes something it must be true. Similarly, people tend to think that scientists make conclusions based upon knowledge of necessarily true facts of which the common man is ignorant. This thinking has put tension between science and religion, with the scientist as the informed wiseman and the religious man as the ignorant fool. However, a brief application of logic reveals the fallacious nature of this mindset and demonstrates that the two can and should be united.

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[156] Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe, *Evolution from Space: A Theory of Cosmic Creationism* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 130. Quoted by Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 57.

Conclusion

Though postmodernism and scientism are dominant ideologies among the western culture, basic logical argumentation demonstrates them to be illogical and self-refuting. Christian apologetics proves itself to be a sufficient tool for addressing these ideas as it integrates philosophical reasoning into a biblical worldview. Although the Apostle Paul faced a different culture during his ministry, he proved to be a competent apologist who not only knew the surrounding culture but was able to appropriately address it. Despite the many diverse applications of Christian apologetics, the Bible makes it clear that defending the gospel on the grounds of truth is necessary for those who profess to be disciples of Christ.

Chapter 5: Apologetics in the Church

Sermons should target people's thinking as much as their wills and feelings... Sunday school should be more effective in training believers how to think carefully about their faith. Training in apologetics should be a regular part of discipleship… Local church after local church should be raising up and training a group of people who serve as apologists for the entire congregation.[157]

A brief application of Christian apologetics through logical argumentation reveals the illogical nature of postmodernism and scientism. It also demonstrates their harsh implications on societal thinking. Although postmodernism and scientism contribute to much of the apostasy experienced in the west, they are just two of the many ideologies of culture. The marketplace of ideas is always ready with the next great idea and does not lack anything in the marketing department. Apologetics can help equip those in the church to correctly assess various ideas through the lens of a Christian worldview. Not only is it effective, it is practiced throughout the New Testament and is mandated, to a certain degree, by biblical authors such as Paul, Peter, and Jude. The lack of such practice is evidenced by the pervasive cultural ideologies, namely postmodernism and scientism, among the church. These philosophies have a directly negative impact on the way in which one practices Christianity. Christian apologetics should be a normative practice in *every* Christian community. However, before proposing a basic model of apologetics some potential objections should be addressed.

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[157] Moreland and Willard, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, 13.

Some Objections

Due to the nature of apologetic argumentation and the overzealousness of some, it is possible that, despite the established need, some would be opposed to implementing apologetics as a normal ministry in the church. Three potential objections will be explored.

Sola Gratia

One common objection is that God is the one who ultimately saves and that apologetics attempts to do the work that only God can do.[158] If one is ultimately saved by God drawing near to him, then why would one need to "convince" someone of the truth of the gospel? However, this objection can be applied to any other ministry as well. If God draws us then why would we need an evangelist or missionary? This question is effectively addressed by Paul's words to Timothy. "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Notice how Paul lists the "must be's" of the Lord's servant all in hope that God will grant repentance. God's sovereignty does not imply mankind's incompetence or ignorance. God uses man to accomplish his sovereign will. He draws those whom he pleases but has chosen his people to partner with him in this mission. Perhaps it was Paul's extensive knowledge of and zeal for Judaism that contributed to God's choosing of him. So yes, God can use a donkey, but he chose Paul.

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[158] Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics*, 145-146.

"Not everyone is won by logic and reason"

Because many are not ultimately evangelized by proofs and evidence, some would argue that this means apologetics is not necessary for the church as a whole. There is some truth to this statement. Not everyone, in fact very few, are won over by logical argumentation,[159] but this does not mean that apologetics should be rejected as an irrelevant approach. Rather it means that apologetics is not ultimate, serving as one of many weapons in the Christian's arsenal. Similarly, acts of charity and selfless love may not ultimately bring one to Christ, but this does not mean we abandon this approach altogether. The Christian is called to be something, not solely do things. Of these things he is called to be is a defender of the gospel. Although salvation is not impossible without apologetics, it is still essential within Christian practice. Consider the early church in Rome. Paul wrote that their "faith was heard of all around the world" (Romans 1:8), yet they had no New Testament at the time of Paul's writing. Does this mean the New Testament is obsolete? Not at all. Much like the Bible, apologetics is a part of God's grace for those to receive and grow in the gospel.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the implementation of apologetics is not necessarily for evangelism. In fact, it is less about evangelism and more about equipping the saints. It is about the cultivation of a sound thinking process in the Christian for the pursuit of truth. If the church is to be seriously recognized as the "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), her thinking must reflect that title. Francis Schaeffer writes, "The unity of orthodox or evangelical Christianity should be centered around this emphasis on truth. It is

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[159] Kinnaman, Lyons, and Barna, *UnChristian*, 57-58.

always important, but doubly so when we are surrounded by so many for whom the concept of truth, in the sense of antithesis, is considered to be totally unthinkable."[160] The church should be the beacon of truth in the midst of darkened understanding. Apologetics is necessary in this process.

