

Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity

**Missional Apologetics:  
An Examination of Essential Elements in the Apologetic  
Approaches of Early Christian Era Apologists in Light of the Mission of Christ to a  
Pluralistic World.**

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Approval Sheet

MISSIONAL APOLOGETICS: AN EXAMINATION OF ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN THE  
APOLOGETIC APPROACHES OF EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA APOLOGISTS  
IN LIGHT OF THE MISSION OF CHRIST TO A PLURALISTIC WORLD.

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To the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord, whose grace never ceases to amaze me.

To Lisa, my bride, best friend, and holder of my heart; who has loved and supported me for many years and has been the best wife and partner and ministry co-laborer any man could wish for. Without you, I would not have achieved this milestone.

To my sons and their brides who have encouraged me to stay the course and pursue the goal of completing this task. Thank you, Ben and Cindy, Dan and Liliana, and Bob and Deborah.

I am a man who has been blessed beyond measure and far more than I could ever deserve!

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## CHAPTER 1: ESTABLISHING THE RATIONALE FOR THE DISSERTATION

The cultural ethos known as postmodernism has impacted the epistemological and functional structures of contemporary society in dramatic ways.<sup>1</sup> Changes in the attitudes, standards, and belief systems from which people operate in their day-to-day lives have seen radical alterations in the last fifty years.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the assertion that postmodernism is a passing trend, the effects of the postmodern mindset appear to be resilient.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the impact of the postmodern milieu has been evident in various ways in local church ministry, as well as the extension of local church ministry on the mission field.

Responses from within Christian churches is often to deny the existence of the postmodern milieu and continue to use evangelism methods that are becoming increasingly more ineffective. Donald Posterski has observed that, “our old strategies to reach others with the gospel, for the most part, simply no longer work.”<sup>4</sup> As a result of the waning effectiveness of traditional evangelism methods and indications that there is a relationship between that waning efficacy and the postmodern milieu, scholars have attempted to formulate strategies for effectively penetrating the culture with the gospel.

### **Problem Statement**

There is an urgent need for pre-evangelism tools aimed at garnering the thoughtful

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Best, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), viii-xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 13-31.

<sup>3</sup> Gene Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 209-234.

<sup>4</sup> Donald C. Posterski, *Reinventing Evangelism: New Strategies for Presenting Christ in Today's World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 13-15.



consideration of the Christian message by a society identified as postmodern, post-evangelical, and post-Christian by researchers and scholars.<sup>5</sup> Apologetics has historically filled the needed role in presenting arguments and evidence designed to legitimize the Christian worldview in cultures where it was not seen as a viable option. Unfortunately, some authors such as Myron Bradley Penner have announced the death of evidential apologetics.<sup>6</sup> Such scholars see apologetics as merely an extension of the Enlightenment Project and the age of Common Sense Reason. Penner states that apologetic arguments for the Christian faith and natural theology have no place in a pluralistic, postmodern society. Along with Stackhouse and Kierkegaard, Penner sees apologetics as damaging to the message of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The apologetic task may make some postmodern theorists uncomfortable due to its appeal to evidence and objective truth, but evidential apologetics can no more be summarily dismissed by contemporary culture than can evidence in the prosecution of a criminal in the courtroom. Those who would posit the rejection of proof in either situation would be advocating an untenable decision. The decision to reject the truth is to accept the relativism and nihilism of the postmodern ethos, which has already proven to be an unlivable worldview.

The decision of some scholars to reject the legitimacy of apologetics based upon the association of rationally defending the Christian faith as merely an extension of Enlightenment philosophy is misguided. The roots of offering apologetic witness to the Christian faith precede the Enlightenment by many centuries. There are strong apologetic appeals to evidence present in the addresses and discourses in the Gospels and in the book of Acts, as well as in some of the

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<sup>5</sup> George Barna, "How Post-Christian Is America? - Barna Group," *Barna Group*, last modified April 15, 2013, accessed November 25, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/608-hpca#.VHPvp5PF-zg>.

<sup>6</sup> Myron Bradley Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–10.

epistles. The apologetic arguments seen in the pages of scripture found their natural extension in the apologies of second and third-century Christian theologians and philosophers.

Christ followers of the first three centuries faced the daunting task of engaging a pluralistic culture that was becoming increasingly more hostile to the claims of Christ and the existence of his followers. The situation demanded that Christians thought and acted missionally.<sup>8</sup> The resulting missional lifestyle produces a radical transformation of worldview and character. Christians came to understand that the mission of Christ was the mission of every disciple of Christ.

In contrast, the pluralistic society in which early Christians lived had an ill-defined worldview and an uncertain moral compass. Missional Christ-followers were compelled to share the good news of Christ by personal commitment to obey Christ's commands and heartfelt concern for their fellow men.<sup>9</sup> The conflict between missional Christians and the pluralistic society around them was inevitable, for the people around the believers viewed their zeal and message to be expressions of extreme hubris. The lifestyle of the committed Christ-followers was interpreted in light of the arrogance perceived by non-Christians, leading ultimately to open hostility toward anyone who followed Christ. While the description of the pluralistic society above depicts the world of Christians living in the first three centuries of the church's existence, it also seems strangely contemporary.

How does contemporary world compare to the world of the fledgling church of Christ? When viewed according to their chronology, the time periods could be considered to be two

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<sup>8</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 116-140.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 236-255.

vastly different worlds.<sup>10</sup> Many of the customs are substantially dissimilar, and the differences in technology between the two are without question. On the other hand, there are striking similarities between the two. In particular, the conflict between the society and Christians described above occurred during the first centuries of the Christian movement and continues to exist in the contemporary world.

In light of the similarities of the culture versus Christian conflict in the early Christian era and post-Christian era cultures, it is necessary to take a deeper look at the apologists who defended the Christian faith in the pre-Christian culture. Taking a closer look at the apologies of men like Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Tertullian can provide some principles that take the work of apologetics in the post-Christian culture to a higher level of effectiveness. The Christian apologists in this study have been selected to provide a sampling of early Christian era defenses from differing settings and different audiences. The writings of these apologists were designed to speak to rulers and crowds of unbelieving people, to Jews and Gentiles, and to individuals and small groups. While many apologies could be included in this study, the scope has been limited to the apologetic writings of those mentioned above to provide a more thorough examination and comparison of the missional elements present in the writings.

The ministry of the early church took place in a challenging context. While the early church had its beginnings in ancient Israel, the greatest degree of Christianity's success in the first century and beyond took place in a highly pluralistic setting. Numerous philosophies and religions proliferated across the Roman Empire and throughout the known world. The Roman government had successfully extended the *Pax Romana* by allowing local customs (including

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<sup>10</sup> The writers in various fields classify cultures as *premodern*, *modern*, and *postmodern*, utilizing defining descriptors that leave the impression that each type of culture is mutually exclusive with no similarity with the other types. In some cases, premodern and modern cultures are treated with disdain, and postmodern culture is virtually deified.

religious practices) to continue with little or no restrictions in the majority of the empire. All religions and philosophies were tolerated, as long as they created no threat to the peace and to the Roman government's rule and authority. In many respects, the world of the early church and the world of the postmodern ethos enjoy many parallels.

At the heart of contemporary society is the pluralistic-postmodern worldview. Postmodernism's chief tenet is the rejection of all traditional and historical metanarratives. Postmodern thinkers believe that human beings do not view the world from an objective perspective but shape their world through communally created concepts and structures, such as language. Since there is no unified, objective way of describing the world from language to language, the existence of universal foundational truth is not possible. The explanation of foundational truths are the basis of worldviews (such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.) are referred to by postmodern scholars as metanarratives.<sup>11</sup> Veith defines postmodernism as "a worldview that denies all worldviews."<sup>12</sup>

In the place of metanarratives, postmodernism emphasizes the creation of micro-narratives. The concept of micro-narratives is centered upon the idea of a determinate community. That is, truth and reality are constructs of the community or society in which one lives—and to some extent, truth and reality are constructs of the individual person. Truth and reality become relative to each individual or each community. What is true or real for one person or community may not be true for a different individual or community. The result is a pluralistic outlook in which all ideas may be held as true and valid, even though the ideas are found to be in direct conflict with one another.

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<sup>11</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 19–24.

<sup>12</sup> Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 49.

Postmodernism is manifested in two basic types. The hard-core or extreme form of postmodernism completely denies the existence of objective, propositional truth. While soft-postmodernism (the second form) does not deny the existence of objective truth, it does deny the ability of humans to know the truth.<sup>13</sup> Either form of postmodernism insists upon an attitude of skepticism toward any metanarrative because of either the non-existence or the unknowability of truth. Propositional-truth-based knowledge is viewed as the construct of the community, with the goal of maintaining existing power structures. In the postmodern view, knowledge becomes the vehicle through which the oppressors control the oppressed within society, and any expression that objective, universal truth exists is an attempt at power-play.<sup>14</sup>

As a result of the rejection of metanarratives and emphasis upon micro-narratives, postmodernism has followed a path that deconstructs all authoritative texts and emphasizes the preeminence of the reader. Deconstruction is the postmodern literary practice of rejecting structured, standard meanings for texts. According to deconstructive theory, words do not have any reference to any objective reality. Words are simply self-referential. Words are allowed to vary in meaning from interpreter to interpreter. The reader creates his own micro-narrative meaning for the text. The idea of self-created micro-narratives means that reality has no transcendent center and may be "read" differently by each "knowing self" that encounters it.<sup>15</sup> Truth and reality become relative—changing from one person or community to the next.

The impact of the postmodern skeptical approach to the Christian metanarrative and the process of deconstruction/reconstruction, with the reader or the reading community as authority,

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<sup>13</sup> Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 18–20.

<sup>14</sup> Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 56–62.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 6-7.

necessitates the establishment of a more remedial beginning point for the Christian witness/apologist. There have been a number of contemporary writers who have noted the growing ineffectiveness of traditional evangelism methods, which are geared to the sharing of biblical truths about Christian conversion. Postmodern culture responds with skepticism, and many Christians are ill-equipped to deal with the postmodern response.

While postmodernism's main continuing influence has been confined to academia and the arts, the skepticism, relativism, and pluralism that postmodernism produces continue to impact society in some dramatic ways. According to D. A. Carson, one of the most serious developments associated with the advancement of the postmodern ethos is "philosophical or hermeneutical pluralism." The postmodern mindset rejects the existence of absolute, objective truth and embraces the concept of pluralistic relativism. Truth becomes a matter of perspective and is open to the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. If truth is a matter of perspective, as postmodernists claim, then conflicting views of reality and truth are equally valid.

The disciplines of theology and philosophy have been impacted by the postmodern turn. Since the golden rule of postmodernism is absolute tolerance, all philosophical views become valid, unless a view claims that it is the proper view to the exclusion of other views.<sup>16</sup> If one is to be philosophically proper to the postmodern golden rule, the best view is to have no view and to be equally tolerant of all other views. Gene Veith quotes one postmodernist philosopher as saying that "the only role of the philosopher now is to 'decry the notion of having a view while avoiding having a view about having views'."<sup>17</sup> In reality, postmodern philosophy rejects the concept of objective, correspondent truth (because of its exclusivity) and have "replaced it with

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<sup>16</sup> Posterski, *Reinventing Evangelism*, 66–70.

<sup>17</sup> Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 60.

nothing.”

The postmodern rejection of objective truth and its emphasis of micronarrative over metanarrative has led to a relativistic inclusive pluralism. Many postmoderns insist that since it is impossible for a person to know absolute, objective truth, and can only perceive a part of the truth, any grand narrative that is stated as objective truth is to be rejected. Some proponents of postmodern philosophy have used the ancient Indian story of the ruler who took a group of blind philosophers to examine an elephant. Each of the blind men was placed at different vantage points around the elephant. One felt the tail, one felt the trunk, one felt an ear, one felt a tusk, and one felt a leg. According to the story, each of the philosophers described his portion of the beast as if it were the entire beast. Each blind man began arguing with the other blind pachyderm inspectors over what the elephant was like, never realizing that he had part of the truth but not the whole truth.<sup>18</sup> The thrust of the story is applied to religious metanarratives to illustrate the idea that all religions are valid, having only part of the truth. The conclusion is then drawn that truth is relative to the perspective of the individual, and all views are to be accepted as being equally valid.<sup>19</sup>

While the postmodern condition in contemporary society has resulted in the rejection of objective truth and the adoption of relativistic pluralism by many people, the church is still charged with the task of proclaiming (to those same people) the exclusivist message of salvation through Christ alone. The clear teaching of scripture about the truth of the gospel supports the assertion of Stanley Grenz that “we simply cannot allow Christianity to be relegated to the status

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<sup>18</sup> M. B. Chande, *Indian Philosophy in Modern Times* (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Dist., 2000), 275-276.

<sup>19</sup> Posterski, *Reinventing Evangelism*, 64–79.

of one faith among others.”<sup>20</sup> Rather than giving into the culture’s desire for the church to compromise and conform to postmodern pluralism, what is needed is a paradigm for dealing with the postmodern ethos.

### Some Key Terms

First, some key terms need to be defined to provide clarity in the remainder of this study. *Early Christian era apologetics* refers to apologetics that was used by Christians in the world before the acceptance of the Christian worldview as a viable position (the first three centuries CE). *Post-Christian era apologetics* refers to apologetics that is utilized or may be utilized in a culture that is witnessing a marked decline in the acceptance of the Christian worldview as a valid and viable philosophical position.<sup>21</sup> The term *missional apologetics* refers to the use of a rational defense specifically aimed at fulfilling the mission of Christ. Missional apologetics seeks to advance the mission of Christ by (1) engaging a lost world in a manner that aims to open minds to the credibility of the Christian worldview and (2) providing a platform or bridge for presenting the gospel message for the purpose of converting individuals into disciples of Christ.

Missional apologetics would be a possible tool or methodology for engaging the post-Christian culture by Christians and churches who desire to live out *missio Dei* in the strictest sense, by multiplying disciples and churches and working for individual and cultural transformation through the gospel of Christ. The principles of missional apologetics are based on

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<sup>20</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 165.

<sup>21</sup> In his informative article, “Beyond Bosch: The early church and the Christendom Shift,” Alan Kreider suggests that mission history may be divided into three distinct paradigms: pre-Christendom, Christendom, and post-Christendom. (see Alan Kreider, “Beyond Bosch: The early church and the Christendom Shift,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 29, no. 2 (2005): 59-68). In light of Kreider’s assessment of missional paradigms, it is suggested that Christian apologetics may be seen in terms of at least three missional paradigms: Pre-Christian apologetics, inner-Christian apologetics, and post-Christian apologetics. These paradigms are determined by the degree of receptivity enjoyed in society-at-large by the Christian worldview.



the teachings and examples found in the lives of Jesus Christ and his apostles. The practice of Missional Apologetics is evident in the apologetic writings of key defenders of Christianity who wrote in the first three centuries after the church began. The possibilities of missional apologetics may be achieved through the application of the principles found in pre-Christian apologetics to the practice of post-Christian apologetics by Christians seeking to live out the mission of Christ in their contemporary society.

Given the stated problem, the following questions will be addressed to provide an answer to the problem:

1. What are the defining principles for the mission of Christ and his fledgling church found in the four Gospels and the book of Acts?
2. What apologetic elements are found in apostolic preaching and what questions do they seek to answer?
3. How do they line up with the defining principles of *missio Christi*?
4. What missional principles may be found in the writings of the early Christian era apologists chosen for this study?
5. What similarities exist between the early Christian era world and the post-Christian era world?
6. What are some suggestions that might form the basis for post-Christian era missional apologetics that may be drawn from early Christian era apologetics?

### **Literature Review**

A search was executed to ascertain the extent to which the subject of missional apologetics or related subjects has been addressed in previously written dissertations. The subjects researched included (1) missional apologetics, (2) postmodern apologetics, (3) missional

theology, (4) early Christian apologetics, (5) Athenagoras, (6) Justin Martyr, (7) Tatian, (8) Epistle to Diognetus and (9) Tertullian.

While some dissertations have been written on certain aspects of selected Christian apologists of the second and third century, extensive searches yielded none that provided analyses in terms of relation to the mission of Christ, nor contextualization parallels between early Christian era/post-Christian era apologetic principle and practice. Several dissertations were found that dealt with related topics (in a very broad sense) but did not address the topics and concepts under investigation in this study. The following comprises a list of dissertations found utilizing the subjects searched and why they do not prevent the continuation of this proposed study.

P. Lorraine Buck of the University of Ottawa wrote a dissertation entitled, “Second-Century Christian Apologies Addressed to Emperors: Their Form and Function.” In this work, the author examines the form and function of four second-century Christian defenses.<sup>22</sup> The stated purposes of Buck's study are to examine the four apologies in terms of literary genre, to demonstrate that they were not written to engage non-Christian emperors or non-Christian populations for the purpose of converting them, but rather were intended as tools for instruction, confirmation, and exhortation of believers.<sup>23</sup> This dissertation does not consider any comparison of the apologetic themes of her subjects with key elements and principles related to the fulfillment of the mission of Christ and his fledgling church as seen in the Gospels and the book of Acts. It also lacks any systematic analysis of the correlation of key themes of the apologies

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<sup>22</sup> P Lorraine Buck, “Second-Century Greek Christian Apologies Addressed to Emperors: Their Form and Function” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 1998), 4. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/304486810?accountid=12085>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

with contemporary culture.

Susan Wendel addressed some of the work of Justin Martyr in her 2009 dissertation entitled “To Hear and Perceive: Scriptural Interpretation and Community Self-Definition in Luke-Acts and the Writings of Justin Martyr.” In her study, Wendel explores the answer to the question, “How was it possible for a group of non-Jews to lay claim to the sacred texts of Jews and use these scriptures to define their own community?”<sup>24</sup> The dissertation addresses several issues related to early Christian interpretation of Jewish scripture. This study does not deal with the apologetics of Justin, nor does it examine his apologies in light of the mission of Christ and his apostles. The comparison of Justin’s apologies to other early Christian era apologies and post-Christian era apologetic challenges is beyond the scope of Wendel’s study.

Eleanor Russel Cate wrote a dissertation for Columbia University in 1966 entitled “Tertullian’s Defense of the Christian Community: An Apologist’s Task and Method.” The writer addresses the legal-style defensive arguments Tertullian makes on behalf of the Christian community.<sup>25</sup> While Cate's study does an excellent job of examining the content and purpose of Tertullian's apology, any comparison of the apology with other apologies of the period or with the apologetic presentations in scriptural canon is outside of the study’s scope. Comparison with elements of the mission of Christ and post-Christian Era Apologetics is not contained in Cate’s work.

Paul J. Donahue of Yale University wrote his dissertation “Jewish-Christian Controversy

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Wendel, "To Hear and Perceive: Scriptural Interpretation and Community Self-Definition in Luke-Acts and the Writings of Justin Martyr," (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2009). <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/749408528/8FCD73322E9D465EPQ/23?accountid=12085>.

<sup>25</sup> Eleanor Russell Cate, “Tertullian’s Defense of the Christian Community: An Apologist's Task and Method" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1966), 1–8.

in the Second-Century: A Study in the Dialogue of Justin Martyr” in 1973. In this study, he attempted to “extract...a picture” of the relationship of Judaism to Christianity in the mid-second century from Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho the Jew.<sup>26</sup> Donahue gives a good historical analysis of the historical data and textual evidence from the Dialogue of the growing antipathy between Christians and Jews during this period. He also deals with the major themes found in the apology. There is no attempt to approach the topics to be addressed in this dissertation.

In 2014, Philip Palmer wrote a dissertation entitled “Cyprian the Apologist.” In this study, Palmer made a strong case for Cyprian to be considered an apologist, based upon a four-part definition cohering with the New Testament usage of *apologia* and *apologeomai*.<sup>27</sup> He lays out an excellent working definition for apologetics – especially in terms of how apologetics functions in defending the faith.<sup>28</sup> While his study compares Cyprian’s works to the works of commonly recognized second-century apologists, Palmer’s work does discuss any of the works in terms of missional elements or objectives.

In 2004, Sung-Hwan Calvin Kim wrote a dissertation entitled “Imitatio Christi: Toward a Pauline Theology of Mission” for Fuller Theological Seminary. In this study, Kim does a missional comparison of the Pauline theology of mission (as examined through Paul’s writings) to the teachings and practice of Jesus Christ (as seen in the Gospels). Kim’s study provides an excellent analysis of contextualization issues of theology and practice of mission between Paul

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<sup>26</sup> Paul J. Donahue, “Jewish-Christian Controversy in the Second Century: A Study in the Dialogue of Justin Martyr,” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1973, 1).

<sup>27</sup> Philip Bradford Palmer, “Cyprian the Apologist” (PhD diss., Liberty University, 2014), 1–7, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1647759276?accountid=12085>.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–15.

and Jesus.<sup>29</sup> The study points out that the guiding principle for the performance of mission must be the theology and mission of Christ that is contextualized to the ministry situation.<sup>30</sup> While Kim does an excellent job of framing his examination of Pauline missiology in light of *Imitatio Christi*, he never approaches the apologies of the early Christian era apologists to provide such a comparison.

Enuel Hernandez, in his study for Liberty University entitled “Noetic Apologetics: A Contemporary Approach in Comparison to Historical Apologetic Methods,” examines and categorizes several of the second and third-century apologists’ works in light of contemporary apologetic methods.<sup>31</sup> He explains his reasons behind the methodological classifications he assigns to each apologist. His dissertation briefly examines apologists throughout church history in similar fashion, leading to the formulation of suggestions for his Noetic Apologetic method as a model for doing apologetics in the contemporary world.<sup>32</sup> While Hernandez gives a good synopsis of the apologetic nature of the four Gospels and the book of Acts, he does not attempt to make a comparison between the apologetics in the Gospels and early Christian era apologetic works. The missional nature of early Christian era apologetics is not examined in his study.

In a 2005 Columbia University dissertation, entitled “Barbarian or Greek?: The Charge of Barbarianism and Early Christian Apologetics,” Stamenka Emilova Antonova examined the term barbarian in Christian apologetic writings from the second, third, and fourth centuries CE. In this

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<sup>29</sup> Sung-Hwan Calvin Kim, “Imitatio Christi: Toward a Pauline Theology of Mission” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006), 17–55.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 231–336.

<sup>31</sup> Enuel Hernandez, “Noetic Apologetics: A Contemporary Approach in Comparison to Historical Apologetic Methods” (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2014), 64–74.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 66–84, 101–105.

work, the author addresses the accusation levied against Christians and its purpose of alienating Christians from the culture.<sup>33</sup> While this study delves in-depth into one of the accusations against Christians that was dealt with by multiple early Christian apologists, there is neither examination of them in light of *missio Christi* nor comparisons with post-Christian Era contexts.

In his 1969 dissertation entitled “Tatian’s Discourse to the Greeks: A Literary Analysis and Essay in Interpretation,” Alfred Osbourne examines the Discourse in terms of some specific criterion. He focuses on an interpretive scheme that highlights the use of genre, style, stance, context, and date in an attempt to clarify key topics addressed by Tatian.<sup>34</sup> Osbourne provides some excellent insights into the text and its thematic interpretation but does not address the apology regarding *missio Christi*, nor for apologetic value, the pluralistic culture of the apologist’s day.<sup>35</sup> This study also does not address the points of intersection between the cultural context of the Discourse’s writing and that of contemporary society.

### **Method Statement**

The purpose of this study is to examine selected apologetic writings from the early Christian era in light of examples and principles depicting proclamation and practice of the *missio Christi* found in the four Gospels and the book of Acts. It is the presumption of this study that key elements concerning the use of early Christian era missional Apologetics can make a positive impact on post-Christian era apologetics, resulting in a more effective use of apologetics in the contemporary world.

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<sup>33</sup> Stamenka Emilova Antonova, “Barbarian or Greek? The Charge of Barbarism and Early Christian Apologetics” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2005), 1–22.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred Ernst Osbourne, “Tatian’s Discourse to the Greeks: A Literary Analysis and Essay in Interpretation” (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 1969), 4–65, accessed February 16, 2016, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/pqdtglobal/docview/302395820/citation/36F42619F43C43F3PQ/1>.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–181.

The primary methodology for the pursuit of this study will incorporate bibliographic research of studies on early Christian era Apologetic writings, with a special emphasis on the works of the apologists under study in this dissertation. Also, research of historians contemporaneous with and shortly following the lifetime of the apologists under examination. Works of key scholars and theorists from contemporary culture will be brought to bear on the study of the early Christian era apologists' works to determine possible points of intersection between the cultures of the two eras. Research of works sought will be accomplished through the use of three different computerized electronic libraries of books and the libraries of Liberty University, the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and public library access of other university and seminary holdings via inter-library loan.

The path that this study will follow involves the exegetical examination of selected biblical texts that highlight the purpose and praxis of *missio Christi*. This portion of the study will seek to answer some key questions: (1) What does Jesus indicate were the reasons for his life and work during his incarnation? (2) How does Jesus carry out his mission? (What practices are evident as he does his work?) (3) How do we see the apostles extending the *missio Christi* after the Lord's resurrection?

The writings of the selected early Christian era apologists will then be assessed in light of the biblical expression of the mission of Christ. The major themes of the apologetic texts will be examined and compared with the missional elements and principles found in the scripture exegesis described above. This part of the study will seek to answer the following: (1) Do the writings of the selected apologetic writings demonstrate the extension of *missio Christi*? (2) To what extent do we see the apologists writing with missional purpose?

The study will attempt to encompass both the exegesis of the texts in question and of the

parallels in both cultures with the idea of finding the points of intersection between the two. Questions for which answers will be sought will be as follows: (1) Are there ascertainable parallels experienced by Christians in the two eras of time in question? (2) How did the Pre-Christian apologists deal with the areas of intersection in their context? (3) Is it possible to utilize or adapt the approach of the apologist in a post-Christian Era context?

### **Design Overview**

In chapter 2, the defining principles for the mission of Christ and the fledgling church will be examined methodologically through the examination of key passages in the Gospels and the book of Acts. The examined passages will be exegeted to determine defining elements of *missio Christi* and its praxis by Jesus Christ and his apostles. While there may be references to apostolic epistles, the major emphasis will be upon Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.

Chapter 3 will look at key apologetic writings by Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Tertullian, examining them for evidence of the missional principles found in scripture (in the lives and teachings of Jesus and the apostles). Exegesis of the text of the early Christian era apologies will be performed to determine if missional elements of *missio Christi* are extended in the works under scrutiny.

Chapter 4 will seek to elucidate the points of intersection between the ministry contexts of the early Christian era apologists and of apologists attempting to minister in the post-Christian era. Points of intersection will be examined to determine apologetic approaches and communicative principles utilized by the Pre-Christian apologists. A comparison will be made to the post-Christian era context and approaches utilized by present-day apologists in dealing with the areas of intersection.

The final chapter will take a look at some general suggestions for the application of



missional principles to the practice of post-Christian era apologetics. Additional areas of inquiry will be proposed for future study on the subject under discussion.

## CHAPTER 2: THE CONCEPT OF MISSION

Christianity, in the postmodern context, has been experiencing a decrease of evangelistic impact upon the unbelieving world. Among Evangelicals and mainline denominations, the number of church members and attenders has demonstrated a steady decline over the past several decades. Some groups, such as the Southern Baptist convention of churches, have sought to reverse this decline with an emphasis on church planting. Unfortunately, while the number of churches planted have increased, evangelistic effectiveness, as measured by the yardsticks of baptisms and church attendance, have continued to decrease.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the statistics indicating an increase in skepticism and unbelief in society have been documented, underscoring the seriousness of the issue.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars and church leaders have attempted to grapple with the growing unresponsiveness of postmodern society to the Christian message and the subsequent decline in the number of professing Christ-followers. Many writers have documented statistics pointing to an inward-focus of evangelical churches in western Christianity as a major reason for the decline. Missiological scholars have indicated that the dilemma is caused by the lack of a compelling vision of the church's mission. Since there is little or no real sense of mission in churches, there is therefore a withdrawal from actively engaging the world with the Gospel.

In response to the perceived missional myopia infecting institutional Christianity, a group of scholars and churchmen launched the Missional Church movement. The movement began with the publishing of the book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in*

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Pipes, "SBC Reports More Churches, Fewer People," *Baptist Press News*, last modified June 10, 2015, accessed January 17, 2018, <http://bpnews.net/44914/sbc-reports-more-churches-fewer-people>.

<sup>2</sup> Gabe Bullard, "The World's Newest Major Religion: No Religion," *National Geographic Society*, last modified April 22, 2016, accessed January 17, 2018, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/04/160422-atheism-agnostic-secular-nones-rising-religion/>.

*North America* in 1998. The book was the brain-child of the Gospel and Our Culture Network. The group was made up of professors and pastors who sought to advance the World Council of Churches' discussion of *missio dei* and Lesslie Newbigin's missionary insights into the North America missiological consciousness. The premise of the GOCN leaders writing in the book is that the churches in North America had lost their missional focus. It was the consensus of the writers that churches had become focused on self-preservation and the growth of church programs, rather than on God's mission. It was hoped that Newbigin's insights could help bring a renewal of the effectiveness in penetrating the culture.

