

6ST530/3 INTRODUCTION TO APOLOGETICS

Reformed Theological Seminary
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Professors: William Edgar
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The Christian faith is not true because it works. It works because it is true. No issue is so fundamental both to the searcher and to the believer as the question of truth. The uniqueness and trustworthiness of the Christian faith rest entirely on its claim to be the truth. God, who is the father of Jesus Christ, is either there or he is not there. Either he has spoken or he has not spoken. What his revelation claims is either true or false. Jesus either rose from the dead or he didn't. There are no two ways about it.

Os Guinness: *God in the Dark* (1996)

□ COURSE OUTLINE:

1. AN APOLOGY FOR APOLOGETICS (April 16)

- 1.1 The challenge of apologetics today
 - 1.1.1 Apologetics in the contemporary world
 - 1.1.1.1 The questions asked
 - 1.1.1.2 The questions not asked
 - 1.1.2 Highlights in the history of apologetics
- 1.2 The biblical basis for apologetics
 - 1.2.1 Initial probe: 1 Peter 3:15
 - 1.2.2 Apology in the history of redemption
 - 1.2.3 Scripture as apology
 - 1.2.4 Personal qualifications of the apologist
- 1.3 Preliminary definition of apologetics

2. "Word Meets World" (April 16, 17)

- 2.1 The ethics of cultural engagement
 - 2.1.1 Liberty
 - 2.1.2 Conscience
 - 2.1.3 License
 - 2.1.4 Prophetic responsibilities
- 2.2 Application
 - 2.2.1 The attraction of media
 - 2.2.2 The challenge of media
- 2.3 Bigger questions about the Gospel and contemporary life

3. CONTOURS OF WORLDVIEW THINKING (Apr 23)

- 3.1 Master narratives of religious change
- 3.1.1 Modernity and the postmodern
- 3.1.2 Globalization and its fruit
- 3.2 Apologetics and other disciplines
- 3.2.1 Illustrations from visual culture
- 3.2.2 Psychology

4.1 PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS (Apr 23-24)

- 4.1 The transcendental approach
- 4.1.1 The background
- 4.1.2 Presuppositions
- 4.1.2.1 Paradigm, pre-understanding, bias
- 4.1.2.2 The point of contact
- 4.1.2.3 From above, yet from every place below

4.2 PERSUASION (Apr 24)

- 4.2 Arguing transcendently
- 4.2.1 Disclosure: the impossibility of the contrary
- 4.2.1.1 Surprised by joy
- 4.2.1.2 The limits of bargaining
- 4.2.1.3 Signals of transcendence
- 4.2.2 Homecoming

4.3 EVIDENCES (Apr 30)

- 4.3.1 Evidences, circles and proofs
- 4.3.2 Conviction and doubt
- 4.3.3 Discursive and non-discursive persuasion
- 4.4 Other schools compared

5.1 APOLOGETICS CONVERSATIONS (Apr 30 – May 1)

- 5.1 The problem of evil
- 5.1.1 The problem stated
- 5.1.2 Classical answers
- 5.1.3 God and the inexcusable mystery of evil

5.2 FURTHER ISSUES (May 1)

- 5.2 Science and faith
- 5.2.1 History

- 5.2.2 Days of Creation
- 5.3 Worldwide apologetics
- 3.3.1 Globalization and missions
- 3.3.2 Confronting world religions
- 3.3.3 Pluralism, relativism and truth

6. APOLOGETICS AND THE FUTURE

- 6.1 The call of the church
- 6.2 Apologetics and theological education
- 6.3 Forms of missions and evangelism
- 6.4 Into the new millennium

