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## EXPANDING THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCOPE OF APOLOGETICS IN EVANGELISM

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EXPANDING THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCOPE OF APOLOGETICS IN  
EVANGELISM

By

Jonathan Dinkins

Submitted to the School of Honors Committee

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

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2023

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those who do not yet know Jesus. May this paper be a tool to help the Church reach them effectively with the Gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Acknowledgment

My gratitude extends to those who have supported me as I wrote this thesis. I would like to thank my thesis advisors Dr. Joseph Davis and Dr. Daniel McNaughton for their insight and guidance in the research process and the instruction I received from them through their excellent classes. Dr. Thomas Gollery was an invaluable help in writing the Data Analysis. I would also like to thank Dr. Gordon Miller for making possible the opportunity to write this paper through Southeastern University's honors program; he is not only a great instructor but a close friend. I would like to thank my girlfriend for the unconditional love and support she has shown me for the past three years. My parents were dedicated to raising me in a godly household and giving me a robust education. Without them, I would not be the person I am today. Finally and above all, I thank God for His grace, mercy, and guiding hand. I pray that this paper is used to advance His Kingdom. From beginning to end, any good that comes out of this paper is from Him.

## Abstract

This paper examines the scope of Apologetics. It argues for the need of a nuanced, holistic form of Apologetics that incorporates a vast array of forms of persuasion that may be used by the Holy Spirit to show a nonbeliever the truth of the Gospel and the necessity to trust in Jesus. It records data from a quantitative study which investigated the personal faith journeys of disciples of Christ and the factors which helped to persuade them of the truth of the Gospel and to submit to the leadership of Jesus. This thesis proposes that the common evangelical understanding of the scope of Apologetics is too narrow and should be expanded to include other forms of valid persuasion. It proposes a nuanced definition of Apologetics: the art and science of offering valid forms of persuasion for the truth of Christianity which the Holy Spirit may use to reveal the truth of the Gospel to unbelievers.

**KEY WORDS:** Apologetics, Traditional Apologetics, Nontraditional Apologetics, Christian Persuasion.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

For some, it was a typical Friday night out on the town square, a time to relax and enjoy the upcoming weekend. For a small group of eager Christians, however, it was an opportunity to share something more significant than a good night. The group frequently met on Friday nights at the square to engage others in conversations about Jesus and the Gospel. They had Gospel tracts and a body of knowledge to share with others. Despite these constants, every conversation was different. Some went well, and others did not; some were brief, others long; some were straightforward, others complicated; some accepted the message, others rejected it.

On this particular Friday night, one young, budding evangelist approached a group of young adults, tracts at the ready. “Did you get one of these?” he asked with a smile. “It is a Gospel tract; do you have a few minutes to talk, or are you busy?” The group was standing outside a restaurant, waiting to be seated, and was willing to chat for a few minutes. The Christian directed the discussion through some familiar elements - a message about the law of God, sin, judgment, heaven, hell, the cross, and faith in Jesus. Despite the content he shared, which he had discussed numerous times with others, this conversation deviated from the familiar path.

The young group, typical of young adults in the modern age, had questions and skepticism about Christianity. “Hasn’t the Bible been changed through the centuries?” Although he possessed only a moderate knowledge of textual criticism, the young Christian did his best to answer their objections, explaining the textual reliability of the New Testament. The group seemed surprised that such answers about Christianity *existed*. They were so impressed that there was an answer to this objection that one group member readily accepted a book written by a

Christian intellectual about the logical reasons for Christianity. One group member lauded the young evangelist's kindness and grace in the conversation. The content of the message was persuasive, but so was the way he presented it. Which factor was more persuasive is hard to say, but it is clear that the conversation could have ended up very differently if either was lacking.

### **What is Apologetics?**

The term *Apologetics* has come to mean that branch of theology that deals with the systematic defense of the Christian faith. It often involves answering objections to and presenting positive truths for Christianity. Because of a rise of intellectual skepticism toward Christianity, especially in the Western world, many Christians understand the task of Apologetics to be a crucial element in evangelism. It is considered a way to clear up intellectual barriers that may prevent a skeptic from coming to faith in Christ and to give them sound reasons why the Gospel is true. Many theologians believe that the apostles used some form of Apologetics at the very beginning of the church.

