10. Norman Geisler: Theism is proved by what is undeniable, and Christianity is known from evidences 256

Evidentialism

11. John Warwick Montgomery: Facts point to interpretations, and critical facts point to Christianity 292

12. Gary Habermas: Christianity can be proved by widely accepted crucial facts 334

Conclusion: Putting it all together 351

Name Index 367

Subject Index 371

Scripture Index 375

Praise for Mapping Apologetics 378

About the Author 380

More Titles from InterVarsity Press 381

Textbook Selector 382
INTRODUCTION

On March 9, 1974, Japanese lieutenant Hiroo Onoda walked out of the jungle on a remote island in the Philippines, finally convinced that World War II was over—twenty-nine years after it had ended. Trained as an intelligence officer in guerilla warfare, he was told to survive at all costs. No matter what happened, his superiors would come for him.

Just a few months after his arrival in 1944, the allies overwhelmed Japanese defenses, and Hiroo’s band of five hid deep in the jungle, surviving on what they could find. When the war ended many attempts were made to find and convince the remaining soldiers to come out. Newspapers and even letters from relatives were left, which they found, along with leaflets. But how could the war have ended so quickly? And why were there spelling errors in the leaflets? Hiroo’s own brother even came and attempted to speak to him over a loudspeaker. The band considered each piece of evidence, and always concluded that the enemy was trying to deceive them. One by one they died, the last one after twenty-seven years in hiding, leaving Hiroo alone.

Finally, a Japanese student tracked Hiroo down and befriended him. He could not surrender, Hiroo explained, until his commanding officer ordered him to do so. The student returned to Japan, and the government found his commander, now a bookseller, who returned in his tattered uniform and personally gave the order. Hiroo, still in his uniform, with sword on his side and his working rifle in his hand, was relieved of duty, and wept. Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos pardoned him for the approximately thirty people he had killed over the years, because the soldier had believed he was still at war. Hiroo returned to a world vastly changed, realizing that his beliefs had been completely wrong for nearly thirty years.
Hiroo illustrates the problem of belief, what to accept as evidence and as valid explanation, how to weigh assumptions, and much more. We make such complex decisions in our own lives, over both minor beliefs and major ones. And we all come to and hold the most crucial beliefs of our existence—our worldview—entailing whether to believe in a God, how to live, and what to do about an afterlife, if there is one.

There could not be a more important question than how we are to decide what to believe. That is the subject of this book.

Scope

There are a number of conflicting approaches, as we shall see. Some approaches have been used to support a wide variety of worldviews, and some have been developed and used in a uniquely Christian context. I have chosen those most discussed today, the live options, as represented by those who have had a major part in shaping them. In a few cases the choice was difficult, and different ones could have been made. I would like to have written much more, covering the work of more apologists in each of the major categories, but the book’s total length would have been daunting.

I have tried to represent each thinker fairly, as they would describe their views. I have had the privilege of meeting and talking to most of the those I have written about (including the late Greg Bahnsen), and whether by personal contact or only via their writings, I am glad to have been exposed to such brilliant minds who have worked hard on these complex issues over a lifetime. I am grateful to those who, despite very busy schedules, were able to review what I had written about them and to offer some input: John Frame, Alvin Plantinga, Mark Hanna, Gordon Lewis (on his views and E. J. Carnell’s), Norman Geisler, Richard Swinburne, John Warwick Montgomery (who also gave helpful input on my concluding chapter) and Gary Habermas. James N. Anderson1 kindly went over my chapter on Cornelius Van Til and gave some helpful input. Their input was not only valuable but also reassuring and encouraging. I’m also grateful to InterVarsity Press’s anonymous reviewer for detailed, thoughtful input.

I have tried to be not only fair but also clear, so as to be accessible to readers who have no special background in apologetic methodology. To that end I have explained terms and kept specialized words to a minimum. I have traded the tech-

---

1James N. Anderson is associate professor of theology and philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, and supervises www.vantil.info/.
nical rigor that characterizes purely academic writing for readability for a wider audience (and in some cases have refrained from referencing more technical sources). Incidentally, I have occasionally used a male pronoun to refer to both men and women where my intention is obvious, and I sometimes use both a male and a female pronoun (“he or she”) to make that clear. Where it is not awkward I use “their.” Biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

Along the way I repeat a few things briefly, by way of reminder, so the reader does not have to search back through the book, and so that the chapters stand alone better, in order to aid the reader who does not go through the book quickly. The structure of every chapter is not identical. Some stop to compare apologetic approaches, and in others more time is spent exploring the criticisms.

To benefit the reader with some background in the topic of the book, and to serve the advanced reader, I have also sought where possible to bring out the deeper, underlying issues separating the views, most of which are philosophical, having to do with issues such as the following: how we know, how we have certainty (and how certain we can be); the relation between faith and evidence; the possibilities of reasoning by way of deduction, induction and abduction; the role of assumptions and presuppositions; the relation between evidence and worldview; the validity of intuition as a way of knowing and its possible divine origin; and whether we can know some things without inferring them from other things we know (i.e., foundationalism). Through all this I hope to bring the issues into sharper focus so as to facilitate more constructive dialogue on the subject of apologetic methods.

The focus of the book is on understanding the theories and how they see each other, so I have kept my own views to a minimum, adding my conclusions and constructive insights in a final chapter. (Perhaps I’ll have the opportunity to expand those into a book.) Where I have made my own brief addition that could be mistaken for the view of the featured apologist, I usually precede it with something like, “We could add that. . . .” In a few places, I have added the thoughts of others to the material about the featured apologist, in order to broaden the reader’s knowledge a bit (the longest addition being a section on miracles in the chapter on evidentialism). In a few sections in which I develop the thinking of the featured apologist, I include a brief criticism from another thinker in order to save the reader from having to go back from the criticism section and search to connect the criticism with the apologist’s view.

My twenty-five years of experience as a professor led me to add a list of terms,
discussion questions and suggestions for further reading. That teaching experience has shown me too that complex issues are best understood if they can be viewed from different angles, and more than once.

In order to increase understanding of where the approaches lead, I have included something of how they would actually be used, focusing on some of the best insights that each has to offer. Some approaches require a bit more detail to show what the apologist is doing and how it all fits with their method. For example, I summarize Norman Geisler’s rationale for selecting the right test for truth, review his criteria for selecting a worldview and finally show how he applies this method to arrive at theism. It requires some detail to see the systematic nature and rigor of his approach. So at the end of the book the reader will come away with not only the theories but also their application.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, I have focused on those who are currently influential, which is why I have chosen, for example, Van Til over Abraham Kuyper. I have also focused on those whose work in the field has been sustained, original and extensive. That entails choosing, for example, Gary Habermas over Josh McDowell, even though as a popular writer, the latter has had enormous influence. My only regret is that the purpose of this book and the constraints on its length do not permit more attention to those who have made very worthy contributions in the past, such as Gordon Clark and C. S. Lewis, and more recently, John Feinberg, the late Paul Feinberg, Douglas Groothuis, Ravi Zacharias and K. Scott Oliphint, to name just a few. It is regrettable that only a few pages can be given to Francis Schaeffer, who had an enormous influence in his day, but is not as well-known to younger people, and shied away from discussions on apologetic theory, most notably with Van Til, who was eager to engage him.