Unloving

Some claim that the argumentative nature of apologetic encounters tends to be unloving. Now, there are instances when arguing over minute issues is sin (2 Timothy 2:14). However, there are several more biblical instances when arguing with a holy motive is encouraged. Disregarding the many instances of Jesus and Paul engaging in debate, there are several instances where fighting for the faith is necessary. In response to those who necessitate circumcision, Paul informs Titus to "rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth" (Titus 1:13-14). Jude writes, "Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 2-3). He wanted to write regarding the joy of salvation shared between them, but he saw it more important to first encourage them to fight for the faith. Immediately after greeting them with mercy, peace and love, Jude encourages them to "contend for the faith". This term *epagōnízomai*, can be broken into *epí*, meaning "focused on", and *agṓn*, referring to "a contest or

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[160] Schaeffer, Sire, and Garber, *The God Who Is There*, 215.

competition".[161] Jude is calling them to fight opposing ideologies. This rhetoric is echoed by

Paul in his letter to Corinthians:

> For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

The Christian cannot forget the war in which he wages. To answer the call to fight against

various demonic ideologies is to love as Christ loved. Dispelling darkness is to walk in the light.

One must not confuse the casting down of ideologies with arrogant debate fueled by pride. This

is not to say that some apologists are not guilty of the latter, rather it is to identify what biblical

apologetics is meant to achieve.

Conclusion

The greatest irony of those who reject apologetics is that they end up refuting themselves. They

employ an *apologia* to argue why one should not engage in *apologia*. Ravi Zacharias observes

this contradiction.

> Apologetics is a subject that ends up defending itself. The one who argues against apologetics ends up using argument to denounce argument. The one who says apologetics is a matter of pride ends up proudly defending one's own impoverishment. The one who says conversion is a matter of the heart and not the intellect ends up presenting intellectual arguments to convince others of this position. So goes the process of self-contradiction.[162]

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[161] "Strong's Greek: 1864. Ἐπαγωνίζομαι (Epagónizomai) -- to Contend with or For," accessed March 23, 2021, https://biblehub.com/greek/1864.htm.

[162] Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, xii.

In all, Christian apologetics should be normative in the Christian community. Despite the various objections raised against an apologetic presence in the church, the biblical call to engage in it trumps them all. Apologetics is *necessary* in the church. It is necessary, to some degree, for all self-professing Christians. To represent Christ is to represent the truth incarnate. One must be able to defend and communicate the gospel of Christ in a world where truth is losing its voice.

Model of Applied Apologetics

Preparing Generation Z to face the quickly polarizing culture does not begin with their age group. It begins with competent leadership that influences *their parents or guardians*. "Teens serve as an accurate barometer of the condition of adults; they reflect back to us the very best and worst conditions of our adult culture. Most problems and issues that we typically label as teenage problems are in fact inextricably linked to problems of the adult world."[163] If the parents do not think critically about their faith then their children will most likely not either. Therefore, the task of equipping the youth is synonymous with equipping those in church leadership. A systemic change is in order if the western church desires to give Generation Z the weapons to fight falsity.

What would it look like to implement a system of Christian apologetics into the church? Many great apologists of the 21st century have undertaken this endeavor and have seen success within their own congregation. However, the scarcity of competent apologists such as these has prevented the implementation of apologetics as a normative operation in ministry. When future

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[163] Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, 50.

pastors think ministry, very few think apologetics. The church is in need of a foundational change that requires intentional work.