There is no uniform consensus, however, on what constitutes Apologetics. Most Apologetics books published today involve philosophical and historical arguments for the central tenets of the Christian faith, including objective truth and morality, the existence of God, the possibility of miracles, the reliability of the Bible, and the Resurrection of Jesus. This has been the traditional understanding of Apologetics in recent decades. Nevertheless, there is a growing interest in the possibility of non-traditional forms of Apologetics. This paper proposes a nuanced definition of Apologetics: *the art and science of providing and presenting reasons for the truth of the Gospel and the necessity to follow Jesus, which the Holy Spirit may use to address the thoughts, feelings, and will of the individual*. In that case, it follows that if there are other valid ways to persuade someone of truth besides rigid philosophical and historical argumentation, then

there may be other forms of Apologetics that may be used, under the conviction and illumination of the Holy Spirit, to convince nonbelievers that Christianity is true.

### **The Research Problem**

This paper presupposes that effective, non-traditional forms of Apologetics exist and are a leading influence in many conversions to Christianity. However, these non-traditional forms of Apologetics are often not considered to be in the field of Apologetics. As a result, the perceived value of these forms is diminished, and their application is neglected. This results in a truncated understanding and practice of Apologetics that fails to acknowledge and implement powerful forms of Christian persuasion. When Christian persuasion, practiced by Jesus and the Apostles, is limited only to intellectual arguments, one can only assume that the effectiveness of evangelism is disastrously reduced. The problem proposed in this paper is whether non-traditional forms of Apologetics are present in Christians' journey to Christ and help persuade individuals to believe the Gospel is true and to submit to Jesus's leadership.

Such are the assumptions of this research project. However, like all good theories, these assumptions should be backed by solid evidence. This research project aims to answer the research problem described above through a quantitative study examining the persuasive factors present in an individual's journey to Christ. Based on the research presented below, the thesis of this paper is that *the typical, contemporary evangelical understanding of the scope of Apologetics is too narrow and should be expanded to include other forms of valid persuasion.*

### **Overview of the Thesis Paper**

The literature review examines how theologians have defined Apologetics and understood its use in evangelism. It also examines some forms of persuasion that scholars have proposed to be utilized in Apologetics. Based on information acquired in the literature review, a

survey was created to determine what forms of Apologetics (which may be redefined as *Christian persuasion*) influenced Christians' view of the truthfulness of Christianity prior to their conversion. Results from this survey will shed light on which forms of Apologetics /Christian persuasion were influential in one's journey to Christ and which variables, such as typical demographics and the Christian's family faith background, may have affected the factors they found influential.

This thesis contains four sections. The literature review surveys the available scholarship on Apologetics, its role in evangelism, and non-traditional forms of Apologetics. The information gleaned from the review, combined with the author's attempt to fill in what he sees as gaps in the research, has been used to generate a survey to evaluate the effectiveness of several forms of Apologetics /Christian persuasion. Then, the methodology describes how the survey was conducted. Next, the data analysis presents an interpretation of the survey results. Finally, the conclusion draws relevant content from the survey and presents information that is helpful to understand the scope of Apologetics and its application in evangelism.

### **Research Questions**

Participants were asked to select all factors which helped persuade them of the truth of the Gospel, which factors helped persuade them to submit to Jesus's leadership, and what kind of barriers they initially had that kept them from coming to Christ. These questions have been short-handed to "Gospel as Truth," "Submission to Jesus's Leadership," and "Barriers in Coming to Christ," respectively, to save space. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Will study participant perceptions of whether their conversion was progressive rather than an abrupt decision be reflected at a statistically significant level?

2. How many participants selected a factor other than Rational Apologetics that they claim helped persuade them of the truth of the Gospel (referred to in the data analysis as “Gospel as Truth”)?
3. How many participants selected multiple factors for the “Gospel as Truth” question?
4. Of participants who selected Rational Apologetics as a factor for the “Gospel as Truth” question, how many also selected either Witness Apologetics or Church’s Witness?
5. Did the frequency of selection for each apologetic factor differ in the “Gospel as Truth” question compared to the question of which factors helped persuade them to submit to the leadership of Jesus (referred to in the data analysis as “Submission to Jesus’s Leadership”)?
6. Were the “Barriers in Coming to Christ” equally distributed across the four categories identified for study purposes?
7. Did participants report a diversity of missing elements that they believe would have been helpful in their journey to Christ?