Each apologist can be unique, but can also in some ways resemble the characteristics of someone representing a different approach. William Lane Craig, for example, is not far from Alvin Plantinga in his emphasis on the personal, inward awareness of God, yet he is thoroughly classical in how he makes his case to others. John Warwick Montgomery, a staunch evidentialist, regards C. S. Lewis as something of a mentor. They are similar in the breadth of their interests, pioneering the use of literature to communicate the gospel, and it seems, similar in their personalities. But in overall approach, C. S. Lewis is in the classical camp.

One of my hopes for this book is that more people will gain a good grasp of

---

2To me they both seem expressive, creative and interested in all of life’s possibilities.
this crucial field of apologetic methods. When the subject is taught often only one approach is presented, and students are left with little or no grasp of anything else—and don’t really even understand the approach they are supposed to accept and use. Those who are introduced to the issues outside of a classroom tend to read only apologists from their own camp.

If progress is to made on a subject so vital, we will need a new generation of people who are interested in doing serious work. Most of those who have labored in this field in modern times are at or past retirement, or have already passed on. My real hope is that this book will help motivate some people to take up this work and carry it forward.

I can’t thank InterVarsity Press enough (especially Andy Le Peau and Al Hsu) for their great patience and encouragement as I struggled with a hellacious onslaught of challenges that greatly slowed progress on the book. I can’t imagine a better publisher, and I am honored they are doing this book. I am also grateful for Mark Hanna, who first introduced me to this topic when I was a seminary student. Not only was he kind and encouraging, but his grasp of all things apologetic has also always been inspiring. I owe thanks to the sabbatical committee, which granted me time to work on this book and on *God in the Shadows: Evil in God’s World*. I also want to thank my wonderful wife, Donna, for her continual support, as well as her example of discipline and passion in the research and writing of her own books.

**Overview**

This book is organized according to a schema, represented in the chart below, that I have used through much of my twenty-five years of teaching this subject. It is not perfect, but I have found that it aids understanding the relationships among the views.

On the far left is fideism (from the Latin for “faith”), according to which belief cannot or should not be supported by evidence of any kind. On this view, faith and reason are in separate, nonoverlapping circles. If we have faith, we have no reasons to believe; if we have reasons to believe, we do not need faith. Some people are fideists because of such convictions about the nature of faith; others believe that the fallen mind is incapable of processing reasons, or that the subject is simply beyond the mind’s grasp. The resulting view is that faith must

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Fideism</th>
<th>Presuppositionalism</th>
<th>Reformed epistemology</th>
<th>Experientialism</th>
<th>Pragmatism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Defining characteristics | -Faith unsupported  
- Faith and reason don’t overlap  
- Or reason is beyond the mind’s grasp  
- Or the mind is too fallen | - Starting points are necessary presuppositions unprovable by independent evidence  
- No independently known facts  
- “Borrowed capital”  
- Autonomy is the problem  
- No common “notions”  
- Reasoning must be circular, deductive, indirect, from Christianity  
- Transcendental argument  
- Range of presuppositionalists, from Van Til to Frame | - Awareness of God (sensus divinitatus) is grounded in how we are made, and triggered  
- Christian faith a gift  
- Classical foundationalism too narrow  
- God is properly basic  
- Faith can exceed reasons | - Experience alone  
- Experience is only proof we can have or only proof we need | - Accept what works  
- Has a wide variety of forms |
| Adherents       | - (Pascal)  
- Kierkegaard  
- Barth | - Van Til  
- Bahnsen  
- Frame (modified key points) | - Alvin Plantinga | — | - C. S. Peirce  
- William James  
- John Dewey  
- Richard Rorty |
| Criticisms      | - Subjective  
- Unbiblical | - Amounts to fideism  
- Transcendental argument cannot prove the Christian God | - Cannot rule out other beliefs, like the Great Pumpkin | - Experiences must be interpreted | - What works ≠ truth  
- What works is vague |
| Epistemological starting point | Faith  
Presupposition | Immediate awareness  
Experience | Workability |  |  |
| Summary         | No reasons or certainty; entirely subjective and volitional | No independent facts as reasons | Intuitions plus ancillary reasons | One type of evidence, but subjective | One type of evidence that links internal and external |

→ Increasing emphasis on objective, independently existing evidence →

**Figure 1. Chart of Apologetic Approaches.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veridicalism</th>
<th>Combinationalism</th>
<th>Classical apologetics</th>
<th>Evidentialism</th>
<th>Rationalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing emphasis on objective, independently existing evidence</td>
<td>Cumulative case, common ground</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Givens + corroboration  
- Givens are known intuitively and certainly, can be corroborated  
- Universal givens can be known by all and constitute cognitive neutral ground  
- God is a universal given  
- Special givens are known by Christians  
- Common ground = human needs, common experiences  
- No spiritually neutral ground  
- Eight kinds of “seeing” | - Christianity a hypothesis to be tested  
- Three-aspect test: rational (self-consistent); empirical (fits relevant facts); existential (can be lived) | - Prove theism, then Christianity  
- Prove theism using theistic proofs: cosmological argument, teleological argument, moral argument  
- Prove Christianity (same as evidentialists) | - Evidence points to Christianity  
- Theistic arguments useful but not necessary  
- Facts point to best interpretation  
- Prophecy and resurrection prove the Bible  
- Use universally accepted facts (Habermas) | - Absolute certainty  
- Start from indubitable point  
- Reason using deduction  
- Build up to worldview |
| - Mark Hannah  
- E. J. Carnell  
- Gordon Lewis  
- Francis Schaeffer | - Norman Geisler  
- William Lane Craig  
- J. P. Moreland  
- R. C. Sproul  
- Richard Swinburne | - John Warwick Montgomery  
- Josh McDowell  
- Gary Habermas | | - Descartes |
| - Givens cannot rationally ground belief | - Three tests are unworkable | - Main critics are presuppositionalists  
- There is no common ground  
- Must reason from Christianity | - Facts must be interpreted  
- Facts cannot point to their interpretation | - Indubitable starting points cannot lead to a worldview without adding along the way |
| Givens and corroboration | Three-aspect test | Two-step argument | Facts pointing to interpretation | Deduction from certain starting point |
| Internal givens and objective corroboration | Hypothesis tested internal to theory, externally with facts and existentially | Uses cosmos and order to prove interpretive framework (theism), then uses facts of history | Proves Christianity using many objective, independently existing facts | Certainty is absolute; nothing is subjective or volitional |

Figure 1 (continued).
be purely a gift from God. Fideists who tilt toward a Calvinistic view of salvation (according to which God predestines individuals for salvation) may see the action of the mind as irrelevant. Because the ultimate cause of belief is divine choice, God bypasses the intellect.