Form vs. Function

The change being proposed here is not one that comes about by launching one program at a church somewhere. Although the model may appear simple, it is by no means subtle. Implementing apologetics in a way that will prevent apostasy invoked by the ideas of western culture requires systematic alterations. This forces one to reassess the form of the church versus the function of the church.[164] Simply put, the function of the church is what it does, namely the role Christ gave to the first disciples to preach the gospel and make more disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). The form of the church is how it fulfills this call. Its form, unlike its God-given function, should always be reassessed and altered according to the operation of its function. Now, there are biblical standards for the form, creating a roadmap for success. However, this does not mean that innovation is prohibited. For example, people write new songs, change the order of service events, preach on different topics, and so on, but the form only changes to satisfy the function. In other words, when the function is not operating at maximum potential, the form needs to be reconsidered. When the gospel is not being preached and disciples are not being made then the way in which things are done needs to be assessed. The research presented prior demonstrates the church's need of addressing her form.

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[164] Much of this concept was inspired by Moreland and Willard, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, 141-142.

A brief survey of the country's largest evangelical churches revealed a common trend among these organizations.[165] Among the many titles of the various pastors the most frequent positions involved pastoral care, team/leadership development, and media/digital development. These pastoral duties are a form of the church and the frequency of these positions demonstrates the philosophy behind how these churches attempt to fulfill their function. The philosophy of how one grows and maintains a church requires much attention that will not be given here. Therefore, this is not an attempt to claim that these positions are irrelevant to the church's function. However, Christian apologists are nowhere to be found among these lead pastors. Furthermore, positions such as Pastor of Leadership Development or other discipleship-oriented roles, make no mention of apologetic training. This is not to say that apologetics is absent from these churches (although no apologetics ministries were found) or that these pastors do not also function as apologists, but it does reveal the priority placed on this discipline. Apologetics is not regarded as a lead pastoral discipline or duty. If anything, it is portrayed as a nonessential subset of ministry. This is the problem of form that is greatly affecting function. Christian apologists should be appointed in every congregation with roles specific to the ministry of apologetics. Now, it is apparent that not everyone is called nor should be an expert apologist. However, to the few who are, those trained and acknowledged as apologists should become normative among the local church and not as a part of separate ministries or academic organizations.

[165] The churches researched were Life.Church, Church of the Highlands, Crossroads Church, Christ's Church of the Valley and NewSpring Church through each of their websites. Each of these congregations have over 30,000 people attend weekly. Size directly correlates with influence. Although it is unlikely to be able to connect these churches with the statistics regarding apostasy, the large population of Christians who attend here reflect a large portion of the evangelical Christian population.

The Church Apologist

The role of the church apologist should be widespread. As a part of the lead pastoral team, he would oversee implementation of apologetic material into the other ministries. As the congregation's advocate for philosophical reasoning, he would influence the thinking patterns and perspectives of other leaders. This role is not solely about teaching facts and its goal is not to solely spread knowledge, although these are important. It is more foundationally about cultivating a thought life where the gospel can take root and grow. It is equipping Christians and church leaders with the tools to think responsibly about their faith and its relation to the world. The goal is to develop Christians who are capable in engaging with the ideas of the world because they have applied intentional thought towards what they believe and why they believe it. J.P. Moreland terms this loss of intentional thinking in the church as anti-intellectualism, which he believes has caused "A loss of boldness in confronting the idea structures in our culture with effective Christian witness." He goes on to say that "...anti-intellectualism has drained the church of its boldness in witnessing and speaking out about important issues in the places where ideas are generated. And for those who do have such courage, anti-intellectualism has created a context in which we Christians often come off as shallow, defensive, and reactionary, instead of thoughtful, confident, and articulate."[166] The church apologist will actively wage war on anti-intellectualism. There are five essential responsibilities of this role.

Firstly, the church apologist must function as a pastor first and a teacher second. The pastoral duty to do everything through the lens of Christ is a must, especially when wielding the sword of truth. A teacher without the heart of Christ could potentially do more harm than good.

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[166] Moreland and Willard, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, 17.

"Consequently, apologetic success is best understood as faithfulness to Jesus Christ."[167] This means discernment is essential. Not all issues brought to the apologist will be in need of a logical defense. "Some are much deeper concerns and are not so much about problems with rational understanding as about problems with existential commitment."[168] The apologist must have the wisdom to discern between intellectual needs and emotional needs, able to bridge the gap between the two. A heart of shepherding must be his deepest motivation. One who prides himself on being right rather than the edification of the church is not equipped to serve as an apologist.