The concept of *missio Dei*, which forms the basis for much of the missional movement's theology and praxis, emphasizes the importance of kingdom orientation in living. While kingdom theology is clearly a part of scriptural teaching and the goal of the created order is the re-creation of the universe under the reign of God, different understandings of *missio Dei* have led to much confusion in terms of its praxis.<sup>3</sup> Craig Gelder and Dwight Zscheile describe three approaches to understanding the *missio Dei* and its relationship to the kingdom of God: (1) the Specialized View of *missio Dei*, (2) the Generalized View of *missio Dei*, and (3) the Integrated View of *missio Dei*.<sup>4</sup> According to Gelder and Zscheile, the problem with contemporary works on the subject is the lack of consistent usage of any one concept of *missio Dei*, even within singular works. The result of this inconsistency of usage is a lack of understanding about what *missio Dei* actually means, leading to a clouded, unbiblical view of mission. Eddie Arthur notes

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<sup>3</sup> Craig Van Gelder, Dwight J. Zscheile, and Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 55–59.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

that even among evangelicals, there is no clear consensus of exactly what constitutes mission.<sup>5</sup>

The modern missional movement seeks to anchor its theology in the creation narrative.<sup>6</sup> The mission of God in the establishment of his kingdom encompasses the redemption of all creation. The redemption of creation includes correcting the ills created through the sinfulness of mankind, including poverty and injustice. Kenneth Ott emphasizes this concept of mission in his dissertation entitled “Initiating a Missional Mindset: The International Leadership Institutes Eight Core Values as Impetus for Missional Living.” In his section on theological foundations, he writes,

We [Christians in the West] have made "mission" what we do (not who God is, or what God is doing), to specialized (what only particular "spiritual" people do in specific locations – over there), and to limited in salvific intent (to save souls, but not the rest of humanity), and to narrow in scope (to humans, but not to the public places where people live: work, leisure, economics, power, governess, etc.).<sup>7</sup>

Ott's concept of mission extends beyond the proclamation of God's salvific work accomplished through the person and work of Christ expressed in the Gospels and Acts. He sees the church as being aligned with *missio Dei* as “God's instrument of healing and restoring wholeness to all of creation in every dimension – spiritual, physical, social, economic, psychological, political, environmental” – the ultimate purpose being the restoration best

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<sup>5</sup> Eddie Arthur, “Missio Dei: The Mission of God” (2009), 1, accessed September 4, 2018, [https://www.academia.edu/2282856/MISSIO\\_DEI\\_THE\\_MISSION\\_OF\\_GOD](https://www.academia.edu/2282856/MISSIO_DEI_THE_MISSION_OF_GOD).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Kemper, “The Missio Dei in Contemporary Context,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38, no. 4 (2014): 188–190. Kemper notes that *missio Dei*'s triune formula begins and ends with creation. The object of God's kingdom is to restore all of creation to the standards and condition that were in place at the beginning of creation. Thus, the kingdom message emphasizes a wholistic gospel which includes redemption of the physical order and human society, as well as spiritual redemption.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth R. Ott, “Initiating a Missional Mindset: The International Leadership Institute's Eight Core Values as Impetus for Missional Living” (DMin diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016), accessed September 6, 2018, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1805167948/abstract/463DCFFB054A4F65PQ/10>.

characterized by the Jewish notion of shalom (well-being, safety, peace, and justice).<sup>8</sup> Ott also esteems the church as the servant of the God's reign, whose hands, hearts, and resources must be dedicated to works that contribute to bringing about the justness and fullness of God's reign.<sup>9</sup>

David Bosch categorizes six basic positions that exist among scholars and churchmen on the subject of mission (fig. 1). The six positions vary, and the emphasis placed on social action as a part of mission. This element of social action addresses the physical, social, economic, psychological, environmental and political elements of existence. The point of contention between the positions involves the inclusion of social action as a part of the mission of God. As Bosch points out, the contemporary tendency has been to define mission to broadly leading to what Freytag refers to as "the spectre of panmissionism," in which everything becomes a part of mission. A more precise definition of mission could help differentiate between the the actual biblical mission and the transformed conditions that are the result of its fulfillment.

	<b>Mission Defined As:</b>	<b>Elements Prioritized:</b>
<b>Position 1</b>	Evangelism is Mission. Evangelism is winning souls for eternity.	Social action is betrayal of mission.
<b>Position 2</b>	Mission = Evangelism (soul-winning)	Social action is optional. While it is good, it may distract from mission and is to be discouraged.
<b>Position 3</b>	Mission/Evangelism = Soul winning	Social action and social ministry are tools to be used to open doors for presenting the gospel.
<b>Position 4</b>	Mission/evangelism and social involvement relate to each other like seed to fruit.	Evangelism is primarily the preaching of the gospel for the conversion and eternal salvation of souls. Social action is the result of life transformation in salvation and is therefore secondary.
<b>Position 5</b>	Mission is more than evangelism. Mission is evangelism plus social action.	Both components are vital, but evangelism has priority.
<b>Position 6</b>	Evangelism and social action are equal in importance but fully diverse facets of the church's mission.	Neither evangelism nor social action should be prioritized.

Figure 1. Missional Positions

<sup>8</sup> Ott, 41.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 42-43.

In some of the more radical elements of the missional movement, the mission of God does not involve eschatological salvation; rather it is about the prospering of human life on earth, working to bring about the transformation of humanly constructed injustice and violence.<sup>10</sup> In this fashion, God's original intention for his created order is restored through the establishment of his earthly kingdom.

While the missional movement has made many positive contributions to the conversation of missional effectiveness in the post-Christian world, the fact that it has left so many concepts ill-defined has resulted in much ambiguity. With the multiplicity of voices defining *missio Dei* in so many ways, the assessment of one writer rings true: "Inadequately developed concepts, unresolved theological issues and unexplored things" have led to a situation in which confusion reigns as a result of the lack of clear definition.<sup>11</sup> This type of ambiguity has allowed the concept of mission to degenerate to the extreme that one individual's stated mission is "blessed in this life to be a blessing to everyone on earth."<sup>12</sup>

When communicating any theological concept, the establishment of a concise definition or a connotative set of defining principles is vital to fostering an understanding of possible applications to the concept. This chapter proposes a new concept upon which to evaluate mission for disciples and churches of Jesus Christ. This new missional principle is *missio Christi* or the

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<sup>10</sup> Marcus J Borg, "What Is the Gospel? - The Marcus J Borg Foundation," accessed January 18, 2018, <https://marcusjborg.org/what-is-the-gospel/>. In his blog post of November 9, 2013, Borg states: "Importantly, 'the kingdom of God' was not about life in the next world, not about heaven, but life on earth... The coming of the kingdom of God on earth was about justice and peace. Justice: that everybody should have enough ('daily bread') of the material basis of life. Peace: the end of war and violence. Jesus's passion – what he was passionate about – was God and the kingdom of God."

<sup>11</sup> Zscheile, Roxburgh, and Van Gelder, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 55–65.

<sup>12</sup> Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post-Protestant, Liberal Conservative, Mystical Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic Contemplative, Fundamentalist Calvinist, Anabaptist Anglican*, (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2004), 113.

mission of Christ. The focus of this chapter is to provide the definition and defining principles of *missio Christi* through the primary lenses of the four Gospels and the Book of Acts. While occasional contrasts or comparisons to present missional church thought may be used, an in-depth analysis of the *missio Dei* concept is beyond the scope of this study and would need to be the subject of an additional study.

Since the scope of this work is focused upon the evaluation of selected early Christian era apologetic works in light of, and in comparison to, the mission of Christ, as expressed in the four canonical Gospels and the book of Acts, the first order of business must be the establishment of the nature of *missio Christi*. This chapter will provide an analysis of the mission of Christ from the perspective of those historical-biblical documents in order to answer three critical questions: (1) What expressed purposes are elucidated for the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? (2) What statements are found in the preaching and teaching ministry of the apostles and early church that can clarify an understanding of *missio Christi*? (3) Are there any distinguishing methodological characteristics evident in the approaches or presentations of the Lord Jesus Christ or his apostles as they sought to fulfill Christ's mission?

### **Defining Elements of *Missio Christi***

What expressed purposes are elucidated for the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? A clear understanding of the defining elements of *missio Christi* are best sought in the words of Jesus Christ and in the preaching and teaching of the apostles. While indications of early church perception concerning the mission of Christ could possibly be found in extra-biblical writings from the early church fathers, the canonical Gospels

and the book of Acts provide the earliest possible records of the ministry of Christ himself.<sup>13</sup> Since the writers were either direct disciples of Christ or their contemporaries, it is likely that the views expressed and incidents recorded provide an accurate account of the teachings of Christ and the beliefs of the early church about Christ's mission. From a historiographical perspective, the fact that we have multiple attestation in a multitude of manuscripts from sources contemporaneous with the events recorded provide substantiation for the historicity of that which is recorded. Therefore, the best sources to gain an understanding of *missio Christi* would be Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.

Jesus made statements during his earthly ministry that he had been sent by his father to accomplish a specific missional purpose. He emphasized this missional purpose with phrases such as, "I came to," "for this very reason I came," or "the Son of Man came... to..."<sup>14</sup> It is evident that Jesus had a well-defined understanding of his purpose for coming to earth. An examination that centers on Jesus' own purpose statements, as well as those expressed by his apostles, reveal certain key components and approaches for the mission of Christ.

An examination of the four Gospels reveals three basic reasons for the coming of Jesus

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<sup>13</sup> According to F.F. Bruce, the accuracy of the historical records found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts, may be accepted with confidence for the following reasons: (1) The chronological proximity to the events recorded. The Gospels and the book of Acts were written close enough to the events recorded to ensure accuracy of the accounts. Even if the late date of authorship is accepted, all four books were completed and in circulation within 60-70 years after the earthly ministry of Jesus was over. This means that the Gospels and Acts were written and circulated within the lifespans of eyewitnesses who could have disputed and discredited the documents for any inaccuracies contained. (2) The abundance of manuscript attestation. There are about 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in whole or in part. Compared to other ancient documents, the manuscript evidence for accuracy of the New Testament documents far outweigh any other ancient document including Caesar's Gallic War, the Roman History of Livy, the Histories of Tacitus and the History of Herodotus combined. The manuscript copies of the secular histories all date from 400 to 1300 years after they were originally written. By contrast, the earliest manuscripts and manuscript fragments date back to as early as A.D 150 (within 50 years from the time the majority of the N.T. was completed and was known to be in circulation.). One manuscript containing the four Gospels and the book of Acts dates to 200-250 CE (110-190 years after date of original authorship. (see: Bruce, F. F. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Blacksburg, VA: Wilder Publications, 2010. Kindle Ebook. Loc. 117-377.)

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; Matthew 10:34; Luke 19:10; John 12:27.



Christ into this world. First, Christ said that he came into this world to provide salvation for sinners. Second, he said that he came to proclaim the good news. Third he came to pave the way for the coming kingdom of God. These three goals comprise *missio Christi*, as defined by the Lord Jesus Christ and as executed by his followers. The way in which this mission was carried out by Jesus and his apostles bore three distinguishing marks: (1) contextualization of approach, (2) consistency of message, and (3) the call to believe and commit.

Writers within the Missional Church Movement, such as Michael Frost, have rightly stated that the implications of the gospel extend far beyond the issue of individual salvation.<sup>15</sup> The mistake that some writers made is the relegation of the importance of individual salvation to that of a mere side-issue or to sidestep it altogether. Since individual salvation is relegated to a peripheral or non-issue, evangelism is then cast in a negative light. Some missional theology writers have branded the evangelistic methodologies employed by many evangelicals as simply a “recruitment” to a particular “brand of religion,” advocating that mission is the act of “alerting people to the universal reign of God through Christ.”<sup>16</sup> While this statement sounds very inspirational, it also fails to provide any concrete ideas about how this is to be accomplished.

As mentioned earlier, the absence of a clearly defined concept of the *missio Dei* within the missional community has resulted in confused and conflicting ideas of mission. At the base of this confusion lies a false dichotomy that has been drawn between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The two are seen as incompatible and, therefore, mutually exclusive. Some have intimated that effective missional praxis necessitates the rewriting of Christian doctrine in ways that violate

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church*, ed. Alan Hirsch. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> David Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1995), 33.

orthodoxy. It is the belief of some writers that the problem of postmodern incredulity invalidates established theological ideas and necessitates their deconstruction and the creation of new narratives.

Well-meaning writers have sought to define Christian doctrines through the deconstructing lenses of postmodern philosophy. In attempting to overcome the offense of the gospel toward postmodern sensitivities, some writers have re-conceptualized biblical soteriology. Biblical teachings about sin, repentance, atonement, and eschatology have been deconstructed and rewritten into forms which are deemed to be much more palatable to the contemporary world. Brian McLaren cites Roman Catholic priest Vincent Donovan and promotion of the idea that a radical deconstruction and reconstruction of Christian theology is necessary in the postmodern world and that this reconstruction must be done with theology growing out of praxis. McLaren then states “similarly, I have become convinced that a generous orthodoxy appropriate our postmodern world will have to grow out of the experience of the post-Christian, post-secular people of the cities of the 21st century.”<sup>17</sup>

Writers such as Brian McLaren, Marcus Borg, and N.T. Wright have all insisted that Christendom has had certain key doctrines wrong for centuries. All three writers (McLaren, Borg, and Wright) insist that the church has misinterpreted Biblical Christology and, therefore, have instituted false soteriology. According to Wright, “we do not have to give up the idea of Jesus dying for our sins... but that idea is refocused, recontextualized.”<sup>18</sup> Borg expresses his desire for this recontextualization by writing, “salvation in the Bible is primarily a this-worldly

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<sup>17</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 91.

<sup>18</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016), 244.

phenomenon. It happens here.”<sup>19</sup> According to McLaren, the chief accomplishment of Jesus’ ministry was that he “exposed humanities capacity for evil behavior, and that he continues to confront spiritual ignorance that lies at the heart of human condition.”<sup>20</sup> The purpose of this work by Jesus is to enable us, like him, to love God supremely and our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>21</sup>

Wright states that the purpose of the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus was to establish God's kingdom and justice on earth, as in heaven.<sup>22</sup> Wrights reinterpretation of Jesus' statement to Pilate about the nature of Christ's kingdom has some merit but ignores the vital eternal aspect of the kingdom. Wright’s interpretation of Jesus’ words tends more toward eisegesis than exegesis. His rendering of the passage, “My kingdom isn’t the sort that grows in this world,” fits with his presuppositions, but seem to be somewhat of a stretch, given the wording in the Greek text.<sup>23</sup>

Wright is correct in noting that the traditional translation of the text has led to the idea that the kingdom is strictly eschatological, with no present impact. However, his rendering of the text easily leads to the converse error of a present-world emphasis with no eschatological referent.

The result of such an over emphasis on the present-world aspect of kingdom living is that there

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<sup>19</sup> Marcus J Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*, Reprint (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2004), 175.

<sup>20</sup> McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 265. In addition, McLaren explicitly denies that the scriptures use a religious (beyond this life) meaning for the term *save*. He states that the Greek term means *rescue* or *heal*. (p. 93). He also focuses the attention of his discussion on the present world concept of salvation, stating that in any context, *save* means “to get out of trouble.” Trouble is defined as circumstances of this present world such as sickness, poverty, oppression, etc. (p. 93).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 216–217.

<sup>23</sup> John 18:36 states, “<sup>36</sup> ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς, Ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου· εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἦν ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ, οἱ ὑπηρέται ἂν οἱ ἐμοὶ ἠγωνίζοντο, ἵνα μὴ παραδοθῶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις· νῦν δὲ ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐντεῦθεν.” The phrase, Ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου is more clearly rendered “my kingdom is not of (belonging to) this world. Κόσμος is contained in the prepositional phrase τοῦ κόσμου τούτου and is in the genitive case (which is usually translated “of.” (see: Lukaszewski, Albert L., Mark Dubis, and J. Ted Blakley. *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament, SBL Edition: Expansions and Annotations*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011.)

tends to be confusion between the mission of kingdom citizens and the outward expressions of the life transforming power of Christ in the lives of people.

The fact that Jesus' teachings intersected practical earthly living in multitudes of applications in no wise confines his kingdom to the earthly sphere. To ignore the eternal, otherworldly nature of the future kingdom is to miss some important aspects of Christ's mission and message. The question to be answered is "what exactly did Jesus and his apostles understand to be his mission?" Understanding the answer to this question is vital to the clarification to the issue of mission for contemporary Christians.

David Bosch warns of succumbing to what he called "the temptation of Concordism," which, would equate social groups and circumstances within first century Palestine with those of our own time. While it is true that there is a historical gap between the time of Christ and today, it would be erroneous to assume that timeless principles may not intersect parallel circumstances in the two periods of time. Bosch's statement that "there are no simplistic or obvious moves from the New Testament to our contemporary missionary practice" would likewise prove to be in error.<sup>24</sup> Remembering to keep Jesus' life and ministry within its historical context is vital to understanding the scriptural teachings concerning his mission, but, it is necessary for Christ followers to apply the principles of those teachings to circumstances found in the contemporary context. With this in mind, the task of discovering *missio Christi* becomes the task-at-hand.

### **Provide Salvation from Sin**

The first New Testament statements defining Christ's mission were those uttered by the angelic messenger to Joseph before the Messiah's birth. They were to call him Jesus, because,

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<sup>24</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Twentieth anniversary ed., American Society of Missiology series no. 16 (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011), 20–25.

“αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.”<sup>25</sup> The announcement to the shepherds underscores this role of the Messiah by referring to him as the anointed Savior (σωτήρ ὅς ἐστιν χριστὸς κύριος).<sup>26</sup>

Jesus uses this same terminology when he declares that he has come to ζητῆσαι καὶ σῶσαι τὸ ἀπολλωλός. In similar fashion, Jesus tells Nicodemus that his purpose for coming into the world is to save the world (σωθῆ ὁ κόσμος), not to condemn it. Later Jesus states that he is the gate to the safety of the sheepfold. If anyone enters through him will be saved (σωθήσεται).<sup>27</sup> In John 12:47, he “did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.”<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the overarching mission of Christ is to be the Savior of the entire world. The usage of the various forms of the word σώζω in the gospels, including the angelic announcement of Jesus’ birth and Jesus’ personal use of the word to describe his mission provides concrete evidence that providing salvation is at the heart of *missio Christi*.<sup>29</sup> The mission of providing salvation implies that there is a danger to be saved from. What do the Scriptures say in regard to this question?

While there are instances of the term "to save" being used in the generic, secular sense in

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<sup>25</sup> Michael W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011), Mt 1:21. The angelic declaration is clear concerning the mission and purpose of the Messiah on earth: “He shall save (deliver) his people from their sins, (τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν).”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Lk 19:10.

<sup>27</sup> Future passive of σώζω.

<sup>28</sup> The Greek phrase, “ἦλθον ἵνα κρίνω τὸν κόσμον ἀλλ’ ἵνα σώσω τὸν κόσμον,” employs the first-person singular aorist-active-subjunctive of the verb σώζω. Jesus make it clear that his mission is to save the world (τὸν κόσμον). The emphasis is that he and he alone will save the world.

<sup>29</sup> Various forms of the Greek words translated *save, savior, salvation*, etc. (σώσει, σώζω, σωθῆ, σωτήρ, etc.) are used in the religious sense of providing salvation or deliverance from the power and penalty of personal sin in the majority of instances in the Gospel and are all identified with Jesus Christ as the provider (see Matthew 1:21, 10:22, 24:13, Mark 5:23, 8:35, 13:13, 16:16; Luke 2:11, 8:50, 9:24, John 3:17, 4:42, 10:9, 11:12, 12:47

the New Testament, the dominant use of the term is used in a special, religious sense.<sup>30</sup> The idea of salvation has specific reference to deliverance from sins, without which, the individual becomes subject to the judgment of God. The positive results of salvation include reconciliation of the person to God and reception of the gift of eternal life. The salvation of the soul includes the present reality and the future hope.<sup>31</sup>

Salvation and the forgiveness of sins are inseparably linked to the mission of Christ in the Gospel accounts. The forgiveness of sins was an important part of his work. In the three synoptic gospels, Jesus emphasized his authority by granting forgiveness of sins for the man he was about to heal. According to Jesus, the healing that followed was the confirmation of his authority to forgive the paralyzed man of his sins (εξουσιαν εχει ο υιος του ανθρωπου επι της γης αφιεναι αμαρτιας).<sup>32</sup> In Luke 7:36-50, Jesus again demonstrated that forgiveness was part of his mission when he pardoned the sins of the woman who anointed him with expensive perfume and dried his feet with her hair. His emphatic statement, “Ἀφέωνταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι,” left no doubt to anyone present that Jesus considered forgiving sins to be within his authority and mission.

*Missio Christi* had as its goal to secure the salvation of individuals and providing forgiveness of sins in a particular way. Jesus summed up his mission to Nicodemus in the following way: “And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. For this is

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<sup>30</sup> The healing of the sick is to save them (Mark 3:4; 6:56; Luke 6:9; 7:3; 8:50; Acts 4:9, 12; 14:9; John 11:12; Jas 5:15), especially by means of miracles—“He saved others” (Matt 27:42; Mark 15:31; Luke 23:35–39). A military contingent escorts Paul to Caesarea “safe and sound” (Acts 23:24); the centurion Julius wanted to save Paul (Acts 27:34). People are saved from difficulties (Mark 13:20; cf. Acts 7:25; Jude 5), from storms (Matt 8:25; 14:30; Acts 27:30ff.), and from death (Matt 27:49; Mark 15:30–31; Luke 23:39; John 12:27; Heb 5:7).

<sup>31</sup> Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 356–357.

<sup>32</sup> This event is recorded in Matthew 9:1-7, Mark 2:1-12, and Luke 5:17-26.

how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.”<sup>33</sup>

The four canonical Gospels provide ample evidence that the primary focus of *missio Christi* was to provide salvation and the forgiveness of sins for lost humanity through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. The salvific work of Christ is made available to the world of humanity but is appropriated individually by faith. The testimony of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all present the unified good news of God’s offer of salvation and forgiveness of sins from the lips of the angelic messengers and from the teaching and preaching of Jesus during his earthly ministry.

The apostles of Christ continued to champion the Christ as the Savior theme in the book of Acts. The continual message of the apostolic kerygma was that Jesus of Nazareth had been confirmed by God the Father to be the one and only Messiah and Savior for Israel and all of mankind.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the book of Acts, the good news of salvation and forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ is the message proclaimed to both Jew and Gentile audiences.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter plainly proclaimed that the critical issue was the repentance of sin and identification with Christ through baptism in order to receive the forgiveness of sins (εις ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν).<sup>35</sup> At the end of Acts 2, Luke records that there were daily additions of those individuals who were “being saved” (τοὺς σφζομένους).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John 3:14-17.

<sup>34</sup> Acts 4:12, Acts 5:42.

<sup>35</sup> Acts 2:38.

<sup>36</sup> Acts 2:47.

After healing a crippled man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, Peter urged his hearers to repent and turn to God through faith in the Messiah Jesus in order that their sins would be wiped away (τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας).<sup>37</sup> Later, Peter shared the message of peace with God through Jesus Christ, stating that all who believe in him would have their sins forgiven.<sup>38</sup>

In Acts 10, God sent Peter to inaugurate the first official outreach to the Gentiles. God used a vision to convince the apostle that no man was beyond God's grace. Peter proclaimed to Cornelius and his household the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. The good news that Peter proclaimed Cornelius included a summary of Jesus' life work of healing and good deeds. Jesus' death by crucifixion and resurrection from the dead, as well as, proof of the resurrection through eyewitness confirmation readers are given as evidence of his ultimate position as Lord and judge of all men. The final sentence of Peter's sermon provides a focal point of all the information previously proclaimed. The simple appeal was made to Cornelius and in those assembled and his house as Peter said, "All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins."<sup>39</sup>

The Apostle Paul, who emphasized that his instruction did not come from the other apostles, but by direct revelation from the risen Christ, continually stressed the importance of

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<sup>37</sup> Acts 3:19.

<sup>38</sup> Acts 10:43. Peter made a clear case to Cornelius and those assembled that the good news was extended to them. The good news was that everyone who believes will receive "ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν." The issue of forgiveness of sins is clearly at the heart of apostolic gospel proclamation to both Jew and Gentile hearers.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 10:43. According to Peter the good news is that forgiveness of sins is available to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ (ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν λαβεῖν διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ πάντα τὸν πιστεύοντα εἰς αὐτόν.). Clearly, the availability of this forgiveness through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is good news for all men. While Peter adds a few details about the life of Christ and proof of his resurrection to foster a better understanding by his Gentile hearers, his message of forgiveness of sins her faith in Jesus Christ remains consistent with the message preached in his other sermons.



Christ's saving mission.<sup>40</sup> In Acts 13, Paul called to both Jews and Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia to listen to the "message of salvation."<sup>41</sup> The message is that Jesus Christ's death and resurrection has provided the means for the sins of individuals to be forgiven.<sup>42</sup>

One of the most potent evidences that the mission of Christ is focused on individual salvation is found in Paul and Silas' encounter with the Philippian jailer. The jailer's question is concise and to the point, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"<sup>43</sup> The question has to do with his own personal salvation. Likewise, the message of the preachers is direct: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household."<sup>44</sup> In both the jailer's question and the witness' response, forms of the word σώζω are used.

In Acts 26, Paul gives an account of his conversion and call from the Lord Jesus Christ before Agrippa. Paul is given the commission to go to the Gentiles to present the good news of salvation. The message is one of repentance from "darkness to light ... from the power of Satan to God." As a result of this decision to believe and act upon the gospel message, they will receive "forgiveness of their sins and given a place among God's people."<sup>45</sup>

Some writers have indicated that the terms *salvation* and *forgiveness* are unclear in meaning in the biblical text. While it is true that the Old Testament does not contain extensive

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<sup>40</sup> Galatians 1:11-24.

<sup>41</sup> Acts 13:26. The message of salvation (ὁ λόγος τῆς σωτηρίας) is clearly the message about Christ's death and resurrection for the sins of all people.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 13:38-39.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 16:30. The Greek text, "Κύριοι, τί με δεῖ ποιεῖν ἵνα σωθῶ," demonstrates that the jailer's concern is for his own salvation.

<sup>44</sup> Acts 16:31.

<sup>45</sup> Acts 26:18. The willingness of individuals to respond in faith to the good news is rewarded with the forgiveness of sins (τοῦ λαβεῖν αὐτοὺς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν) and guarantee of a place among God's people of faith (κλήρον ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πίστει τῇ εἰς ἐμέ). (see: Polhill, John B. *Acts*. Vol. 26. *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992.).

teachings concerning the afterlife, the concept of moral salvation and eternal life are not foreign concepts. In the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles expanded the discussion about these subjects. Jesus stressed the need for repentance in order to escape eternal punishment. He talked extensively about the need for salvation and forgiveness, teaching that he was the pathway to both.

The New Testament is not the only place that the words σόζω, σωτήρ, σωτηρία, and σωτήριος are found. Secular Greek literature also makes frequent use of these words. The root meaning of σόζω and σωτηρία in secular literature means “to deliver” when there is a particularly perilous situation or mortal danger.<sup>46</sup> While there are a number of references in secular literature where salvation refers to the provision of healing from physical infirmity for injury, the religious usage is also common. In this instance, salvation from peril or death involves the interaction of some deity.<sup>47</sup>

In the New Testament, the dominant message concerning σόζω and σωτηρία consists of deliverance from the penalty of sin and thereby escaping the wrath of God. Such salvation affects both present life and the eschatological future. The message of salvation and forgiveness through Jesus Christ preached by the apostles was the message offering eternal life to those who would believe. On one occasion, Paul and Barnabas linked the two together, indicating that the place among God’s people was the eschatological hope of eternal life (αἰωνίου ζωῆς).<sup>48</sup>

In all four Gospel accounts, Jesus pointed to his impending death by crucifixion and his

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<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey William Bromiley, Gerhard Kittel, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under σόζω.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, “21.18 Σόζωα; Σωτηρίαα, Ας,” *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

subsequent resurrection from the dead as the means through which salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life would be secured. On at least three occasions, he plainly taught that he was giving his life as a sacrifice for the sins of people. On other occasions, he spoke of his impending death and resurrection in veiled or metaphorical ways.

In Jesus' night time meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus likened his own crucifixion to the lifting of the serpent on the pole by Moses during the wilderness wanderings of Israel.<sup>49</sup> During the wilderness judgment of Israel for the people's rebellion, it was faith in the serpent on the pole that provided salvation from judgement and death. Jesus declared that his own death on the cross would provide the way of salvation for all who will trust in his sacrifice. All who are willing to believe will not perish, but have everlasting life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον).<sup>50</sup> While the discourse with Nicodemus makes a metaphorical allusion to the coming passion of Christ, the point is clear: Jesus' self-sacrifice on the cross will provide the pathway to eternal life for all who will believe. D.A. Carson points out that this sacrifice by the Son is the climax of the mission of Christ, rooted in the love of the Father and focused upon all of humanity.<sup>51</sup>

During his discourse on the Good Shepherd, Jesus again referenced his death on the cross as a willing sacrifice that would please the heavenly father.<sup>52</sup> On another occasion, he referred to his death as an act in which he would "give his life as a ransom for many."<sup>53</sup> In both cases, Jesus

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<sup>49</sup> John 3:1-21.

<sup>50</sup> The salvation from eternal death (perish under God's judgment) to eternal life is the offer made. πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλὰ ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον

<sup>51</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (repr., Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 185–208.

<sup>52</sup> John 10:14-19.

<sup>53</sup> Mark 10:45. The phrase "λυτρον ἄντι πολλῶν" is a direct reference to the work of Jesus paying the price for the freedom of sinners on the cross. In John 8:32-35, Jesus teaches that a person who commits sin is its slave [δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας] (John 10:44). Thus, Jesus laid down his life in order to pay the price for the sins of

made it clear that he was not going to be a victim upon whom death was imposed. The Gospel narratives describe unsuccessful attempts being made to execute Jesus on different occasions.<sup>54</sup> In each of these instances, the scriptures simply state that it was not yet time for Him to die. Jesus was not put to death until He declared, “Now the time has come.” Because Jesus had the right to choose the time and manner of his own death, “the power to lay down” his life and to “take it up again,” he was able to choose to become the instrument of reconciling mankind and God.<sup>55</sup>

Jesus also spoke in greater detail about his upcoming death with his disciples. He warned them that he was going to be betrayed, put on trial, beaten, and crucified. He also predicted his resurrection three days later.<sup>56</sup> As Christ engaged in the Passover feast with his disciples, he used the cup of wine and the loaf of bread to teach about the significance of his death by crucifixion. He was establishing a new covenant with his disciples and those who would choose to follow him in the future. In this covenant, he was providing for the forgiveness of sins, and salvation leading to eternal life for all who would believe in him.

### **Proclaim the Good News**

According to the Gospels, Jesus stated that another element of *missio Christi* was the preaching of the good news (εὐαγγέλιον). The εὐαγγέλιον is described several ways in the Gospels and the book of Acts. It is called the good news about (or of) the kingdom, the good

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mankind.

<sup>54</sup> John 5:18; 7:44-45; 8:20, 59; 10:39; 11:53-54.