Fideism is thus a denial of apologetics, which makes it different from other views. All the views to the right hold that there is at least some overlap between faith and reason, that there are reasons of some kind for belief.

On the far right of the chart is rationalism, which claims complete proof for belief. The classic example is René Descartes (1596–1650), who lived in the tumultuous aftermath of the Reformation, when the Continent was divided over religious belief. He sought certainty by starting from something he could not doubt, then building up from there he used deduction, a form of reasoning that guarantees the truth of the conclusion if we accept the premises. In spite of his original approach and rigorous effort, virtually everyone today sees Descartes as coming short of providing the level of certainty he offered.

So the far left and the far right are opposites: faith can have no support, and faith has complete support.

Just to the right of fideism is presuppositionalism, which says we can have no direct proof for either God or Christianity. That means we cannot make either one the conclusion of a noncircular argument. In a traditional argument, premises are known independently of the conclusion and are offered as grounds for the conclusion. The problem with this, says the founder of presuppositionalism, Cornelius Van Til, is that nothing can be known independently of God because ultimately truth is whatever God says it is. God does not “know” an independently existing reality, rather, he determines that reality. He knows the lights are on in the room because he determined that they would be on. Adam fell when he tried to become independent of God, determining for himself what is true and morally right. Fallen humanity’s problem is not primarily ignorance, but rebellion. The unbeliever does not need to merely add a few facts to his worldview but to completely tear it down and rebuild one that makes God the source and guarantor of every fact. So to encourage the nonbeliever to think he can know premises and determine truth independently of God is to inflame the problem. Furthermore, even if such a process results in a person affirming the Bible as the Word of God, he has in effect passed judgment on God, when God should be passing judgment on him. As well, things can be tested only using something higher and more ultimate, yet nothing can be more ultimate than the Word of God. Despite all this, the presuppositionalist says
we can have absolute proof for the Christian God, because only if he exists can we know anything. Only if the Christian God exists and knows everything—as well as determines everything—is knowledge of any kind about anything possible. All other viewpoints fail because they claim to be true yet cannot properly account for how we have knowledge. So while there is no direct proof, there is absolutely certain indirect proof for Christianity. Christianity is a presupposition we cannot do without. It is claimed that even attempts to disprove Christianity must assume it is true; thus we can know Christianity transcendentally, as a necessary assumption. Also, the Bible is self-attesting: God’s sheep hear his voice (Jn 10:27).

This view is next to fideism because it bases knowledge on a presupposition (roughly, a commitment to a foundational assumption) rather than anything known independently. Proponents see their view as akin to rationalism, which offers absolute certainty for knowledge, whereas many critics see it as closer to fideism, because it works by presupposing rather than directly proving.

Note that there is a wide range among presuppositionalists, from those who follow Van Til with little or no modification, such as Greg Bahnsen, to those who have modified the view considerably, such as John Frame. Some of Frame’s modifications, such as acceptance of some use of induction, of the transcendental argument as a direct as well as an indirect proof, and acceptance of the cumulative force of arguments, would put him on the right side of the chart. There are also those who take the label of presuppositionalist who emphasize Van Til’s rejection of traditional, direct proof but want little or nothing to do with his indirect proof. I knew one professor who called himself both a presuppositionalist and a “biblical fideist.” So on the chart we can have a left side of presuppositionalism, which is closer to fideism, and a right side, which sees a robust role for proofs of different kinds. In the middle would be Van Til and Bahnsen. Frame would be on the far right, ideally on a line that extends to the right side of the chart (which would best be indicated by an arrow, since an actual line might be visually confusing).

Gordon Clark and Carl F. H. Henry represent a more deductive form of presuppositionalism, in which the Bible is posited as true, and what can be deduced from it is also true. Unlike Van Til and Bahnsen, they do not try to justify Christian presuppositions transcendentally, that is, as the only basis for reason. Herman Dooyeweerd (DOE-yuh-vaird; 1894–1977) took some of the foundations laid by Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) in a different direction than Van Til.

John Frame has sought to remain true to Van Til’s central insights while modifying significant aspects of his approach. He maintains his former teacher’s
convictions that since facts are not independently existing realities, we cannot simply see which interpretation fits best and use them independently to decide on an interpretation (the view of evidentialism), and there can be no neutral ground. He emphasizes the important nuance that it is really statements of facts that are not separate from interpretation.

Frame says that in an argument, because the premises commit us to the conclusion, they therefore commit us to what the premises presuppose, making presuppositions a kind of conclusion. Presuppositions are commitments that govern our other beliefs, and as such they are not defeasible (cannot be defeated by evidence and argument) unless a contrary presupposition is adopted. Since all thought is dependent on God, who makes all argument possible, we should not encourage the nonbeliever to think otherwise.

Contrary to Van Til, Frame believes that there can be real agreement between the believer and nonbeliever, induction can be acceptable in apologetics and the transcendental approach is an overall goal and not a single argument—there being no way the Christian God of love, justice, patience, wisdom and more must be presupposed in order for anyone to understand and talk about anything. He also believes that there is no essential difference between direct and indirect reasoning; therefore, the major difference between presuppositional and traditional apologetics may be the intent of the apologist to acknowledge God as sovereign and the source of all meaning, intelligibility and rationality, that is, the ultimate authority for human thought.

Frame adds the extremely important stipulation that interpretations can be verified on the basis of facts. In other words, we can compare the data of the mind with the data of the external world. Interpretations can be verified by comparing them with facts, and facts can be verified by comparing them with interpretations. Neither one is a brute, incorrigible standard.4

These and other modifications make presuppositionalism much closer to traditional apologetics, and give it access to a large array of more traditional arguments. Frame adds his own highly constructive innovations, holding that as nonomniscient beings we can see things in different perspectives that are simultaneous and overlapping, where each can contain the other. Knowledge, for example, is a matter of sense experience, reason and feeling.

To the right of presuppositionalism is the Reformed epistemology of Alvin

4Personal email correspondence with Frame, Aug. 24, 2013.
Plantinga. He challenges the notion that belief must be proportional to evidence such that we are entitled to believe only as much as we can prove. In answer, he points out that people commonly and rightly believe many things they would have trouble proving, such as that the world was not created with apparent age only a few minutes ago, or that people have minds like us and are not merely cleverly designed robots. So it is rational to believe in God to a degree greater than we can prove. The level of proof that would be required to justify a belief as crucial as Christianity would be very high, and we have that level for virtually no philosophical beliefs of that magnitude. Knowledge of God is the result of an inner knowing, what Calvin called the *sensus divinitatis*, which arises in us because of how we are made. The catalyst for that knowing can be different for different people, perhaps the grandeur of mountains, or the starry sky. Knowledge of Christianity comes by an inner knowing that is a special gift of the Holy Spirit. The inner knowing of both God and Christianity is not evidence for a conclusion, but an immediate knowing (like knowing we have pain, or that we exist). Plantinga affirms the value of arguments, but alone they hold little promise of being sufficient to truly justify belief in God or Christianity.