Secondly, the church apologist must be competent in his field. Due to the nature of this work, he will most likely need a formal education in apologetics. Being able to bridge the gap between the gospel and other religions, worldviews, and cultures is an essential skill he must have. This requires knowledge in a wide range of topics so that he is familiar with a variety of ideologies. Although apologists, such as William Lane Craig, advocate for specialization in a particular type of apologetics,[169] this role requires the apologist to have general knowledge on a variety of topics. Specialization is more necessary in the academic realm. For example, when one is debating an atheist on the validity of naturalism, it would benefit the apologist to not only know this topic but to be able to refute it thoroughly impromptu. The church apologist needs not prepare for academic debates, although this certainly may be an element of his job. However, he must be prepared to field the various questions invoked by other ideologies. He must be a well-rounded resource able to handle a variety of intellectual questions and objections. Furthermore,

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[167] Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics*, 22-23.

[168] Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), accessed March 23, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=799507, 14.

[169] "Apologetics Training - Advice to Christian Apologists Part 1 | Reasonable Faith," accessed March 23, 2021, http://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/apologetics/apologetics-training-advice-to-christian-apologists/.

he must have a thorough understanding of Christian doctrine and its biblical foundations to act as his standard in refuting false ideologies. He must also remain vigilant in his watch for emerging ideologies of culture. He is to act as a bellringer or watchman as ideological barriers to the gospel are born in culture. This requires paying attention to the ideas that circulate various arenas such as politics, science, and the arts. Being aware of the coming storm, warning those in his community, and equipping them to weather it are essential in the work of the apologist.

Thirdly, much of the church apologist's work would involve teaching. He must be competent in forming curricula for various ages and intellect. The goal of his teaching is to not only equip believers with tools, but to also reinstate a life of intellect in the church. It is to create a culture where conversations cover a variety of topics and thinking hard about relevant issues and ideas is commonplace. He must equip parents with the tools to raise disciples in their own home. Whether it is the ability to answer objections, promote healthy Christian thinking, or help their children draw near to God in Spirit and truth, these skills are necessary for parental discipleship.[170] Parents who are competent in raising disciples at home is the mark of a successful church apologist. Furthermore, he would also counsel and teach those with specific questions or needs such as one who is attempting to evangelize to a Muslim friend.

Fourthly, the church apologist must be involved in other ministries throughout the church community. The implementation of a church apologist is not to create an apologetic ministry that is added to a list of several other ministries. Rather, the church apologist should influence the many ministries already present, injecting a healthy dose of apologetic perspective relevant to each. The goal is not to say, "We have an apologetics ministry", rather to say, "We are an

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[170] Ravi Zacharias et al., *Is Your Church Ready?: Motivating Leaders to Live an Apologetic Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2003), accessed March 24, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397379, 62-66.

apologetically minded church". This would mean contributing to sermon development with the possibility of giving an apologetic sermon every so often. It would mean working with the youth ministry based on the needs brought about by secular education. The apologist would contribute to the work of missionaries and evangelists by preparing them to face various ideologies of foreign cultures. He would be constantly assessing the needs of each ministry and equipping them accordingly.

Fifthly, the church apologist is to identify and mentor future apologists who desire to contend for the gospel in this way. Just as lead pastors are focused on developing church leaders and dedicate much time and energy to that end, so must the apologist be in regard to developing leaders in Christian thinking. People are interested in Christian apologetics, but they typically need to go beyond their local church to get it and do not recognize it as a viable career option. If the church apologist is successful in his position, there will be many who feel the call to vocationally defend the gospel as an apologist. Identifying and mentoring those who are called in this way will be another major role of the church apologist.

These five roles characterize the foundational work of the church apologist. Intentional prioritization of this role would cause a radical shift in church culture among the western evangelical churches. The cultural ideologies of the West would no longer threaten the ill-equipped church, rather the equipped church would begin to threaten the surrounding culture. Moreland implemented a department of Christian education as an extension of his local church. This department, called Grace Discovery Center, functioned similar to the teaching role of the apologist mentioned in this section.[171] Moreland has dedicated much time and energy to implementing apologetics in the church as a whole and serves as an excellent example of what

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[171] Moreland and Willard, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, 144-146.

apologetic success looks like. Quoting one of his apologetic endeavors in full will strongly

establish this point.