<sup>55</sup> Frank E Gaebelein and J. D Douglas, *John-Acts*, vol. 9, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1981), 109–110.

<sup>56</sup> Matthew 16:21-28; 20:17-19; Mark 8:31-38; Luke 9:21-22.

news about Jesus the Messiah, the good news about Jesus, the good news concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus, the good news for the people of Israel, the good news about the wonderful grace of God, God's good news, and the message of salvation.<sup>57</sup> In addition to the descriptions in the Gospels and Acts, other phrases used in the New Testament include the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ, the good news of God, the good news about Jesus, the good news of Christ, the good news of salvation, the good news about Christ, the good news that God save you, and the good news of peace.<sup>58</sup> The central theme of all of these descriptors of the εὐαγγέλιον is the message about salvation from sin through Jesus Christ.

The key activity in the gospels concerning the good news is its proclamation. Just as there are several descriptors for the good news, there are also varying descriptions of the manner in which the gospel is conveyed. There are ten Greek verbs describing the action of proclaiming the good news that have been translated as *preach, spread, bring, present, tell, announce, teach, declare, defend, confirm, proclaim, and explain*.<sup>59</sup> In the four Gospels and the book of Acts, eight of the nine verbs are used.<sup>60</sup>

One of Jesus' expressed purposes for entering the world is for proclaiming the good news. The proclamation of this good news is irrevocably connected to his first purpose. That is, to proclaim the good news of the salvation and forgiveness of sins that is provided through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>57</sup> Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Mark 1:1; 1:14; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 16:16; Acts 8:4; 8:35; 10:36; 13:26; 20:24.

<sup>58</sup> Galatians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:16; Philippians 1:5; Ephesians 1:3; Ephesians 2:17.

<sup>59</sup> Acts 8:35; 13:32; 13:15; Luke 3:18; 8:1; 20:1; Romans 1:1; 1:9; 15:16; 15:1; 1 Corinthians 9:23; 1 Thessalonians; Philippians 1:7; Galatians 1:16; Ephesians 6:19.

<sup>60</sup> W. E. Vine et al., eds., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville: Nelson, 1985), Preach, Preaching. While Vines lists ten possible Greek words that may be translated "to preach or proclaim" the good news, an examination of the Greek text in the four Gospels and the book of Acts reveals that eight are used in those books. These eight verbs, in various forms, are as follows: εὐαγγελίζω, κηρύσσω, προκηρύσσω, παρῥησιάζομαι, διάγγελλε, λαλέω, and διαλογίζομαι.

The apostle Paul described the content of the gospel message in the creed that he quoted in I Corinthians 15:3-4 “I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.” In the verses immediately preceding his summary of the gospel, the apostle states that the important message he is passing on is the good news that provides salvation. He insists that the gospel message is one whose basis is well verified through eyewitnesses. It is the provision of salvation and the proclamation of the Messiah and his salvific work that paves the way for the kingdom of God.

### **Pave the Way for a Kingdom**

As mentioned earlier, the idea of the good news in the New Testament is referred to with various qualifying descriptors. One of the most frequently used descriptors is “the good news of the kingdom.” While it is certainly good news that the kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven) has arrived, a rather serious problem exists that must be addressed.<sup>61</sup> Jesus’ teachings concerning the character of kingdom and its citizens begs the question, “where is Jesus going to find people qualified to populate such a wonderful kingdom?” Indeed, even a cursory reading of the preaching and teaching of the master demonstrates the degree to which the human race has surrendered to sin and its enslaving power. The persistent rebellion by a recalcitrant human race has produced devastating consequences for individuals, for human society, and throughout the created order.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Matthew 4:17.

<sup>62</sup> Romans 8:20-24. The rebellion of man has led to the entire “creation” being subjected to the emptiness and perversion of purpose (τῆ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἣ κτίσις ὑπετάγη). Paul states that the whole creation “travails in pain together” (πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συνστενάζει καὶ συνοδίνει) expectantly awaiting the ultimate freedom from sin’s curse. The picture painted is one in which all of the created order (as a unit) has been placed under God’s curse for the sin of humankind and eagerly awaits delivery from the pain, misery and frustration resulting that curse.

If this heavenly kingdom inaugurated by Christ is to be able to come to its ultimate fruition and if the people to whom Christ preaches in the Gospels and the apostles preach to in the book of Acts are to populate such a kingdom, a tremendous transformation must take place. Such transformation would entail two humanly impossible tasks to take place: (1) The guilt of sins committed in the past and the moral debt created by the sins must be expunged from the record of individuals desiring to be a part of God's kingdom. (2) A radical transformation in the character of individuals aspiring to kingdom citizenship must be affected. Only if both of these processes take place is it possible for sinners to become the saints who could qualify against the high moral standards demanded by the king.

Christ's answer to the rich young ruler presents a powerful case in point. The young man came to Jesus with a sincere and serious question: "Good Master what good thing can I do so that I might be a part the kingdom of God?" Jesus' reply serves to underscore the stark reality of humanity's moral dilemma. Jesus replied, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God." The real problem surfaces through the demanding teachings concerning the qualities of and demands made of kingdom citizens. The qualities of kingdom citizens elucidated in passages such as the Sermon on the Mount present the type of kingdom any person would love to be a part of.<sup>63</sup> The deplorable conditions of earthly kingdoms paled when compared to that which Christ offered his listeners.

It little wonder the large crowds followed him wherever he went.<sup>64</sup> The crowds became so large that large areas were demanded in order to accommodate the number of people coming to hear Jesus preach. The multitudes desired to be a part of God's kingdom, but Christ made it clear

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<sup>63</sup> Matthew 5:1-7:29.

<sup>64</sup> Matthew 8:1; 9:36.

that his kingdom was radically different than what they expected. Christ indeed was paving the way for a new kingdom, but it was one that differed from the popular perception in several ways.

While the beginnings of the kingdom were to be seen in this present world, the ultimate fruition of the messianic kingdom was to be eschatological. Jesus proclaimed that the heavenly kingdom predicted in the Old Testament, by the prophets, was coming to pass during his earthly ministry.<sup>65</sup> He also insisted that some of his followers would see his kingdom before they died.<sup>66</sup> But he also preached that his kingdom was not an earthly kingdom, and emphasized the need for people to prepare in this life to become a part of his coming kingdom.<sup>67</sup> The people to whom Jesus was preaching, including his own disciples, were not expecting a heavenly kingdom, but rather, an earthly kingdom that would overthrow Roman domination. The question posed by Jesus' disciples in Acts chapter one demonstrates the mindset of the average Israelite concerning the role of Israel's Messiah. The disciples asked, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?"<sup>68</sup> Throughout the book of Acts there is a steady growth in development of apostolic understanding concerning the kingdom of God. By the end of the book Acts, there is a general understanding that the kingdom of God includes all nationalities of people and is much larger than the traditional idea of a restored Jewish kingdom.

### **Missio Christi and Contextualized Preaching**

A point of major emphasis in missional thinking is the importance of contextualizing the

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<sup>65</sup> Luke 4:18 – 21; 7:22-23

<sup>66</sup> Luke 9:2

<sup>67</sup> John 18:36

<sup>68</sup> Acts 1:6. The Greek phrase "Κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ" clearly presents the apostles' understanding that Jesus' mission was to free Israel from Roman bondage and restore the Davidic kingdom to Israel, with Jesus as the ruler.



presentation of the good news of Jesus Christ to each unique cultural setting. Timothy Keller emphasizes that the concept of contextualization should not involve any compromise of the gospel message. He defines contextualization as “giving people the Bible’s answers to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking, in language and forms that they can comprehend, and through appeals and arguments with forced they can feel, even if they reject them.”<sup>69</sup> This means the communication must be adapted and translated in such a way that the message connects naturally with the people’s understanding, without compromising the essence or particulars of the gospel itself. Keller states, “A contextualize gospel is marked by clarity and attractiveness, and yet still challenges sinners’ self-sufficiency and calls them to repentance.”<sup>70</sup>

The four Gospels provide abundant examples contextualization in the delivery of the good news of Jesus Christ. This principle can be seen in the general presentations given through the Gospel writers, as well as, specific examples in the encounters of Jesus with various groups and individuals.

Dean Fleming indicates that the Gospels function as “audience-oriented communication,” which moves beyond the mere transference of information. The ultimate goal of such communication is to persuade readers and move them into action. Each of the Gospel writers produced contextual documents that narrate the gospel story for specific “target audiences within the first century Mediterranean world.” While there is much material that is common in the synoptic gospels, the ordering of events and details within shared stories seems to indicate that stories and teachings of Jesus are being contextualized as the most effective communication to

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<sup>69</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 89–98.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

the given target audience. The Gospel of John demonstrates specialized contextualization through the inclusion of different material than some presented in the Synoptics, as well as, concepts and terminology that are unique to John. In addition to these general observations concerning the contextualization of the gospel presentation in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there are specific statements made by the writers that indicate contextualized presentation.

The gospels record a number of encounters between Jesus and various individuals or groups of individuals that demonstrate Jesus using the principle of contextualization. Figure 2 gives a breakdown of six specific encounters, recorded in the Gospels, in which this principle is demonstrated. As the great master teacher, Jesus readily engaged specific situations with adaptive ways of communication that enabled his hearers to grasp the good news. While the encounters listed in *figure 2* all took place within a relatively small radius of territory, different settings and sociological subgroups were addressed. In each of the six situations highlighted, Jesus contextualized his approach and presentation in ways that spoke to specific needs.

Christ approached the needs of each individual or group of individuals in different ways. His approach to Nicodemus was contextualized quite differently than was his encounter with the Samaritan woman. Given the differences in religious traditions and moral outlooks, it is unlikely that a single approach would work effectively for both. Jesus expressed the need for transformation in both lives in different terminology. With Nicodemus, Jesus presented the necessity spiritual transformation for even a pious, religious teacher. Without the experience a spiritual supernatural birth from God, participation in the kingdom of God becomes impossible. For the woman at the well, the transformation must begin with the realization and repentance of her own personal sin and a need for the life transforming presence of the spiritual water which only Christ can provide.

In all cases, Jesus began his encounters by using cultural connectors that bridge gaps in understanding with his hearers. The initial point of engagement for each encounter provided the beginning of his connection with his hearers. Jesus answered the questions about life that were being asked by his hearers without compromising gospel truth. Quite often the answers that he gave were not the answers that they wanted to hear, resulting in the rejection of his answers. The fact that they could not escape the force of his answers and arguments may be seen in the extreme responses the people offered to his teaching. The responses range from radical belief to plotting Jesus' demise. The manners in which Christ contextualized his message left no margin for neutrality, issued a clarion call for repentance.

The gospel presentations summarized in Figure 2 occurred in contexts that ranged from large public gatherings to private, in-home encounters. In Acts 2, the gospel encounter centers around the multi-lingual witness of Christians to non-believers on the day of Pentecost. Acts 3 portrays a gospel presentation that began with the healing of a crippled man. In both cases, the groups engaged were large and predominately Jewish. Both presentations were centered in the temple area of Jerusalem. In Acts 8 and Acts 10, the encounters were private affairs with Gentile God-fearers. One on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, the other in Cornelius' private home in Caesarea. The last two encounters listed in Figure 2 took place in less hospitable situations among larger groups of people who were less familiar with the story of Jesus. The last of the two occurred in the midst of skeptical Athenian philosophers of the Epicurean and Stoic persuasions.

The people addressed in the encounters represented had vastly different worldviews, lifestyles, and backgrounds. Their understanding of biblical teachings varied from having a working knowledge of Jewish scriptures to biblical illiteracy. Their understanding of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God ranged from limited exposure to the idea of kingdom being a

foreign concept. Some of the individuals in the second and third chapters of Acts may have been among the crowds who heard Jesus’ teachings on the nature, ethics, and make-up of God’s kingdom, but since the idea of the kingdom was not well-developed in the Old Testament writings, a theology of kingdom was not well-defined either. In the case of the Gentile hearers, God-fearing or not, biblical knowledge and kingdom understanding would have been at the point of illiteracy. Without some type of contextualized presentation, little connection with the good news could be hoped for.

Passage Location	John 3:1-21	John 4:5-52	John 8:21-30	Luke 5:17-26; Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:1-8	Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11	Luke 20:20-26; Mark 12:13-17; Matthew 22:15-22
Geographical Location	Aenon (Aramaic="springs" possibly in southeast hills of Mt. Karison near the northern border of Judea)	Sychar of Samaria	Jerusalem	Capernaum	Galilee	Jerusalem
Setting	Private night-time encounter	private meeting in a public place	In the Temple Treasury Area	a house full of people	Synagogue	In the Temple
Audience	Nicodemus (Pharisee and member of Sanhedien) Pharasees numbered about 6000 in the time of Jesus.	Samaritan Woman	To a large group of people	a large group of people	Man with the withered hand, Pharasees, other attendees	a large group of Jewish people
Initial Point for Engagement	Initiated by Nicodemus	Request for water	Jesus warns about his upcoming death by crucifixion	paralytic man lowered through roof	Pharasees asked a question (Matthew 12:10)	spies from the Pharisees tried to entrap Jesus
Contextualized elements in discussion	(1) Kingdom of God, (2) application of physical truths to spiritual realities, (3) appeal to nicodemus' knowledge of Jewish history of Exodus (4) Typological applicaion of narrative	(1) Linking of physical needs with spiritual needs, (2) dealt with Samaritan religious traditions with corrective truth, (3) used common ground of expetation of Messiah, (4) revelation of personal sin as evidence of messiahship.	(1) Confrontation with sin, (2) Use of "I Am" (3) foretold of his crucifixion	(1) confronted issue of his authority, (2) Confirmed his authority to forgive sins	(1) Jesus asked questions designed to uncover wrong beliefs. (2) Jesus supports his premise with healing the man.	(1) Jesus uses the Roman coin to redirect the attention of the spies. (2) Jesus asked a question that led to the obvious answer. (3) Jesus pointed out that God recognizes governmental authority.
Specific Call To Action	experience the new birth by belief in God's Son.	belief in Jesus as Messiah	Believe in Him or die in sins	Believe his claims to divine authority	(1) implied invitation to repent of wrong attitudes, (2) Invites man to stretch out his arm and be healed.	"Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."
Response	No spcific response recorded, but he spoke in defense of Jesus in John 7:50 and helped Joseph (called a secret disciple) with Jesus' burial in John 19:38-42	Belief, as evidenced by her actions and witness to her community	Many believed (vs. 30)	fear, amazement, praise of God	Jesus'enemies begin conspiring to kill him.	Amazement and silence

Figure 2. Gospel Presentations

The work of the apostles following the ascension of Jesus demonstrates a continuation of Christ’s mission in the Gospels. In the book of Acts, Jesus’ followers continued to follow his model for engaging culture. They continued to utilize the contextualization principle in communicating with the different groups and individuals they encountered. Figure 3 illustrates six apostolic encounters that demonstrate the continued use of contextualization.

As in the case that Jesus' presentations in the Gospels, the ultimate goal of good news proclamation is to bring about transformation in the lives of individuals responding in faith to the good news. The type of transformation sought can only take place through the salvation provided by the death and resurrection of Christ. The apostolic message portrayed in Figure 3 demonstrates the consistency in message in all contexts. The specific call to action in each case was the acceptance (belief) of the good news as evidenced by repentance and baptism. In every case, the emphasis was appalling individuals receiving forgiveness for their sins, which placed them in a new standing with God and as part of God's covenant people.

Passage Location	Acts 2:14-41	Acts 3:11-26	Acts 8:26-40	Acts 10:34-48	Acts 13:13-52	Acts 17:16-34
<b>Geographical Location</b>	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jerusalem Road (desert)	Caesarea	Antioch in Pisidia	Athens
<b>Setting</b>	Likely the Temple area	Solomon's Colonnade (vs. 11)	Private encounter	Cornelius' house	Synagogue	marketplace, Areopagus
<b>Audience</b>	Jews from around the Eastern Roman Empire	Israelites (vs. 12)	Ethiopian eunuch	Gentiles (Cornelius' household)	Jews and Proclaytes	Gentiles and Philosophers
<b>Initial Point for Engagement</b>	The multi-lingual witness of Christians	Healing of the lame man (vs. 10)	Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah	an appointment set by God	Jewish worship service	statue of the unknown god
<b>Contextualized elements in discussion</b>	(1) Reminder of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 (2) Presentation of the Gospel (vs. 2-36).	(1) Questions about the healing of the lame man (vs. 11-12). (2) Presentation of the Gospel (vs. 13-26).	(1) Meaning of the scripture passage needed. (2) Good news about Jesus explained from the passage in question.	(1) God's acceptance of all nationalities of people. (2) the "Good News of Peace" through Jesus (vs. 36-43)	(1) exhortation from Jewish history (2) the "Good News of the Promise" through Jesus (vs. 26-42)	(1) Commented on the religiosity of Athenians. (2) Used unknown god statue to proclaim the true God and Christian worldview. (3) Referred to pagan poets to give commandment to present call for repentance and belief in the true God. (4) Presented the resurrection as proof of this message.
<b>Specific Call To Action</b>	Acceptance of the Gospel as evidenced by repentance and baptism (vs. 38)	Repentance and belief in Jesus (vs. 19-20)	Believe the message of Jesus (as evidenced by baptism)	Believe (as evidenced by baptism)	Believe and receive justification and forgiveness of sins (vs. 38-39)	Repent and believe
<b>Response</b>	About 3000 people "saved" and baptized.	Many believed the message (Acts 4:4)	The Ethiopian requested to be baptized	Those present demonstrated belief-evidence through gift of the Spirit and were then baptized.	"Those who had been appointed to eternal life believed." (vs. 48)	Some believed (vs. 34)

Figure 3. Apostolic Encounters

The basic facts of the gospel and the clarion call for repentance and faith in the Savior remained the same from presentation to presentation. The apostles sought to connect with people in the languages and forms that they comprehended, through appeals and arguments designed to persuade them to believe. The apostles attempted to answer the questions that were being asked by the people they were attempting to engage.

On the day of Pentecost, the prevailing question among those in the crowd was, “What do these things mean?” Following the healing of the crippled man in Acts 3, the question was, “How was this man healed?” The Ethiopians question for Philip was, “who is this prophet writing about?” The question in Cornelius’ mind was, “What is God’s message for my household and I?” The question in Antioch was the nature of the good news of promise. In Athens, the philosophical issue was the true nature of God.

In each of the six gospel encounters recorded and summarized in Figure 2, the gospel messenger contextualized the good news message by connecting the culture’s question with the unchanging truths of the gospel through the languages, forms, argument, and appeals that opened the comprehension of the hearers. They proclaimed the mission of Christ to provide salvation and the forgiveness of sins to individuals who respond in repentance and faith in Christ. The result of receiving the gospel message placed believers into a new relationship with God as a part of his covenant people. In doing so, the apostles and messengers in the book of Acts followed the example of Jesus Christ in the execution of *missio Christi*.

In chapter 3, an examination of selected apologetic presentations from the second and third centuries will search for continuity in the execution of *missio Christi* with its execution in the presentations by Jesus and his messengers in Gospels and Acts.

### CHAPTER 3: EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA APOLOGETICS AND *MISSIO CHRISTI*

In order to advance the study to the next level, key apologetic writings by Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Tertullian will be examined for evidence of the missional principles found in scripture (in the lives and teachings of Jesus and the apostles). Exegesis of the texts of the early Christian era apologies will be performed to determine if missional elements of *missio Christi* are extended in the works under scrutiny.

Throughout the four Gospels and the Book of Acts, distinctive traits emerge that begin to clarify *missio Christi*. The gospels demonstrate that Jesus began to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God. As the monarch of the kingdom, Jesus set forth standards to which kingdom citizens were required to ascribe. The ethical, moral, and relational expectations that he described exceeded the legalistic standards of the religious establishment of his day. The challenge that the righteousness of kingdom citizens would need to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees set some rather lofty standards.

As pointed out in chapter 2, such standards illuminated a very serious problem. The institution of such high kingdom standards created a humanly impossible barrier. Fortunately, the Gospels present a consistent message called the good news. The proclamation of that good news involved the coming of the Savior who would provide the avenue for the forgiveness of sins and the transformation of character needed for the creation of kingdom citizens. Thus, the call to repent and believe the gospel was not an empty appeal. Through the sacrifice of his own life and vicarious resurrection, Jesus both claimed and demonstrated his authority to provide forgiveness of sins.

The proclamation of the good news in the book of Acts provides for continuation of this consistent message by the followers of Christ. In every sermon and address beginning with

Pentecost, the consistent message is that people need to repent of their sins and believe the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. The apostolic witness concerning Jesus' death by crucifixion and his bodily resurrection from the dead served as evidence and confirmation that the message of Jesus' Messiahship was true. This good news concerning the forgiveness of sins through the Messiah was proclaimed throughout Israel and all of the known Gentile world.

The message of the good news quickly proved to be counter-cultural. Jesus offered a living apologetic, as well as verbally defending his role as Messiah and Savior. In his 2009 book, *Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters*, Norman Geisler calls Jesus Christ, "the greatest apologist for Christianity who ever lived."<sup>1</sup> Christ performed miraculous signs designed to confirm the verbal defenses he used to support his claim to be the Messiah and to combat the culturally reinforced messianic misconceptions prevalent among his countrymen. The messianic fallacies were so embedded culturally that even Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist, needed to be corrected.<sup>2</sup> In response to John's question, Jesus pointed to the signs and missional markers that were to define and identify the Messiah as proof that he was the Anointed One.

On another occasion, Jesus challenged his detractors to believe in him because of his miraculous works, which confirmed the divine origin of his mission as Messiah.<sup>3</sup> Jesus pointed to specific Old Testament scriptures that he was fulfilling as evidence of his God-given role.

Christ revealed that he knew things that only God could have known. He revealed the

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<sup>1</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters*, (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2009), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, under "Introduction."

<sup>2</sup> See Matthew 11:1-7, Luke 7:20-22. John sent some of his disciples to inquire if Jesus were the Messiah or if they should be looking for someone else. Jesus answered the messengers with the living apologetic supporting *missio Christi*.

<sup>3</sup> John 10:25, 38; John 14:10-11.



thoughts of people and spoke of the activities of people in locations outside of his proximity.<sup>4</sup> In one such incident, Jesus demonstrated his deity by revealing where Nathaniel had previously been and his thoughts during his encounter with Jesus. The result of this living apologetic was the desired end of *missio Christi*; Nathaniel chose to believe in Christ.

When confronting the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar, Jesus demonstrated that he had knowledge of the past. He revealed details about the woman's personal life that were beyond what Jesus should have as a mortal. While being a stranger to the woman and the town, Jesus revealed that he knew that she had been married five times and was presently living with a man that was not her husband.<sup>5</sup> Jesus demonstrated a living apologetic that not only convinced the woman but a large number of the people of Sychar as well.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the four Gospels, Jesus uses various things to build his apologetic case supporting his Messiahship. Geisler lists nine things used by Jesus in his apologetic approach. His list includes his use of testimony, miracles, the resurrection, reason, parables, discourse, prophecy, arguments for God, and his life. While Geisler's evaluation placing Christ in the classical apologetic camp may invite considerable debate among contemporary schools of apologetic methodology, there can be little doubt that Jesus did employ apologetic arguments. This fact provides a strong case that part of *missio Christi's* methodology includes the use of apologetics.

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<sup>4</sup> John 1:43-51, Mark 2:1-12, Matthew 9:1-8, Luke 5:22, Luke 11:17.

<sup>5</sup> John 4:1-11.

<sup>6</sup> John 4:39 records that many (πολλοὶ) of the Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus. The term could be accurately translated "a great number." The text also attributes decision of the throng of Samaritans believing in Christ to the testimony of the woman. The obvious radical change in her life was evident to the people of the village. This woman who had avoided the people of Sychar out of shame now sought the people out for the purpose of sharing the good news about Jesus. Not only was Jesus' life an apologetic, the Samaritan woman's life became one as well.

The apostles clearly followed the Lord's example in regard to the use of apologetics in their kerygmatic presentations throughout the book of Acts. In Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, the apostle uses more than one line of apologetic evidence to present his case for Jesus of Nazareth being God's Messiah. He uses the phenomena occurring through the Christ-followers, rational thoughts, and prophecy to demonstrate that God was at work among them. Peter then proclaims the message about the good news of forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Christ. The final piece of evidence presented in his message was the fact that there were witnesses to the resurrected Christ. The crux of the entire apologetic message was the need for all who heard to repent and believe the message about Christ.

In Acts 10, Peter presents the case for Christ utilizing a different apologetic approach but presenting the same good news about forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Christ. Peter changed his apologetic approach in response to the difference in the people being addressed and the context in which he found himself. His apologetic approach minimized the use of prophecy and emphasized the universal nature of the message of Christ. In this sense, Peter contextualized his apologetic approach to reach a Gentile audience. Peter's presentation concluded with the appeal for repentance and faith in Christ.

Just as in the two examples above, the book of Acts demonstrates that Christ's followers carried out *missio Christi* in a similar fashion as did their master. Various apologetic devices were used to present the case for the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. The clear implication is that Christ's followers considered apologetic arguments to be a vital method for carrying out the mission of Christ.

The world of the 2nd and 3rd centuries was not a welcoming place for the fledgling faith called Christianity. In the beginning, there was no systematic persecution of Christ followers, but

their religion was illegal and oppressed at the local level. Such oppression was widespread, with the blessings of governmental authorities. The beliefs and practices of Christians were largely misunderstood. The result of this widespread misunderstanding was rumors that greatly misrepresented the practices of Christian worship. While certain general questions were held in common across the Roman Empire, there were specific questions that arose in given local contexts.

In various locations around the Roman Empire, individuals arose from within the Christian communities who offered formal answers to the questions being asked in the Early Christian era context. These individuals offered reasoned defenses to counter the misrepresentations prevalent among the nonbelievers who were attacking the Christian faith in general and persecuting individual Christians in local communities. In some cases, these defenders of the faith called apologists address dignitaries, others addressed groups of people, and still others addressed individual people.

Early Christian era apologists followed the example of Jesus, the apostles, and other messengers in the book of Acts. The select group of apologists being examined in this study demonstrate a similar apologetic methodology in their pursuit of fulfilling the mission of Christ. As such, their work appears as a natural extension of the mission of Christ as expressed in the Gospels and Acts. They use a variety of apologetic approaches to present the message of Christ. The works of the four apologists in question span a time between 100 and 300 CE. Figure 4 gives a pictorial representation of the approximate times of ministry for each of the writers in relation to the Roman rulers who governed during the ministries of these Early Christian era apologists. In each case, the elements and varying approaches of *missio Christi*, as expressed in the ministry of Jesus Christ and messengers in the fledgling church (in the book of Acts),

become apparent in the reading of the apologies under examination.

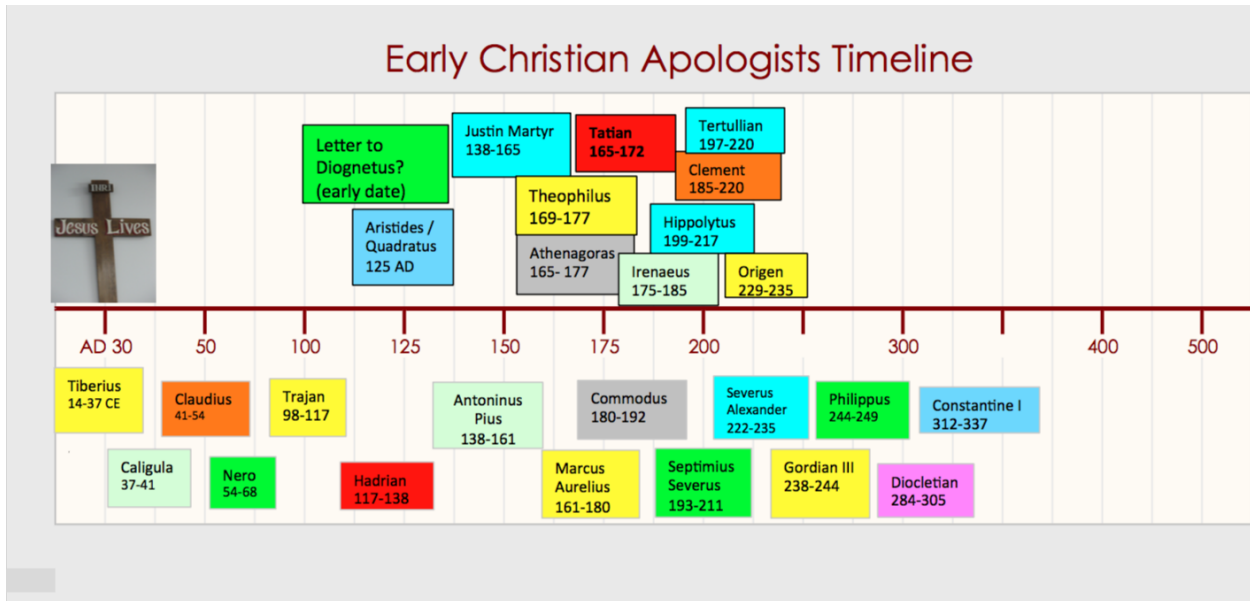


Figure 4. Timeline of Early Christian Era Apologists

### Aristides

One of the earliest known apologists was Aristides of Athens. According to the historian Eusebius, Aristides wrote an apology to Emperor Hadrian.<sup>7</sup> This work has survived in its entirety in a Syriac translation, as well in some fragmentary sources and in an edited form in a religious novel that was written by a seventh-century monk from the Monastery of St. Saba.<sup>8</sup>

Little is known about Aristides apart from what is recorded by Eusebius. According to the historian, Aristides and another apologist, Quadratus, presented apologetic writings to Emperor Hadrian in Athens in the year 2141 after Abraham, which corresponds to the Christian year 125 CE. The historian implies that Hadrian was persuaded by these petitions, coupled with a

<sup>7</sup> Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 4,3,2.

<sup>8</sup> Robert McQueen Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*, (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 34-39.

letter from Serenius Granianus, proconsul of Asia, resulting in Hadrian issuing an Imperial rescript forbidding the punishment of Christians without careful investigation and trial.