Reformed epistemology is to the right of presuppositionalism because it affirms a role for independent proofs, but it is on the left side of the chart because it is a type of intuition that grounds faith.

Next is experientialism, especially of the sort where an experience is taken as grounds for the conclusion that God exists or that Christianity is true. In this type, experience is evidence for the conclusion. This would include such things as experiences of answered prayers, or providential care, or an awareness of God that is the basis for the conclusion that God is there. What is unique about this method is that such experiences are the only basis for belief. Other methods to the right of it accept experience as one proof among many. To the left of the view, fideism accepts no proof, presuppositionalism does not regard experience as proper proof for God or Christianity and Reformed epistemology regards experience as a direct knowing, but not evidence for a conclusion. So coming from the left side of the chart, experientialism is the first view that accepts something as independent grounds to justify belief.

Although I have met people who take an experientialist approach to justifying belief in God or Christianity, it is difficult to find whole books supporting the view. People who take the view generally regard their experiences as adequate to justify only their own beliefs, and do not expect mere reports of their
experiences to be sufficient for someone else; thus others would need to have
their own experiences. So it is not hard to see why few would see the value in
writing about their experiences as a way to convince others. This book does not
have a chapter on the approach, but it includes a brief critique by Norman
Geisler. The problem with experientialism is that experiences must be inter-
preted. A person can have an experience, but that does not mean we must—or
even can—take it at face value. Someone’s experience of their dead ancestor
appearing to them could be interpreted in a number of ways, as could a person’s
experience of the Hindu god Shiva. Whether such things are regarded as real,
imaginary, demonic apparitions or whatever depends on what other beliefs we
hold as true. Furthermore, how do we resolve conflicts between experiences?
Therefore, experience is widely regarded as insufficient as the sole means of
proof, though it typically appears as one type of evidence in the apologetic
methods to the right of it on the chart.

Next we add pragmatism, which essentially offers one source of justification,
that of workability. There are both simple and sophisticated forms of this view,
but the idea is, if it works we can accept a belief as verified to some degree. There
is a difference between the (more radical) claim that workability equals truth,
or is what we mean by truth, versus workability as an indicator of truth. The
latter view is often added into the mix of possible methods of justification
among views to the right of pragmatism on the chart. I have chosen not to use
the available space in the book to detail pragmatism because, so far, its best-
known philosophical forms have not been as popular as other approaches
among those seeking to know or justify theism or Christianity. The view has
been developed by C. S. Peirce (pronounced “Purse”; 1839–1914), William James
(1842–1910) and recently by neopragmatist Richard Rorty (1931–2007). I have
included brief criticisms of pragmatism made by Norman Geisler.

Moving again to the right on our chart, veridicalism, developed by Mark
Hanna, sees knowledge as grounded in givens,5 which are known intuitively and
with certainty, and are not inferred from other things we know. All humans can
benefit from universal givens, some of which cannot be coherently denied (be-
cause denying them would require assuming them), such as our own existence,

5“Literally anything that can be veridically, nonpostulationally, and nondiscursively grasped by
consciousness is a given. And if it is susceptible of apprehension by all human beings in prin-
ciple, it is a universal given.” Mark M. Hanna, Crucial Questions in Apologetics (Grand Rapids:
and the principle of noncontradiction. Awareness of the existence of the God of
theism is a universal given. Christians benefit additionally from special givens,
including awareness that God cares for them, that the Bible is God's Word (which
is self-attesting only to believers\(^6\)) and that he or she is saved. Because universal
givens are knowable independently of a worldview and within any worldview,
they form cognitive neutral ground. There is, however, no spiritually neutral
ground, since everyone either accepts or rejects what can be universally known
about God.\(^7\) There is common ground consisting of human needs, such as guilt
and loneliness, as well as cultural patterns of thinking and acting.\(^8\) Though
known immediately, givens can be corroborated in different ways, for example,
by reflection, and by their connection to other givens.\(^9\) Some are known because
they are undeniable, and others can be supported by evidence and inference.
Some arguments for theism are inductively strong, such as the kalam cosmo-
logical argument, and the teleological argument from fine tuning of the universe
for life.\(^10\) In all it can be shown that God is the best explanation. A case can also
be made for Christianity. The essential beliefs of Christianity are givens that can
be corroborated. They are not arrived at from nontheological data or premises.\(^11\)
Citing Christ's statement that some see without “seeing” (Mt 13:13), Hanna iden-
tifies eight kinds of “seeing,” only one of which is physical. Each has two poles,
relating to its reality (metaphysical) and its knowability (epistemological). They
are physical, intellectual, introspective, intersubjective (awareness of other
persons and one's relationship to them), moral, aesthetic (which can grasp ob-
jective beauty) and spiritual (one mode that is common to all humans, another
that is unique to Christians). Some forms of seeing overlap and interact; for ex-
ample, spiritual seeing requires some use of intellectual seeing. He argues (in a
forthcoming book) that biblical theism is the only adequate explanation of the
eight modes of seeing and their objective correlates.

Next is the view called combinationalism. According to the combinationalism\(^12\)
of E. J. Carnell and Gordon Lewis, traditional proofs for the existence of God are
inadequate for the same reason that the empiricism they are implicitly based on

---

\(^{6}\)Ibid., p. 103.
\(^{7}\)Ibid., p. 105.
\(^{8}\)Ibid.
\(^{9}\)Ibid., p. 101.
\(^{10}\)Phone conversation with Mark Hanna, Oct. 16, 2013.
\(^{11}\)Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 121.
\(^{12}\)The name was not chosen by Carnell, but it is used in Norman Geisler’s widely read Christian
is inadequate: you can never arrive at what is immutable, universal and necessary from what is finite. If you cannot arrive at God from experience, you must bring God to experience, in the form of a hypothesis to be tested. This does not mean our faith is weak or tentative, only that to be intellectually honest, as God would have us be, we must at least in principle be rational in our faith. In this sense we treat Christianity as a hypothesis, and like any hypothesis, it must not contradict itself. Anything self-contradictory cannot be true, but what is noncontradictory could be true. To see if it is true, we check it with all relevant facts, looking for contradictions between the hypothesis and the facts. The hypothesis should be applicable to life in the sense that it can be lived out without contradiction. There is common ground between believer and nonbeliever, consisting, for example, in the principle of noncontradiction, values, ethics and the need for love. Furthermore, worldviews typically overlap in areas that are impersonal and nonmetaphysical. Even science, properly practiced, can be carried on between believer and nonbeliever. But worldviews diverge as soon as questions of ultimate meaning and purpose arise. We can prove that Christianity is true to the extent that we can prove any real-world belief is true, that is, with high probability. Yet we can have complete inner assurance, “certitude,” that it is true. Combinationalism is to the right of pragmatism on the chart because it tests belief using an objective standard, that of consistency. A hypothesis must be consistent within itself, consistent with the facts and capable of being lived out consistently.