### **Conclusion**

God has given His Church the extraordinary task of taking the Gospel into the world (Matthew 28:18-20). The task of evangelism is not easy, and without the Holy Spirit, it would be impossible. Biblical data and contemporary experiences reveal that human beings have intellectual, emotional, and volitional barriers that become obstacles in one’s journey to Christ. Throughout Church history, Apologetics has been a tool to remove intellectual barriers, answer objections, and present persuasive reasons for the Christian faith. In the evangelical tradition, Apologetics has been understood to comprise rational, intellectual arguments for Christianity.

This paper, however, seeks to provide a nuanced definition of Apologetics, contending that Apologetics should be defined more broadly. The ultimate goal of this study is to equip the Church to carry out an effective apologetic ministry as God uses it to carry the saving and healing power of the Gospel into the world. The next chapter will review the literature on Apologetics that provided the theoretical framework for developing the research study.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

The subject of Christian Apologetics in evangelical circles has become increasingly popular and common in the West. Opinions about Apologetics and what it entails, however, are wide-ranging. Many believers have *some* opinion about Apologetics, even if that opinion is not well-developed.

What exactly is Apologetics? For many, rational arguments for God's existence, the Bible's historicity, and Jesus's Resurrection come to mind. Some view Apologetics as a needless task replaceable by the work of the Holy Spirit to convict hearts and change minds. Others think of it as a way to bolster the Christian's faith. Still, others see it as an indispensable element of evangelism. Many books on Apologetics discuss the nature of truth, arguments for God's existence, a defense for miracles, an explanation for the presence of evil, and a case for the Bible's reliability (or, at least, the Gospels). Some books demonstrate how to use this information in evangelism to present a compelling case for Christianity to the unbeliever.

Such is the common conception of Apologetics among evangelicals. A looming question, however, is whether such an academic discipline is fruitful and theologically warranted. Furthermore, are these rational arguments, based heavily on philosophy and history, to be the entire scope of Apologetics? If this scope should be expanded, what impact will that have on evangelism? This paper challenges the common understanding of what forms of persuasion could be considered Apologetics. This section will outline the nature of knowledge and persuasion, what Apologetics is, whether it is theologically warranted, the challenges of traditional Apologetics, and whether its scope should be expanded.

## Epistemological and Rhetorical Considerations

Christianity is a historical religion that makes objective historical claims. If the God of the Bible does not exist or Jesus did not physically rise from the dead, Christianity cannot be true (c.f., 1 Corinthians 15). The primary function of Apologetics is to persuade individuals of the truth of Christianity. According to evangelical soteriology, knowledge of specific facts is necessary for salvation, although by no means does knowledge and assent alone comprise biblical faith (e.g., see Romans 10:9,10). To thoroughly consider the proper scope of Apologetics, one must first ask what constitutes knowledge and how one is persuaded to believe something is true. To answer these questions, one must explore the disciplines of epistemology and rhetoric.

J.P. Moreland and Garrett DeWeese, two contemporary Christian philosophers, explain that knowledge constitutes justified true belief. That is, to say one knows something is to say that he or she believes a true fact and has justification for believing it. Take away any of these three criteria, and an individual cannot be said to truly *know* something. If one does not believe in some proposition, or if that proposition is not true, or if they have no justification for believing that proposition, one does not have knowledge about that proposition.