He also refers to Aristides as “a man of faith and devoted to our religion.” About a century later, Jerome stated that Aristides was a philosopher of Athens, and that he retained his philosopher’s garb after his conversion to Christianity. Jerome echoes Eusebius’ claim that Aristides presented a defense of the faith to Hadrian at the same time as Quadratus. Jerome also writes that Aristides’ Apology was extant in his day. According to Jerome, the apology was basically comprised of the opinions of philosophers (*contextum philosophorum sententiis*), and that Aristides approach was later imitated by Justin Martyr.

Even with the lack of personal information about the apologist, the fact that Aristides’ apology was written so close to the apostolic era allows for the gleaning of some vital information about the nature of early Christianity. Given the fact that the apostle John died in the late 90s and the historian Eusebius records that the apology was delivered to Hadrian in the year 125, this would place Aristides defense at less than three decades beyond the apostolic era. In that ephemeral period, it is astonishing that the Roman world had moved from a complete ignorance of Christian beliefs and practices to a prodigious plethora of fabricated distortion about Christians and what they believed.

Aristides targeted his apology to an audience of one, the “all-powerful Caesar Titus Hadrianas Antoninus, venerable and merciful.”<sup>9</sup> The Emperor was in a unique position to put an end to the official sanctioning of the localized persecution against Christians that was so prevalent in Roman society. With a single decree, Hadrian could put an end to the widespread violence against Christ followers. With this in mind, Aristides crafted his apology to answer the

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<sup>9</sup> Aristides, *The Apology Of Aristides*, chap. I.

questions that were most likely in the mind of the Emperor.

While far from virtuous, the nature of Roman society, was religiously based. As the apostle Paul found when he was at Athens, the Romans worshiped a superfluity of gods. In Paul's day, it is said that there were gods on every block of the city. In some sense, this was a good picture of the entirety of Roman civilization. Luke's depiction of what Paul had seen in Athens illustrates the depth of idolatry in Roman society. Luke records that Paul found that the city was wholly given to idolatry. Someone had even erected a monument to the unknown God. Most Romans believed that the stability of Roman society was dependent upon the blessing of the gods. Roman mythology and society had given birth to a multiplicity of gods. The average citizen had given little thought the nature of the gods that they worshiped, yet they believed that their existence was dependent upon these beings.

The common moniker of Christians was that of atheists. Since Christians rejected the idea of the pantheon of gods worshiped by the Romans, Christians were viewed as threat to the safety and security of the Roman Empire. If one did not believe in the gods, then he or she was an atheist. Roman leaders had actually accused Christians being the cause of misfortunes and natural disasters because of their failure to worship the Roman gods. According to the popular train of thought, the gods were angry because the Christians refused to worship them and, therefore, withheld their benevolent protection.

Aristides set out dispel the common misconception that Christians were dangerous to Roman society and therefore an enemy of the state. If he were to be able to open the door for presenting the good news of Jesus Christ and extend the mission of Christ in his time, it was imperative that he correct the popularly-held fabricated persona of Christians. In order to accomplish this, the initial enquiry to be answered was, "if Christians do not worship the Roman

gods, who do they worship?"

Aristides' apology begins by answering the question regarding the object of Christian worship. The apologist presents an eloquent, thoughtful philosophy that establishes the Christian idea of God as an infinite and indescribable being who created all things and sustains all things by His own power. He is the self-existing creator and the unmoved mover in creation. He created the cosmos *ex nihilo* for the benefit of mankind. He is formless and unlimited. He is all-powerful, wise, and needless, yet needed by all creation. As such, men should serve and glorify Him as the only true and living God.

The apologist's argument confronts the false beliefs and practices in Roman society in a similar fashion as the argument given by the apostle Paul to the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17. Like Paul, Aristides refutes the pagan idea of polytheism, championing the Christian monotheistic God as creator and the ultimate judge of all men. Just as the apostle championed the idea that the nature of God cannot be represented by any type of art that man may devise, the apologist declares that God cannot be represented by man-made idols that cannot speak or defend themselves.

Aristides also describes Christ as the Son of the Most-High God. Christ was revealed by the Holy Spirit, descended from heaven, born of a Hebrew virgin, crucified by the Jews, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven. These basic tenets of the Christian gospel he entrusted to the apostles, whom he sent into the world to share His message. The Apology of Aristides becomes an expression *missio Christi* as it encapsulates the good news of Jesus Christ. Just as the Lord and his apostles actively expressed the message of the cross and Jesus his subsequent resurrection as a life-transforming message for the forgiveness of sins, the apologist follows suit by presenting the gospel in his presentation.

Another similarity between Paul's presentation to the Athenian philosophers and Aristides apology to Hadrian is the fact that both men chose to avoid any deep treatment of Jewish prophecy concerning the Messiah. In fact, neither Paul nor Aristide these make any mention of Old Testament Scripture. This choice in contextualization by both men it is likely due to the ignorance other audiences of the Hebrew Scriptures. They chose instead to use a philosophical approach.

The apology divides mankind into four tribes: Barbarians, Greeks, Hebrews, and Christians. According to Aristides, Barbarians and Greeks count their descent from a multiplicity of gods. While Paul makes only a fleeting reference to the large number of statues representing the Greek gods and chose to focus on the unknown God, Aristides chose to go into great depth in his discussion of the Greek, Barbarian, and Egyptian gods. The apologist engaged in a rather lengthy polemical discussion of the various gods worshiped in Roman culture, pointing out why each of them is undeserving of being worshiped. These pagan deities were often personifications of things within the created order, such as water, fire, wind, or the sun. Individual Greek gods such as Kronos, Zeus, Hermes, Asclepius, Aries, Dionysius, Artemis, Aphrodite, Apollo, and Tammuz, are likewise proclaimed as unworthy of worship due to their personal immoral conduct and inability to help those of their own kind. In each case, Aristides asks the question, if these gods are unable to help themselves, how can they help others? He accuses non-Christians (especially the Greeks) of allowing the immorality of their gods to influence the way that they live. In fact, the Greeks follow the base moral practices of which they have accused Christians. He specifically names practices such as homosexual intercourse, Oedipal sexual intercourse, and other forms of "monstrous impurity."

Jews, while holding to monotheism, also err from true knowledge. They approach the



truth closer than do other nations; however, their beliefs and practices still fall short of the truth. Aristides contains that the Jews do not serve God, but rather angels; the feasts and the rituals performed by the home are not accurately observed.

In his Apology, Aristides argued that non-Christians had an inadequate view of God. Barbarians (also identified with Egyptians in one manuscript) went astray because they worshiped the changeable elements of nature, which are clearly limited creations and unable to fulfill the role of God. The error of the Greeks was that their gods were anthropomorphic, with human weaknesses. The Jews were close to the truth since they worshiped one God but were misled by being ritual-centered. The Christian tribe alone has acquired and employed the whole truth.

Aristides states that “Christians are honest and pious, and the truth is set before their eyes, and they are long-suffering.” Christ’s followers had experienced the life-transforming message of Jesus Christ. This transformation enabled believers to compassionately endure the persecution from people who are destitute of knowledge. Instead of retaliating, they offered prayer for those who persecuted them, that they might repent of their errors. The radical change in worldview experience by believers had, instead of making them a threat to society, transformed them into better citizens of the Roman Empire.

In light of the logic of their beliefs and the uprightness of their behaviors, Aristides insists that Christians should be looked upon with favor and sought-out for counsel, instead of being forced to endure persecution. Though generally Aristides did not rely on philosophical nuances, he did demonstrate his familiarity with the works of pagan philosophers. His acquaintance with pagan religion and philosophy is reminiscent of that which was expressed by the apostle Paul at the Acropolis. Early church father Jerome was so impressed with the philosophical acumen

demonstrated in the apology, that he praised Aristides as a *philosophus eloquentissimus et sub pristine habitu discipulus Christi*, and his Apology as an *iudicium ingenii eius apud philologos*.<sup>10</sup>

### **Justin Martyr**

Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) was born at Flavis Neapolis. Having received a classic Greek education, Justin received philosophical training in Stoic, Pythagorean, Platonist, and Peripatetic philosophies but became disillusioned with all of them.<sup>11</sup> After rejecting them, he met an old Christian man in the vicinity of the seashore who engaged him in a discussion about God and claimed that the testimony of the prophets is more trustworthy than the logic of philosophers. It was this argument that Justin affirms as the catalyst which stimulated a love of Christ in him and led him to embrace Christianity.<sup>12</sup> The gallant conduct of Christians who were facing execution also played a significant role in his decision to become a Christian.<sup>13</sup> He then adopted the attire of a philosopher and traveled about teaching. During the reign of Antoninus Pius, he started his school in Rome. One of Justin's more famous pupils was Tatian. In the reign of Marcus Aurelius, after disputing with the cynic philosopher Crescens, he was accused by the latter to the authorities, then tried, and probably martyred in 165.

Justin penned three apologies that will be examined in this study: His *First* and *Second* Apologies, and the *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. In each case, Justin contextualized his argument for the Christian faith for his specific target audience. Such contextualization is a vital

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<sup>10</sup> Jerome. *De Viris Illustribus*, 20.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, sec. Dialogue with Trypho II.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, III.I.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* See Apology II.XXII.

communicative practice in the performance of *missio Christi*. If the good news message is to be conveyed in a way that is able to be understood and responded to, it must be contextualized.

Justin's first *Apology* was written to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius, the emperor's sons, Verissimus and Lucius, the Senate, and the Roman citizens.<sup>14</sup> The First Apology was likely written between 155-156 CE, a date based on the reference to Felix as a recent prefect of Egypt.<sup>15</sup> Robert Grant claims that this Apology was written in response to the martyrdom of Polycarp. This data would provide a possible explanation as to why the Apology heavily focused on punishment by fire.<sup>16</sup>

The first *Apology* focuses on some key themes and requests regarding defending Christianity, and more specifically, Christians against unjust persecution. The apologist begins with a forceful request for governmental authorities and community leaders to embrace the pursuit of truth, rather than the tide of public opinion when putting accused Christians on trial. Justin points out the injustice of condemning a person for being a Christian when no crime or evil deed has been committed by the Christian. Justin declares that he asks only that Christians be tried based upon hard evidence; if the individual is guilty of a real crime, then they should be convicted because of the evidence against them.

Justin goes to great lengths to belie the misconceptions of pagans about the beliefs and practices of Christians. In the process of correcting the misconceptions, Justin points out that the

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander Roberts et al., *The Apologies of Justin Martyr* (Greenwood, WI: Suzeteo Enterprises, 2012), I, I.; and Justin, *The Works Now Extant of S. Justin the Martyr, Translated, with Notes and Indices* (Oxford: J. H. and Jas. Parker; F. and J. Rivington, 1861), I, I.

<sup>15</sup> Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 50–55; and Everett Ferguson, John D. Woodbridge, and Frank A. James, *Church History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 80. Antonius Pius reigned during the years of 137-161 CE. Also, internal evidence in the *First Apology* suggests a date within this time frame, most likely at or around the generally accepted dating of 144-151, due to the author's statement that he is writing 150 years after the birth of Christ (XLVI, I). External evidence would place the writing of the Apology at around 156. This is based upon the probable date of Polycarp's martyrdom, which is the probable catalyst for the authorship of Justin's *First Apology*.

<sup>16</sup> Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 50–55.

accusers of Christians are guilty of the same things of which they accuse Christians. He details the typical lifestyle shared within the Christian community and demonstrates that the accusations commonly leveled against Christians are inconsistent with their beliefs and praxis. In fact, judging Christians based on the evidence of their deeds and character would lead to Christians being known as good people, not evil ones.

After discussing at length issues related to the teachings of how Christians are to live, Justin focuses on a clear presentation of the Christian gospel about Jesus Christ. The proclamation of the good news, contextually conveyed, provides an effective extension of *missio Christi* to the apologist's audience. While he admits that Christians worship Christ to the exclusion of the heathen gods, he denies that Christians do not believe in God—one God. He then explains in great detail about messianic prophecy and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He is careful to include in his presentation the call to repentance and faith in Christ. The apologist also gives a description of Christian worship, including the practices of baptism, the Eucharist, and Christian greetings. Based on the evidence presented, Justin then appeals again for justice to be extended toward Christians and against those who would falsely accuse Christians.

The first nine chapters of Justin's apology comprise an extended plea for justice for Christians. He provides an extended appeal to reason to his audience as philosophers seeking truth.<sup>17</sup> Justin points out the injustice of condemning people because they are called by a particular name. In this particular section, he uses testimony (based upon the beliefs of Christianity) as an apologetic device. He insists that Christians, like anyone else, be tried for deeds that they have done rather than because they are called by a particular name (Christian). Justin's use of Christian testimony as an apologetic device acquired its validity from the very

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<sup>17</sup> Roberts et al., *The Apologies of Justin*, I, II.

teachings of Christ related to the things that Christians had been accused of, such as cannibalism, atheism, gross sexual immorality, and being enemies of the state.

The fact that Christians were those who strove to obey the teachings of Christ belied the accusations that had been levied against them by unbelievers. Justin quoted the teachings of Jesus Christ on all of the issues under question. He then pointed out that Christians could not be guilty of the things they were being accused of without violating the teachings of Christ and being in gross violation of the rules within the Christian community. The apologist openly challenged the Roman officials comprising his audience to investigate the merits of each individual case against a believer. He conceded that any individual being found guilty of specific charges of wrongdoing should be punished.<sup>18</sup> The assistance of the Christian community was even offered in carrying out such punishment.<sup>19</sup>

While the purpose of Justin's first *Apology* was to defend Christians against injustice, the majority of this work serves to build an evangelistic apologetic and deliver a polemic against Roman polytheism, thereby advancing *missio Christi*. Chapters one through eight of the *Apology* focus on Justin's appeal for justice to Christians who are on trial. Chapters nine through sixty-seven compare and contrast the beliefs and practices of Christians to those of polytheistic Roman philosophy. As he builds his case, Justin specifically focuses on Christian teachings related to Roman accusations.

In chapters 6 through 10, Justin exposes the absurdity of the atheism allegation against Christians. He explains that Christians worship the one true God, who is going to judge every person. He admits that Christians do not worship the Roman gods and assert that such beings are

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<sup>18</sup> IRoberts et al., *The Apologies of Justin*, I, II.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

not gods, but rather “wicked and impious demons.”<sup>20</sup> He points out that one of their philosophers, Plato, also spoke of men being judged in the afterlife.<sup>21</sup> Justin often tried to find common ground in the works of poets and philosophers upon which to build his arguments. The apostle Paul demonstrated the use of this type of cultural connections as bridges to communications as he interacted with the Athenian philosophers at the Acropolis.

Justin seems to take his cue from the apostles in his references to the teachings of Christ and especially to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. In chapter eight, he refers to Jesus as “our teacher.... Who was also born for this purpose, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the times of Tiberius Caesar; and that we reasonably worship him, having learned that he is the son of the true God himself.”<sup>22</sup> Later in the Apology, he records that Jesus Christ was promised by the Jewish prophets and that he would heal “every disease and every sickness and raise the dead, and be hated, and unrecognized, and crucified, and die and rise again, and ascend to heaven, and be called the Son of God.”<sup>23</sup> Justin also points out that the angel had prophesied to Mary, that she was going to conceive and bear a son, named Jesus, who would “save his people from their sins.”<sup>24</sup>

Surprisingly, Justin makes extensive use of Jewish prophecy in building his case for the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. This practice puts him in stark contrast with Aristides, who seems to focus more on the philosophical arguments in favor of Christianity. While both apologists were

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<sup>20</sup> Roberts et al., *The Apologies of Justin*, I, V.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., I, IIX. While pointing out that both Plato and Christ both taught that there would be posthumous punishment for the wicked, Justin clarifies that the judgment would be eternal rather than one thousand years as Plato supposed. He also made the assertion that Jesus Christ will be the judge, rather than Rhadamanthus and Minos. (see I, VII).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., I, XIII.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., I, XXXI.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., I, XXXIII.

writing to Roman officials, their styles of argument were quite different. Aristides could be referred to as a scriptural minimalist in his apologetic arguments; Justin, on the other hand, makes extensive use of Old Testament Scripture quotes from Jesus Christ. Justin confirms the uniqueness of Jesus Christ by discussing Old Testament prophetic utterances detailing specifics about Jesus' life, including his virgin birth, place of birth, and entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey. He also pointed out specific prophecies about various details occurring during the trials and crucifixion of Christ. While this might seem to be a surprising contextualization move by Justin as he writes to Gentile governmental leaders, presenting an abundance of strong evidence about Christ would likely work well with a highly-intellectual and philosophically-oriented audience.

Throughout the apology, Justin appears to be setting forth his argument in a most persuasive way. He speaks of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ with great passion. He bears testimony to his own conversion experience in the change that has taken place in his life. He reports of the transformation that has taken place in the lives of Christians who have repented and trusted Christ for salvation. The truth of the Christian message and godly lifestyle of Christ-followers is compared and contrasted with the blatant immorality and false teachings associated with the Roman gods. As the Apostle Paul did with King Agrippa, Justin reasons with his audience concerning righteousness in the judgment to come. In the conclusion of his apology, the apologist issues of brief, veiled appeal to which he hopes his audience will respond.

Even in the midst of appealing for justice to be performed by Roman judges in response to Christians who have been falsely accused of wrongdoing, Justin's *First Apology* seeks to fulfill *missio Christi*. The consistent and clear message of salvation being provided by the death

and resurrection of Jesus Christ as presented with view to a response. The good news of the heavenly kingdom being constructed of transformed individuals from all nations is presented.

Justin contextualizes his apologetic presentation to maximize communication with his audience as he seeks to answer the questions that were evidently being asked. A careful reading of this work elucidates the following questions:

- (1) Are not Christians really atheists?
- (2) Why do Christians not worship the Roman gods?
- (3) What and how do Christians worship?
- (4) What is this kingdom that Christians are looking for?
- (5) Are Christians really sexually immoral people?
- (6) How is it that Christians can bear injustice and still pray for their enemies?
- (7) Are Christians treasonous rebels?
- (8) What is this resurrection that Christians talk about?
- (9) If the Christian message is true, why is it so new?
- (10) How can the Christian Savior be the son of God?
- (11) Was not Christ really just a magician?
- (12) What makes Christ so unique?
- (13) Why do Christians practice baptism and communion?

In contrast to the general nature of his first apologetic work, the *Second Apology* of Justin the Martyr appears to have been triggered by a specific event that was a recent memory for the writer. Three Christians had been beheaded by order of the Roman prefect, Urbicus, because of their open confession to being Christ-followers.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 53–55.



The *Second Apology* appears to be written to the Roman Senate, rather than to Emperor Antonius Pius, like his *First Apology*. There are some scholars who believe that the Second Apology was written as an appendix to the *First Apology*, though there is a lack of evidence to provide a conclusive argument in favor of this hypothesis. The *Second Apology* was written in Rome at some time between 148 and 161 CE.<sup>26</sup> If the second apology was not an appendix to the first, the date of authorship was likely somewhere between 157 and 161.

Justin frames his argument with specific examples of the unjust condemnation of Christians by governmental officials in response to charges advanced by non-Christians. The charges made against the Christians named in the *Apology* were emotional charges made without factual basis of evildoing. The prefect had executed Christians, like Ptolemæus, based upon the *nomen* alone; that is, they were convicted of being a Christian.<sup>27</sup>

The apologist makes a somewhat humorous accusation against one of the individuals whom he expects to retaliate against him for this apology. Justin uses a play on three Greek words that are similar in spelling and sound, but different in meaning. He states that Crescens is a lover of φιλοψόφου (noise) and φιλοκόμπου (boasting), but not a lover of φιλοσόφου (wisdom).<sup>28</sup> He accuses Crescens of speaking against that of which he has no knowledge. He accuses Crescens of being utterly wicked and παμπόνηρος (depraved) as a “slave of popular and

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<sup>26</sup> Johannes Quasten, *The Beginnings of Patristic Literature: From the Apostles Creed to Irenaeus*, vol. 1, *Patrology* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1986), 201–04.

<sup>27</sup> Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, sec. Second Apology II.

<sup>28</sup> Justin, *The Works Now Extant of S. Justin the Martyr*, Apology of Justin 2.3.

senseless opinion and fear.”<sup>29</sup> Justin states that such is the issue that he has with all who cause the unjust persecution against Christians.

The apologist answers the absurd question posed to Christians about the issue of suicide. Christians do not commit suicide because that would be contrary to the will and purpose of God.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the idea that doing God’s way should produce immunity from persecution is also erroneous. He points out that such persecution is orchestrated by demons, who have been seeking to use and abuse people throughout the ages. The fact that demons should catalyze persecution against God’s people should produce no surprise.<sup>31</sup>

In chapter six, Justin writes an encapsulated gospel presentation, clearly presenting the message of Christ's mission in the incarnation. He states that the reason that God does not destroy the world and end the wickedness of mankind is the presence in the world of Christians. Were it not for the presence of Christians, those who sit in judgment of Christians would themselves be subject to the fires of God’s judgment. The demons, who are the instigators of the evil in the hearts of the persecutors will likewise be subject to God’s judgment for the evil being done to Christians.<sup>32</sup>

Justin argues that the philosophers who denigrate the idea of eternal judgment for wickedness and eternal reward for the righteous demonstrate their obstinacy and ignorance. He reminds the readers of the parable of Xenophon about Hercules and the appearance of Virtue and Vice. Neither appear as they truly are nor according to their outcome. Likewise, those who

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<sup>29</sup> Justin, *The Writings of Justin Martyr* (Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 2007), sec. Second Apology, III.

<sup>30</sup> Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, sec. Second Apology IV.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. Second Apology V.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. Second Apology VIII.

follow demonically devised illusions against Christians will one day find that they have been deceived.<sup>33</sup>

In his *Second Apology*, Justin provides a contextualized apologetic message that bears similarities with the message preached by Jesus and his apostles. As he defends Christians through the use of fact and testimony, Justin presents the gospel in a nutshell. The apologist argues from his personal testimony and those of other Christians, that the readers need to repent of their debauchery, which is the basis of their accusations against Christians. The evil that they assume to originate with Christ to be carried out by his followers actually originates in the myths of pagan gods and is perpetuated in the lives of their devotees. Justin then issues to the readers a call to repentance and urges that the Apology be published for all to read and that real justice will prevail throughout the empire and the world.<sup>34</sup>

*The Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* is the oldest extant Christian apology against the Jews.<sup>35</sup> The date of composition for the work is impossible to pinpoint. The only affirmation for a date of authorship that can be made is that it was written after the *First Apology*. *The Dialogue* evidently took place at Ephesus after the conclusion of a Jewish war, which most scholars believe to have been the war of Barchochebas.<sup>36</sup> Eusebius attests to the historicity of *The Dialogue with Trypho* through mentioning the whole work, as well as referencing various parts of the work.<sup>37</sup> As indicated in its title, the target audience of this apology was Jewish; whereas,

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<sup>33</sup> Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Second Apology IX–XI.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. Second Apology XII–XV.

<sup>35</sup> Quasten, *The Beginnings of Patristic Literature*, 1:202–04.

<sup>36</sup> Grant, *Greek Apologists*, 52; James Donaldson, *A Critical History of Christian Literature and Doctrine: From the Death of the Apostles to the Nicene Council*, vol. 1, The Apostolic Fathers (London: MacMillan and Co., 1886), 89.

<sup>37</sup> Donaldson, *A Critical History*, vol. 2, 86.

the first and second apologies were targeted to Gentiles.

*The Dialogue* is the earliest comprehensive explanation of the reasons for regarding Jesus Christ as the Messiah of the Old Testament and the first systematic effort to reveal the incorrect view of the Jews regarding Christianity. The discussion is extensive, lasting for two days. In the course of the discussion, the apologist shares the story of his philosophical journey and conversion to Christianity.<sup>38</sup> *The Dialogue* discusses the inadequacy of pagan philosophical ideas such as the immortality of the soul and transmigration of the soul.<sup>39</sup> Justin also delves extensively into Old Testament prophecy, using many references to the Old Testament scriptures in order to present the biblical testimony to Jesus Christ.

As Justin exposed the problems with pagan philosophy, Trypho could heartily agree. As a Jew, he found himself in complete agreement concerning the inadequacy of philosophies such as Pythagoreanism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism. Trypho found issue with Justin as the apologist shared the testimony of his conversion to Christianity. Trypho's prejudice against Christianity and his ignorance of its message were demonstrated in his response to Justin's Testimony:

I approve of your other remarks, and admire the eagerness with which you study divine things but it were better for you to still to abide in the philosophy of Plato, or of some other man, cultivating endurance, self-control, and moderation, rather than be deceived by false words, and follow the opinions of men of no reputation For if you remain in that mode of philosophy, and live blamelessly a hope of a better destiny were left to you, but when you forsaken God and reposed confidence in man, what safety still awaits you.<sup>40</sup>

In response to the Inquirer's statement the apologist attempts to maintain an amiable

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<sup>38</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885) Logos E-Book, 198-269.

<sup>39</sup> Roberts et al., *The Apologies of Justin*, Dialogue With Trypho V.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Dialogue with Trypho VIII.

approach by assuming ignorance of Christ on the part of his audience. Justin challenged his adversary to listen on the basis of a common pursuit of truth and insists that he has not been deceived nor that he believed in empty fables or words without any foundation.<sup>41</sup> He then uses Old Testament Scripture to waive an extensive case for the truth of the Christian message about Jesus Christ. In the course of the lengthy discussion with Trypho, Justin reasons from the writings of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms to prove not only the Messiahship of Christ, but the reason for his death on the cross.

The apologist proclaims that Isaiah taught that sins are forgiven through the blood of Christ that was poured out on the cross.<sup>42</sup> It is through conversion of the heart, testified of in baptism, that righteousness is imparted to the believer.<sup>43</sup> The extensive discussion presents an in-depth look at the good news and its Old Testament roots. In the last chapter of the apology, Justin extends the appeal for Trypho and his companions to repent and believe in Christ. His final statement to them is, “I exhort you to give all diligence in this very great struggle for your salvation, and to be earnest in setting a higher value on the Christ of the Almighty God than on your own teachers.”<sup>44</sup>

The apologist argues then against the errant locus of the Jews about the purpose of the Mosaic law and the correct path to biblical salvation.<sup>45</sup> He delves deeply into expositions of various points of the Jewish Law, explaining the divine purpose of each point. The ways of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Dialogue with Trypho IX.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Dialogue with Trypho XIII.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. XIV.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., CXLII.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Christ are expounded and demonstrated as being superior to Judaism (in much the same way as the writer of Hebrews did). Justin proclaims plainly that salvation for the Jews only comes through Jesus Christ. Righteousness may not be realized by any individual apart from a faith in Christ.

Justin points out that the Jews have led the way in causing Christians to suffer persecution. He states that instead of attempting to punish those who are truly obedient to God by following his Messiah, Jewish people should examine the facts, admit their failings, and experience conversion of the heart through Christ. The apologist contends that those open to making an honest search of the scriptures, comparing them to Christ and his teachings, will find themselves trusting in and following Christ.<sup>46</sup>

Pierre Ndoumaï recognizes that Justin operates under some basic principles in his attempt to engage unbelievers in different contexts. (1) He states that Justin operates with an openness and civility to his audience, while maintaining a view to his ultimate aim. (2) Openness and dialog were bridge that open the way for the presentation of the message of Christ. For Justin, dialogue and proclamation went hand in hand. Ndoumai insists that for Justin and the other Early Christian era apologists, “*dialogue et proclamation vont de pair. Or, la proclamation implique l’appel à la conversion.*”<sup>47</sup> Thus, the natural outcome of all dialogue with unbelievers was the call for belief and conversion. Justin's apologetic proclamation of Jesus Christ was contextualized to fit his audience but kept focus on the basic goal of evangelization and conversion.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Ndoumaï, “Justin Martyr et le dialogue interreligieux contemporain,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 66, no. 3 (2010): 547–56.

## Tatian

Tatian was a second-century Christian apologist and philosopher. He was the author of the first known harmony of the Gospels called the *Diatessaron* (διὰ τεσσάρων), the *Address to the Greeks*, and a number of other works that survive only in text fragments or are mentioned *en passant* by other historical Christian authors, such as Eusebius or Irenaeus of Lyons. Several sources, including the apologist himself, indicate that Tatian was an Assyrian. Aside from this and a few other facts, there is little surviving biographical information about him. Based on the descriptions of his life by other church fathers and his own works, it is supposed that he was born around 120 CE and died between 180-190.

In his *Address to the Greeks*, Tatian states that he was born in Assyria into a wealthy family.<sup>48</sup> He also states that he was educated in rhetoric, travelled extensively, gained a thorough knowledge of Greek philosophy and religion, and was initiated into a mystery cult.<sup>49</sup> He was at first a zealous scholar of heathen literature and seems to have been especially fervent in his study of philosophy. He found the bewildering mazes of Greek speculation unsatisfactory, and he became completely dismayed with the prevailing religions of the Roman culture.

At some point, Tatian visited Rome, where he became acquainted with and became a disciple of Justin Martyr.<sup>50</sup> The evidence indicates that Tatian's conversion to Christianity was not due to some personal cataclysmic event, but rather was the result of a robust, rational search. Tatian states, "I sought how I might be able to discover the truth. And, while I was giving my

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<sup>48</sup> Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), chap. 29.1.

<sup>49</sup> Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, eds., secs. 35.1–2, 29.1.

<sup>50</sup> Jakob Engberg, ed., *In Defense of Christianity: Early Christian Apologists*, vol. 15, *Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 67–79.

most earnest attention to the matter, I happened to meet with certain barbaric writings.”<sup>51</sup> The depth of his search is evident throughout his *Address to the Greeks*, as he exposes Greek culture with a keen understanding that could have only been gained through vigorous personal study. While disenchanted with the empty philosophies of men, he was introduced to the Christian scriptures and was powerfully drawn by the moral purity taught therein.<sup>52</sup> Tatian was equally challenged by the means of deliverance from the bondage to sin proclaimed by the Christian gospel. Tatian encountered “the easily intelligible account of the creation of the world,” which he found to logically cohere far better than any of the pagan philosophies or religions. As a result, the theology of creation became important to his apologetic project, as well as did the doctrine of monotheism, which became a vital part of his philosophical approach to Christian theology.