In the next column is classical apologetics, which is practiced by people as diverse as C. S. Lewis, William Lane Craig, J. P. Moreland, R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner and Norman Geisler. This approach aims first to prove theism, the general belief that God is, for example, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, creator and sustainer of the universe. If theism is not proved first, proof for the resurrection, for example, would not necessarily be interpreted theistically by the unbeliever. Of course if the unbeliever already accepts theism, proving it is unnecessary.

Classical apologists use theistic arguments (though they are also used by some apologists who use other methods). They are types or families of arguments in that there are a number of variations to each. The cosmological argument essentially reasons from the existence of the universe to a creator. One form argues that God is a necessary being, that he must exist in every possible world. Another argues that everything needs an adequate cause; thus the universe needs an adequate cause, and that cause is God (he is not a thing, and is
The teleological argument reasons from design in the universe to a designer. Modern science has uncovered intricate design in DNA, for example. We are also discovering the amazing extent to which the universe has been finely tuned to allow for life. The moral argument, which is not used as widely as the cosmological and teleological arguments, argues from the existence of objective moral obligations to a higher moral being as the grounds of such obligations.

Norman Geisler believes we must use a different approach to prove the truth of a worldview versus truth within a worldview. He uses six first principles of reality, which cannot be denied, because any attempt to deny them would use them (similar to Hanna’s view). We do not need to prove them; we simply “see” that they are true once we understand them. One first principle (stated informally) is that “something exists.” Anyone who attempts to deny that is admitting they exist. Another is the principle of noncontradiction, which would also be assumed by anyone attempting to deny it. Once alternatives are eliminated and theism is proved, Geisler shows that Christianity explains all the known facts in the most consistent way.

To the right of classical apologetics, and just left of rationalism (on the far right), evidentialism has been popularized in recent decades by Josh McDowell, who was influenced by John Warwick Montgomery. Gary Habermas has also been influential and widely known. The view does not require that theism be proved first. While most evidentialists accept theistic arguments and would use them, they do not believe it is necessary to first prove theism. Unlike classical apologists, evidentialists believe that, at least to some extent, facts point to their proper interpretation. So evidentialists typically work to prove the resurrection after supporting the veracity of the Bible (e.g., John Warwick Montgomery), or at least the believability of very widely accepted crucial facts (e.g., Gary Habermas). Many of the same facts and approaches used by evidentialists are used by classical apologists in their second step, which seeks to prove Christianity.

Let’s review the chart again, this time more briefly. For fideism there can be no proof, but there is certitude from faith in revelation. For presuppositionalism there can be no direct proof of Christianity, but we must presuppose it: roughly, assume it by conviction and necessity. The case must ultimately be circular. Revelation is known of its own authority, but we can have proof because it must be presupposed. For Reformed epistemology noncircular arguments are acceptable in principle, and should be developed, but they are not adequate to ground something as crucial as religious faith. Belief in God is an
awareness that can arise in us because of the way we were created, and belief in Christianity is a divine gift. Moving right, experientialism is the first view that accepts something as decisive, standalone evidence for the conclusion that Christianity is true. The evidence is internal and subjective. Pragmatism deals with workability, which is a more objective form of experience and is therefore to the right of experientialism. (Note that what “works” can be defined differently by different people.)

Moving further right (but not including rationalism on the extreme right nor combinationalism) we have views that accept induction as an important and effective method of proof for religious belief. They (including combinationalism) also accept a cumulative case, that is, layers of proof adding up to form a stronger case overall. Religious experience and workability in life (including giving life meaning) also typically play a supporting role in an overall case (whereas with experientialism experience is the only proof). Veridicalism accepts both givens that are known intuitively and that are undeniable, and effective corroboration, through evidence and reason. Everyone can have an immediate awareness of God, and the Christian can have an additional awareness of some essentials of Christianity. In its emphasis on direct awareness it is like Reformed epistemology, but in veridicalism corroborating evidence can be strong and decisive. So like Reformed epistemology on its left, it has a place for intuition, but like views on its right, it has a place for a convincing case based on evidence.

As we continue to move right, intuition (similar to “self-attesting” for presuppositionalism) plays less of a role, and there is more emphasis on independently existing objective evidence as grounds for belief. There are also more such objective criteria, until we get to evidentialism, which appeals to a multiplicity of individual facts.

Combinationalism accepts livability as a test of a hypothesis, but only as one of three aspects of consistency, whereas to the left pragmatism viewed livability as the main criteria, and to the right of combinationalism, livability is viewed as only one of a number of factors in an overall case.

Classical apologetics accepts arguments for theism and for Christianity, typically insisting (like presuppositionalism) that a worldview determines the interpretation of facts. But like the views on the right side of the chart, that worldview is established by something other than a necessary assumption (for

---

13Presuppositionalists would say that the transcendental argument provides objective evidence, but they would not say that it is “independently existing,” since no facts exist independent of God.
Geisler, it is by undeniable first principles, but unlike presuppositionalism, they are necessary in every worldview; cf. Hanna).

Evidentialism is the near polar opposite of presuppositionalism, affirming that facts can be known independently of the views that interpret them, and that facts can even point to the correct interpretation.

I once showed this chart to Greg Bahnsen, who not surprisingly said that presuppositionalism should be on the right, next to rationalism, as offering absolutely certain proof for belief. In response I pointed out that certainty was secondary; the primary order of the chart was appeal to independent evidence for the conclusion: So fideism appeals to no independent evidence. Presuppositionalism appeals to a presupposition but not to independent evidence as grounds for belief (i.e., no direct proof). Reformed epistemology appeals to intuition. Experientialism appeals to one subjective criterion as evidence for a conclusion; pragmatism, to one external criterion. Next is veridicalism, which appeals to givens plus external and independent evidence. Then comes combinationalism, with its appeals to consistency of hypothesis and fittingness with the facts plus livability. Then classical apologetics appeals to independent evidence for theism and Christianity. And finally evidentialism appeals to a multiplicity of independent facts—the opposite of presuppositionalism’s view that there are no independent facts. Bahnsen thought for a few seconds and said, “That could work . . . that could work.”\(^\text{14}\) I then mentioned that I always tell my students that presuppositionalists see their view as close to rationalism as far as both offer certainty. I add that they would see their presuppositionalism as different from rationalism’s method of using independent evidence (Descartes, for example, famously beginning from his own thought—again, the opposite of presuppositionalism, which begins with God as the standard of truth). If it were not visually too complicated, on the chart I might put fideism, presuppositionalism and rationalism each at different points of a triangle so that presuppositionalism could be equidistant from the faith of fideism and the absolute proof of rationalism, yet unique. But over the years students have generally confirmed that it would be too complicated, and thus unhelpful.