□REQUIREMENTS FOR 6ST530/3

1. **Class participation:** This means not only attendance in class, but preparation for class. The professors will do their best to engage the largest number of students in discussion. Experience shows significantly less learning is done when classes are missed!
2. **Featuring Dr. Chris Simmons:** This course will begin with a Forum entitled “Word Meets World.” It will jointly be presented by Drs William Edgar and Chris Simmons. A graduate of Westminster Seminary, New York University and the University of Chicago (PhD), Dr. Simmons taught for 7 years in Media Studies at Messiah College, and then served as Executive Director of the Gospel & Culture Project from 2008 to 2009. Simmons is a specialist in culture studies, with a focus on film and visual culture. The rest of the course will be taught by Dr. Edgar.
3. **Required reading:** Due on dates indicated below, pp.4-6. It is essential to keep up with the reading, since a good deal of the lecture material assumes a background from the reading, not to mention the exam at the end of the course. There is no midterm exam, but there is a term paper. Some of the reading may be new and challenging to certain students, so, do keep up.
4. **Response paper:** You will be required to write a response to a chapter in *Constructing a Life Philosophy*, the 6th or 7th edition, San Diego: Greenhaven Press, “Opposing Viewpoints Series,” 1993, or 2002. [n.b. If you can’t find either of these, check your local library. Otherwise, you may respond to one of the chapters in *World Religion* in the Opposing Viewpoints series Greenhaven Press, 2006.] **Due postmarked by May 7th.** Please mail a hard copy to Professor Edgar c/o Reformed Theological Seminary 1028 Balls Hill Road, McLean, VA 22101. *No e-mailed papers will be accepted.* Be sure your name is on it. It is a ten-page apologetic response. See this Syllabus, pp. 7-10, for details. The professor will correct your papers.
5. **Final exam:** The exam must be proctored by an RTS employee, an ordained minister or elder, or an employee of a testing center that offers proctoring services. It takes three hours, covering all aspects of the course. Please use a dark pen, and leave margins. See this Syllabus, p.

10, for details. Do benefit from the “Preparatory Questions,” pp. 11-12. Your proctor must mail your exam to the RTS-DC campus, postmarked no later than **Wednesday, May 12th, 2010**.

Office Hours: The professors will be available during their time in DC, upon appointment.

☐ **Required Reading:**

DUE April 16

1. AN APOLOGY FOR APOLOGETICS

REQUIRED

1 Peter 3:8-22 (Greek version if possible)

William Edgar: *Reasons of the Heart*, Phillipsburg: P & R, 2003, pp. 11-50

SUPPLEMENTARY

Os Guinness: *Time for Truth*, Grand Rapids: Baker/Hourglass, 2000, entire

Dick Keyes: *Chameleon Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Baker/Hourglass, 1994

K. Scott Oliphint: *The Battle Belongs to the Lord*, Phillipsburg: P & R, 2003

2. WORD MEETS WORLD

Attend the conference as you are able; be prepared to discuss the material

DUE April 23

3. CONTOURS OF WORLDVIEW THINKING

REQUIRED

Al Wolters: *Creation Regained*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985, entire

Cornelius Van Til: *Christian Apologetics*, Phillipsburg: P & R, 2003, pp. 1-82

Lesslie Newbigin: *A Word in Season*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, entire

SUPPLEMENTARY

Brian J. Walsh & Richard Middleton: *The Transforming Vision*, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984

David K. Naugle: *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.: *Engaging God's World*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002

David B. Hegeman: *Plowing in Hope: Toward a Biblical Theology of Culture*, Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 1999

Steve Turner: *Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts*, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001

Andy Crouch: *Culture Making*, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008

Peter L. Berger: *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999

Philip Jenkins: *The Next Christendom*, New York: Oxford, 2002
Richard Keyes: *Seeing Through Cynicism*, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006
J. Richard Middleton & Brian J. Walsh: *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995
David J. Bosch: *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1995
Charles Taylor: *A Secular Age*, Cambridge: Belknap Harvard U. P. 2007

4.1 PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS (1)

REQUIRED

Cornelius Van Til: *Christian Apologetics*, Phillipsburg: P & R, 2003, pp. 83-197

SUPPLEMENTARY

Steven B. Cowan, ed.: *Five Views on Apologetics*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000, 207-264
Cornelius Van Til: *The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed., rev., Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976
Greg Bahnsen: *Van Til's Apologetic*, Phillipsburg: P & R, 1998
-----: *Always Ready*, Robert Booth, ed., Atlanta: American Vision, 1996
John M. Frame: *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1995

4.2 PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS (2)

REQUIRED

William Edgar: *Reasons of the Heart*, Phillipsburg: P & R, 2003, pp. 51-115

SUPPLEMENTARY

G. K. Chesterton: *The Everlasting Man*, Fort Collins: Ignatius Press, 1999
Francis A. Schaeffer: *The God Who Is There*, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968

DUE April 30

5. APOLOGETIC CONVERSATIONS

REQUIRED

D. A. Carson: *How Long, O Lord: Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006, entire

SUPPLEMENTARY

Lesslie Newbigin: *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989
Dan McCartney: *Why Does It Have to Hurt?: The Meaning of Christian Suffering*, Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1998
Ruth A. Tucker: *Walking Away from Faith: Unraveling the Mystery of Belief and Unbelief*, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002, entire