The formative years of Christianity discipleship were under orthodox Christian teaching, for Irenaeus adds his confirmation of the reports that Tatian was a student of Justin. According to Eusebius, it seems that Tatian’s pre-conversion philosophical quest may have influenced his thinking following the martyrdom of his mentor. The possibility that past philosophical study might have encroached upon the apologist’s post-Justinian theological ideas is supported by Irenaeus’ statement that Tatian became a conceited teacher and heretic following Justin’s martyrdom. The seriousness of Tatian’s alleged errors is underscored by Eusebius recording that Tatian was excommunicated from the Roman congregation in 172 CE. Epiphanius reports that Tatian established his own school in Mesopotamia the same year, called the Encratites, that is, “the self-controlled,” or, “the masters of themselves.” Tatian finally settled at Antioch, acquiring

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<sup>51</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, ed. Molly Whittaker, (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press, 1982), sec. 29.1.

<sup>52</sup> Engberg, *In Defense of Christianity*, 67–79.



a considerable number of disciples.<sup>53</sup>

Gerald Hawthorne takes the opposing view of Tatian's apostasy in his 1964 article in the *Harvard Theological Review*. He calls the apologist "a great missionary leader in the East," and takes the position that Irenaeus may have misunderstood Tatian's theology, having based his opinion solely upon the *Address to the Greeks*.<sup>54</sup> Osbourne points out that some orthodox writers close to Tatian's time regarded him not only as orthodox, but also as a defender of orthodoxy. In addition, Osbourne make a case that Tatian may have been the founder of Assyrian Christianity.<sup>55</sup>

Some scholars believe that most of Tatian's works, whether written before or after his excommunication, are no longer extant because of his reputation for formulating heresy. Fortunately, his *Address to the Greeks* has been preserved in spite of this late-life reputation as a heretic. The apologetic work gives valuable insight into the world of the second-century Christian church; and even if Tatian did eventually err theologically, the *Address* appears to be written during the apologist's more orthodox times.

There are several key themes addressed in the *Address to the Greeks* that form the basis of Tatian's apologetic argument. The key themes provide possible clues to the questions he was seeking to answer in his discourse. The apologist frames his answer by drawing stark contrasts between non-Christian religion and philosophy and Christianity, through using both polemics against the Greeks and positive apologetic defenses of Christian positions. In the pages that follow, some key themes will be drawn from the text of the *Address to the Greeks* in an effort to

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<sup>53</sup> Engberg, *In Defense of Christianity*, 67-79.

<sup>54</sup> Gerald Hawthorne, "Tatian and His Discourse to the Greeks on JSTOR," *The Harvard Theological Review* 57, no. 3 (July 1964): 165-66.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

arrive at the accusations or questions against which Tatian was making his defense.

Tatian begins his address with an obviously polemical rant against the philosophers of his day. He points out the inconsistencies, excesses, and boasts of the philosophers who were his contemporaries. According to the apologist, the prideful boastings of the heathen philosophers about their importance in knowledge, wisdom, and culture is based upon lies. While Greek philosophers boasted about being the ones to invent methods for forecasting the future, mathematics, and written communication, Tatian presents the true origins of each and calls on the philosophers to cease claiming credit for things over which they had no influence.<sup>56</sup> He then singles-out specific pagan philosophers, such as Diogenes, Aristippus, Plato, and Aristotle, demonstrating the failures and fallacies of their writings.<sup>57</sup> The apologist polemicizes against philosophers such as Heraclitus, Euripides, Socrates, Empedocles, Pherecydes, and Crates. He then issues a warning to avoid such people: “Wherefore be not led away by the solemn assemblies of philosophers who are no philosophers, who dogmatize one against the other, though each one vents but the crude fancies of the moment. They have, moreover, many collisions among themselves; each one hates the other; they indulge in conflicting opinions, and their arrogance makes them eager for the highest places.”<sup>58</sup> In the mind of Tatian, the problematic and conflicting philosophies, errant attitudes, and inconsistent lives of the pagan philosophers demonstrate that to follow any of them is to embark down the wrong path.<sup>59</sup>

Even a cursory comparison between the approaches of Tatian and his teacher Justin

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<sup>56</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, chap. 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, chaps. 1–2.

reveals sharp contrasts between them even in their views of pagan philosophy. Justin attempts to find some elements of truth in the writings of some Greek thinkers, on the other hand, Tatian insists upon complete renunciation of all Greek philosophy. Justin, in his defense of Christianity, pays high respect to non-Christian philosophy. Tatian portrays only a loathing hatred of all Greek civilization, art, science, and language. The apologist ridicules pagan deities as inventions of humans, corrupt, and unworthy of veneration. Religion that should promote purity and righteousness becomes the catalyst of immorality and corruption in religious adherents.<sup>60</sup> In light of the issues raised in the address, Greek philosophy and the religions connected with it are demonstrably false and completely devoid of truth.

There seems to be a conscious exclusion of biblical and Christological concepts. While it would seem that these concepts might be vital, it is probably because of his presumed audience. He is clearly targeting a non-Christian audience. Since his pagan readers are not cognizant of any concept of a Christian Savior, he chooses to not deal with Christology and emphasizes instead a theology of creation, which is more likely to arouse the interest of the pagan philosophers that were his contemporaries. Since Tatian's goal is to preach the Christian message to the Greco-Roman populous, his best method is to employ a philosophical mindset which was not foreign to his readers.

Christianity's God is superior to the gods of the Greeks, and Christianity, in contrast with corrupt Greek philosophy, is true philosophy. Where pagan religion and philosophy fail due to a weak cosmology and corrupted morality, Christianity succeeds. Tatian combines the philosophical idea of God's absolute transcendence with the Judeo-Christian idea of monotheism by describing God as transcendent to his created world. God is the creator of all things and is the

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<sup>60</sup> Quasten, *The Beginnings of Patristic Literature*, 220-221.

“necessary ground (ὑπόστασις) of all being,” for things visible and invisible. He overcomes some of the problem with the idea of transcendence with his concept of Logos, based upon an adaptation of the Johannine prologue. The transcendent God, with logos-power (διὰ λογικῆς δυνάμεως), has created all that exists from nothing. While there is an absence of an in-depth Christology, the apologist is careful to create literary ties that clearly make God and the Logos equal. These ties include the inclusion of using identical terminology when describing each person. Thus, the transcendent God, acting through the agent of the power of the Logos (Son) brings everything into being and is the necessary ground of all.<sup>61</sup> Tatian’s treatment of cosmology is first time the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* is developed in a Christian context. The concept of “creation from nothing” is foundational to the Christian concept of cosmology. In this concept, Christianity presents a serious revolt against second-century Greek thought.<sup>62</sup>

For Tatian, God’s creative activity always results in good. Indeed, evil is not the creation of God. In regard to things in nature being used for evil, the apologist writes, “But God, if He had prepared these things to effect just what men wish, would be a Producer of evil things; whereas He Himself produced everything which has good qualities, but the profligacy of the demons has made use of the productions of nature for evil purposes, and the appearance of evil which these wear is from them, and not from the perfect God.”<sup>63</sup> While some have pointed in ridicule or in justifying jest to substances made from a part of nature to produce evil results or to

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<sup>61</sup> Osborne, “Tatian’s Discourse to the Greeks,” 103–04.

<sup>62</sup> Engberg, *In Defense of Christianity*, 67–79.

<sup>63</sup> Tatian, “Address of Tatian to the Greeks,” in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. J. E. Ryland, vol. 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 72.

encourage profligate behavior as evidence that God is the author of evil, in reality, the evil comes from demonic perversion or human pilfering.

Tatian is careful to correct the views of Middle Platonists and Gnostics about the origin of matter. Like his mentor, he emphasizes that matter is a creation of God. As such, it shares neither God's eternity, nor his power. All creation, including all matter, owes its origin to God. Tatian would echo with the Apostle John, "πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν."<sup>64</sup>

In addition to giving the Greeks a look at the logical philosophy of monotheistic creationism, he also advocates that there is a purpose toward which all of creation is moving. He contrasts Greek mythology's ideas concerning judgment and the afterlife with Christian teachings concerning the Christian view of judgment and the resurrection hope of believers. According to Tatian, the future hope of Christians and the future judgment of unbelievers is bound up in the faithfulness of the eternal logos; through whose judgment the righteous will be rewarded and the unrighteous will be punished. He emphasizes that the judgments rendered by the logos will not be based upon mindless fate, but as a consequence of the free choices made by individuals.<sup>65</sup>

Humans were originally created in the image of God, with the ability to freely choose good or evil. Given that, by nature, goodness belongs only to God, humanity had to become united with him and his Spirit in order to choose good. Humanity forfeited this ability through the fall and have only been able to choose evil since that time. Only by being "begotten again,"

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*, Jn 1:3.

<sup>65</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, chap. 11.

and thereby regaining the spirit, are humans able to be reunited with God.<sup>66</sup>

In chapters 8 through 10, Tatian attacks the mythology of the Greeks as inconsistent and the idea of zodiac control of world affairs through the planets and constellations to be demonic. He finds the fatalistic philosophy of the zodiac to be both alarming and ludicrous. Were such a system of fate true, and all of the universe controlled by the stars, mankind would be involved in a hopeless game of chance. Worse still, the mythological gods would likewise be under the control of such fate. The end of such universal governance would render beings that should be all-powerful gods to be mere mortals.<sup>67</sup>

Tatian uses one of the rhetorical methods of the second sophistic period: *ekphrasis*, or narrative description. Utilizing this method, Pausanias and Lucian describe statues and buildings in detail to demonstrate the scope of their knowledge and the power of their rhetorical abilities to recreate skilled features of art in words. But Tatian does not use ekphrasis to work the power of rhetoric to celebrate aesthetics. Instead, he uses it to create descriptions of statues of females and famous figures exemplifying the shames of culture. He depicts women engaged in questionable activity, usually of a sexual sort. Other figures described are "memorials of evil." Christian women, in contrast, Tatian asserts, are virtuous.<sup>68</sup>

The apologist is upset about the immorality of the Greek gods that is so prevalent in Greek mythology. He goes into great detail elucidating the sins of the various Greek gods by name. In a rather pointed comment, Tatian writes "And are not the demons themselves, Zeus at their head, subjected to fate, being overpowered by the same passions as men?" He then

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., chaps. 5.3, 15.1.

<sup>67</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos*, chaps. 8–10.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., chap. 33.

expresses wonder that such beings could be worshiped. Surely philosophies and religions that lead to the adoration of such sinful false gods inspire flagrant and immoral behavior has no right to claim to be the true path.<sup>69</sup>

In Chapter 11, the apologist confronts the false doctrine of fate. He sets forth an argument that men are free to choose. Being bound to a life of sexual immorality or grief and suffering is not a forgone conclusion in Tatian's thinking. As he sees it, men have the capacity to choose the better path through dying to the world and living for God. He states that it is not fate that destroys man, but man destroys himself through this own free will. Just as man has the ability to choose to do evil, he also has the ability to reject sin and embrace change. The underlying message is one seeking for the repentance of the Greeks, desiring that they would embrace the truth of Christ and his word.

The writer then launches into a discourse that describes the threefold nature of man, as created in the image of God. Man is not only a material being, but additionally possesses two distinct immaterial parts. He tells the Greeks that man has a soul (*ψυχή*) and an inner part that is an image and likeness of God himself (spirit).<sup>70</sup> Thus, man is in one sense material but is in another sense superior to matter. In spite of the fact that God has created man in an essence that is superior to physical matter, the Greeks have chosen to worship hand-made images formed from physical matter and empowered by demonic spirits. They have chosen to listen to what the apologist called "trickeries of frenzied demons" rather than those who teach the truth. Tatian's discourse on this subject of the pagans' choices is reminiscent of Paul's discussion in Romans

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<sup>69</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos*, chap. 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 13.

chapter 1. “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever.”<sup>71</sup>

The ψυχή, contrary to the ideas of Greek philosophy, is not immortal in the same manner as the Greek philosophers understood immortality. According to the Greeks, human beings are a soul that has a body.<sup>72</sup> The relationship between the soul and body could be likened into the relationship between the horse and his rider. In this line of thinking, salvation is basically deliverance from the body (soma), which has imprisoned the soul.<sup>73</sup> Tatian elucidates the Hebrew-Christian concept of human existence for the Greeks. Each human being is essentially a souled body, under the guidance of a spirit. The spirit of a person is quickened by union with the Divine Spirit (Logos) when that individual receives the truth. Likewise, if a person rejects the truth, and thereby rejects union with the Logos, the spirit is weakened and unable to lead the soul, resulting in separation from God and an inability to find God—leading to the individual following the “sophistries of demons.” Tatian warns that the fate of the soul is dependent upon the path that a man chooses in this life. The soul who chooses to live in darkness, rejecting the truth, dies with the body, but will rise again at the end of the world, with the body, to be judged. But the ψυχή that acquires the knowledge of God never dies.<sup>74</sup>

Perhaps one of the most potent statements made by the apologist in regard to the nature of man states, “Man is not, as the croaking philosophers say, merely a rational animal, capable of

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<sup>71</sup> Romans 1:25 (HCSB).

<sup>72</sup> Plato, “Phaedo,” in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Harold North Fowler, vol. 1: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo (Medford; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), sec. 80a.

<sup>73</sup> Norman Geisler, “Immortality” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 350.

<sup>74</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, chap. 15.



understanding and knowledge; for, according to them, even your rational creatures appear possessed of understanding and knowledge. But man alone is the image and likeness of God.”<sup>75</sup>

Tatian points out the fact that man’s creation in the image and likeness of God makes him superior to both the animals and to demons. For neither the animals nor the demons possess the *imago dei*. The very reason that man is granted room for repentance, and demons are not, is the presence of the image of God in man and its absence in demons. According to Tatian, part of possessing the image of God is having the capacity for union with God himself. This union is not this the Greeks suppose, as stated in their concept of immortality, that the soul of man may become united with the divine postmortem. Instead, it is possible for God to inhabit the being of the individual who is united with him. It is union with the spirit of God which enables a human to perceive things in the spiritual realm. When an individual possesses this ability, he is able to discern the deception of demons. Contrarywise, the individual who is not united with the spirit of God is unable to discern demonic activity. The apologist explains that it is impossible for dead men to speak with greater wisdom than they possessed when they were alive. On the other hand, demons are given to impersonating dead people to the living. This is done with the purpose of deception of the living to the end of misleading and destroying them.<sup>76</sup>

Demons seek every opportunity and means of deceiving people. They pervert the minds of human beings by influencing them to trust in the magical arts to provide health, healing, and happiness. Tatian admonishes the Greeks to yield to the power of the logos. He warns that demonic spirits do not operate with the purpose of helping human beings, but rather, destroying

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<sup>75</sup> I Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, chap. 15.1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 16.

them. He writes, “The demons do not cure, but by their art make men their captives.”<sup>77</sup> In contrast to the demons, God gives many wonderful gifts to believers and unbelievers alike and is deserving of every person’s gratitude.

In chapters 22 through 26, Tatian points out the absurdities of Greek myths and religious practices, their forms of amusement, the boasting and arguments among philosophers, and educational methods and emphases. He confronts the Greeks with the inconsistency of the almost amoral pluralism in their society who at the same time are attempting to force those who hold to the true philosophy of Christianity and are seeing to advance *missio Christi* to forsake the truth. He states that the hatred of Christians is unreasonable and condemns the conflicting laws of the heathen.

In chapter 29, Tatian gives his own personal testimony of his search for truth and ultimate commitment to truth. A cursory reading of this chapter makes it clear that Tatian involved himself in an earnest search for true philosophy. As he searched in various places, through various philosophers and the pagan religions, he found nothing to satisfy his heart or mind.

During the most intense time of his search, he was introduced to certain “Barbaric writings,” which he ultimately reveals to be Christian scriptures. In them, he found writings that were far superior to the philosophies of the Greeks. He was drawn by the way the scriptures were written, the genuineness of the writers, the prophecy of future events, the quality of the ethical commands and the declaration that one God rules the universe. In them, he found intelligibility of communication and of philosophical thought, and he ridicules the Greeks for lacking these

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<sup>77</sup> Tatian, “Address of Tatian to the Greeks,” in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. J. E. Ryland, vol. 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 73.

characteristics.

As he continued to read and meditate upon the Scriptures, he began to understand that the things he had formerly learned in the philosophy of man led to condemnation. He also came to understand that there was freedom through accepting and following the Christian message.

Tatian then decided to commit himself to following Jesus Christ and his word.<sup>78</sup>

The apologist urges his readers to avoid ridiculing or demeaning Christians, but instead to examine their principles and beliefs. He urges the Greeks to follow the philosophy that is more ancient than their own. He defends Christianity as the most ancient of philosophies, and as such, demonstrably true. The truth of the Christian message, he states, is proven by the fact that it supports unity among people and is accessible to all. Those who would come to Christ are not judged by their looks or outward appearance, nor are they called into question about their intelligence or physical strength. Those who follow Christ find themselves on level ground regardless of their physical circumstances.<sup>79</sup> Tatian extols the virtues of Christian women, chiding the Greeks for their ridicule of the same. He compares the moral turpitude of Christian women with women of pagan myth, demonstrating the morally superior behavior of Christian women. He finds it amazing that the pagans condemn Christian women while at the same time deifying and memorializing females found in moral turpitude with statues and other works of art.<sup>80</sup>

The writer begins his conclusion by stating that the things that he has written about were not received second-hand but are things to which he is an eyewitness. He is familiar with their

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<sup>78</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, chap. 19.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, chaps. 31–32.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 33.

rhetoric, their many forms of art, their inventions, and their statues. He openly professes to reject arrogant philosophies of Romans and the idle discussions of the Athenians and has chosen to embrace Christ and his message. He emphasizes that he has not chosen to strike out on a new path, but has chosen to live according to a philosophy, which is more ancient than the Greek institutions.<sup>81</sup>

To support his argument Tatian enlists evidence from the testimonies of several people groups including the Chaldeans, the Phoenicians, and the Egyptians. He enlists the Babylonian history written by Berosus, Chaldean historian and priest of the god Belus. According to the apologist, the historian recorded the account of King Nabuchodonosor (Nebuchadnezzar), who made war against the Jews and whose exploits were prophesied about seventy years before they happened. The Jewish prophets that prophesied about Nebuchadnezzar antedated by centuries the man, Moses, who recorded the first principles of the Judeo-Christian philosophy and religion. Given the fact that King Nebuchadnezzar predated Greek philosophy and Moses predated Nebuchadnezzar, Judeo-Christian Philosophy predates Greek philosophy by far.<sup>82</sup>

The apologist's second line evidence is the testimony of the Phoenicians. He relates the story of historical books that were translated into Greek from Phoenician. In the historical record, the marriage of Chiramus, daughter of Menelaus to King Solomon of Israel is chronicled. Tatian estimates this marriage to have taken place somewhere close to the time of the Trojan war. Since the Trojan War predates Greek philosophy and the life of Moses predates the Trojan War, it only stands to reason that Christian philosophy predates Greek philosophy.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, chap. 35.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 36.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

The last piece of evidence introduced by the apologist in proving his argument from antiquity comes from the historical chronicles of the Egyptians. From the historical record of Ptolemy, a priest of Mendes, the approximate time of the Exodus of Israel under the leadership of Moses is deduced. Tatian uses the list of kings in Egypt, along with the length of their administrations, to conclude that Moses lived approximately 400 years before the Trojan war. To drive the final nail in his argument from antiquity, the apologist points out that the Olympics began 407 years after the taking of Troy. The wise men who first began to use the ancient myths and legends to weave Greek philosophy into the philosophical forms of Tatian's day taught between the 39<sup>th</sup> and 62<sup>nd</sup> second Olympiad. In performing the math, the conclusion may be drawn that the beginning of Greek philosophy took place between 446 and 469 years after the taking of Troy. If Moses lived 400 years before the taking of Troy and great philosophy began as much as 469 years after the taking of Troy, Moses predates the first Greek philosophers by as much as 869 years.<sup>84</sup>

The *argument from antiquity* is Tatian's capstone argument for justifying the Christian faith. He employs this argument to refute the accusation raised against him that "Tatian, aspiring to be above the Greeks, above the infinite number of philosophic inquirers, has struck out on a new path, and embraced the doctrines of Barbarians."<sup>85</sup> He insists that Christian doctrines are not recent inventions, but are actually ancient Judeo-Christian tradition that all Greek thought and scholarship flows out of, although its form is unrecognizable. Tatian's presentation is intended to support his philosophical understanding of creation. He believes that the Old Testament creation

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<sup>84</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, chap. 38.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

account is true, therefore the oldest, and all cosmogonies of later writers he considers to be plagiarized.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, using historical evidence and mathematics, Tatian presents a tremendous case for the preeminence of Judeo-Christian philosophy over Greek philosophy, based upon the fact of its obvious superiority in regard to being the most ancient. His argument from antiquity effectively silences the charge advanced against Christians, and Tatian in particular, that they are starting something new and rejecting the ancient philosophy of the Greeks.<sup>87</sup> The apologist openly confesses that he is a disciple of Christianity (the barbarian philosophy), presents himself for examination (which presupposes being put on trial), and declares his immovable commitment to his faith.

According to the apologist, there is a stark contrast between true and false religion, between true and false philosophy. He demonstrates the errors of Greek philosophy and religion, which is immoral, inconsistent, and unsatisfactory. By contrast, Christianity is demonstrated to be true philosophy and religion because of its antiquity, creator God, and its ability to help man to live a better life.

The themes that appear in the *Address to the Greeks* are common to those that appear to the works of the apologists who preceded him. Aristides, Clement, Mattheos, Athenagoras, and Justin joined Tatian as inhabitants in a world where the tide of public opinion was against all who were committed to Jesus Christ. The exclusivist doctrine of salvation through Christ alone and his eternal Lordship over his creation, the ethical convictions that conflicted with the lax societal mores, and the zealous proselytizing evangelism practices of the Christian movement

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<sup>86</sup> Engberg, *In Defense of Christianity*, 67–79.

<sup>87</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, chaps. 39–40.

brought the violent hatred of the Roman populous. The absolute commitment of Christians to Jesus Christ alone as Lord, to the exclusion of any participation in Emperor cult rituals focused the ire of the Roman governmental officials upon the church of the first three centuries; for such refusal was interpreted as sedition.

Christians like Tatian were faced with questions based upon lies, innuendos, and twisted facts. Reading the works of the apologists of the first three centuries yields a wealth of understanding about the content of those questions. In reading Tatian's Address to the Greeks, the reader can reduce the arguments he used into component themes that overarch the document. A concerted effort in examining the themes enables the distillation of the themes into some questions for which the apologist was attempting to provide a reasoned defense.

Several themes emerge from Tatian's arguments. These themes include the futility of pagan philosophy and its inferiority to Christianity, the error deterministic fate, the true nature of immortality, the absolute truth is found in Christianity, and that Christianity is the most ancient faith. From the discussion of these themes, it appears that Tatian was attempting to offer a defense against the following questions:

- (1) Why do Christians choose Christianity over and above the traditional religions and philosophies found in Roman culture?
- (2) Why do Christians criticize the pagan gods and people when fate has determined the course of things?
- (3) What makes Christians so obstinate in their resistance to the pressures to recant?
- (4) Why would someone choose a new religion, like Christianity, over ancient philosophies and religions?

As with the the other Christian apologists that preceded him, Tatian seeks to follow the

admonition that the Apostle Peter gave in 2 Peter 3:15: “Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” (ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαὺν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος).<sup>88</sup> Like Aristides, one of Tatian’s purposes in offering an apologetic for Christianity was to request an end to the mistreatment of Christ-followers.<sup>89</sup> He writes with focused themes that address the issues that were being raised to him and that required a logical defense.

The concepts advanced in Tatian’s Address to the Greeks effectively confronts several second-century relational issues existing between Christians and the pagan society that surrounded them. While there is no indication that the apology provided Christians any relief from persecution, Tatian did provide Roman governmental officials and the society at large with much fodder for thought, and he likely provided Christ followers with the evangelistic ammunition needed to confront their pagan neighbors with philosophical credibility.

Even though Tatian did not deal with Christology and does not present a clear message of the gospel, he does attempt to lay the foundation for presenting the Christian worldview. His argument centers on the superiority of monotheism over polytheism and presents evidence that Christian monotheism provides a more solid foundation for morality than does Greek polytheistic philosophy. In some respects, Tatian presents an argument strikingly similar to that which would be associated with a classical apologetic argument for Christian theism. The aim of the apologist is apparently to engage his audience in an ongoing dialogue. His intent is made

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<sup>88</sup> Michael Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*, 1 Pt 3:15.

<sup>89</sup> Aristides of Athens, “The Apology of Aristides,” in *The Gospel of Peter, the Diatessaron of Tatian, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Visio Pauli, the Apocalypses of the Virgil and Sedrach, the Testament of Abraham, the Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena, the Narrative of Zosimus, the Apology of Aristides, the Epistles of Clement (Complete Text), Origen’s Commentary on John, Books I-X, and Commentary on Matthew, Books I, II, and X-XIV*, ed. Allan Menzies, trans. D. M. Kay, vol. 9, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1897), 279.



clear as he invites individuals in his audience to seek him out for further discussion. Tatian writes, “for to those who wish to examine our principles I will give a simple and copious account of them.”<sup>90</sup> In so doing, he does not issue a call for repentance and belief to salvation, but he does offer an invitation for inquirers to seek him out for answers to their questions.

### **Tertullian**

Quintus Septimus Florens Tertullian was born in Carthage Africa to pagan parents somewhere between 145 and 160 CE. His father served in the Roman military as a Proconsular Centurion. By his own admission, Tertullian grew up enjoying the brutalities of the Roman arena and the lasciviousness of the vulgar theater.<sup>91</sup> He was also a passionate student of literature, law, and philosophy.<sup>92</sup>

While few details may be documented about the apologist's conversion to Christianity, most scholars place the event at around 185 CE. Tertullian became a presbyter of Carthage in Africa about 190 CE and a priest about 192. His writings indicate that his most productive ministry took place during the reigns of Severus and Antoninus Caracalla, or between the years 193 and 220 CE.<sup>93</sup> He apparently died between the years of 220 and 240 CE. Scholars have disagreed on the exact date when *The Apology* was written. The range of possible dates for

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<sup>90</sup> Tatian, “Address of Tatian to the Greeks,” in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. J. E. Ryland, vol. 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 77.

<sup>91</sup> L. Russ Bush, ed., *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics, A.D. 100-1800* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1983), 83–85.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., “Introductory Note,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, vol. 3, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 6.

authorship range from 198 CE to 217.

The defense was written during the continuation of Roman persecution against Christians. Tertullian is writing *The Apology* in response to the condemnation of Christians διὰ τὸ ὄνομα, on the basis of the *nomen ipsum*, with no other charge of wrong-doing.<sup>94</sup> He highlights the injustice being done by governmental officials who are charged with carrying out justice and the unfounded hatred of Roman society in general.

Tertullian's Apology is a defense of Christianity against the ignorant and irrational persecution of the unbelieving Romans (both in and out of government). The writing was addressed to the provincial governors appointed by Rome, to affect an end to the mistreatment and martyrdom of innocent Christians. The apologist opens his apology with a formal request that the truth, while not allowed to defend itself publicly, may be allowed to present its case to the rulers through the hidden pathway of his voiceless book.<sup>95</sup>

The apologist asserts that Christians are prosecuted for claiming the name of Christian, for which they can offer no defense but apostasy from Christ. He states that Roman justice is caught in a paradoxical form of jurisprudence. Real criminals given opportunity to deny their crimes, offer a defense against their charges and are tortured to get them to confess to their offenses. By contrast, Christians are not presented with evidence of the crimes for which they are condemned and are tortured to make them stop confessing Christianity. They are refused any opportunity for vindication. Magistrates make no attempt to find evidence of any crime - the

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<sup>94</sup> E. G. Hardy, *Christianity and the Roman Government: A Study in Imperial Administration* (New York: Green, and Co., 1894), 127.

<sup>95</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., "The Apology," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, Logos E-Book., vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), sec. I.

name Christian is considered to be the crime.<sup>96</sup>

The writer of the apology finds most remarkable that hatred of the name Christian overshadows the positive results that come from converting to Christianity. He points to the testimonies of those who lived wicked lives before conversion, who now lead virtuous lives. He writes of the lunacy of those who react with repulse and hatred toward family members whose conversion to Christianity have actually made them exemplary people. Tertullian writes, "The wife, now chaste, the husband... casts her out of his house; the son, now obedient, the father, who used to be so patient, disinherits; the servant, now faithful, the master, once so mild, commands away from his presence; it is a high offence for anyone to be reformed by the detested name. Goodness is of less value than hatred of Christians."<sup>97</sup>

Tertullian then exposes the hypocritical standards by which Christians are judged. The things of which Romans accuse Christians are rife among the Roman citizens who are making the accusations. While criticizing Christians for ignoring the state religion, the Romans have ignored it themselves, by legitimizing cults such as Bacchus and Serapis, which the Senate actually outlawed in more decent times.<sup>98</sup> Christians are falsely accused of, and hated for, gross immorality by a society where similar immorality is a fact of life.

The apologist moves from presenting the hypocrisy of Roman assumptions about the Christian life and worship to presenting the positive case for Christian belief and practice. He points to the fact that Christian beliefs and practices are founded upon the principles found in divinely revealed scriptures. These scriptures teach about the one creator-God and about his

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., II.

<sup>97</sup> Robertson, Donaldson, and Coxe, "The Apology," IV.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., X.

Christ, who came to earth to provide the way for evil men to be transformed into good ones.

Tertullian then moves to defending Christians against the charge of treason against Caesar.<sup>99</sup> He points out the absurdity of demanding that sacrifice is made to heathen idols, incorporated into the Roman pantheon from defeated peoples because they are no more able to protect the Emperor than they were able to do so for the ruler of their native country. Instead, the Roman officials would be wiser to ask Christians to pray to the true and living God for the safety of Roman rulers. Indeed, the apologist assures his readers that Christians already pray for such rulers. He urges the readers to examine the sacred writings of Christians to confirm that such practices are taught in them.