Before we begin, it is worth briefly recounting why fideism, which challenges the legitimacy of apologetics, is biblically inadequate. Here are just a few examples of biblical reasons for belief. Moses asks God for signs to show his people that he has divine authority (Ex 4:1), which God grants, and later he grants

---

\(^{14}\)Personal conversation after Bahnsen was a guest speaker in my apologetics class, Master’s College, Newhall, California, in the fall of 1993.
abundant signs in the confrontation with Pharaoh (Ex 7–11). In the wilderness, God supernaturally demonstrates his presence, his provision for his people and his backing of Moses’ leadership. In the conquest of the Promised Land, God divides the Jordan (Josh 3:17), gives victories over superior forces (Josh 1:4-9; 3:10-17) and extends daylight (Josh 10:12-14). He grants miracles for Gideon (Judg 7:16-22), Samson (Judg 14:6, 19; 15:15; 16:3) and others. Prophets such as Elijah predict events and perform miracles. Jesus’ life fulfills a number of prophecies and is attested by miracles. He points to them as grounds for belief (Lk 24:27; Jn 10:37-38). When John the Baptist doubts, Jesus points to evidence that matches prophecy (Mt 11:4-5; cf. Is 29:18). Jesus meets Thomas’s doubts with evidence (Jn 20:27). After the resurrection, he gives “many convincing proofs” (Acts 1:3; cf. Lk 24:39). John recounts some of Jesus’ supernatural deeds as a way of inspiring saving faith (Jn 20:30). The supernatural authority of the Seventy (Lk 10:17) and the apostles (2 Cor 12:12) is attested by miracles. Paul argues from Scripture that Christ had to suffer and rise again (Acts 17:2-3), and he regards the resurrection as “proof to all men” (Acts 17:31; cf. Rom 1:4). Some do believe because of miracles (Jn 12:11; Acts 9:42; 13:12).

As mentioned above, this does not show that an unproblematic appeal to miracles and prophecy can be made today, but that Scripture uses reasons in support of faith. Just how that should be done is the subject of this book.
PART ONE

Foundational Issues
Some have claimed that the Bible contains no apologetics, and that we look in vain for any attempt to prove the existence of God. It simply assumes the existence of God, and we should do the same. But this view overlooks the fact that the Bible was written mostly for the benefit of believers, not for unbelievers. And looking for answers to atheists—of which there were very few in Israel and not that many in the classical world—overlooks the way believers dealt with the challenges of the day. The main question in ancient times, reflected in the Old Testament, was not whether God exists but which God should be obeyed and served. A major issue in the New Testament was, who is the person of Christ?

**Old Testament**

Much more work needs to be done on the subject of apologetics in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. We can, however, identify some general themes.

God’s power to act is given throughout the Old Testament as a reason to believe and trust in him. He supports those who obey, honor and trust him, confidently expecting him to act (e.g., Is 49:23). He also provides for them, guides and protects them and even cares for their descendants (Deut 28:1-14). Those who oppose him he will oppose in a myriad of ways (e.g., 1 Sam 2:30; Ps 18:26). There are anomalies, such as Job, but in general there is a sharp contrast between the well-being of those who love and serve him versus those who oppose him. Though the people might not have thought of it primarily as a source of confirmation, there is some explanatory power, and thus confirmation, in the correlation between personal and national faithfulness to Yahweh and well-being in the past and present and as a predictor of the future; and conversely for correlation between lack of faithfulness with trouble in the past, present and future.
God’s actions had, understandably, more apologetic impact on the ancient peoples who witnessed them and, in the case of Israel, passed down the memories of them. For example, many of those who saw Israel defeat powerful enemies became convinced of Yahweh’s reality (Josh 2:9-11). The persuasiveness of an argument from events to the God behind them is felt less today since it depends on accepting the Bible as an accurate historical record. Today, owing to several centuries of attacks on the historical credibility of the Bible, many unbelievers doubt its historical accuracy (what the Christian should do about that doubt is partly the subject of this book).

Isaiah exemplifies an important type of Old Testament apologetic reasoning. To make it vivid he offers a courtroom proceeding, with evidence and witnesses, challenging opponents,

“Present your case,” the Lord says.
“Bring forward your strong arguments.” (Is 41:21; cf. Is 43:26; 45:21)

The proceedings contrast Yahweh, the true God, with idols, which are made by very human craftsmen from ordinary materials (Is 40:18-20; 41:6-7; 44:9-20). Whereas idols cannot save, Yahweh can vanquish enemies (Is 41:11-12), sustain life (Is 41:17-18) and fructify the land (41:19). He does it in order

that they may see and recognize,
And consider and gain insight as well,
That the hand of the Lord has done this,
And the Holy One of Israel has created it. (Is 41:20)

Idols are mere “wind and emptiness” (Is 41:29) that can neither answer nor deliver (Is 46:7; 45:20)—in fact the idols themselves have gone into captivity (Is 46:2).

In similar reasoning, the psalmist says that idols are merely “the work of man’s hands.” They cannot speak, see, hear, smell, feel or move. Those who make and trust them “will become like them” (Ps 115:4-8; cf. Ps 135:15-18). Habakkuk also contrasts trusting in something one has made rather than God (Hab 2:18). Jeremiah emphasizes that only the true God, not idols, can give rain (essential to life in a desert; Jer 14:22)—a point that Elijah dramatically demonstrates in his showdown with the false prophets and their idols (1 Kings 17–18).

This type of reasoning was well understood by other ancient peoples. When the Assyrians go against Israel, the spokesperson says to Hezekiah that it is futile to trust that Yahweh will deliver them. No other gods have delivered their people from Assyria, and Yahweh will be no different. Hezekiah prays that God will show
he is superior to the idols, and God responds by giving them victory (Is 37). When the Syrians invade Israel in the hill country and suffer defeat, they suppose it is because Yahweh is a God of the hills. If they fight on the plains, they reason, their own gods will be stronger and will defeat Israel. Yahweh makes sure the Syrians are defeated on the plain as well, to show he is Lord over all (1 Kings 20:23, 28).

Ancient societies had many supposed gods and prophets speaking for them. Even Israel, at times, had prophets representing other gods, as well as prophets who spoke falsely in the name of the Lord. The genuine prophets of the true God were at times validated by performing miracles. The woman of Zarephath understands this when Elijah raises her son. She says, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth” (1 Kings 17:24). One of the most dramatic miracles in the Old Testament is Elijah’s showdown with the false prophets on Mt. Carmel, when their god cannot cause their sacrifice to spontaneously burn up, whereas Elijah’s God can. “When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God’” (1 Kings 18:39). Additionally, one of the most memorable events in Israel’s history, one that defines them as a nation, is the miracle of the exodus. The clear implication, reiterated throughout the Old Testament, is that they could have come forth only if their God was real.