What constitutes truth, belief, and justification is a matter of greater controversy. Moreland and DeWeese, however, argue for their positions on these subjects. Truth, they claim, means a proposition corresponds with reality and is the way things really are. Belief describes the mental state of accepting a proposition as true. The debate over justification is complex, but Moreland and DeWeese settle on moderate foundationalism. They propose three classes of indubitable beliefs based on nondoxastic evidence (i.e., not based on another belief): self-evident, incorrigible, and perceptually experienced beliefs. Furthermore, there are some



beliefs, such as those from memory and perception, that are possibly wrong but which one is justified to believe. Although the ideas are complex, this position is confirmed by general experience. People seem to know some things to be true and are justified in believing them, even if they are not entirely certain.<sup>1</sup>

Common experience tells individuals they can know and act on certain knowledge. Life experiences also demonstrate that people come to believe things in many different ways, some valid and others not. Furthermore, people are often persuaded to believe something or to act in a certain way. The art of persuasion is known as rhetoric, and there is perhaps no greater rhetorician than the great philosopher Aristotle. His means of persuasion are still studied and implemented today. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle identifies three means of persuasion: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. According to Aristotle, persuasion can occur “through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence (*ethos*)... through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion by the speech (*pathos*),” and “through the arguments when we show the truth or the apparent truth from whatever is persuasive in each case (*logos*).”<sup>2</sup>

Although each of these categories may be broken down into subcategories, and although the question remains which forms of persuasion are ethical or valid in leading to the truth, these three forms of persuasion still make up the backbone of rhetoric. While this short consideration of epistemology and rhetoric is insufficient for any detailed analysis, it brings awareness to the complex issues surrounding Apologetics. For Apologetics to be effective, one must consider the nature of knowledge and how one comes to believe in something. The remaining sections of this

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<sup>1</sup>Garrett J. DeWeese and J.P. Moreland, *Philosophy Made Slightly Less Difficult: A Beginner's Guide to Life's Big Questions* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 54-70.

<sup>2</sup>Aristotle and George A Kennedy, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 2nd ed, WorldCat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), <https://seu.on.worldcat.org/oclc/79609126>, 38-39.

literature review will note the discussions by scholars on how Apologetics has been defined, its purpose, how it may be used to persuade others of the truth of Christianity, and the scope of proper apologetic methods of persuasion.

### **Contemporary Definitions of Apologetics**

Theologians and apologists define Apologetics in numerous ways. Prominent Apologist William Lane Craig, in his book *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, defines Apologetics as “that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”<sup>3</sup>

Kenneth D. Boa, in an introductory article for Doug Powell’s book *Ultimate Guide to Defend Your Faith*, provides a more detailed analysis. He states that Apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which originally meant a speech of defense, as in Socrates’s *apologia* before his execution. The word is used 17 times in the New Testament and gives the idea of a reasoned defense. By the second century, this word began to be used to describe Christian writers who defended Christianity from attacks. Today, an *apology* indicates a work for the defense of the Christian faith and may include proof of Christianity, a defense from attacks, refutations to other contradictory beliefs and persuasion to convince people of the truth of Christianity and to apply that truth to their lives.<sup>4</sup>

James W. Sire, in his book *A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics*, seeks to reach a definition of Apologetics by looking at various texts from the Bible. He begins with 1 Peter 3:15, an often-quoted verse for Apologetics, and notes that the context involves the threat of persecution for believers. It is a call to consider the charge and probably to offer evidence in

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<sup>3</sup> William L. Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), XI.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth D. Boa, “What Is Apologetics?” Essay, In *Ultimate Guide to Defend Your Faith*, by Doug Powell, VII-VIII (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2019).

response. Sire then turns his attention to the books of Acts. In 2:1-42, the Apologetic included an explanation and proclamation of the Christian faith. In 17:1-9, Paul argues from the Scriptures with the Jews. In 17:16-34, Paul lectures the philosophers, this time without Scripture, linking the Gospel with their interest in religion and new things.

Sire then turns to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, in which Paul says, “and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”<sup>5</sup> Some believe this indicates Paul gave up his approach used in Acts 17:16-34. But more likely, he adapted his approach to the city of Corinth, where philosophical reflections would not have been natural. Apologetics, Sire contends, had to do with correcting those inside the church, as in 2 Cor. 10:1-6 and Jude 3. Indeed, the Gospels themselves function as “Apologetic tracts.”