Jean Bethke Elshtain: *Who Are We?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000
Craig S. Keener & Glenn Usry: *Defending Black Faith*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1997
Os Guinness: *Long Journey Home*, New York: Doubleday, 2001
-----: *Unspeakable: Facing up to Evil in an Age of Genocide and Terror*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005
William Edgar: *The Face of Truth: Lifting the Veil*. Phillipsburgh: P & R, 2000

For the paper: *Constructing a Life Philosophy*, the 6th or 7th edition, San Diego: Greenhaven Press, "Opposing Viewpoints Series," 1993, or 2002

RESOURCES

Today, resource books and others, are proliferating. It is important to be aware of these, because the quality is improving all the time. Furthermore, much apologetics is being done in formats related to the information explosion. The following items are suggestive, but hardly exhaustive.

Mars Hill Audio: Tape series, NPR format, hosted by Ken Myers. Very insightful interviews on every aspect of contemporary culture. Special emphasis on the arts. Current address: P.O. Box 1527, Charlottesville, VA 22902-1527.

[http://mhadigital.org/index.php?post_category=MHA%20info]

The Trinity Forum: Several curricula whose stated purpose is, "Strengthening Spiritual Balance in Secular Leadership." They issue from the work of Os Guinness, and consist of Aspen-type seminars. Billed as "an academy without walls," they use texts from the classics, to theology, to skeptical moderns, to Scripture, challenging the student to think through first-order questions. Excellent resources, such as "Provocations." [<http://www.ttf.org/>]

Several periodicals are recommended in order to keep abreast of cultural trends. Among the most important are *Chronicles*, *Soundings*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Capital Commentary*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Icon*, *The New Republic*, *The Utne Reader*, *Books and Culture*, *Select Items*, *Hedgehog Review*, *First Things*, *The Reformed Apologist*, *Modern Reformation*, *Christianity Today*, *Prism*, *The Reconciler*, *Gadfly*, *Forbes Media Critic*, *The Wilson Quarterly*, *The Economist*, *The Brandywine Review of Faith & International Affairs*. See also the *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (IVP).

A large number of *websites* related to apologetics exist. Some are profitable; many are exercises in "vain repetition." Browsing through various drives gives an open window onto American Christianity. One sees a good number of evidentialist sites, with questions focusing on evolution, the Bible's reliability, the cults, etc. There are also a fair number of Roman Catholic sites, embracing a great variety of issues and approaches. Despite the smaller population, Reformed circles display a significant number of sites as well.

For some of the most interesting links:

<http://maxpages.com/thirdmill> (Richard Pratt's fascinating and engaging *Third Millennium Ministries*) <http://www.liberty.edu/resources/library/christn/apol/apol.htm> (from Liberty U.) www.thetruthaboutdavinci.com (WTS!) <http://str.org/links/apolsite.htm> (from Stand To Reason; this is probably the most rich).

From a specifically Reformed point of view:

<http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/apologetics.html> (Jonathan Barlow and Ed Welsh's site)
<http://www.scccs.org> (from the late Greg Bahnsen's Institute)

Most useful all around:

<http://www.ttf.org/> (The Trinity Forum: "engaging leaders... for personal and societal renewal")
<http://www.veritas.org/index.html> (from the Veritas Forum; outstanding creative apologetics in universities)

<http://huizen.dds.nl/~chr/links/apolog.htm> (from Christian Europe Online; very useful resources)

For a good general index [<http://www.rctr.org/ap6.htm>]

Response Paper

The Written Assignment

The paper, based on the principles below, counts for *half* of your grade, along with the final exam. It is due **postmarked by May 7th**. Please send to Prof. Edgar (*hard copy only*), c/o Reformed Theological Seminary 1028 Balls Hill Road, McLean, VA 22101.

There is one specific focus to the paper, for all students. It is to be a thoughtful apologetic response to one of the essays in the book, *Constructing a Life Philosophy*, in the "Opposing Viewpoints" series. In the event this is unavailable, you may use one of the chapters in *World Religion* in the Opposing Viewpoints series Greenhaven Press, 2006. No other text is permitted. You may pick any one article, except those that are forthrightly Christian. The paper must be limited to ten pages (10), double-spaced, not including endnotes or bibliography. Please do not use smaller than font size 12.