According to the apologist, the only things that Christians are guilty of are obeying God and doing good to others. Christians cling to such practices as loving enemies, maintaining pure lives, being faithful in all interactions with all people, and seeking to help all people to know Christ and his ways. He points out that the public welfare is not enhanced when multitudes of good and innocent people are murdered. In fact, a society that commits such atrocities cannot go unpunished, for God will provide a reckoning and the number of Christians will multiply.<sup>100</sup>

The writer references the uniqueness, power, and divinity of the Christian Savior in various ways in the apology. He quotes from Elucidation IV, “Tiberius accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ’s divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favour of Christ. The senate, because it had not given

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., XXVIII.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., L.

the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Cæsar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians.”<sup>101</sup> Tertullian refers to Christ as the son of God, the supreme head and master, the Enlightenment and trainer of the human race, and the creator. Like Tatian, Justin, Aristides before him, Tertullian calls Christ the logos of God. The writer lays out a succinct, but potent narrative about the origin, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He presents a summary of proofs belying the Jewish opinion that Christ was only a man. The proof included acts in which Christ defeated demons, healed the afflicted, demonstrated his authority over nature, and resurrected the dead, which proved that he was the primordial Logos of God (“ostendens se esse verbum dei, id est λόγον, illud primordiale, primogenitum”).<sup>102</sup>

The *Apologeticum* presents a clear rendition of the gospel, summarizing Christ's conflict with the Jews, an account of his crucifixion, the uniqueness of his manner of death and burial, and the testimony of his resurrection and post-resurrection ministry. In an assertion unique to the apology, the power of the evidence for Christ's divinity was convincing even for Pontius Pilate. “*Ea omnia super Christo Pilatus, et ipse iam pro sua conscientia Christianus, Caesari tunc Tiberio nuntiavit.*”<sup>103</sup> The apology seeks to advance *missio Christi* by presenting a positive witness for Christ and to persuading the recipient of the document to believe it is witness. The writer urges the readers to make an examination of the claims presented. He also states that the transforming nature of the good news compels the hearer to make a decision to renounce false

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., XXI-XXII.

<sup>102</sup> Tertullian, *Tertullian-Minucius Felix*, ed. T. R. Glover (Medford, MA: William Heinemann Ltd.; Harvard University Press, 1931), 110.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 112.

religion and believe the truth.<sup>104</sup>

Tertullian points out that Christians are not treasonous traitors but are loyal citizens who pray for Caesar and other governmental leaders. The apologist points out that Caesar should desire the prayers of believers, because he is dependent upon the graces of the living God. He argues that when Roman leaders execute Christians, they are actually doing a disservice to the Empire, for they are actually wringing the souls from those who are beseeching God on behalf of the Emperor.<sup>105</sup> Tertullian points out that the Scriptures enjoin believers to pray for “kings, and rulers, and, powers,” even those who prove themselves to be enemies and persecutors of Christians.<sup>106</sup> He points out that Christians have another reason to pray for the safety of the Empire – greater dangers could be forthcoming if the Empire were to fall. Since Christ-followers have no desire to fall into greater difficulty, it behooves them to pray for Caesar.<sup>107</sup>

The apologist also follows in the example of Jesus and his apostles by seeking to address false beliefs through exposing them to the light of truth. Christians have been charged with not holding Caesar with proper respect because of their failure to offer him emperor worship. The *Apologelicum* contends that Christians do hold the Emperor with the respect due his office since it is the Lord God himself who has called Caesar to his office believers hold him in high regard because of Christ's command.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Tertullian urges the reader(s) to seek whether or not Jesus is divine (Quaerite igitur si vera est ista divinitas Christi.) If the search demonstrates that Christ is divine and that the good news transforms lives, the reader is compelled to repent of false religion and believe the transforming truth (conperta inprimis illa omni ratione quae delitiscens sub nominibus et imaginibus mortuorum quibusdam signis et miraculis et oraculis fidem divinitatis operatur). This is an overt appeal for the conversion of the reader.

<sup>105</sup> Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, “The Apology,” XXX.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., XXXI.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., XXXII.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., XXXIII.

Tertullian adds an additional appeal to the Romans to reconsider their condemnation of Christians as dangerous to society and to consider forsaking false religions in favor of the worship of the true God. Christians had been accused of being the cause of local calamities across the empire. He stated that ignorant people cried out “against innocent blood” because of baseless pleas that Christians are “the cause of every public disaster.”<sup>109</sup>

The Apology elaborates on a long list of public disasters that occurred before the reign of Tiberius and before the coming of Christ into the world.<sup>110</sup> If Christians precipitate all natural disasters, then what caused the disaster that destroyed the islands of Hiera, Anaphe, Delos, Rhodes, and Cos? What caused the earthquake that consumed the Corinthian Sea and spawned a tsunami that destroyed part of the Lucania? There were no Christians to blame when the cities of Vulsinii and Pompeii were destroyed by fire.<sup>111</sup> All of these natural disasters took place before there were any Christians in the world. The clear conclusion is that Christians cannot be to blame for natural disasters that take place in the world contemporary with Tertullian any more than they could be to blame in the world of the disasters that Tertullian referenced.

The apologist then turned the tables on his audience. He proclaimed the problems to be the sin of mankind. He wrote, "The truth is, the human race has always deserved ill at God's hand. First of all, as undutiful to him, because when it knew him in part, it did not seek after him, but even invented other gods of its own to worship; and further, because as a result of their ignorance of the teacher of righteousness, the judge and avenger of sin, all vices and crimes grew and flourished." He pointed out that people had the opportunity to seek after and find the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., XL.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

gracious creator God that Christians know and proclaim. If it were not for the prayers of Christians, greater disasters would occur than have already happened. The apologist argues that it is, in fact, the Romans who were to blame for the disasters. While Christians fast and pray to God for his protection from disasters, the Romans give Jupiter the credit for the protection provided by the true God. The natural disasters are the judgment of God upon an unbelieving world, which Christians are also obliged to endure. The implication seems to be present that Tertullian is using logic to appeal to the Romans to repent of their idolatry. In the closing remarks of chapter XLI, he asks the question: “Why do you continue to pay homage to being so ungrateful, and unjust?”

The apology clearly attempts to fulfill a dual purpose. The first aim is to provide an adequate defense against false accusations being levied at Christians. The writer lays out the evidence in a manner that is designed to sway the opinion of the reader. At the same time, the apology bears the marks of design aimed at furthering the *missio Christi*. The good news of salvation is presented in a very clear manner. The problems of mankind's rebellion against God, God's provision for mankind's rebellion through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, in the appeal for repentance of sin and faith in Christ are present and prominent in this apology.

Tertullian contextualized his presentation to his audience. He uses references and language designed to connect with his audience. He also seeks to address those questions and charges being set forth by the recipients of his apology. The arguments presented in the apology appear to be answering the following questions:

- (1) Why is it wrong to hate and persecute Christians?
- (2) Are not all Christians guilty of such hideous crimes as cannibalism and incest?
- (3) Why do Christians refuse to offer sacrifice to Caesar?



- (4) Why do Christians refuse to honor the Roman gods?
- (5) What kind of God do Christians worship?
- (6) Why would anyone follow a religion as new as Christianity?
- (7) Are not Christians really treasonous traitors?

### **Conclusion**

The exegesis and examination of the select apologists and apologies used in this study have been shown to exhibit specific elements of *missio Christi* displayed throughout the Gospels and the book of Acts. Specific elements exhibited by individual apologies vary from document to document and author to author. In each case, the apologists combined intricate legal defenses with commonly used evangelistic tools. Arguments against the mistreatment of Christians were combined with polemical arguments against Roman polytheism, testimonials concerning the transformation of lives experienced by Christians, the presentation of the gospel message, and appeals for pagans to repent of their false beliefs and accept the Christian message.

The missional value of the various apologists and apologies may be evaluated by evaluating (1) the degree of their focus upon Christ, (2) the clarity of gospel message presented, (3) the strength of appeal for conversion of the audience, and (4) the level of contextualization used in attempting to persuade the audience toward a favorable response to Christianity.

Utilizing these criteria, it is possible to make determinations as to which apologists and apologies demonstrate the greatest strengths in extending the mission of Christ.

The works of Justin, which includes two apologies and the *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* contain the strongest focus upon the person and work of Christ. *The Dialogue with Trypho* has the greatest apologetic emphasis on the person and work of Jesus. The *First Apology of Justin* also contains a very strong focus upon the messianic work of Christ, his virgin birth, and his

miracle-working power. The *Second Apology* has the weakest emphasis on Christ among the three documents examined.

In his conversation with Trypho and his companions, the apologist uses the term “Christ” over 350 times. He uses “Jesus Christ” and “Lord Jesus Christ” in several chapters. Prophecies are brought to bear by the writer in every exchange. Justin discusses virtually every aspect of the person and work of Christ, from his pre-existence to his glorification at the right hand of the Father. Jesus’ virgin-birth, his working of miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection are all elucidated in light of prophetic utterances from the pages of the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. The good news is more clearly proclaimed in the dialogue than it is in any of the other apologies of Justin. The apologist builds in appeals for Trypho to believe in Jesus Christ both overtly and covertly. The length of the discussion and the depth of the material used by Justin demonstrate a highly contextualized approach.

Like the Dialogue, the *First Apology* of Justin is also strong in its emphasis on the person and work of Christ. The document mentions Jesus Christ by name eighteen times. The crucifixion of Christ is mentioned a dozen times throughout the apology. Jesus’ teachings on various subjects are quoted in various places among the apology’s forty-eight chapters. In addition to the quotations of Jesus, prophecies supporting the messianic role of Jesus are discussed in an extended fashion. While the *First Apology* does not display the depth of discussion as *The Dialogue* there is a strong emphasis on the gospel with a straightforward appeal for the audience to believe. The *First Apology* is also a highly contextualized document that utilizes material to bridge the philosophical gap between the Christian worldview and that of his audience and presents the gospel in a way that would be understandable to his audience. The contextualized presentation of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world and the arguments

designed to establish the superiority of Christianity over Greek philosophies and religions are focused on the extension of *missio Christi*. In both *The Dialogue* and *The First Apology*, Justin presents a positive pattern for apologetics in a pluralistic setting such as the contemporary world.

While the Christological emphasis of Justin's *Second Apology* is the weakest among his three extant apologies, it is far from absent.<sup>112</sup> The emphasis is not as in-depth due to the fact that the document is far shorter than the other two. The *First Apology* has forty-nine chapters and the *Dialogue* consists of 142 chapters, while the *Second Apology* has only eight.

Among the extant works of apology from the second and third centuries, Tertullian's *Apology* also ranks among the strongest in missional purpose. While the Justinian apologies contain a greater level of Christological references and discussion of the person and work of Christ, Tertullian's discussion is both powerful and succinct. The gospel message is presented with clarity and a strong appeal for repentance and faith in Christ. While Tertullian's apology bears similarity to previous apologetic works, it also bears the marks of contextualization for his audience.

*The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* and Tatian's *Address to the Greeks* focus on the doctrine of Christians and the source of that doctrine, the Christian Messiah, Jesus Christ. These works focus more on comparing and contrasting Christian beliefs with those of their polytheistic Roman compatriots and other religions. Little is said about the person and work of Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry. Aristides limits his comments concerning the life and work of Christ to 188 words, in which he includes a brief explanation of the gospel. The extent of Tatian's discussion of the person and work of Christ is limited to a 343-word philosophical discussion

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<sup>112</sup> In this brief document, Justin devotes 262 words in a discussion about Jesus Christ. He presents Christ as the Creator, Savior, and deliverer of mankind, who was sent "for the sake of believing men and the destruction of demons."

about the pre-existence and incarnation of Christ as the *λόγος* of God. Both Aristides *Apology* and Tatian's *Address to the Greeks* are contextualized documents designed to elicit additional investigation by its recipients and further discussion between the recipients and the apologist.

According to the established criteria, all of the apologies examined demonstrate a majority of the marks necessary to be considered missional in nature. The manner in which the apologists presented their material indicate both defensive and evangelistic goals. The defensive goal was the eradication of the persecution of believers in the Roman Empire, or at least the official sanction of it. There was also present a desire to convert those who read the apology to the Christian faith. Indeed, if the second goal were realized, the first goal would naturally occur. The pursuit of *missio Christi* would result in a transformed society.

In chapter four, the discussion of the missional marks of these early church apologists will be compared with those present in some select contemporary apologetic presentations. The discussion will also include possible parallels between the missional apologetic presentations of the Early Christian era apologetic works discussed in this chapter and the selected post-Christian era apologetic works that will be under examination.

## CHAPTER 4: THE INTERSECTION OF MINISTRY CONTEXTS

On the surface, it would appear that the ministries of early church era apologists and post-Christian era apologists could enjoy no point of intersection due to the many centuries difference between the ministry contexts. Indeed, postmodern hubris might even cause one to ignore these ancient writings as the irrelevant musings of tradition that are inseparably bound to the ignorance of an outdated worldview.<sup>1</sup> Such a dismissal of early church era apologies might cause post-Christian apologists to miss some vital principles that could prove helpful for ministry in the contemporary context.

A closer examination of early church era apologies in the ministry contexts which gave them birth uncovers some key parallels in ministry context between the early church era and the post-Christian era. These parallels in ministry contexts provide some points of intersection between the ministries of early church era apologists and post-Christian era apologists. As demonstrated in chapter 3, the writings of the early church era apologists discussed displayed the elements that gave definition to the mission of Christ and his apostles. *Missio Christi* was effectively extended in the apologetic works written by these intellectual philosophers. While it is clear that they were offering a formal defense of Christianity to unbelieving audiences, in an attempt to bring about an official end of persecution, they were also attempting to carry out the mission of Christ. Above all, they were missional Christians.

The main question under consideration in this chapter is “Are there any intersections

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<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 122–125. Erickson criticizes the “chronological snobbery” of the postmodern assumption that something more recent is automatically superior to anything that is older. Such chronological snobbery would lead to the marginalization of ideas set forth by early church era apologists and the elevation of postmodern era ideas as inherently superior. The metanarrative expressed by the early church era apologists would be approached with incredulity and therefore subjected to deconstruction or outright rejection as irrelevant.

between the cultural context in which the early church era apologists ministered and the cultural context in which post-Christian era apologists find themselves ministering?” If there are areas of intersection between the cultural contexts of the two eras, then there are principles that may serve as catalysts for improvement in the practice of apologetics in the post-Christian era. While it is possible to only get a glimpse of the effectiveness of early church era apologetics, history gives evidence that there was an alteration in cultural receptivity to the gospel. There is indication that the writings of these early church era apologists did in fact impact official Roman policy toward Christians.<sup>2</sup> The proclamation of the Christian gospel, which included the use of missional apologetics, had a definite impact on the general population of the Roman Empire, as evidenced by the growth in the numbers of Christians throughout the Empire.

The Christian movement began with a small band of disciples and expanded to a major movement across the Roman empire in just a few hundred years. The writings of ancient Roman historians and official Roman governmental documents demonstrate that there were significant numbers of Christians in major cities across the Empire by the end of the third century CE. Sociologist Randy Stark summarizes the growth of the Christian movement in the Roman empire from an insignificant number in 40 CE, to approximately 1,200,000 by the year 300 CE. By the middle of the 4th century, the number of Christians in the Roman empire had reached

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<sup>2</sup> According to Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, the apologies of Aristides and Quadratus were instrumental in bringing about the Rescript of Hadrian to Minicius Fundanus issued sometime between 124 and 129 CE. In the rescript, the Emperor states that accused Christians are not to be sentenced on the basis of public sentiment or in response to a mob-outcries against a person for being a Christian. Christians were to be tried in open court on the basis of evidence that they had committed a crime against Roman law. Moreover, any citizen found guilty of falsely accusing a Christian of a crime would be punished for it. “[B]y Hercules, if anyone brings the matter forward for the purpose of blackmail, investigate strenuously and be careful to inflict penalties adequate to the crime.” (Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History and 2: English Translation*, edited by T. E. Page, E. Capps, W. H. D. Rouse, L. A. Post, and E. H. Warmington, translated by Kirsopp Lake and J. E. L. Oulton. Vol. 1. The Loeb Classical Library. London; New York; Cambridge, MA: William Heinemann; G. P. Putnam’s Sons; Harvard University Press, 1926–1932. 4.9.3.)

approximately 34 million (more than half of the entire population).<sup>3</sup>

While the numeric growth of Christianity ultimately elevated it to the position of a major religious force in the Roman Empire, the first three centuries CE produced some severe challenges for the fledgling faith. The cultural challenges faced by Christianity in those early centuries provide some possible points of intersection with the culture of the post-Christian era.

### **Culturally Legitimized Pluralism**

The first area of intersection between the cultures of the early church era and the post-Christian era is the prevailing acceptance of religious pluralism as a societal norm. The degree of religious pluralism in any given society as a direct reflection of that society's cultural attitudes about the nature and role of religion in society. Mark Silk defines religious pluralism as the societal norm that enables a country made up of people from different faiths to exist without sectarian war or the persecution of religious minorities.<sup>4</sup> All religions are placed on equal position before the law or are given formal protection, as long as the religions are practiced within a certain range of connections and obligations. The parameters of this pluralism are perceived differently in different times and places, and it is a social paradigm that exemplifies some shared conception of how a country's various religious obligations relate to each other and to the culture as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Thus, religious pluralism in any society is governed by the prevailing ideas that define cultural security. A multiplicity of religions and philosophies may be tolerated

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<sup>3</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 306–308.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Silk, “Defining Religious Pluralism in America: A Regional Analysis,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 612, no. 1 (July 2007): 64–85.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

and even legally protected as long as beliefs, connections, and obligations to those groups are not perceived to threaten that society or culture.

The culture of the early church era apologists was one in which religious and philosophical pluralism was the official stance of the Roman government and widely accepted among the populace. The rapid growth of the Roman Empire and the limited military resources of the Roman army produced a pragmatic approach in governing the conquered peoples. One of the primary applications of this pragmatic approach was in the exercise of religion. The Roman people were already given to worshipping the pantheon of deities with whom they held somewhat of a symbiotic relationship. To these gods they offered sacrifices and worship in exchange for protection and blessings. Religious law and practice of Roman citizens centered on a ritualized system of honors and sacrifices that were seen to elicit a deity's favor. Hardy writes, "The Roman religion was essentially and before all things a national religion; its object was primarily, not the honour of the gods, but the safety of the state, of which the goodwill of the gods was supposed to be the necessary condition."<sup>6</sup> It was common for Romans to worship multiple deities for the dual purposes of seeking favor and avoiding disfavor. While it was their civic duty to worship the major deities dictated by law, citizens were free to worship other gods as they saw fit.

To neglect worshipping the various gods was seen as a form of atheism, but excessive devotion or fearful groveling to deities or seeking of divine knowledge was seen as *superstitio*. Any deviation from these moral norms were believed to cause divine anger (*ira decorum*) and bring harm to the State. The belief in this form of divine retribution is substantiated by Livy's account of the disasters that occurred in the early part of Romans second Punic War. In

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<sup>6</sup> E. G. Hardy, *Christianity and the Roman Government: A Study in Imperial Administration* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), 4.



particular, Rome's defeat at Cannae in 216 BCE is attributed to the anger of the Roman gods in response to the neglect of their worship.<sup>7</sup>

While acts of public veneration of the gods was viewed as a civic duty, the worship of additional gods was viewed as acceptable behavior. For this reason, the average Roman citizen had no difficulty with allowing people to worship the gods of conquered peoples. In fact, the culture of the day had become so multiethnic and religiously pluralistic that Lucian wrote an amusing sketch that underscored the religious attitudes of that day. The population of Olympus had swollen due to illegal immigrants among the ranks of the Olympic gods. In order to deal with the problem of the limited supply of ambrosia and nectar, discussion breaks out concerning countermeasures in dealing with the problem.<sup>8</sup> Lucian writes the following:

Since many of the strangers, not only Greeks but barbarians also, being in no wise worthy to share in our polity, but having falsely registered by some means and masquerading as gods have filled heaven so that our drinking-parties are full of a riotous rabble of many tongues and a motley crew ... Be it resolved ... that in the case of all those who have been considered worthy of temples or sacrifices, their statues be torn down and there be substituted those of Zeus or Hera or Apollo or some other (legitimate) god.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, with levity, Lucian imagines the historic Greek gods' difficulty in dealing with the pluralism of Roman society. Lucian's contemporary, Maximus of Tyre, wrote of the problem from a completely different perspective. After expressing an apparent dismay over the multitude of gods in Roman culture, Maximus expresses an acceptance of a more convergent view of the

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<sup>7</sup> Livy, *History of Rome*, ed. Canon Roberts, *History of Rome (Roberts)* (Medford, MA: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1912), 22, 1, 8–20.

<sup>8</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *Religious Diversity in the Graeco-Roman World: A Survey of Recent Scholarship, The Biblical Seminar* 79 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 143–163.

<sup>9</sup> Lucian, *Lucien: With an English Translation*, trans. A.M. Harmon, vol. 5 (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1962), 417–442.

divine.<sup>10</sup>

The basic pantheon of Greco-Roman gods worshipped in the Roman Empire contemporaneous with the pre-Christian era apologists were about a dozen. To this pantheon, a multitude of other minor gods were added during the conquest years of the Roman Empire. Most cities enshrined their own patron god or gods, and families usually worshiped their own household gods as well.<sup>11</sup> The Roman government's policy was basically syncretistic, accepting the various deities either by identifying them with some of the *dii indigetes* and thereby admitting them within the *pomerium*, or by integrating them into the national worship as *dii novensiles*.<sup>12</sup> Even monotheistic Judaism found toleration in the Roman Empire.<sup>13</sup>

The scriptural account of the apostle Paul's stay in Athens paints a vivid picture of the Greco-Roman pluralistic world.<sup>14</sup> According A.T. Robertson, Pliny stated that the number of gods depicted in Athens alone numbered more than 30,000.<sup>15</sup> Petronius the satirist ridiculed the religiosity of the Athenian people by stating that in Athens it was easier to find a god than a man.<sup>16</sup> People of varied faiths and ethnic backgrounds from across the vast empire inhabited the city. Due to the multiplicity of faiths present within the empire, no single religion held sway.

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<sup>10</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *Religious Diversity in the Graeco-Roman World*, 143–163.

<sup>11</sup> Wasson, Donald L. "Roman Religion." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. Last modified November 13, 2013. [https://www.ancient.eu/Roman\\_Religion/](https://www.ancient.eu/Roman_Religion/).

<sup>12</sup> Leon Hardy Canfield, *The Early Persecution of Christians*, 2nd ed., vol. LV, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law (New York: Columbia University, 1913), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Theodore Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte*, vol. v, pp. 487; English translation in *The Provinces of the Roman Empire* (New York, 1887), ch. xi.

<sup>14</sup> Acts 17:16-34.

<sup>15</sup> A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933). See Acts 17:16. Robertson writes: "Pliny states that in the time of Nero Athens had over 30,000 public statues besides countless private ones in the homes."

<sup>16</sup> Petronius, *Petronius*, ed. Michael Heseltine (Medford, MA: William Heinemann, 1913), Sat. 17.

Among the intellectual elite, religion was a novelty. The situation faced by Paul in Athens was likely the norm among this group. Luke records that the people of Athens spent their time seeking to hear some new idea.<sup>17</sup> The tendency of the Athenians to pursue the latest philosophical fad a religious idea as described extra biblically by Chariton of Aphrodisias, Demosthenes, and Thucydides.<sup>18</sup>

The state policy appeared to be one of a watchful toleration. With the many gods represented among the Roman citizenry and the many cults represented within the worship of those gods, the Roman government allowed the worship of the various gods without interference. as long as citizens were not incited to neglect the national religion or create a threat to the populace.

There were a few recorded exceptions to religious toleration during the course of Roman history. The religious cults of Bacchus and Isis were among the few to be declared as illegal due to the excessive immoral and illegal behavior of its adherents. Livy recorded a rather detailed account of the suppression of the Bacchus cult in 188 BCE.<sup>19</sup> According to Levy, the grand maxim of this religion was that nothing was unlawful, resulting in cult meetings becoming dens of incredible vice and centers for all types of civic crimes such as murder, forgery, and conspiracy.<sup>20</sup> One hundred twenty-five years later, the Isis cult was suppressed because of

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<sup>17</sup> Acts 17:21.

<sup>18</sup> Chariton and George P. Goold, *Callirhoe*, Nachdr., The Loeb classical library 481 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 1.11,6-7;; Demosthenes., *Demosthenes with an English Translation*, trans. J. H. Vince., M.A. (Medford, MA; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1930), 1.4-10; Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (Medford, MA: London, J. M. Dent; New York, E. P. Dutton, 1910), 3,38,5.

<sup>19</sup> Vide Wagener, "Observations complémentaires sur la lecture de M. Giron relative à la liberté de conscience à Rome," in *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Bruxelles*, 1893, vol. xxvi, p. 315; Hardy, *op. cit.*, 2nd. ed., p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Livy, *op. cit.*, xxxix, 8, 13-16.

immoral practices performed under the cloak of its rites.<sup>21</sup> With the exception of a few religious cults such as those listed above, the Roman empire operated with a great degree of religious pluralism.

With the passing of almost 2,000 years of church history, it would seem that there would be little intersection of ministry contexts between the early church era in the post-Christian era. In spite of the passing of time, the pluralism of the early church era appears strikingly similar to that which is experienced in the post-Christian era. Just as religions and philosophies abounded in the first three Christian centuries, even so religions and philosophies proliferate in the post-Christian era. The religious mosaic that is demonstrated in both societies ultimately led to the development of a pragmatic religious pluralism in both. The religious and philosophical pluralism of the first three Christian centuries arose as a result of the polytheistic Greco-Roman society pragmatically accepting the deities of the various conquered people groups in order to promote the *Pax Romana*. While contemporary pluralism evolved from a different set of circumstances, the effects are much the same.

The ministry context of the post-Christian era has been marked by lingering elements of postmodernism. The postmodern worldview rejects all traditional and historical metanarratives, denying the existence of objective and propositional truth. Postmodernism has followed a path that deconstructs all authoritative texts and emphasizes the preeminence of the reader. Linguistic meaning and practical interpretation of reality are reconstructed utilizing postmodern tools of skepticism, pluralism, and relativism. While postmodernism's main continuing influence has been confined to academia and the arts, the skepticism, relativism, and pluralism that postmodernism produced has impacted society in some dramatic ways. It has made significantly

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<sup>21</sup> Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, 18, 3, 4; Tacitus, *Annals*, ii, 85.

impacted the functional structures of contemporary society. Changes in the attitudes, standards, and belief systems from which people operate in their day-to-day lives have seen radical alterations in the last fifty years.<sup>22</sup> In spite of the assertion that the postmodernist paradigm is ephemeral, the effects of the postmodern mindset appear to be resilient.<sup>23</sup>

Postmodernism arose in response to, and rejection of, the claims of modernism.<sup>24</sup> Along with the rejection of modernism's claim to truth, the postmodern ethos expressed an incredulity of traditional concepts of reality and truth. In the place of the modern and premodern standards of reality and truth, post-moderns have embraced relativism and repudiated the belief in correspondent reality.<sup>25</sup> Language, according to the postmodern ethos, is open to individual interpretation.<sup>26</sup> Reality is that which is culturally created through language. Instead of language expressing reality, it creates reality.<sup>27</sup> For the postmodern individual, the issue is not discovering truth, but determining what is truth. The bottom line is that truth is made rather than found and is determined by the individual.<sup>28</sup>

According to D. A. Carson, one of the most serious developments associated with the advancement of the postmodern ethos is "philosophical or hermeneutical pluralism."<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>22</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 13–31.

<sup>23</sup> Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 209–234.

<sup>24</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3–23.

<sup>26</sup> Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 253–263.

<sup>27</sup> Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 130–149.

<sup>28</sup> Glenn B. Siniscalchi, "Postmodernism and the Need for Rational Apologetics in a Post-Conciliar Church," *The Heythrop Journal* LII (2011): 751.

<sup>29</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

postmodern mindset rejects the existence of absolute, objective truth and embraces the concept of pluralistic relativism. Truth becomes a matter of perspective and is open to the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. If truth is a matter of perspective, as postmodernists claim, then conflicting views of reality and truth are equally valid. The acceptance of philosophical or hermeneutical pluralism leads to the acceptance of religious pluralism.

Post-Christian culture has experienced the proliferation of divergent religious groups and postmodern ideals have embraced the pluralistic idea that all of the divergent groups are equally valid. While there are still many in society who hold exclusivist positions on religious philosophy, official government policies would hold to a pluralistic position, and society at large would give at least verbal assent to the basic tenets of religious pluralism.

The plethora of religions and philosophies provides pluralism's proponents with one of their primary arguments. Given the fact that there are so many different religions and philosophies in the world, it is therefore impossible for any one of those religions or philosophies to make claims of possessing the absolute truth. Would it not be much more acceptable to see all of the religions and philosophies as various paths to the same end? Could they not all be paving various routes to the ultimate reality?

According to the World Christian Encyclopedia, there are presently nineteen major world religions which may be subdivided into two hundred seventy large groups and a plethora of small groups.<sup>30</sup> The encyclopedia of American religions indicates that all nineteen major religions are represented in the United States and that there are total of 1,584 religious

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<sup>30</sup> "Religions of the World: Numbers of Adherents; Growth Rates," accessed May 8, 2018, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/worldrel.htm>.

organizations in the US and Canada.<sup>31</sup> With so many varied religious groups present in North American culture and in the global religious landscape, governments either generally adopt an official policy a pluralistic toleration or begin systematic persecution of any group outside of the official religious governmental stance. In the United States of America, the official stance is one of pluralistic toleration. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees the free exercise of religion, thereby setting the stage for a religiously pluralistic culture.<sup>32</sup>

A religiously and philosophically pluralistic culture has also been encouraged through the rise of the postmodern ethos. In postmodernism, the rejection of all metanarratives, rejection of foundationalism, and incredulity toward objective truth have led to a hard form of religious pluralism and an extreme form of moral and epistemological relativism.<sup>33</sup> Michael Jones has elucidated four forms of pluralism in his 2008 paper “The Problem of Religious Pluralism.” These four forms of pluralism are as follows: strong pluralism, moderate pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism.