> I have trained people to share their faith for over forty years. I can tell you from experience that when people learn what they believe and why, they become bold in their witness and attractive in the way they engage others in debate or dialogue. While pastoring a church in Baltimore, I once taught a twelve-week class on Christian apologetics. The course cost fifty dollars to take, required two textbooks, and had several homework assignments, including two papers. When the sixth week ended, a man named Bob came up to me after class and, with tears running down his cheeks, expressed his gratitude for the high academic standards and requirements in the class. I asked him why he was grateful about this. I will never forget his response. He told me he had worked at the same place for ten years but had never shared his faith with anyone because he was afraid someone would ask him a question, he would not know the answer, and his inadequate preparation would embarrass him and the Christian faith. But at his workplace the week before this particular class, he had shared his faith with three workers because for the first time he felt he had some answers, and his boldness was strengthened by that conviction… Knowing what you're talking about may be hard work, but it clearly pays off.[172]

The church apologist would ensure that stories like these are no longer minority instances, but

commonplace among the Christian community.

Apologetics in All Pastoral Leadership

Perhaps the more ambitious proposal being made is that the church apologist would also

train the pastoral team in the fundamentals of apologetics. Again, this is to cultivate an

apologetically-minded church from the bottom up. Although all are not called to be a Paul, who

engaged in war-like apologetics, all who attempt to satisfy the biblical standards of Christian

leadership, such as those outlined in Titus 1:5-9 and 13-14, should be competent in defending the

objectivity of Christianity. In other words, biblically speaking, training in and the practicing of

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[172] Moreland and Willard, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, 17.

apologetics is necessary for all who are in church leadership. Peter Grant articulates the need for Christian apologetics among local church leaders.

> When it comes to the ministry of apologetics in the local church, the pastor and other leaders must know the way and show the way. They must lead the church by conviction and example in helping people answer tough questions about life. In teaching and leadership they must equip believers to give reasonable answers... The pastor who ignores the role of apologetics in dealing with these questions will find himself offering compassion without conviction and comfort without the ultimate comfort of knowing God; he will leave his hearers stranded in a sea of doubt and miss opportunities to share the gospel.[173]

Thorough training in apologetics would influence other aspects of ministry, such as sermon preparation, evangelism and teaching. Again, it is important to note that the goal of teaching apologetics is not necessarily to gain knowledge, but to equip pastors and leaders to communicate the gospel effectively. "Apologetics is conversational… it is much more concerned with removing misunderstandings, explaining ideas, and exploring the personal relevance of faith."[174] Basic skills, such as navigating comments like "that's just your interpretation", would be better apprehended and result in fruitful conversations. Not only would it foster a stronger faith among church leaders, but it would aid in counseling and conversational efforts.

The church apologist would train the pastoral staff through a short introductory course on apologetics. This course would cover basic concepts and arguments, encouraging the participants to think critically about Christianity. The goal is not to master anything, but to become familiar with difficult questions/ideas and the various ways in which they are addressed. The following is a theoretical outline of an eight-week course that meets 2-3 times a week. Each week will cover a different topic:

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[173] Zacharias et al., *Is Your Church Ready?*, 45-46.

[174] McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 17.

1. **Basics of philosophy:** This topic will serve as the foundation for the following 7 weeks. Skills in logic and reasoning will be the main focus, such as the use of argumentation and basic syllogisms. Philosophical training is a must for the mind that seeks to think critically. "Indeed, I should say that the relevance of philosophy to apologetics is so great that even if you do not specialize in philosophical apologetics but choose to go into some other type of apologetics, you would do well to take a strong dose of analytic philosophy... analytic philosophy lays great worth and emphasis on clarity of definitions, careful delineation of premises, and logical rigor of argumentation."[175] Problem solving and critical thinking will lay the groundwork for the rest of the course.

2. **The Historical Christ:** This topic will reflect the approach of the Apostle Paul throughout the majority of his recorded ministry. Paul established Christ as the Messiah by establishing his resurrection from the dead as well as his fulfillment of prophecy. In fact, Paul hinged the entirety of the Christian faith on the historical resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:14). This topic will demonstrate how one can reflect on history to establish the divinity of Christ by his resurrection, fulfillment of prophecy, and the eyewitness accounts of the early church.