Concluding, Sire gives a definition of Apologetics based on biblical data that states, “Christian Apologetics is simply the presentation of a case for biblical truth.”<sup>6</sup> This simple definition is amplified by his statement that “Christian Apologetics lays before the watching world such a winsome embodiment of the Christian faith that for any and all who are willing to observe there will be an intellectually and emotionally credible witness to its fundamental truth.”<sup>7</sup>

### **The Relationship Between Apologetics and Evangelism**

Many Christian scholars have identified a significant relationship between Apologetics and evangelism, holding that the two go hand-in-hand. Apologetics and evangelism, however, are not identical tasks. Frederic R. Howe, in his article *Comparative Study of the Work of Apologetics and Evangelism*, provides several key differences. Evangelism, he claims, is

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 2:4, ESV

<sup>6</sup> James W Sire, *A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2006), 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

essentially the proclamation of the Gospel. Each discipline uses different information, and the end result of each is different - Apologetics seeks to give a defense, while evangelism seeks to convert people to Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

Despite these differences and possible objections from others who may say Apologetics has the same end goal of evangelism (i.e., conversion), there is remarkable unity among many theologians throughout church history of the compatibility of Apologetics and evangelism. Norman Geisler gives several examples of important theologians who believed in the compatibility of reason and the work of the Holy Spirit, including Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and B.B. Warfield.<sup>9</sup> After surveying these great thinkers' views on the relationship between reason and the Holy Spirit, Geisler concludes by saying, "The Holy Spirit works in and through evidence but not separate from it. As the Spirit of a rational God, he does not bypass the head on the way to the heart."<sup>10</sup>

Many modern theologians hold this same conviction, too, arguing that Apologetics is indeed compatible with evangelism. For example, Adam W. Greenway states that the mind is essential in conversion because it is the receiver of facts and interprets information in light of the knowledge and commitments it already has. He contends that it is both unreasonable and unscriptural to simply present the Gospel to a skeptic who has objections to the Christian faith.

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<sup>8</sup> Frederic Howe, "Comparative Study of the Work of Apologetics and Evangelism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135, no. 540 (October 1978): 303-313.  
<https://search-ebscohost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000768336&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>9</sup> Norman L. Geisler, "Holy Spirit, Role in Apologetics," Essay, In *The Big Book of Christian Apologetics: An A to Z Guide*, 242-247 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

To deny any need for Apologetics, Greenway asserts, is to assume that the Holy Spirit cannot use sound reasoning to bring people to Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Theologians have long held that reason has a place in faith, an issue crucial for addressing Apologetics's role in evangelism. Timothy McGrew, for example, in his contribution in *Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy*, seeks to demonstrate that what can be called “natural theology” is compatible with Christianity. He does this by showing several philosophical arguments that confirm aspects of the Christian faith. “Philosophy,” writes McGrew, “rightly and thoughtfully pursued, offers us multiple clues that point to the existence of a deity. Christianity offers us a view of God and man that goes far beyond what philosophy can attain. Yet there is, as I see it, no contradiction.”<sup>12</sup>

Many theologians echo McGrew’s convictions. Thomas Schirrmacher, in his article *Observations on Apologetics and Its Relation to Contemporary Christian Mission*, observes that since Christians are not supposed to accept things with blind faith, they must be able to give reasons to embrace Christ.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Harold Netland says that Apologetics is unavoidable because the Gospel is necessarily tied to truth claims and because Christ and the Apostles never asked for blind faith but rather used corroborating arguments. He writes:

If someone asserts that a given statement is true we normally do not accept it as true unless we are convinced it is a serious charge which cannot be cavalierly dismissed. Those who take it upon themselves to proclaim the truth of the Gospel

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<sup>11</sup> Adam W Greenway, “When Euangelion Met Apologia: An Examination of the Mind’s Role in Conversion and the Value of Apologetics in Evangelism,” *Great Commission Research Journal* 2, no. 1 (Sum 2010). <https://search-ebscohost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI FZU210607000084&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy McGrew, “Convergence Model,” Essay, In *Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy*, edited by Richard Brian Davis and Paul M. Gould, 123–50 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 150.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Schirrmacher, “Observations on Apologetics and Its Relation to Contemporary Christian Mission,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 44, no. 4 (October 2020). <https://search-ebscohost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=146671603&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

to a largely unsympathetic audience owe it to their audience to be prepared to respond in an informed and appropriate manner to criticisms and questions leveled against the Christian message.<sup>14</sup>