In the Old Testament, the ability to foretell the future is also a clear mark of the true God himself. Isaiah proclaims that Yahweh alone can predict the future (Is 44:23), “declaring the end from the beginning” (Is 46:10). God explicitly identifies this ability as a way to discern between one who speaks for him and one who does not: “‘How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him” (Deut 18:21-22).

The prophetic tradition that was validated formed a cohesive whole in that each contribution constructed a harmonious message. In many cases they knew their contemporaries, and even validated their message (e.g., Elijah’s mantle passed to Elisha, 2 Kings 2:13).

**New Testament**

The New Testament reflects important apologetic themes found in the Old. For example, Christ clearly and repeatedly appeals to prophecy to show that he represents the true God. He came as the fulfillment of the predictions.
Christ also uses miracles as an additional way to demonstrate that he speaks for the living God. He goes so far as to say, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father” (Jn 10:37-38). Nicodemos is one who clearly grasps the significance of Christ’s miracles, saying, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (Jn 3:2). John closes his Gospel by saying that he has recorded some of Jesus’ miracles in order that people might come to believe in him and thereby have salvation (Jn 20:30-31).

Acts also records numerous miraculous events performed by or on behalf of the apostles (e.g., Acts 3:7; 14:10). Miracles as divine credentials will be used again by the two witnesses in Revelation 11:5-6.

It is common to hear—even from pulpits—that miracles never change the mind of anyone; they merely confirm the faith of believers and harden the disbelief of nonbelievers. But the idea is simply not biblical. When Jesus raises Lazarus, “many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him” (Jn 11:45). The Pharisees become concerned that if Jesus goes on performing such miracles, “all men will believe in Him” (Jn 11:48). When Peter raises Aeneas, “all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord” (Acts 9:35). When Peter raises Tabitha, “it became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:42). When Paul blinds Elymas the magician, “the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened” (Acts 13:12). Jesus expects that miracles will convince people, and condemns Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (Mt 11:21, 23) for failing to respond to them. (This is not to say that citing the miracles of the Bible will have the same apologetic effect today that it had in biblical times, for reasons we will mention briefly when we discuss David Hume.) There is a sense in which, for some people, their response to a miracle may have merely manifested the underlying condition of their heart such that those who were open responded, whereas those who were already hardened rejected the miracle and the message. But that is different from the miracle itself always and only either confirming people in belief or hardening them in unbelief, but never convincing.

Jesus also defends his message with scriptural arguments. For example, he confronts his opponents with the fact that the Messiah will be the son of David, and yet David can also call him “Lord” (Mk 12:35-37). And he defends his message logically. When his opponents claim that he casts out demons by the
power of Satan, Jesus points out the absurdity of the idea that Satan would fight his own forces. It is a move in logic called a reductio ad absurdum, in which you show that your opponent’s position leads to an absurdity (Mt 12:25-26; Mk 12:26; Lk 11:17-18).

Like Jesus, the apostles seek to convince people of the truth. In his Pentecost sermon, Peter reasons with his Jewish audience from Scripture, appealing also to Jesus’ miracles (Acts 2:22) and the resurrection (Acts 2:24). Paul customarily goes to synagogues and “reason[s] with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence” (Acts 17:2-3; cf. Acts 18:4, 19; 19:8). Acts notes with approval those who were powerful at defending the truth of the gospel and refuting objections (Stephen, Acts 6:10; Paul, Acts 9:22; Apollos, Acts 18:28). Paul includes the ability to refute those nonbelievers who contradict sound doctrine as a qualification of an elder (Tit 1:9; nonbelievers, cf. Tit 1:10-16).

In Galatians Paul answers what was no doubt an objection from some Jews: How could Jesus be the Messiah, or even be sent from God, if he was hanged on a cross and died? Paul acknowledges that anyone hanged on a tree is cursed, but explains that Christ died a substitutionary death for sin, taking the curse for our sin on himself (Gal 3:13; see Deut 21:23). He also defends salvation by grace through faith in the face of Jewish and Judaizing tendencies to depend on works (Gal 3:6-12). Paul changes his approach when talking to non-Jewish audiences. After healing a man at Lystra, he confronts the peoples’ devotion to the Greek deities. He says that God “did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). All the while God had been showing people his true nature through his providential care and the beneficent regularities of nature. This echoes the words of Psalm 19, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God” (Ps 19:1). The regularities of the universe (Ps 19:2, “day to day,” “night to night”) give clear nonverbal testimony (Ps 19:3, “no speech, nor are there words”) that reaches “through all the earth” (Ps 19:4).

Paul’s most extensive recorded presentation to Gentiles is his remarkable sermon in Acts 17 to some of the intelligentsia of the day. Discussion of the sermon could fill a chapter of its own, but we could say briefly that he first gets their attention (Acts 17:22-23), then says things that agree with their views (Acts 17:24-29), and goes on to raise issues that conflict with their views (Acts 17:30-31). To those unfamiliar with the relevant Greek philosophical views, it appears that Paul is confronting them from start to finish. But actually he is showing some
agreement. He no doubt was well acquainted with the views of the Stoics, in part because his hometown, Tarsus, was a major Stoic center. Stoics held that God is not confined to temples and idols (Acts 17:24), nor is he like the mythic gods who have needs (Acts 17:25). He is much bigger than that (Acts 17:29). He is immanent in the world (Acts 17:27). Furthermore (in contrast to much Greek cultural chauvinism), Stoics held that humanity is a unity\(^1\) (Acts 17:27-28). But just when his audience would have felt like standing and cheering, Paul confronts both the Stoics and Epicureans with those parts of the gospel that would have been foreign to any Greek. He mentions judgment through Christ and the resurrection (Acts 17:31). The Greeks held that the body imprisons the soul, so the idea of rejoining one’s body in the afterlife would have made no sense. And that’s when the meeting breaks up (Acts 17:32).

Some Christians regard Paul as having erred in his Acts 17 presentation. Some also regard 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 as a statement of confession and resolve not to dabble in philosophical talk again, but instead to give a straightforward presentation of the gospel. However, those who hold the sermon to be no less exemplary than Paul’s other evangelistic speeches point out that Paul gives no indication to the Corinthians that he is thinking about his speech in Athens. Nor do the passages necessarily conflict. He says to the believing Corinthians that he wants their faith to rest on the power of God rather than human wisdom, and he focuses on Christ. To the unbelieving Athenians he compares and contrasts their views with Christianity, and talks about Christ.