The assignment is to hold an apologetic interaction with the author of the article. So you must address both the surface issues and the underlying presuppositions of the philosophy set forth. The **key** is that in your refutation, you must strive to apply the *transcendental approach* as you will have learned it in the course. This is the focus of Section 4, and of much of the required reading. Thus, you must strive to be *persuasive*, and not simply enunciate your disagreements. In order to accomplish this, it is important to answer the author in such a way as he or she would say, "Yes, though we disagree, you've understood my position, and are fair to me." More than that, you must try to get over onto the ground of the view you disagree with, in order to show *from within* how it fails to live up to its own claims.

The format is up to you. The simplest would be an article or a book review format. See any standard theological journal for a model. But a dialogue or personal letter is fine too.

Because this paper is short, you really don't need to do any background research into the issues involved. But you can, if that helps. Just remember, you are not responding to a person or an issue but to one article. For example, if you were to write on Ruth Sasaki's "Buddhism Is the Way to Ultimate Reality," it probably will not hurt to do some reading on Buddhism, and you may consult the bibliographical material in this syllabus. But the paper is *only* about this article.

In order to help with your progress in writing the paper, you *might* consider the following process. This is just a *suggestion* for you. Only the final paper is required:

Three step process

1. Choose article, with optional preliminary bibliography established.
2. Create a full outline of your paper.
3. The final paper.

Nota Bene: There will be a late penalty of one grade point (i.e. B+ to B; B to B-, etc.) per day late handing in the final paper. Only the most *serious* excuses (nuclear disaster, etc.) will be accepted as legitimate for lateness. If you know it'll be late **don't wait** till the last minute to ask. The professor is much less lenient under pressure! If English is not your native language, please contact Professor Edgar.

Though voluntary, the professor would be glad to look at steps 1 or 2. E-mails are fine for specific questions and details, but deeper issues are better handled in personal conversation. However, they will not commit to a possible grade.

About grades: In this course, a B+ is considered a standard, good grade. It means you have fulfilled the assignment and have respected the basic principles outlined here. B or B- means it is fine, but has a few minor problems. A- means the work is of superior quality. An A means it is exceptional, and distinctive. In the C's means it needs some work in a significant area. The D area means there are some serious problems, though it is still passable. F is not.

□ General Principles for Writing Papers

With apologies for what may sound patronizing, we have found from experience that it is better to say too much here, than too little. So, here goes. This is not a research paper, since it relates primarily to the particular text you've chosen. Yet a number of students entering RTS have not had a great deal of experience writing term papers. So it is important to know the purpose of this kind of work. Do read over the following material carefully. I find that whenever there are problems, in 95% of the cases the remedy would have been in the principles given below.

1. Level: A graduate level paper involves taking a topic, in this case, the article from the anthology, and doing independent investigation in it. This is more than a high school book report, but less than a master's thesis. Working at the graduate level means you are expected to demonstrate both competence and originality in your approach. For models, you could look at a book review in a standard theological journal.

2. Research: We have stressed that you don't need to do this in connection with a response paper. If you do conduct a background investigation, this can include a number of types of sources. Besides books and articles, resources can occasionally include oral interviews, films, web sites, etc., though these should be used sparingly. Be sure to cite them according to conventional academic methods.

3. Critical spirit: If you come from a non-Western culture, you may need to learn more about the academic concept of originality we practice at RTS. In some countries, because the greatest wisdom is considered to come from various authorities, simply quoting them at length is a sign of good work. In the West, we respect authority but we also believe it important for the student to try to *think the issues through critically*. (a) By criticism we don't mean preaching about all the bad things that are said, and leaving it there. (b) Nor does it mean you have to write a landmark article, using ideas no one has ever thought of. (c) It does mean you penetrate into the subject, getting to the bottom of what the author is saying, and reacting biblically, presuppositionally, and analytically to his or her article. If you borrow a significant idea, be sure to give credit for it by footnote. But don't bother quoting or footnoting every detail, which is cumbersome.

4. If the reader finds an average of two or more orthographic errors per page, he may hand the paper back, un-graded, for corrections. You will have one week to rectify this, and then late penalties apply. Be sure to plan ahead for this. Use the spell check! Get an editor.

5. Standards for good writing are not universally ordained. Nevertheless, writing well is not purely a subjective judgment. There are great advantages to using a style that is clear, elegant, and credible. The best way to learn how to write exquisitely is to follow a favorite author. There are useful guides on style as well, such as by Kate Turabian or William Zinsser.

Specific Directives

1. Don't forget a title, your name, the date, and the course name.

2. Please type, or use a word-processor. Use double-space and plenty of margin on both sides of the text. Please don't try to make up for the page limit by choosing a tiny font face! Must be 12 or higher.