According to Jones, strong pluralism views all religions as effective in attaining their own ends and are equally valid and true. Moderate pluralism views all religions as socially facilitated endeavors to grasp at the same ultimate reality (God, Yahweh, Allah, Bahman, etc.) and, therefore, soteriologically efficacious. Inclusivism views only one religion as true but holds to the premise that the other religions of the world are just as soteriologically efficacious as the one true religion. Exclusivism states that only one religion is soteriologically efficacious and the adherents of all other religions are lost. In spite of the logical problems inherent in the first three

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<sup>31</sup> G. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> US Constitution, amend. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Michael S. Jones, “The Problem of Religious Pluralism” (Faculty Publication, Liberty University, 2008), 4–7, accessed May 8, 2018, [http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/phil\\_fac\\_pubs/4](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/phil_fac_pubs/4).

positions, and in spite of the fact that postmodernism utterly fails as a worldview, views of religious pluralism in American society have gained a foothold.

According to Carson, the radical pluralism that postmodernism breeds leads to two major issues. The first is that there is no heresy except that there are heresies. Carson elucidates the problem in this way:

No matter how wacky, no matter how flimsy their intellectual credentials, no matter how subjective and uncontrolled, no matter how blatantly self-centered, no matter how obviously their gods have been manufactured to foster human self-promotion, the media will treat them with fascination and even a degree of respect. But if any religion claims that in some measure other religions are wrong, a line has been crossed and resentment is immediately stirred up: pluralism has been challenged. Exclusiveness is the one religious idea that cannot be tolerated. Correspondingly, proselytism is a dirty word.<sup>34</sup>

The second issue is the dramatic softening influence that such pluralism has on many people who would otherwise disapprove of radical religious pluralism.<sup>35</sup> One of the tragic side effects of pluralism as a societal norm is the tacit approval of postmodernism's concepts by many who would resist verbal assent to its tenets. It would seem that mainline and evangelical Christianity would be among the most vocal opponents of pluralistic philosophy. Unfortunately, the continuous pressure exerted through secular educational channels and various forms of entertainment media have brought about the steady erosion of belief in the uniqueness and exclusivity of the Christian message by many who claim to be Christ followers. In a recent poll of evangelical believers, the softening of Christian convictions is clearly evident. A March 2017 survey of 1,456 practicing Christians illustrates the erosion of basic beliefs in this group. This research reveals that over half (54%) resonate with postmodern views and almost 1/3 of those surveyed (29%) adhere to ideas that are based on secularism. Twenty-eight percent of the

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<sup>34</sup> Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 32–33.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 30–31.



professing Christians that were surveyed strongly agreed that "all people pray to the same God or spirit, no matter what name they use for that spiritual being."<sup>36</sup>

The extension of *missio Christi* has been impacted in both the early church era and the post-Christian era by the prevailing influence of religious and philosophical pluralism. While many of the deities worshiped may differ from one era to the other, the intersecting factor is still present. In both the early church era and post-Christian era, the religious and philosophical pluralism has presented a grave challenge to those who would attempt to carry out the mission of Christ.<sup>37</sup>

### **Societal Resistance to the Gospel Message**

Christian evangelists and apologists faced a number of issues in their attempts to advance *missio Christi* in the early church era. Even though Christianity experienced a sizable growth throughout its first three centuries, it also met with much resistance throughout the Roman world. Ancient historians, like Pliny and Eusebius, paint a vivid picture of the conflict that developed between Christians in their early church era society. The hostility of Roman society toward believers in Christ through officially-sanctioned governmental persecution and through unofficial persecution administered through mob violence.

The exclusivist message that salvation was through Christ, and Christ alone, was in direct opposition to the pluralistic ideas of Roman society. The fiercely monotheistic Christian worldview found itself in conflict with a society where new deities were continually being

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<sup>36</sup> Pew Research Center, "When Americans Say They Believe in God, What Do They Mean?," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, April 25, 2018, accessed May 18, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/04/25/when-americans-say-they-believe-in-god-what-do-they-mean/>.

<sup>37</sup> David Kinnaman, "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians," *Barna Group*, accessed May 18, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/>.

introduced. Non-Christian Roman citizens viewed the Christian conviction of one and only one Savior and God as a personal affront and a radical rejection of widely accepted Roman pluralism. In addition, the addition of the imperial Roman cult, worshipping deceased Roman rulers, added the issue of patriotism (or the lack thereof) to the already tense relationship between the Christian movement in Roman society. The refusal of Christians to offer the sacrifice of incense to Caesar and his predecessors marked Christ followers as unpatriotic and treasonous. To the average Roman citizen, it was no big deal to offer incense to Caesar with the ceremonial confession, "Caesar is Lord." Since there were already a multiplicity of gods, to offer this tribute to the imperial cult was merely an act of patriotism. For Christians, however, such a confessions and acts were blasphemous.

The extent of the conflict between Christ-followers and their contemporaneous culture is well-documented in ancient history and from the early church era apologetic writings. As the early church sought to advance the mission of Christ in its world, the resulting struggles are recorded in the writings of Eusebius, Pliny the Younger, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Tertullian, and others.

Pliny the Younger provides information that confirms the conflict between Roman officials and Christians. Being a young man, with the major responsibilities that befall the ruler of a province, Pliny found that dealing with the ever-increasing number of Christians in his territory to be quite an annoyance. Many Christians had been brought before him for judgment. Some he had condemned to death, and some he had driven from their commitment to Christ. After some investigation, Pliny decided to write to Trajan the Emperor, relating his findings and seeking the Emperor's counsel on how to dispose of the cases brought before him involving Christians. Pliny writes,

The method I have observed towards those who have been denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their creed might be, I could at least feel no doubt that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy deserved chastisement. There were others also possessed with the same infatuation, but being citizens of Rome, I directed them to be carried thither.

These accusations spread (as is usually the case) from the mere fact of the matter being investigated and several forms of the mischief came to light. A placard was put up, without any signature, accusing a large number of persons by name. Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the Gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the Gods, and who finally cursed Christ—none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing—these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by that informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion, but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five years ago. They all worshipped your statue and the images of the Gods, and cursed Christ.

They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. Even this practice, however, they had abandoned after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations. I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses: but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition.<sup>38</sup>

The writings of Christian apologists also give testimony to the conflict that took place between Christians and the society at large, as well as with Roman authorities. Church historian Eusebius records that two different apologists wrote to defend Christians close to the turn of the second century. The first apologist was Quadratus, and the second was Aristides, who both addressed Hadrian the Emperor. While the apology of Quadratus is not available, the one written by Aristides is extant. From the records of Eusebius' and Aristides' apologies, the conflict

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<sup>38</sup> Pliny, *Letters*, ed. T. E. Page et al., trans. William Melmoth, vol. 2, *The Loeb Classical Library* (London: William Heinemann, 1931), 401–405.

between Christians and the Roman society is evident from the earliest times following the apostolic era.

In addition to the conflict between the Roman officials and Roman society at large, historical records also paint a vivid picture of the conflict between Christians and the Jewish people. In Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, the writer addresses the open hostility between Jewish leaders and Christians. He accuses the Jewish leaders of putting Christians to death and sustaining an ongoing persecution against them. Justin accuses Trypho of allowing the fear of the Jewish leaders of being his motivation for refusing to believe in Christ.<sup>39</sup> This declaration made by Justin comports well with the accounts of Jewish interference with the performance of *missio Christi* by the apostles found in the book of Acts.

Justin boldly confronted Trypho concerning the Jewish-led persecution of Christians in his dialogue. He states the following:

For other nations have not afflicted on us and on Christ this wrong to such an extent as you have, who in very deed of the authors of the wicked prejudiced against the just one, and us who hold by him. For after you had crucified him, the only blameless and righteous man – through stripes those who approach the father by him or healed – when you knew he had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, as the prophets foretold he would, you not only did not repent of the wickedness you had committed, but at that time you selected and sent out from Jerusalem chosen men through all the land to tell that the godless heresy of Christians had sprung up and to publish those things which they all who knew us not against us. So that you are the cause not only of your own unrighteousness, but in fact that of all other men.... Accordingly, you displayed great zeal and publishing throughout all the land bitter and dark and unjust things against the only blameless and righteous light sent by God.<sup>40</sup>

From the early days of the fledgling church, Jewish authorities sought to disrupt the proclaiming of the good news. Such attempts seem to have had their origins shortly after the day

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<sup>39</sup> Justin Martyr. *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, Chapter 39.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Locations 379-392.

of Pentecost and continued throughout much of the early history of the church. The book of Acts records the persecution by Jewish leaders, or at the instigation of Jewish leaders, in Acts 4:1-22, 9:21-24, 14:1-6, 14:19-20, 17:5-9, 17:13, 18:12-17, and 23:12-22.

From the Jewish point of view, conflict arose from the view that followers of Jesus were preaching a heresy. Jewish leaders sought to silence the preaching of the early church through incarceration, beatings, and sometimes execution through stoning. In Acts 4, the council of Jewish rulers and elders had the apostles Peter and John arrested and put in jail overnight. The leaders then proceeded to question the apostles and then sought to silence them through threats. In chapter 9, a group of Jews sought to silence Paul by laying out a plot to execute him. Acts 14 describes another attempt on Paul's life by attempting to stone him to death. In chapter 17, Jews from the synagogue enlisted the help of troublemakers in the marketplace to instigate a mob riot, seeking to silence Paul and Silas. Finally, in chapter 23, another plot was instigated involving forty men who had pledged to kill the apostle Paul and silence the preaching of the gospel.

Roman historian Suetonius bears indirect testimony to the Jewish resistance to the gospel and continued attempts of Jewish leaders and people to silence the message of Christ in the city of Rome. Historians record that during Claudius' reign as emperor, Jews were driven from the city of Rome because of frequent disturbances in riots among the Jews "at the instigation of *Chrestus*." Piecing this information together with records from Tacitus concerning the rapid spread of Christianity in the city before the time of Nero, that *Christus* is a common corruption for the name of Christ. In addition, three or four inscriptions before the time of Constantine have been found where Christians are called Χρηστιανοί and accounts of these riots referred to by Suetonius elucidate the fact that the riots were attacks of unbelieving Jews upon Christians. Tertullian and Lactantius to speak of Christians being called *Christianus* and *Christus*. This type

of mob violence is recorded to have occurred at Jerusalem, Antioch of Pisidia, at Iconium and Lystra, and at Thyatira and Berea.

In addition to being viewed as heretics, Jewish Christians earned the ire of their Jewish contemporaries as unpatriotic for refusing to join in rebellion against Rome. In 132 to 135 CE, Bar-Cochba (later called Bar-Cosiba) led a rebellion against Rome and caused all Christians who would not join him to be murdered. The rebellion was put down and more than half a million Jews were slaughtered. Following the failed rebellion, the Jews lacked opportunity to physically persecute Christians, and therefore turned to polemical writing to discourage Jews from converting to Christianity. Jewish anti-Christian propaganda was disseminated through the Talmud, the Mishnah, and tractates. Evidence that the Jews actively polemicized against Christianity is clearly substantiated and Justin Martyr's apologetic work, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*.

Jewish resistance to the message of Jesus Christ is revealed in polemic works that began in oral form and eventually coalesced into written form. Two of the more popular versions of the Jewish polemic works are known as the *Toldath Yeshu* and the *Maaseh Yeshu*. These works seek to resist the good news message through the fabrication of distorted fictional accounts of the life of Christ. In these accounts, the Christian doctrines of the virgin birth, the messianic miracles, and the crucifixion and resurrection are changed to present Jesus as a wicked and unacceptable false Messiah. According to Michael Meerson, the written form of the *Toldath Yeshu* has been dated as early as the second century.<sup>41</sup>

The information for these polemical works appears to have been derived from basically

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Meerson, *Illegitimate Jesus: Family Matters with 'Toledot Yeshu'* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 91–111.

four sources: (1) Jewish rabbinic literature, (2) noncanonical Christian writings, (3) canonical Christian Scriptures, and (4) pagan anti-Christian writings of the Roman period. Two of the main sources for these anti-Christian polemical writings appear to have been anecdotal quotations from various parts of the Talmud and the Midrash. The material from these rabbinical writings seem to be adaptations of the materials chiefly aimed at refuting Christ's virgin birth and his ascension to heaven.

The second century Greek philosopher Celsus used these sources to attack the paternity of Jesus, ridiculing Christ as the illegitimate son of a soldier named Pantera or Pandera. The original reference to the Roman soldier named Pantera is found in an antidotal reference from Jewish rabbinical writings. The *Toldath* also polemicized against the miracles of Christ as trickery learned as magic in the land of Egypt or from the misuse of the divine name of the Jewish God. The Christ-as-magician polemic was also derived from rabbinical writings. The *Toldath* appears to reference some knowledge of events recorded in the canonical Gospels as well as the noncanonical books known as apocryphal gospels.

Gentile writers also sought to prevent the advancement of the church's fulfillment of Christ's mission through polemical arguments of their own, as well as some borrowed from Jewish writers. Two prevalent anti-Christian writers contemporaneous with the early church era apologists were Celsus and Lucian.

Celsus was a second century Greek philosopher and opponent of early Christianity who was best known for his literary work, *On the True Doctrine*. While there are no extant copies of *On the True Doctrine*, some of this work survives in quotations contained in a third century work by Origen of Alexandria, entitled *Contra Celsum*. Celsus sought to argue that Christianity was a threat to stable communities and to the worldview upheld by the pagan religious systems. While

the writings of Celsus were not addressed by any of the early church era apologists under investigation in this work, his views are representative of how Christians were viewed by the general populace within the Roman Empire, and his arguments likely reflect common arguments against Christian beliefs.

Celsus attacked Christianity at its core by attempting to demean and discredit Christ himself. Origin quotes Celsus as stating that Jesus was not born of a virgin but rather,

“invented his birth from a virgin,” and ridiculed Christ as being “[B]orn in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt on account of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God.”<sup>42</sup>

Thus, Celsus seeks to indict the very character of Jesus by accusing him of being an illegitimate child, an Egyptian-trained magician, and a blasphemous charlatan.

In addition to his attack on Christology, Celsus provides insights into other criticisms levied against Christianity and its claims. Some of the arguments set forth against Christians were intended to refute the veracity and originality of the Christian scriptures, belief in the *parousia*, and the problem of evil. Celsus illustrates a common polemic against Christians and their message as he attacks Christian writings as (1) lies, (2) fables, (3) ill constructed, (4) monstrous fiction, (5) containing inconsistencies, and having been (6) repeatedly redacted.<sup>43</sup> He

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<sup>42</sup> Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume IV. Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth, Minucius Felix, Commodian, Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Arthur Cleveland Coxe (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), I, XXVIII.

<sup>43</sup> Celsus, *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 37.



also ridicules the Christian doctrine of divine judgment and the resurrection of the dead as “silly” and “nothing less than nauseating and impossible.”<sup>44</sup> While his arguments demonstrate a misunderstanding of some basic Christian ideas concerning the *parousia*, Celsus presents a clear denial concerning the idea of any ultimate judgment for mankind.

Contemporary apologists face similar arguments against the veracity of the Christian Scriptures by skeptics who advance arguments of biblical contradictions and claims that the manuscripts have been massively redacted.<sup>45</sup> They write books that charge the human authors with plagiarizing ancient myths and inventing fables. Some even propose that the apostles and Christ are myths invented by early church leaders in order to deceive people and enable the establishment of a new religion for monetary gain.<sup>46</sup>

Celsus also penned the beginnings of the argument contra-Christianity, commonly called the argument from the problem of evil. He argued that if there were a God who created Adam and Eve, and allowed them to sin, then he also created evil. If God made everything and everything is governed by him, then he is not just in judging his creatures for committing evil. He cannot be benevolent (as Christians claim) and be both the originator and judge of evil.<sup>47</sup>

Clearly for Celsus, the existence of evil presents a problem for the monotheistic idea that God is benevolent and is not the originator of evil. According to this argument, the existence and

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<sup>44</sup> Celsus, *On True Doctrine*, 86.

<sup>45</sup> See: Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible* (repr., New York; Enfield: HarperOne, 2010); Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); William Craig Lane, “Does God Exist? The Craig-Hitchens Debate | Reasonable Faith,” accessed April 2, 2018, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates/does-god-exist>.

<sup>46</sup> See: D. M. Murdock and Acharya S, *The Origins of Christianity and the Quest for the Historical Jesus Christ* (Stellar House Publishing, 2011); David Fitzgerald, *Nailed: Ten Christian Myths That Show Jesus Never Existed At All* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu, 2010); Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (Kempton, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Celsus, *On True Doctrine*, 102, 115.

ultimate judgment of evil are inconsistent and incompatible with the Christian doctrine of God. Thus, the existence of the Christian God becomes a logical impossibility in the mind of the pagan philosopher.

Contemporary skeptical philosophers such as Paul Kurtz and Richard Carrier have attempted to advance similar arguments based upon variations of the problem of evil in attempts to invalidate the Christian concept of God. They have also attempted to counter the Christian moral argument for God's existence, alleging that morality does not find its basis in God, but is a human invention.<sup>48</sup> Attempts by both early church era Gentile and Jewish polemicists to counter the Christian gospel through attacking the eyewitness accounts of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ are strikingly similar to attempts of post-Christian era anti-Christian polemicists. Attempts to erode the credibility of the Christian message appear to be foundational to the arguments of those who oppose *missio Christi* in either mission context. In addition to the arguments designed to attack the credibility of the Christian message, arguments attacking the morality and lifestyle of Christians are also common in both eras.

During the early church era, Christians were commonly accused of various forms of immorality. Christian apologists of this era commonly defended the Christian community against charges of cannibalism, infanticide, sexual promiscuity, political treason, and other spurious charges. In spite of the striking lack of evidence against Christians to substantiate any of the charges levied, common misconceptions were allowed to establish criminality for simply being a Christian. Thus, individuals placed on trial as Christians, were commonly faced the choice of renouncing their faith or embracing martyrdom.

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<sup>48</sup> See: Paul Kurtz, *Embracing the Power of Humanism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000); Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2010); Richard Carrier, *Sense and Goodness Without God*, Kindle e-book. (Bloomington, NY: Authorhouse, 2005).

While all of the early church era apologists' writings give evidence to the depth of the pluralism and radical resistance to *missio Christi* present in their respective ministry contexts, the writings of the Athenian Christian philosopher Aristides and Tatian the Assyrian apologist each provide cases in point. Both men struggled to find the truth in the midst of the religiously pluralistic society in which he lived.<sup>49</sup> The apologies of both writers provide extensive discussions of the gods worshiped and the schools of philosophy that were present in the early church era. Both presented the superiority of the Christian worldview and strong cases for the exclusivity of the Christian message.

Aristides defends against a plethora of moral charges against Christians in his apology. All of the charges dealt with the basic morality and integrity of the Christian community. Chapter 15 of his defense indicates that Christians were charged with various forms of sexual immorality, dishonesty, thievery, crimes against family and neighbors, idolatry, immodesty, impurity, and treason. Given the fact that Christians had embraced the teachings of Christ and openly proclaimed his teaching to others, the pagan accusations of immorality would constitute hypocrisy to an extreme degree. Indeed, many of the charges levied against Christians were openly accepted and practiced by unbelievers in Roman society.

Aristides debunked the prevailing pluralism of the early church era society by pointing out the logical inconsistency of Roman praxis. Roman society accepted the existence of a multiplicity of gods and the validity of various philosophies, while attacking the validity of Christianity. The philosopher perceived logical inconsistency on two fronts. First, he points out

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<sup>49</sup> According to Eusebius, Aristides and another apologist, Quadratus, presented apologetic writings to Emperor Hadrian in Athens in the year 2141 after Abraham, which corresponds to the Christian year 125 CE. The historian implies that Hadrian was persuaded by these petitions, coupled with a letter from Serenius Granianus, proconsul of Asia, resulting in Hadrian issuing an Imperial rescript forbidding the punishment of Christians without careful investigation and trial. (see: Eusebius, *Eusebius: The Church History*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007), IV, 3.; George A. Jackson, *The Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists of the Second Century*, ed. George P. Fisher (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), 180.)

the blind acceptance of the pluralistic national religion that advocated the worship of corrupt deities, while choosing to reject and persecute the higher moral road of Christianity. Aristides argued that worshipping the changeable elements of nature anthropomorphized in Greek and Roman mythology plunged the society into destructive error. The Greek gods were weak and sinful, leading those who follow such gods, into similar moral failure. At the same time, the righteous God of the Christians and his Savior-Christ was rejected as being inferior to the deities inhabiting the Greek pantheon. The Christian tribe alone had acquired and lived by the truth. Roman society had rejected the truth in favor of a pluralistic toleration of religions devoid of truth.

Second, Aristides saw logical inconsistency and hypocrisy in the governmental and societal pluralistic acceptance of the multitude of religions present within the Roman Empire, while refusing to grant tolerance to those practicing Christianity. In fact, the persecution of Christians through official governmental action and unofficial mob violence was tacitly supported by the government. If it were the official governmental policy to exercise tolerance of all religions, then the intolerance toward Christians amounted to gross inconsistency in the application of governmental rule and societal praxis. It would seem that the acceptance of the religious pluralism among the Roman elite, and society in general, should be extended to Christians as well.

In addition to his discussion about the various religions practiced in Roman culture, Aristides demonstrated his familiarity with the works of pagan philosophers. The introduction to his apology describes Aristides' journey to Christian conversion in philosophical terms. His search began with consideration of the creation itself. When he began to muse about the world and the wonders of the universe, he "perceived that the world and all that is therein are moved by

the power of another; and I understood that he who moves with them is God.”<sup>50</sup> As he perceived the orderliness and complexity of creation, he was drawn to faith in this creator, the Christian God.

While Aristides did not utilize extensive quotation of Scripture passages, he did use his philosophical acumen to advance the cause of *missio Christi*. He accurately conveys the Christian worldview in philosophical terms and lays the groundwork for the gospel presentation that follows later in the apology.

The philosopher’s lack of Scripture quotation in no wise diminishes his summary of the identity and work of Christ, nor the clear identification of Christ’s followers and their mission.

Aristides presents his case in the following way:

The Christians, then, trace the beginning of their religion from Jesus the Messiah; and he is named the Son of God Most High. And it is said that God came down from heaven, and from a Hebrew virgin assumed and clothed himself with flesh; and the Son of God lived in a daughter of man. This is taught in the gospel, as it is called, which a short time ago was preached among them; and you also if you will read therein, may perceive the power which belongs to it. This Jesus, then, was born of the race of the Hebrews; and he had twelve disciples in order that the purpose of his incarnation might in time be accomplished. But he himself was pierced by the Jews, and he died and was buried; and they say that after three days he rose and ascended to heaven. Thereupon these twelve disciples went forth throughout the known parts of the world and kept showing his greatness with all modesty and uprightness. And hence also those of the present day who believe that preaching are called Christians, and they are become famous.<sup>51</sup>

He proclaims that the mission of Christians is to continue to spread the message of their Messiah, helping unbelievers to find the truth, "repent of their error," and receive forgiveness by

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<sup>50</sup> Aristides of Athens, “The Apology of Aristides,” in *The Gospel of Peter, the Diatessaron of Tatian, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Visio Pauli, the Apocalypses of the Virgil and Sedrach, the Testament of Abraham, the Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena, the Narrative of Zosimus, the Apology of Aristides, the Epistles of Clement (Complete Text), Origen’s Commentary on John, Books I-X, and Commentary on Matthew, Books I, II, and X-XIV*, ed. Allan Menzies, trans. D. M. Kay, vol. 9, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1897), 263.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

believing in their Messiah.<sup>52</sup>

Likewise, Tatian utilized philosophy to demonstrate the weaknesses of the religions and philosophies contemporaneous with his time. During the early years of his life, he had been an eager student of heathen literature, especially philosophical literature. Having found no satisfaction in the bewildering mazes of Greek religion and philosophy, he summarily rejected them. During this time of emptiness, he came in contact with the sacred books of Christianity. He was immediately attracted by the message of hope that he found in the Scriptures. Tatian rejected the religious pluralism of his culture and embraced the truth of Christianity. The philosopher describes his journey to the acceptance of the Christian faith as having originated with his own dissatisfaction with pagan philosophies and his own search for the truth. He rejected the religious rituals “performed by the effeminate and the pathetic” and practices that delight in “human gore and the blood of slaughtered men.” While he was pondering his revulsion to such rituals, he encountered “certain barbaric writings, too old to be compared with the opinions of the Greeks, and too divine to be compared with their errors.” He was then “led to put faith in these.” Because of the “unpretending cast of the language, the inartificial character of the writers, the foreknowledge displayed of future events, the excellent quality of the precepts, and the declaration of the government of the universe as centred in one [b]eing.” After declaring his faith in the Christian God and allegiance to the Christian message, he then offers to explain the

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<sup>52</sup> Aristides, “The Apology of Aristides,” 279. The kindness of believers stemming from the transformation brought through the forgiveness afforded by *missio Christi* is summarized by the apologist’s eloquent words: “Christians are just and good, and the truth is set before their eyes, and their spirit is long-suffering; and, therefore, though they know the error of these (the Greeks), and are persecuted by them, they bear and endure it; and for the most part they have compassion on them, as men who are destitute of knowledge. And on their side, they offer prayer that these may repent of their error; and when it happens that one of them has repented, he is ashamed before the Christians of the works which were done by him; and he makes confession to God, saying, I did these things in ignorance. And he purifies his heart, and his sins are forgiven him, because he committed them in ignorance in the former time, when he used to blaspheme and speak evil of the true knowledge of the Christians.” It is noteworthy that helping unbelievers to find forgiveness of their “errors” by sharing the good news of Jesus was the mission of the twelve disciples and continues to be the mission of the Christians being defended by Aristides. Thus, both the twelve and believers contemporaneous with the apologist are involved in extending *missio Christi*.

Christian message to anyone desiring to understand it. This is Tatian's way of demonstrating his own involvement in *Mission Christi*.

Tatian extends *missio Christi* in much the same way as the apostles. He declares the deficiencies of pluralistic Roman religion and philosophy, testifies of his own repentance from error and reception of the Christian truth, and makes an appeal for unbelievers to come to him and receive instruction about the Christian message.<sup>53</sup>

Tatian utilizes philosophical arguments to point out the failures and fallacies found in the plethora of ideas esteemed in pluralistic Roman culture.<sup>54</sup> The apologist argues for the superiority of the Christian worldview over the empty religions and philosophies that he had rejected. The apologist derides pagan deities as the brainchildren of humans, corrupt and unworthy of veneration. Religion that should encourage virtue and rectitude becomes the catalyst of depravity and vice in religious adherents. The religions of Rome are patently false and utterly bereft of truth. Given the track record of pagan religions and philosophy, the acceptance of religious and philosophical pluralism as a societal norm and standard is an intellectually dishonest pathway. The apologist uses his personal testimony of the truth that he found in the Scriptures and a potent polemic against Roman pluralism to extend the *missio Christi*.

Early church era apologists, uniformly sought to counter the arguments attacking the Christian message about Christ, the veracity of Scripture, the surety of judgment and the problem of evil. Rampant religious pluralism created a world in which the idea of absolute and universal truth were foreign concepts, thereby intensifying the cultural resistance to *missio Christi*. These apologetic and cultural issues provide the intersections between the ministry settings of the early

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<sup>53</sup> Aristides, "The Apology of Aristides," 279.

<sup>54</sup> Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos and Fragments*, Chap. 2.

church era apologists and apologists in the post-Christian era.

The ministry of the early church era apologists in the dynamic witness of the early church led to a dramatic change in the philosophical and religious climate of the Roman Empire. The number of Christians across the Roman Empire multiplied exponentially, resulting in greater openness and receptivity to the Christian message. On the other hand, the philosophical and religious climate of the post-Christian era has been marked by the opposite trend. The increase of secularism and pluralism in the postmodern era have led to a decreasing receptivity to the Christian message and an increasing resistance to *missio Christi*.

The skepticism that feeds postmodern philosophy and its pluralism has also led some to reject all religious metanarratives and micronarratives as blatantly false. D.A. Carson has highlighted eight "correlatives of pluralism" that have impacted contemporary society and have hastened cultural decay.<sup>55</sup> These correlatives are both caused by and contribute to the growth of pluralism. The growth and the effects of pluralism are leading to a steady decline in the religious and moral climate of the culture.

In 2017, the pew research Center surveyed more than 4,700 adults in the United States concerning a belief in God. In this study, 33% of the respondents believe in some higher power/spiritual force and reject the biblical concept of God. Ten percent of the respondents stated that they did not believe in any higher power/spiritual force or God at all.<sup>56</sup> Between the years 2007 and 2014, the number of US citizens who identify themselves as not adhering to any religion increased from 16% of the population in 2000 to 23% percent of the adult population in

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<sup>55</sup> Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 13–54.

<sup>56</sup> Pew Research Center, "When Americans Say They Believe in God, What Do They Mean?"



2014.<sup>57</sup> Clearly, the incredulity to metanarratives is continuing to have an impact in American culture.

Gene Edward Veith points out that postmodern culture has validated the idea of consumer spirituality. Many times, this spirituality is logically unsystematic in nature. People simply decide to believe in things that they "like." Veith gives the example of the young man who espouses to belief in reformed theology, the inerrancy of Scripture, and reincarnation.<sup>58</sup> The postmodern emphasis on religion does not focus on what is true, but what a person likes or dislikes. In the minds of many people, evidence and plausibility are not required; the important matter is whether or not it is pleasing to the individual. Likewise, morality is not a matter of right and wrong, but a matter of personal desire. Veith writes, "Postmodernists tend to reject traditional morality.... They will defend their rights to do what they want with puritanical zeal. Furthermore, they seem to feel that they have a right not to be criticized for what they are doing. They want not only license but approval."<sup>59</sup>

The postmodern rejection of objective truth and morality presents new problems in carrying out *missio Christi*. In a world filled with skepticism toward all metanarratives, sharing the Christian metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and transformation becomes difficult.

Diogenes Allen articulates the epistemological difficulty that obstructs the communication of the good news dictated by *missio Christi*:

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<sup>57</sup> Gregory L. Smith, "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, November 3, 2015, accessed May 18, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>.