3. **The Reliability of Biblical Manuscripts:** This topic will address the history of the Bible's formation. Concepts such as inerrancy, accuracy of current manuscripts in relation to the original ones, and archeological confirmations will be broached. This will

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[175] "Apologetics Training - Advice to Christian Apologists Part 1 | Reasonable Faith," accessed March 23, 2021, http://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/apologetics/apologetics-training-advice-to-christian-apologists/.

not consist of hermeneutics, rather it will establish the reliability of the Bible, demonstrating why hermeneutics is a beneficial practice.

4. **Faith and Science:** This topic is aimed towards reconciling the relationship between science and Christianity. The prevalent scientism of this current culture necessitates the need for such a topic. The shortcomings of naturalism and atheism will be assessed and the superior philosophy of Christian theism will be confidently established.

5. **The Problem of Evil:** This topic will deal with the classical problem of evil. It will entertain the various questions that arise from the claim of God's goodness given the prevalence of evil in the world. The answers may vary depending on particular denominations, but the point is to raise this difficult question and encourage critical biblical thinking in response.

6. **The Moral Argument:** This topic will approach the idea of objective morality and its implications on the truth of theism. The concept of good and evil and a standard according to which these are determined will be the main focus of this topic.

7. **Natural Theology:** This topic will cover the idea of *ex-nihilo* creation and the inherent evidence for God given his creation as explained in the first chapter of Romans. Intelligent design, the kalam cosmological argument, and the fine-tuning of the universe will also be included.

8. **Current Culture:** This topic will identify the current cultural ideologies of the day. The apologist will provide information on the current 21st century western culture's postmodernism and its implications such as religious pluralism, tolerance, and relativism. This topic is subject to change dependent on the current cultural ideologies. This topic can cover a wide range of ideas depending on the location of the church and specific demographics that make up the particular community.

This theoretical curriculum is meant to convey the type of training pastoral staff would receive by the church apologist. However, this is only an example. Given his expertise, the church apologist would have full authority to determine the essentials of general training in apologetics.[176] It is important to note that not all individuals are geared towards grasping some of this content, but that is part of the point. The goal of this training, especially towards church leadership, is to stretch thinking capabilities and shift perspectives, not necessarily master the material.

<div align="center">Impact on the Youth</div>

Given the rates of apostasy among the youth in western culture and the lack of biblical coherence among the population, it is evident that an implementation of Christian apologetics into the local church would have a tangible impact. If implemented intentionally, the model

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[176] Given the wide range of beliefs among evangelical Protestant churches, the content taught by the respective church apologist will vary. For instance, apologists who are presuppositionalists may reject the notion of natural theology and therefore exclude it from their curriculum. Similarly, he may see a need that is specific to the immediate surrounding context and culture and form a curriculum to meet this need. This model is designed to give autonomy to the apologist to implement what he sees as biblical and essential. It is assumed that his formal training in apologetics qualifies him to have such autonomy.

presented above would drastically alter the culture of church life. It is this change in form, namely prioritization of Christian apologetics, that would improve the church's function. This change in function would directly impact the youth. It is much more than launching an apologetic program for a couple weeks or inviting an apologist to speak at a youth service. It is a systemic change that will influence the parents and youth ministers who contribute to the spiritual development of these kids.

Equipping parents with the skills and tools to disciple their children far outweighs the greatest youth minister this world has to offer. Voddie Baucham Jr. correctly asserts, "Our children are falling away because we are asking the church to do what God designated the family to accomplish."[177] Discipleship begins in the home. If the apologist is biblically sound,[178] he will realize that youth ministry will never replace at home discipleship. In fulfilling his third role as a teacher, his equipping of Christian parents will shift autonomy and responsibility for discipling children from the church to the home.

Furthermore, when a healthy Christian thought life is cultivated in the minds of parents it will naturally influence their children. Biblical conversations become less intimidating when they are motivated by genuine curiosity and confidence in certain biblical truths established by apologetics. Kids have questions, and sometimes difficult ones. This is not to say that apologetics would allow parents to have every answer ready, but it would create an atmosphere where questioning and thinking is welcomed, especially knowing that there is a resource readily available (the church apologist and his teachings). Having the correct fact to answer a particular

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[177] Voddie Baucham Jr, *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 9.