### **Challenges to Traditional Understandings of Apologetics**

Despite a large consensus among many theologians about the compatibility of these Apologetics and evangelism, some have noted challenges involved in their implementation with each other. Two specific problems will be discussed below: the problem of cross-cultural persuasion and the problem of “seductions”. One challenge to traditional apologetics which demonstrates a need for expanding the church’s understanding of apologetics’ scope is the issue of contextualization. A major discussion among many theologians is the issue of cross-cultural persuasion which, because of the globalization of the world and the blending of various worldviews, is increasingly urgent for many parts of the world, especially America. Writing about Christian missions, Thomas Schirrmacher says that Christian missionaries must present the Gospel to their audience in ways that are intelligible to them. Because of this, missionaries ought to carefully study their audience’s culture so as to present the Gospel in ways they will understand.<sup>15</sup>

Benno van den Toren, writing about contextualized Apologetics, notes three barriers to cross-cultural persuasion (the term he prefers over Apologetics ). First, humans are heavily influenced by the community they are in. Secondly, a person’s worldview intensely affects both

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<sup>14</sup> Harold Netland, “Toward Contextualized Apologetics,” *Missiology* 16, no. 3 (July 1988): 291. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000804618&site=ehost-live&scope=sit>e.

<sup>15</sup> Schirrmacher, 359-367.

their will and emotions. And thirdly, different cultures will deal with objections to their outlook in different ways. All of these barriers make it difficult for cross-cultural persuasion.<sup>16</sup>

While some critics of Western theology view Apologetics as irrelevant, Harold Netland, in his article *Toward Contextualized Apologetics*, maintains that it is unavoidable. Apologetics, however, must be contextualized. Netland makes a distinction between transcultural and culture-specific Apologetics. The former deals with objective reasons for Christianity regardless of how a human responds. The latter's purpose is to persuade others using both the relevant data and "justification procedures." Contextualized Apologetics will be mindful of the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the target audience. Transcultural Apologetics is the grounds for contextualized Apologetics, irrelevant to the individual, specialized and analytical whereas contextualized Apologetics is not.<sup>17</sup>

The example of contextualized Apologetics is outlined in Evert Van de Poll's article *Evangelism or the Paradox of Europe and Christianity*. In the article, he outlines three angles in the context of evangelism - secularization, postmodernism and post-Christendom. These angles provide an understanding for how to develop common ground with individuals in Europe.<sup>18</sup> Such an analysis of European culture demonstrates the need for contextualized Apologetics.

The challenges noted above, although directed primarily to the challenge of contextualization, shed light on the need to reevaluate the scope of Apologetics. Cultural

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<sup>16</sup> Benno van den Toren, "Challenges and Possibilities of Inter-Religious and Cross-Cultural Apologetic Persuasion," *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, q (2010), accessed April 07, 2022, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=47409507&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>17</sup> Netland, 289-303.

<sup>18</sup> Evert Van de Poll, "Evangelism or the Paradox of Europe and Christianity," *European Journal of Theology* 25, no. 2 (2016): <https://search-ebscohost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI8W170613003004&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

sensitivity and barriers, however, are not the only challenges in the realm of Apologetics and evangelism. Os Guinness, in his book *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, warns of the danger of what he calls “technique.” Many people, Guinness claims, view the action of planting churches like they do planting a new fast-food restaurant. When this mentality is adopted in Christian persuasion, results are ineffective. Guinness uses the term “technique” to denote this mentality of persuasion and urges Christians to resist the temptation to use seductions. When it comes to Christian persuasion, there is no “cookie-cutter” approach to doing things.<sup>19</sup>

### **Expanding the Scope of Apologetics**

Because of these and other challenges in Apologetics, some apologists are calling on the church to expand its understanding of the scope of Apologetics. This means examining new types of evidence or reasoning that offer a persuading case for Christianity in a biblically valid way. Oftentimes, the content of Apologetics is thought to consist of rigidly logical argumentation for the Christian faith based on philosophy, science, and history. While that content is constantly affirmed as crucial to the task of Apologetics, some theologians are advocating for a broader understanding of what counts as Apologetics.