3. It is always wise to have an outline. The fuller the better, including: (a) headings with complete clauses or sentences; (b) each topic must have at least two sub-topics; (c) an introduction in which the main thesis is stated, or at least anticipated; and (d) a conclusion in which the thesis is restated.

Thus, this hypothetical outline is *incorrect*, at least in form:

- Introduction
- I. The Nature of Buddhism
 - A. Based on Sasaki
- II. Why the author is wrong
 - A. Apologetics vs Buddhism
- Conclusion

This one is *correct* (though lacking any other merit!). Note, for example, how I requires II, and A requires B, to make it a complete argument. Note too the way complete phrases help move the discussion along:

- Introduction: Interacting with Buddhism is challenging for the apologist
- I. Buddhism is a reform movement within Asian religions
 - A. Sasaki presents Zen, a radical refinement of general Buddhism
 - B. Most Westerners do not know these nuances
- II. The Bible's approach to religion helps us discover the underlying assumptions
 - A. In both Buddhism and Zen there is generally a world-denying tendency
 - B. Yet this is not consistently possible, on its own ground
 - C. Romans 1 explains the problem
 - D. Romans 3 gives a more persuasive remedy
- Conclusion: Zen must be called to task and answered

Final Examination

The final exam is meant to test your knowledge of the course material. It takes three hours, and the format varies from year to year. Usually, there will be a balance between objective questions, such as identification of names and terms, and more synthetic questions which require reflection on a particular point. Success or failure on the exam often depends on whether the work has been done on a regular, daily basis. Taking notes in lectures is a personal art, not a science. Usually, students write too much. It is far better to look up, understand the discussion, and write down one or two key ideas that have transpired. Confronting a notebook full of class notes at the end of the semester can be discouraging. It may help to know how much and how little to write down from the sample exam below. Also, study the "Preparatory Questions," pp. 11-12. If you are comfortable with these, you'll do fine. Please use an ink pen, but not the color red.

SAMPLE

[This is an old exam. Remember there may be different texts and issues from year to year. If any of these questions are unfamiliar, it may be that you will not encounter them in the course this year.]

Time limit: three (3) hours. Note: you may use an English Bible, without notes or other helps. This exam is in three parts. Part 1 = 20 points (suggested time, 30 minutes); Part 2 = 50 points (suggested time, 1 1/2 hours); Part 3 = 30 points (suggested time, 1 hour).

Part 1

Define or identify in two or three sentences. With proper names state only their significance for apologetics and the approximate date. Please select ten (10) only, out of thirteen (13). Only the first ten answers will be corrected.

1. Disclosure
 2. The postmodern condition
 3. The indirect method
 4. Augustine
 5. Paradigm
 6. Karl Barth
 7. Monet's *Railroad Train at Argenteuil*
 8. Bargaining
 9. Sense of deity
 10. Presupposition
 11. Cosmological proof
 12. *Apologeomai*
 13. Signals of transcendence
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Part 2

Answer in one or two paragraphs. Do not try to be exhaustive, but show your familiarity with the issues. Please select five (5) only out of seven (7). Only the first five will be corrected.

1. Why do we refer to presuppositional apologetics as *transcendental*? Explain the meaning of this term, say something about the method it implies, and give one or two specific examples of how it works.

2. What does Cornelius Van Til mean by *analogy*? What errors does he mean to avoid? How does his concept describe the way we are meant to know God and the world?
3. According to Philip Jenkins, why might the Christian faith in the Southern Hemisphere become a “new Christendom”? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Jenkins’ approach?
4. How can God be all-powerful and good at the same time, in the light of the reality of suffering, according to Ruth Tucker?
5. How does God’s love affect his decision to create, according to Cornelius Plantinga?
6. How should presuppositionalists answer the charge that their method leads to a shouting match between people who are committed to their own logical circles?
7. How would you answer the challenge, “all religions are the same,” transcendently?

Part 3

Write a well organized essay in which you draw elements from various parts of the lectures and readings together. Be as full as you need to be. Please select only one (1) out of the two. Only the first one will be graded.

1. David Hume once said, God cannot be both all-powerful and good, if there is evil in the world. How would you answer him?
2. What is the relation between the believer's and the unbeliever's knowledge of the truth? Show familiarity with issues like Romans 1, common grace, the point of contact, etc. Answer with a view to persuading a non-Christian of the truth of Christianity.