There is no indication in either context that Paul does anything wrong. It would be hard to imagine Luke leaving out any such indication since the speech is so important. It is the most detailed of the apostle’s encounters with Gentiles, and it is in no less than Athens, the center of thought in the ancient world. Furthermore, the supposedly errant features of the speech are also in his brief address at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17): he quotes no Scripture, and does not focus on Jesus as Messiah (incidentally, he also mentions God’s patience, Acts 14:16; cf. Acts 17:30). It is here that he appeals to natural revelation (beneficent order, Acts 14:17). So if Paul is wrong in Acts 17 he is also wrong in Acts 14, yet neither context indicates he is.

Luke ends his account of the speech with its results. Some reject the message, some want to hear more and “some men joined him and believed”

---

Apologetics in the Bible

(Acts 17:34). One convert is no less than Dionysius the Areopagite, who tradition says became important in the early church. So if the speech was a failure, it had a remarkable effect.

Though Paul appeals to natural revelation and quotes no Scripture, he does present scriptural ideas. It seems he expects certain things to be clear to people even apart from Scripture—which fits what he says in Romans 1. There he explains that all people are accountable and without excuse because they can have some basic knowledge of God and his moral law (Rom 1:19, 32; cf. Rom 2:14-15): “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20 [emphasis added]). He does not go into detail, but it seems that everyone can make a simple inference to the existence of God. Creation allows people to clearly see “His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature” (Rom 1:20). Those who worship some demeaning and idolatrous distortion of God are denying that basic awareness available to every human (Rom 1:21, 23). There is an alternate view that in Romans Paul is referring to a noninferential, or nondiscursive, awareness of God, that we simply become aware of God without it being a conclusion (which as we shall see, is held by Alvin Plantinga, and is considered possible by William Lane Craig).

Whatever is available about God through inference or immediate awareness is, however, not specific enough to include the gospel. Paul says that the contents of the gospel come only through a human messenger: “How will they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14).

Luke weaves into his writings his own defense of Christianity, though it is rarely recognized as such by modern readers because he was responding to the first-century situation. Christianity looked like a troublemaker’s religion because it was often associated with conflict, riots and imprisonment. Even its founder was executed as a common criminal. The Roman writer Tacitus says that after Christ’s execution, “a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.”

In response, Luke documents how the proceedings against Jesus were illegal. He was not convicted in a bona fide court. Pilate declares his innocence three times (Lk 23:4, 14, 22), and so does the Roman centurion attending his crucifixion (Lk 23:47; Matthew even includes a statement by Pilate’s wife about Jesus’s innocence; Mt 27:19). Luke includes that the hostility toward this innocent and once popular man came from jealous and hypocritical religious leaders. As to how the Son of Man could be the victim of scheming people, the answer is that he was no mere victim, but everything was following a divine plan. John even includes a prophetic explanation as to how Jesus could have chosen a traitor for a disciple (Jn 3:18; see Ps 41:9). The Gospels show Jesus in confident submission during the trials and crucifixion.

As for trouble encountered later by Christ’s followers, Luke shows in Acts how much of it came from jealous leaders (e.g., Acts 13:45; 14:2, 19; 17:5, 13; 21:27). To counteract them he records how many officials were favorable toward the disciples. One proconsul was favorable, and even believed (Acts 13:7, 12). At Philippi the chief magistrate apologized to Paul and Silas for the illegal beatings (Acts 16:37-38). The proconsul of Achaia ruled that accusations against Paul were merely internal to Judaism; they were guiltless as far as the government (Acts 8:12-13). In Ephesus civic leaders were friendly to Paul and publicly absolved him of wrongdoing (Acts 19:13-14). The Roman commander at Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias, reported to Governor Felix that Paul had done nothing deserving death or imprisonment (Acts 23:29). After hearing Paul’s case, Felix kept him in prison an inordinate amount of time in hopes of receiving a bribe and wishing to curry favor with the Jews (Acts 24:25-27). Festus and Agrippa heard his case and declared that he had done nothing deserving death or imprisonment (Festus: Acts 25:25-27; Agrippa: Acts 26:31-32).

Luke also records illegal proceedings against Paul that end with Paul graciously overlooking the offenses (Acts 16:23-40; 22:24-29). Acts closes with Paul carrying on his full missionary activity from prison, right under the watchful eye of the guard. Had anything illegal been going on, he would certainly have been stopped. As to the argument that Jesus could not be the Messiah because the Jews rejected him, Luke records Stephen’s speech in detail, according to which Israel had a long history of rejecting the prophets, so this was nothing different (Acts 7:51-52). Mark

---


also makes a point of Israel's rejection of God and his messengers (Is 6:9 in Mk 4:12; Is 29:13 in Mk 7:6-7; Ps 118:22-23 in Mk 12:10-11). In fact, the theme of divinely super-intended hardening appears in all four Gospels (Mt 13:14-15; Lk 8:10; Jn 12:40) and Acts (Acts 28:26-27). Paul develops the theme in relation to God using that hardening in order to bring Gentiles into his plan of salvation (Rom 11:8-10, 25).

The theme of Israel's rejection of truth is given prophetic implications when Mark and Luke record the astounding prediction that the temple would be destroyed (Mk 13:2; Lk 19:44), which was fulfilled in A.D. 70.

The early church also began defending the resurrection. Matthew answers the charge, which was apparently circulating, that the disciples stole Jesus' body. He explains that the story was concocted by the chief priests with the cooperation of the soldiers (Mt 28:11-15). Paul offers the eyewitness accounts of Peter, the Twelve, James, “all the apostles,” five hundred people and himself (1 Cor 15:5-8). Luke records Paul's defense before authorities, in which he offers his encounter with the resurrected Christ (Acts 9:3-6) as the reason for his own remarkable conversion (Acts 22:3-14; 26:9-18).

Matthew includes a full exposure of the deficiencies Jesus opposed in the Judaism of his time and that gave him and the disciples so much trouble. Acts 23 charges the leaders with obsessive outward conformity and the desire for attention while being inwardly ungodly, missing the entire essence of a righteous life and persecuting those who are truly serving God. Far from pleasing God, they incur his wrath and lead followers disastrously astray. They will in no way enter heaven, it is said (Acts 23:13; cf. Acts 5:20).

A more philosophical challenge seems to have arisen late in the first century, as what appears to be early forms of Gnosticism began to emerge. (Paul seemed to be opposing an early form of Gnosticism in Colossians.) In keeping with a major theme in Asian thought, Gnosticism held that the physical realm is bad and the spiritual realm is good. This entailed that Christ could not have been fully physical and that his incarnation must have been only apparent. In answer to this, John begins his epistle with an affirmation that Christ was physical: “What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life” (1 Jn 1:1 [emphasis added]).

So, understood in context, the Bible is rich in apologetic content. There are also verses that moderate the importance of evidence. After giving Thomas the proof he requests, Christ says, “Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed” (Jn 20:29). And Paul tells the Corinthians he does not want to speak with “persuasive words”
lest people’s faith rest on “the wisdom of men” (1 Cor 2:4-5; cf. 1 Cor 1:17; 2:1).

The various approaches to apologetics seek to give a coherent account of these and other biblical passages.