Again, Os Guinness claims that there is more than one way of doing Christian persuasion. He notes that it is an art, not a science. Moreover, it is not about what is modern or postmodern but about what is biblical. He claims the Bible combines the rational and the experiential, and so should our persuasion. God’s truth can be explained and defended in numerous ways: through stories, arguments, reason, questions, and imagination. This persuasion involves not only intellectual elements but moral and spiritual ones as well.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Os Guinness, “Technique: The Devil’s Bait,” Essay, In *Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, 29–46 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*,



Benno van den Toren also prefers to use the term *persuasion* in place of Apologetics because there are different forms of argumentation as well as emotional and moral aspects. One approach he advocates for is using narrative Apologetics. Narrative Apologetics appeals to more of our humanity, such as the emotions and imagination. It also has the power to plunge someone into another world. Story, Toren holds, is not incompatible with modernist argumentation, and both can provide valid arguments in different ways.

Concerning what some call *worldview Apologetics*, Toren holds that this method uses criteria to analyze a worldview that is not immediately accepted by all audiences. While the criteria are valid, it is better to use criteria that are shared with a particular audience to be more effective in Apologetics. Otherwise, the apologist would have to first prove the validity of the criteria prior to using it to analyze a worldview.<sup>21</sup>

In another work, Toren maintains that reason never operates in a vacuum. There is no full-proof method for cross-cultural argumentation, and there must first be an element of openness on the hearer's part, which involves the wills and the emotions. Good Apologetics, therefore, ought to address the entirety of a person, of which intellect is only one part. Furthermore, the character of the apologist is crucial. Christian witness includes both the content and the character of the evangelist. The character should naturally flow from the power of the content: the cross of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

What, then, does an apologetic that both addresses the entirety of a person and is culturally sensitive look like? Some theologians offer a few suggestions. David Pickering, in an article titled *Reflections on the Changing Landscape of Apologetics*, notes that there is a recent

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<sup>21</sup> van den Toren, *Challenges and Possibilities*, 42-64.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard van den Toren, *Christian Apologetics As Cross Cultural Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark, 2011).

trend in philosophy and theology known as the *affective turn* that seeks to give place to emotion and imagination in these disciplines. This trend has affected Apologetics, too. Pickering argues that since Apologetics seeks to change peoples' minds, the factors that bring change in the "social imagination" must be considered. Although Apologetics prizes wisdom, apologists operate in a world that highly values emotion. It may seem that reason does not matter to people anymore, but the people who use emotion often use reason to determine the best strategies. This highlights a key challenge to the discipline of Apologetics. In fact, Pickering himself asks a central question relevant to this thesis when he writes, "The increasingly visible broadening of the scope of the study of Apologetics, in both its direct and indirect forms, raises questions of definition. Where do the boundaries of Apologetics lie?"<sup>23</sup>

While there is no consensus as to where these boundaries lie, some have offered creative suggestions for Apologetics that push the common understanding of what Apologetics is. One author expresses the desire to move away from "rational" Apologetics towards "witness" Apologetics, arguing that reason has an unduly elevated status as a product of the Enlightenment. He advocates an apologetic whose substance is Christ. Christians, he holds, are transformed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses to Christ despite persecution. This is an apologetic that comes from giving a witness to Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Others do not express such a disdain for "rational" Apologetics but offer up other means of Christian persuasion that are in harmony with reason but not necessarily tied to rigid philosophical or historical speculation. For example, one type of Apologetics that is being advocated for is called *imaginative Apologetics*. This is a method proposed by Alison Milbank in

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<sup>23</sup> David Pickering, "Reflections on the Changing Landscape of Apologetics," *New Blackfriars* 103, no. 1103 (2021): 97–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12690>.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Moore, "From Rational Apologetics to Witness Apologetics," *Antonianum* 90, 2 (2015). <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3811006&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

a chapter from the book *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition*. She argues that imagination is actually a tool of philosophy. God Himself works with humans through the imagination, and when people use imagination they, in a sense, perform a lesser act of re-creation by seeking meaning in experiences. By awakening peoples' creativity, they will awaken their religious sense. This is particularly needed in today's industrialized culture.