[178] See Chapter 2 for identification of child discipleship by parents mandated by the Bible. The church's role is to equip parents for discipleship and not necessarily disciple their children for them. This is made explicitly clear in Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4.

question is one thing, but the ability to generate meaningful conversation that goes beyond the biblical text or Christian dogmas is another. This allows Christianity to be integrated into the daily life of a teenager in the midst of opposing western culture. Dan Kimball writes, "I am finding that emerging generations really aren't opposed to truth and biblical morals. When people sense that you aren't just dogmatically opinionated due to blind faith and that you aren't just attacking other people's beliefs out of fear, they are remarkably open to intelligent and loving discussion about choice and truth.[179] This particular blind faith and fear would be dispelled by basic training in apologetics. It paves the way for natural, genuine conversation not only between children and their parents, but also between one youth and another.

As the pastoral staff become familiar with apologetic topics, the youth ministry will be directly impacted as well. It is the goal of the apologist to guide the youth pastor in forming teachings and sermons that will help defend against the secular ideologies prevalent in education. This will shape the way in which the gospel is communicated and how sermons are formed. As in all ministerial endeavors, truth should be the focus of the church's teaching. However, there appears to be an emphasis on, as Moreland terms it, "felt needs" instead of objective truth, especially among youth ministries. Youth ministry in the West appears to act as more of a safe Friday night alternative than training in the true gospel. Alison Thomas hopes to see this shift from the latter to the former. "My prayer for weekly youth group gatherings is that they will go from being an entertainment show full of feel-good games to an intense forum that invites tough

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[179] Dan Kimball et al., *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), accessed March 23, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5607949, 86.

questions and provides satisfying answers."[180] This requires the truth-centered teaching encouraged by apologetics.

Simply put, the current model of youth ministry is not working.[181] The high rates of apostasy among the youth reflects an incompetent church in forming young disciples. In response to the correlation between the largest historical increase in full-time youth pastors and the greatest decline of youth evangelism Alvin Reid writes "... I don't think that the rise of youth ministers and the accompanying decline of youth evangelism is necessarily a cause-and-effect relationship. But the failure of contemporary youth ministry to make a positive impact on youth culture cannot be ignored. Thus, *if we keep doing what we're doing, we'll keep getting what we're getting!*"[182] This trend will only intensify if intentional action is not taken, but "we must first acknowledge that many of our current forms of youth ministry are destructive."[183] The whole system is in dire need of a form change. Implementing apologetics as a high-level priority in the church and equipping parents with the skills necessary to disciple their children is the answer to this problem.

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[180] Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion*, 48.

[181] Baucham Jr, *Family Driven Faith*, 191.

[182] Alvin L. Reid, *Raising the Bar: Ministry to Youth in the New Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2002), 39. His emphasis.

[183] Mark Yaconelli, "Youth Ministry: A Contemplative Approach," *The Presbyterian Record* (Toronto, Canada: Presbyterian Church in Canada, March 2001), accessed March 25, 2021, http://search.proquest.com/docview/214355016/abstract/261D141A9CA64953PQ/1, 2.

Conclusion

This model of applied apologetics hopes to reverse the effects of western culture on the church. The systemic change in prioritizing apologists within the local church will cultivate Christians who think thoroughly about their faith. Among these Christians are parents who, when properly equipped by the church apologist, will introduce this culture of Christian thinking in their own households. The downstream effects of this particular change in form will greatly impact the youth. The many ideologies of western culture will no longer threaten the young Christians who have thoroughly reasoned their faith and have been equipped by their parents first, and the church second. When culture no longer threatens the church, there comes a time when the tables turn and the church begins to threaten the culture. This is when the light of the world begins to shine, piercing the murky abyss created by postmodernism. This is when the salt of the earth reintroduces flavor to a world whose taste buds are numbed by bland subjectivity (Matthew 5:13-16). But this will only happen when the church begins to boldly contend for her faith. Although almost 40 years ago, the words of R.C. Sproul will effectively conclude this point.

> The church is safe from vicious persecution at the hands of the secularist, as educated people have finished with stake-burning circuses and torture racks. No martyr's blood is shed in the secular west. So long as the church knows her place and remains quietly at peace on her modern reservation. Let the babes pray and sing and read their Bibles, continuing steadfastly in their intellectual retardation; the church's extinction will not come by sword or pillory, but by the quiet death of irrelevance. But let the church step off the reservation, let her penetrate once more the culture of the day and the face of secularism will change from a benign smile to a savage snarl.[184]

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[184] Robert Charles Sproul, John Henry Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 4.

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