

INTRODUCTION TO APOLOGETICS

RTS Washington DC
Fall, 2011

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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

- 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. DEVELOPING A CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW

- 2.1 Basic orientation
 - 2.1.1 Recent history
 - 2.1.2 Religion and culture
 - 2.1.3 Humility and worldview claims
- 2.2 The fundamentals of the Christian world view
 - 2.2.1 From him and through him and to him
 - 2.2.2 The cultural mandate in creation, fall, and redemption
 - 2.2.3 About public life
 - 2.2.4 About knowledge
 - 2.2.5 The clash of worldviews
 - 2.2.5.1 The relationship of belief to unbelief
 - 2.2.5.2 Common grace and the antithesis

3. UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

- 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
- 3.3 Persuasion and change

4. PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

- 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 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
- 4.2.2.1 Evidences, circles and proofs
- 4.2.2.2 Conviction and doubt
- 4.2.2.3 Discursive and non-discursive persuasion
- 4.3 Other schools compared

5. APOLOGETICS CONVERSATIONS

- 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 Psychologized culture
- 5.2.1 A therapeutic world
- 5.2.2 Apologetics and psychology
- 5.3 Worldwide apologetics
- 5.3.1 Globalization and missions
- 5.3.2 Confronting world religions
- 5.3.3 Pluralism, relativism and truth
- 5.4 Science and faith
- 5.4.1 History
- 5.4.2 Models
- 5.4.3 Challenges

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 COURSE

1. **Required reading:** Due on dates indicated below. 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. Some of the reading may be new and challenging to certain students, so, do keep up.

2. **Response paper:** You will be required to write a response to a one particular non-Christian thinker. One suggestion is to look at the series, *Constructing a Life Philosophy*, the 6th or 7th edition, San Diego: Greenhaven Press, “Opposing Viewpoints Series,” 1993, or 2002; or also one of the chapters in *World Religion* in the Opposing Viewpoints series Greenhaven Press, 2006. **Due December 6th**. Hard copies only, please (no e-mailed papers will be accepted). Please mail them to Jennifer McGahey, who will forward them to me. Be sure your name is on it. It should not exceed 15 pages. Students are expected to use the method set forth in this course.

3. **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. Your proctor must mail your exam to the RTS-DC campus, postmarked no later than **December 13th**. It takes three hours, covering all aspects of the course. Please use a dark pen, and leave margins.

Office Hours: The professor will make himself available before or after class meetings by appointment.

☐Required Reading:

1. AN APOLOGY FOR APOLOGETICS

REQUIRED --- due September 9

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

Michael Goheen & Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, Baker, 2008

SUPPLEMENTARY

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

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

2. DEVELOPING A CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW

REQUIRED --- due September 9

William Edgar, *Reasons of the Heart*, Phillipsburg: P & R, 2003, entire

SUPPLEMENTARY

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

Al Wolters, *Creation Regained*, Eerdmans, 1985

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

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

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

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

3. UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

REQUIRED --- due November 4

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989

SUPPLEMENTARY

Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, 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*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1995

David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*, Trinity Press, 1995

4. PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

REQUIRED --- due November 4

Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics*, Zondervan, 2000, 207-264

Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, P & R, 2003, entire

SUPPLEMENTARY

Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed., rev., Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976

Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, P & R, 1998

-----, *Always Ready*, Robert Booth, ed., American Vision, 1996

John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, P & R Publishing, 1995

G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, Ignatius Press, 1999

Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1968

5. APOLOGETIC CONVERSATIONS

REQUIRED --- due November 11

- D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord: Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, Baker Academic, 2006, entire
Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, Crossway, 2006, chapters 4-10

SUPPLEMENTARY

- Ruth A. Tucker, *Walking Away from Faith: Unraveling the Mystery of Belief and Unbelief*, Inter-Varsity Press, 2002, entire
Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Who Are We?* Eerdmans, 2000
Craig S. Keener & Glenn Usry, *Defending Black Faith*, Inter-Varsity, 1997
Os Guinness, *Long Journey Home*, Doubleday, 2001
-----, *Unspeakable: Facing up to Evil in an Age of Genocide and Terror*, Harper-San-Francisco, 2005
William Edgar: *The Face of Truth: Lifting the Veil*, P & R, 2000

RESOURCES

Today, resources 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.

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. Current web-address: www.ttf.org.

Several periodicals are recommended in order to keep abreast of cultural trends. Among the most important are *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (IVP), *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*.

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)

Lecture Schedule

September 9-10	Apology for Apologetics Developing a Christian Worldview
November 4-5	Understanding the Times Presuppositional Apologetics
November 11-12	Apologetic Conversations