<sup>58</sup> Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 174-176.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 195.

<sup>279</sup> Diogenes Allen, "Christianity and the Creed of Postmodernism," *Christian Scholar's Review* 23 (1993): 119.

We not only construct the world, so that all knowledge, value, and meaning are relative to human beings, as Idealists since Kant have argued, but now the radical conclusion is drawn that there is no reality that is *universally* constructed because people in different periods of history and in different societies construct it differently. There is no definitive procedure or universal basis to settle disputes in the natural sciences, in ethics, and in the interpretation of literature. Every domain of inquiry and every value is relative to a culture and even to subcultures.<sup>279</sup>

The postmodern epistemological problem that Allen defines presents an accurate statement of postmodernism in its most extreme form, which has failed in its bid for complete societal acceptance. Unfortunately, even with the rejection of extreme postmodern epistemology in many realms of life, it has made a major impact in the areas of morality and religion. Religious pluralism and relativistic morality have gained a significant foothold in society.

Douglas Groothuis contends that postmodernism has led to "truth decay," especially in the areas of religion and morality.<sup>60</sup> He believes that the reasons for truth decay are rooted in the intellectual world as well as the everyday experiences in culture. The pluralism and relativism of postmodern philosophy are exacerbated by information overload, a hyper-mobile society, global connectivity, and consumerism.<sup>61</sup> Such a mindset reduces truth to a matter of personal choice, allowing the individual to shop in the supermarket of ideas and adopt a philosophy of life that makes him comfortable. When truth becomes a matter of personal preference, attempting to advance the mission of Christ by sharing the good news of Jesus finds major resistance because of *missio Christi's* emphasis on objective, universal truth.

In addition to the cultural issues brought on by postmodernism (religious pluralism, moral relativism, and a decaying concept of truth), resistance to the advancement of the mission of Christ has been fueled by similar polemical attacks on the Christian message. Apologists in

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<sup>60</sup> Douglas R. Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 20.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–25.

the post-Christian era are answering some of the same questions that were addressed by the early church era apologists. Unbelieving polemicists, especially within intellectual and academic contexts, often debate issues such as the resurrection of Christ, Christian morality vs. relativism, the person and work of Christ (Christology), the *parousia* and final judgment, and the problem of evil. In addition, the subjects of creation vs. evolution and theism vs. atheism are also frequent subjects of discussion and debate.

There are many apologists engaged in ministry during this post-Christian era. In order to provide a succinct summary of subjects under debate, four contemporary apologists will be examined: William Lane Craig, Gary Habermas, Ravi Zacharias and Josh McDowell. Website lists of the debates and lectures by each of these prominent apologists provide tools that give insight into the issues being addressed in the post-Christian era ministry context.

Debate transcripts and published lectures on William Lane Craig's *Reasonable Faith* website reveals the following subjects being addressed: the existence of God, cosmology and origins, the origin of morality, the person and work of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the problem of evil, Christianity vs. other world religions, and eternal punishment.<sup>62</sup> The website of Gary Habermas demonstrates that he has addressed the following subjects: the resurrection of Christ, Christianity vs. other world religions, doubt vs. hope, the person and work of Christ, suffering and the problem of evil, Christianity vs. naturalism, Christ's resurrection vs. ancient mythology, atheism vs. Christianity, reliability of the Gospels, and the importance of near-death experiences.<sup>63</sup> The Ravi Zacharias International Ministries website reveals the following subjects

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<sup>62</sup> William Lane Craig, "Writings | Reasonable Faith," Apologetics Education, *Reasonable Faith*, last modified 2018, accessed July 7, 2018, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings>.

<sup>63</sup> Gary R. Habermas, "Dr. Gary R. Habermas - Online Resource for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," Apologetics Education, *Gary Habermas Ministries*, last modified 2018, accessed July 7, 2018, <http://garyhabermas.com/video/video.htm>.

focused upon by the apologist: the distinctiveness of Christ, subjective morality vs. biblical morality, the uniqueness of Christianity, the existence of God, the resurrection of Christ, the nature of God, the problem of evil, eternal punishment, and atheism vs. Christianity.<sup>64</sup> Josh McDowell has debated such issues as the crucifixion of Christ (with an Islamic debater), the veracity of Scripture, the resurrection of Christ, absolute truth vs. subjective truth, objective reality, messianic prophecy, and Christianity vs. Islam.<sup>65</sup> In the case of all four apologists, common themes emerge: the Christian God, the person and work of Christ, the uniqueness of Christianity as opposed to other religions, the reliability of Christian Scripture, the nature of morality, the resurrection of Christ, the Christian concept of judgment and eternal punishment, the nature of truth and reality, and the problem of evil.

One common tool used by post-Christian era apologists, with great effectiveness, is the element of personal testimony. With Ravi Zacharias and Josh McDowell, a different set of circumstances led to their conversion experiences. Feelings of despair that led to a suicide attempt are what prompted Ravi Zacharias to turn to Christ. Zacharias shared the turning point in his life in the following way:

My Dad was very hard on me. I went to the university lab and picked up some chemicals marked "Poison" and took it home. I didn't know if I would go through my suicide plan or not. I had no hope. There was no tomorrow. The next day, everyone had left the house. The only one home was a servant, and he was down the hall from my bedroom. Five of us kids lived in this little bedroom with an attached bathroom. I shut the door and put all those little packages into a glass of water and when I stirred it with a teaspoon everything began to bubble and froth, and flow out of the glass. I gulped it down. It was such a salty concoction that my body couldn't contain it. I began to throw up. Once the gag reflex took over, I couldn't stop. I was holding on to the sink as my feet

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<sup>64</sup> Ravi Zacharias, "Ravi Zacharias International Ministries," Videos, *YouTube*, last modified 2018, accessed July 7, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDMOEj6lneZWgrp-r8KqXIQ>.

<sup>65</sup> Josh McDowell, "Josh McDowell Debates," Videos, *YouTube*, accessed July 7, 2018, [https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video;\\_ylt=AwrE1xr5W0Bb6l8A1JFXNyoA;\\_ylu=X3oDMTByMjB0aG5zBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNlYwNzYWw-?p=josh+mcdowell+debates&fr=tightropetb#id=1&vid=d55b4dd65c18aa04368140c71cf69fbc&action=view](https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video;_ylt=AwrE1xr5W0Bb6l8A1JFXNyoA;_ylu=X3oDMTByMjB0aG5zBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNlYwNzYWw-?p=josh+mcdowell+debates&fr=tightropetb#id=1&vid=d55b4dd65c18aa04368140c71cf69fbc&action=view).

were collapsing under me. I had just enough presence to scream and our servant broke down the door to get me.

When I came too, I was in the hospital with needles sticking all over my body. My mother was standing there, and my father had just come through the door. I knew what he was thinking. I had brought disgrace upon the family, and I didn't know how to live and I didn't know how to die. The doctor didn't give me much hope. He wasn't sure if I would make it. He felt that I did a lot of damage to my organs.

My Mom was standing there when a local Christian worker was singing "There is Balm of Gilead." My Mom asked, "How did you get here?" The worker said, "I am a minister." Mrs. Zacharias said, "My son is in very critical condition." The minister said, "I need to give him this Bible, and he opened it up to John 14. She said, "You can't talk to him." He asked my mother to read it to me. It was John 14:19 that touched me and meant to me as the defining paradigm: "Because I live, you also will live." No one had to explain it to me.

I had never owned or read the Bible. I thought, "This may be my only hope: A new way of living. Life as defined by the Author of Life." I committed my life to Christ praying, "Jesus if You are the one who gives life as it is meant to be, I want it. Please get me out of this hospital bed, and I promise to leave no stone unturned in my pursuit of truth." Five days later I walked out of the Wellington Hospital in Delhi, India, a totally different man.

In 1966, I emigrated with my family to Canada, earning an undergraduate degree from the Ontario Bible College in 1972 (now Tyndale University College & Seminary) and a Master of Divinity from Trinity International University.

Even unto this day, I will take a taxi and park in front of the Wellington Hospital. This is where it all happened. God had made a man to come and give me a Bible. Something of an internal transaction took place.<sup>66</sup>

While Josh McDowell had had a very painful and tragic childhood, he describes his conversion experience as having more of an intellectual origin. His journey of faith began with some friends challenging him to examine the evidence in favor of Christianity.

My new friends challenged me intellectually to examine the claims that Jesus Christ is God's Son; that taking on human flesh, He lived among real men and women and died on the cross for the sins of mankind, that He was buried and He arose three days later and could change a person's life in the 20th century.

I thought this was a farce. In fact, I thought most Christians were walking idiots. I'd met some. I used to wait for a Christian to speak up in the classroom so I could tear him or her up one side and down the other and beat the insecure professor to the punch. I imagined that if a Christian had a brain cell, it would die of loneliness. I didn't know any better.

But these people challenged me over and over. Finally, I accepted their challenge,

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<sup>66</sup> Ravi Zacharias, "Ravi Zacharias | Testimonies | FBGT-General," *Full Gospel Businessmen's Training*, accessed July 7, 2018, <http://fgbt.org/Testimonies/ravi-zacharias.html>.

but I did it out of pride, to refute them. But I didn't know there were facts. I didn't know there was evidence that a person could evaluate.

Finally, my mind came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ must have been who He claimed to be. In fact, the background of my first two books was my setting out to refute Christianity. When I couldn't, I ended up becoming a Christian. I have now spent 13 years documenting why I believe that faith in Jesus Christ is intellectually feasible.

At that time, though, I had quite a problem. My mind told me all this was true but my will was pulling me in another direction. I discovered that becoming a Christian was rather ego-shattering. Jesus Christ made a direct challenge to my will to trust Him. Let me paraphrase Him. "Look! I have been standing at the door and I am constantly knocking. If anyone hears Me calling him and opens the door, I will come in" (Revelation 3: 20). I didn't care if He did walk on water or turn water into wine. I didn't want any party pooper around. I couldn't think of a faster way to ruin a good time. So here was my mind telling me Christianity was true, and my will was somewhere else.

Every time I was around those enthusiastic Christians, the conflict would begin. If you've ever been around happy people when you're miserable, you understand how they can bug you. They would be so happy and I would be so miserable that I'd literally get up and run right out of the student union. It came to the point where I'd go to bed at 10 at night and I wouldn't get to sleep until four in the morning. I knew I had to get it off my mind before I went out of my mind! I was always open-minded, but not so open-minded that my brains would fall out."

But since I was open-minded, on December 19, 1959, at 8:30 p.m. during my second year at the university, I became a Christian.<sup>67</sup>

The way in which Zacharias and McDowell utilize their Christian conversion testimonies to convey the message of Christ is very reminiscent to the same practice utilized by pre-Christian apologists. The major point of emphasis in using the personal testimony of the apologist is the power of the message of Christ to transform lives. The transformed lives serve as evidence for the truth of the gospel.

The work of the apologist in both the early church era and the post-Christian era is to offer a defense for the Christian message and worldview in a way that advances *missio Christi*. There are many similarities in the apologetic praxis of apologists in both eras. In each case, the practitioners seek to fulfill the admonition of the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:15, in providing a

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<sup>67</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1972), Kindle Edition. Location 10388.

ready defense of the Christian hope.<sup>68</sup> In the early church era, apologists focused on offering defenses to combat the misconceptions and lies that perpetuated in their culture and convincing people that the good news of Christ was true. In the post-Christian era, apologists focus mainly on providing arguments supporting the veracity of the Christian worldview and message.

One of the major concerns faced by both early church era apologists and post-Christian apologists is attempting to convince their audiences of truths that those audiences reject for emotional reasons, rather than logical reasons. In the early church era, each of the apologists found themselves confronting embedded moral practices and religious philosophies that were a great variance with Christian teaching. Attacks against Christians in the Roman empire were emotional reactions to perceived threats against deeply embedded worldviews that were not logically based.

As was discussed in chapter 3, the Roman worldview was based upon the symbiotic relationship between the people and their deities. This relationship had been woven and taught for generation after generation. The myths surrounding Roman deities had been repeated for hundreds of years, without any logical examination. Christian apologists found it necessary to confront the myths upon which the Roman worldview was founded. They had to engage in polemics demonstrating the logical and moral issues that arose from worshiping the deities and the inevitable effects of the immorality reflected in the myths. The apologists then were able to establish that the Christian worldview and message offered a better way than pagan myths and religions.

Each of the four early church era apologists provided extensive arguments against illogical worship of the immoral host of deities worshiped in their contemporaneous culture.

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<sup>68</sup> *Cambridge Greek Testament: Greek Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1 Pt 3:15. “ἔτοιμοι ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαὺν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος.”

Even though they ministered in different contexts over the course of two centuries, Aristides, Justin, Tatian, and Tertullian all faced similar issues. They offered defenses urging the recipients to logically consider the emotionally-based beliefs that resulted in the persecution of Christians.

Post-Christian era apologists also find themselves in a similar position. With the rejection of modernism and the rise of the postmodern ethos, apologists often find themselves addressing people who base their lifestyles upon emotion rather than logical thinking. Many of the positions held by individuals within postmodern culture fall apart when placed under the scrutiny of logical examination. Often, when challenged to logically examine a belief that is logically inconsistent, individuals will simply fall back on the idea that truth is relative to the individual – what is true for one person may not be true for another. According to some writers, the ultimate truth is that there is no absolute truth. Since no one can have a God's-eye view of everything, it becomes impossible to know the truth about anything. As a result, any assertion claiming objective, absolute truth is met with an emotionally-charged reaction.



## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### Summary

Postmodernism has left a tremendous impact on the epistemological and functional structures of contemporary culture. While postmodernism has largely been dismissed as a worldview, its philosophical tenets have resulted in changes in the attitudes, standards, and belief systems from which people operate in their day-to-day lives. The radical changes that have taken place have led to scholars referring to contemporary society as being "post-Christian." The post-Christian era is called such because of the waning influence of Christianity in contemporary culture. The weakening of Christianity's influence has led to a decrease in the effectiveness of traditional evangelism methods. This decrease in effectiveness is demonstrated in statistical studies that have shown marked decreases in baptisms and the average attendance in local churches.

Given that traditional evangelism methods are waning in effectiveness, it has become evident that there is an urgent need for pre-evangelism tools to help open the minds of people for the validity of the Christian message. From a historical perspective, apologetics has historically filled the role of a pre-evangelism tool for accomplishing such a task. While some scholars decry the use of apologetics in the post-Christian era, to speak of discarding the use of apologetics seems to be premature and ill-advised. Instead, scholars should look to Scripture and history to find patterns for apologetic pre-evangelism that may provide help for the post-Christian era.

A study of the Gospel narratives and the book of Acts reveals that there are many addresses with strong apologetic elements that can provide the pattern for contemporary apologetics. The study of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John also helps to put these elements into perspective with the mission of Christ. In fact, it is through these Scripture studies that the very

basis of *missio Christi* in theory and practice is seen and how the apologetic arguments of Jesus and the apostles fit within that purpose.

Chapter 2 examined the response of contemporary scholars to the growing ineffectiveness of the church in engaging in reaching the culture at large with the good news of Christ. The Missional Church movement, which began with the publishing of the book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church*, has sought to refocus and reimagine ministry in the post-Christian era. The Missional Church movement set forth the concept of *missio Dei* in an attempt to help the church regain her missional focus, thereby becoming more effective in reaching people in the post-Christian era culture.

The Missional Church movement has done an excellent service to Christianity through the movement's kingdom focus and emphasis on the fulfillment of the mission of God. The emphasis upon mission as the nature of the church, rather than a program of the church, and the importance of every Christian living life on mission are vitally important for world impact. The problem with the *missio Dei* concept is its ambiguity, which has led to confusion in its application in local church settings.

To eliminate this ambiguity, this work presented an in-depth look at the mission of Christ through the introduction of the concept *missio Christi*. The mission of Christ was defined as conceptualized in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the book of Acts. The statements of the angels, Jesus, and his apostles provide an excellent working definition and description of exactly what the mission of Christ was and what the mission of Christ's church should be in the contemporary setting.

An examination of the four Gospels reveals three primary reasons for the coming of Jesus Christ into this world. First, Christ said that he came into this world to provide salvation for

sinners. Second, he said that he came to proclaim the good news. Third, he came to pave the way for the coming kingdom of God. These three goals comprise *missio Christi*, as defined by the Lord Jesus Christ and as executed by his followers. The three goals are not mutually exclusive, but somewhat intertwined. Jesus' message was a message about the kingdom of God and its inauguration in the world of his day and its ultimate realization and eschatological hope. Jesus had to come to provide salvation for individuals because the sinfulness of man prevented them from being fit subjects for God's kingdom. He had to provide a way to atone for sin and for transforming people from rebels to righteous saints who could be participants in the kingdom.

The way in which this mission was carried out by Jesus and his apostles bore three distinguishing marks: (1) contextualization of approach, (2) consistency of message, and (3) the call to believe and commit. The book of Acts demonstrates that the apostles of Christ continued to extend *missio Christi*, as Christ taught it when he was on the earth. The clear message of the apostles was that individuals needed to repent of sin and believe in Jesus Christ (as demonstrated through the act of being baptized in his name) to receive forgiveness of sin and become participants in Christ's coming kingdom. The apostles continued to carry out Christ's methodology by delivering the consistent message of the good news and calling for belief and commitment in ways that were contextualized for the people to whom the message was delivered.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation summarized an analysis of the works of four different Early Christian era apologists to determine if these apologists sought to extend *missio Christi* in their ministry context. The work of each apologist was examined to find the critical elements of the mission of Christ, as explicated in the Gospels and the book of Acts. In all, six apologies were examined to determine if they aimed to extend *missio Christi* in the different ministry contexts

that gave birth to the works. The apologies examined were written across time spanning the better part of a century, penned in different locations of the Roman Empire, authored by men with different backgrounds, and addressed to different audiences. As a result, different apologies were contextualized for different audiences.

Aristides was a philosopher of Athens, Greece, who wrote to Emperor Hadrian around the year 125 CE. Justin Martyr, a native of Palestine, authored three of the apologies examined. His First Apology was likely written around 155 to 156 CE to Emperor Antonius Pius. Justin's second apology appears to have been written to the Roman Senate somewhere between 157 and 161 CE. Justin's third work, the Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, was written sometime following Justin's First Apology and was targeted at a Jewish audience. Tatian, an Assyrian philosopher who wrote his *Address to the Greeks*, targeted philosophers and the general audience in his work written somewhere between 167 and 172 CE. Tertullian was from Carthage in Africa and wrote his apology somewhere between 198 and 217 CE (during the reigns of Severus and Antonius Caracalla). While each of the philosophers addressed similar themes, their arguments were contextualized for their unique audiences.

In each case, the apologists combined intricate legal defenses with commonly used evangelistic tools. Arguments against the mistreatment of Christians were combined with polemical arguments against Roman polytheism, testimonials concerning the transformation of lives experienced by Christians, the presentation of the gospel message, and appeals for pagans to repent of their false beliefs and accept the Christian message. The missional value of the various apologists and apologies were evaluated with the four-part rubric: (1) the degree of their focus upon Christ, (2) the clarity of gospel message presented, (3) the strength of appeal for conversion of the audience, and (4) the level of contextualization used in attempting to persuade

the audience toward a favorable response to Christianity. While the different apologetic works met the different criteria to differing degrees, they all appear to seek the advancement of *missio Christi*. Therefore, all four apologists would qualify as missional in orientation, and their apologies demonstrate the pattern of Christ and his apostles.

In chapter four, points of intersection between the Early Christian era ministry context and post-Christian era ministry context were explored. While the two ministry contexts are separated by some seventeen centuries, there are some ways in which Christ followers of both time periods lived in similar circumstances.

The world of the *Pax Romana* was a multicultural, multilingual, diverse culture in which the worshipers of many gods and adherents to various philosophies were united through a pragmatic pluralism. Any religion or philosophy was granted official tolerance and passive societal acceptance unless it proved hazardous to the well-being of society as a whole or unless it claimed to be the exclusive arbiter of truth. During the first three centuries of her existence, the church of Jesus Christ found herself at odds with traditional societal mores and beliefs. The good news about Jesus Christ provided a severe pushback against Rome's pragmatic pluralism. The moral standards proclaimed and practiced by followers of Christ ran amok with the lax moral standards of Roman society. As a result of Christianity's exclusivist message in lofty moral standards, Christians found themselves in conflict with the world around them.

Contemporary society bears many of the same traits as the cultural context of Early Christian era ministry. The lingering elements of postmodernism have resulted in a pragmatic pluralism that allows for conflicting religious and philosophical claims to be seen as equally valid. Post-Christian era apologists find themselves attempting to minister in a world that rejects objective truth and shuns all universal metanarratives. Contemporary society has become a

mosaic of religious and philosophical ideas which are often found to conflict with the Christian message and its morality. Because Christianity proclaims a message emphasizing objective, universal truth, Christians find themselves under public scrutiny and encountering resistance (and sometimes persecution) from an unbelieving society.

As they attempt to deal with post-Christian society, contemporary apologists find themselves dealing with similar issues as those faced by their Early Christian era counterparts. Contemporary apologists must realize that the issues created by religious pluralism are not unique to the post-Christian era. Since there are points of particular intersection between the Early Christian era in the post-Christian era ministry contexts, it is likely that much can be learned from those who ministered in similar situations, even though much time has elapsed between the two eras.

### **Suggestions for Application**

What lessons can post-Christian era apologists glean from Early Christian era apologists to carry out the apologetic task in a missional way? It is now imperative to advance to some suggestions for application of *missio Christi* in the post-Christian era. From this study flow six suggestions:

1. Post-Christian era apologists must approach their task with the overarching goal of opening the minds of unbelievers to the viability of the Christian worldview. In contemporary society, many unbelievers reject the Christian message because they do not understand it. The decline of Christian influence in contemporary society has led to a misunderstanding of the Christian worldview. The result of this misunderstanding is the closing of minds to the veracity of the Christian message. People do not generally embrace what they do not understand. The first goal of post-Christian era apologists, then, must be the opening of minds to the viability of the

Christian worldview.

Early Christian era apologists approached their task with the overarching goal of opening the minds of their audiences to the viability of the Christian worldview. They presented evidence and arguments designed to increase the awareness and accurate understanding of those being addressed of the content of the Christian worldview. Because of the vast amounts of misinformation present in their culture about Christian beliefs, the apologists presented an accurate account of the content and logic of the Christian worldview.

2. Post-Christian era apologists must remember that the goal of their apologetic is not to win arguments, but rather souls, and through that, grow Christ's kingdom. The ultimate goal of the apologist is to be an evangelist. If winning souls is the ultimate goal, the apologist must seek to bring the person his audience into the kingdom of God. Since individuals cannot be coerced into a relationship with Christ, it is doubtful that they can be argued into the kingdom.

The attitude in which the apologist approaches his unbelieving audience will produce either a positive or negative reaction to his message. One of the significant communicative concepts of postmodernism is that of "conversation." While there are some negative connotations to the postmodern concept, the idea of engaging in an apologetic "conversation" with an individual or individuals contains merit.

Many of the early Christian era apologetic works either overtly or covertly bear the marks of engaging in an apologetic conversation. *The Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* presents a clear example of such a conversation. While the other apologies do not present the give and take of a conversation, the manner in which the apologists write can demonstrate a tone of conversation with their audience. Justin's *First Apology* and Tertullian's *Apology* both demonstrate this conversational tone. While Tatian's *Address to the Greeks* is more polemical than the others, it

still bears the mark of this conversational method. The end goal of each of the apologies seems to be to change the minds of those in his audience about Christianity and ultimately to bring them into Christ's kingdom.

3. Post-Christian era apologists must recognize that a person must come to question, evaluate, and reject his own worldview before he will accept and embrace the Christian worldview. This process, simply stated, is the essence of the biblical concept of repentance. According to Scripture, repentance is necessary for salvation. If the ultimate goal is to bring people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and thereby helping them to become fit subjects for Christ's kingdom, the apologist must be committed to the process.

The goal of the apologist is not to lead the believer to a surface level commitment, but complete conversion and transformation of the individual at the deepest levels. Paul Hiebert states that "conversion [often] takes place at the surface levels of behavior and beliefs, but if worldviews are not transformed, the gospel is interpreted in terms of pagan worldviews, and the result is Christo-paganism."<sup>1</sup> This problem is especially prevalent in Hindu societies, where the acceptance of a multiplicity of gods is already a norm. The pluralistic society also increases the possibility of a surface-level profession of faith without the corresponding repentance. Unless a person begins the process of transformation by questioning and evaluating the validity of their own worldview in light of the Christian worldview, they are not likely to reject their own and embrace the truth.

Justin presents this process powerfully in his testimony at the beginning of the *Dialogue*

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<sup>1</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 69.



*with Trypho.*<sup>2</sup> When confronted by Trypho and his companions, Justin opens his discussion a philosophy by speaking of his journey into faith. Justin spoke of his background in Greek philosophy, primarily as a Platonist. One day he was confronted by an old man in the field near the sea who struck up a conversation with Justin. The old man gently guided him in the process of evaluating his own philosophy, rejecting it, and embracing Christianity.

4. Post-Christian era apologists must learn to contextualize the method in which their apologetic is presented and the terminology employed in communicating it but keep the facts of the message consistent and clear. If the apologist attempts to communicate with words that are beyond the audience's ability to understand, or if he frames his arguments with points of reference that are outside of his hearer's experiences, he will not likely connect with them. Instead, he must have a good understanding of the background and life experiences of those with which he wishes to communicate and use that understanding to contextualize his apologetic.

The Early Christian era apologist attempted to contextualize their apologetic arguments for those with whom they communicated. Aristides couched his apologetic in terms that Emperor Hadrian would be able to understand. Justin contextualized his apologetic presentations in precise ways for his audiences. The way he approached his defense of Christians to the Emperor was significantly different from his apologetic approach as he engaged Trypho. Tatian and Tertullian contextualized their approaches to engage the audiences and their locations.

5. Post-Christian apologists must consistently seek to understand the questions being asked by people and seek to answer those questions in an understandable way. Missional church leaders have stated that one of the main problems preventing traditional churches from

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Logos E-Book., vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, I-VII.

connecting with their cultures is that they are answering questions that no one is asking. If apologists are to become missionally engaged with their culture, they must exegete their culture. They must understand the questions that people are asking. They must seek to provide the answers to the questions that are being asked. At all costs, apologists must seek to avoid answering questions that no one is asking – for to do so is to become irrelevant and ineffective in fulfilling *missio Christi*.

Pre-Christian apologists sought to answer the questions that were being asked in their day. The questions were sometimes similar and sometimes varied. The questions that Trypho the Jew was asking were entirely different from the ones being asked by Antonius Pius. Trypho asked questions that had direct reference to the Old Testament prophets and other Old Testament Scriptures. Justin addressed Antonius Pius concerning questions about Christian beliefs and practices in relation to the worship of the Greek gods. While some of the subject matter addressed was similar in content (i.e., the resurrection, proper worship of God, eternal judgment), it was couched in very different terminology according to the recipient. The apologists, however, were careful to address the questions that were being asked by each audience.

6. Post-Christian era apologists must endeavor to provide a living apologetic. Words and actions need to both be in the equation or the results will not follow. A living apologetic is the communicated testimony of lives transformed by Jesus Christ. This living apologetic must undoubtedly begin with the life of the apologist but may also include the stories of other people's lives which have been transformed by the power of the gospel. While logical arguments and substantial historical and scientific evidence may both provide a powerful apologetic for Christian theism and other philosophical issues, the absence of a living apologetic will come to

naught.

Early Christian era apologists understood this principle and provided living apologetic examples in their arguments. In some instances, the living apologetic was the apologist himself. In virtually every case, the lives of other believers whose lives have been transformed provided the living apologetic.<sup>3</sup> For the pre-Christian apologists, the evidence presented in their apologies was confirmed by the living apologetic presented in their own lives and the lives of their fellow believers. The equation that confirms the Christian message could be summarized as apologetic evidence plus living apologetic equals the advancement of *missio Christi* (AE + LA = AMC).

Pre-Christian apologists engage the world of their day to advance the mission of Christ. While the early Christian era world was not won solely by apologetic presentations, the apologists certainly fulfilled their role in presenting the Christian message so highly pluralistic world that bears many parallels to the post-Christian era world of today. The Early Christian era apologists also left works behind that can serve as valuable tools of study for post-Christian era apologists. While this study has sought to take an in-depth look at the principle of *missio Christi* and its extension for the early Christian era apologists and its relation to apologetics in the post-Christian era, its scope was limited. Some additional questions and documents could bear study concerning the same subject.

### **Areas Needing Additional Study**

Additional study in the area of missional apologetics should be extended by including the writings of other early Christian era apologists. Valuable insights may be arrived at in examining the principles of *missio Christi* and its extension in the writings of those apologists,

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<sup>3</sup> See Justin's First Apology. XXIX, Tertullian, Apology XXXIX, L; Tatian, XXIX, XXXIII, XLII.

with possible intersections between the writings of these additional early Christian era apologists and the work of post-Christian era apologists and their ministry contexts.

Missional apologetics in the post-Christian era would also benefit from studies designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the obstacles in the post-Christian context that prevent the opening of unbelieving minds? Studies designed to expose the issues producing the reluctance of unbelievers to accept the Christian message. Such studies may involve quantitative research involving surveys and interviews of non-Christians. If comparison is made to early Christian era ministry, in-depth historical research it would have to be done, as well as extensive exegesis of early Christian era apologetics that were not examined in this study.

2. What are the central questions in the post-Christian era that need an apologetic answer? The study of central questions that need answering in the post-Christian era would likely need to be done in specialized ways. Specifically, unique ministry contexts would need to be examined to uncover questions peculiar to those contexts. Historical studies would also be involved enabling the discovery the early Christian era contacts that would correspond to the context of the post-Christian era milieu under question. Early Christian era apologetics works found to be situated in a similar ministry situation to that milieu under examination could then be studied in order to find principles and ideas for application in the post-Christian era setting.

3. What are the best ways in the post-Christian era to demonstrate a living apologetic? A thorough exegesis of specific ministry situations in contexts is vital to the understanding of the best ways to demonstrate a living apologetic in that ministry context. Comparisons could be made to early Christian era contexts in which similar circumstances and issues existed.

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