When one encounters reality in such a way, she continues, it leads us upward. Christians are to recognize form and meaning in the world and to be convincing in their presentation of the Gospel by awakening peoples' desires. According to Milbank, imaginative Apologetics has two aims - to awaken that desire of "homesickness" in people and to help people realize that they actually have an assumption that their experiences have a religious depth. Reason is beneficial but it leads to the opening of a mystery, she claims. But imagination helps people see the mystery *as a mystery*.<sup>25</sup>

Another creative apologetic is advocated for by Derwin L. Gray in a chapter he authored in the book *A New Kind of Apologist*. In the chapter, he claims that a multiethnic church is an apologetic. A church that is multiethnic can be a testimony of God's grace and an apologetic to the world. Throughout the New Testament, the Gospel is said to have the power to reconcile ethnicities, and this is done by Jesus. Churches today can pray and fast, create a multiethnic staff, incorporate diverse musical styles, and learn from multiethnic churches to tear down tensions

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<sup>25</sup> Alison Milbank, "Apologetics and the Imagination: Making Strange," Essay, In *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition*, edited by Andrew Davison, 31–45 (Baker Academic, 2011).

and create these multiethnic church bodies.<sup>26</sup> A church with multiple ethnicities can testify to the reconciling power of the Gospel to the whole world.

Although only three suggestions for nontraditional forms of Apologetics are presented above, this is enough to demonstrate the possibility that there may be other valid forms of Apologetics besides “rational Apologetics” which may be used in evangelism. The qualitative study documented in this chapter used some of these suggestions while adding other forms of persuasion not listed above.

### **Conclusion**

Apologetics has been defined in numerous ways by many theologians, and it has long been seen as a discipline in harmony with evangelism. The common conception of Apologetics in the West that views the content of Apologetics as essentially involving rigid philosophical and historical arguments, however, faces many difficulties when practically applied. Many have noticed these difficulties and the ensuing issues they bring and have advocated for a new way of doing Apologetics. They have also called for a broadening of the scope of Apologetics.

Despite the valuable resources noted above, there appear to be some gaps in the literature on the scope of Apologetics and nontraditional forms of Apologetics. For example, the author found little on the epistemological foundations for Apologetics, especially in regard to nontraditional forms. Furthermore, the idea that the scope of Apologetics should be expanded appears to be a rarity among the literature. Finally, suggestions and evaluations for nontraditional forms of Apologetics are lacking. Although the author may have missed some crucial literature that touches on these subjects, these subjects seem to be either rarely discussed or absent altogether.

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<sup>26</sup> Derwin L Gray, “The Multiethnic Church: God's Living Apologetic,” Essay, In *A New Kind of Apologist*, edited by Sean McDowell, 114–23 (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2016).

The most significant gap in this literature review is the absence of quantitative studies that specifically research the factors that helped persuade individuals of the gospel's truthfulness. The author found no studies that closely match the study documented in this paper, and this study may be a field of study that has yet to be explored.

This literature review notes some of the challenges of Apologetics in the contemporary world. It also demonstrates hope that by expanding the scope of Apologetics, it can become a more effective tool in evangelism. The quantitative study surveys believers on how they came to faith in Christ and what factors helped them to decide to follow Jesus.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter will outline the methods used in formulating the survey questions for the research project. As stated above, this research aims to enhance an understanding of the factors Christians found persuasive in their faith conversion. This research involved a quantitative study, utilizing a digital survey method.

### **Participants**

The quantitative survey's target population was individuals 18 and older who identified as Christians. Participants involved members of a private Christian school and one local church, as well as Christians who received the survey by word-of-mouth. Because of limited resources, surveying was directed toward but not confined to the central Florida area. To best screen participants, participants were asked if they could confidently say they had repented of their sins, put their trust in Jesus as Savior, and submitted to His leadership. Those who could not confidently answer affirmatively were asked not to take the survey. This question aimed to eliminate individuals who were not genuine Christians or were not confident in their relationship with Christ. "Nominal" Christians - defined for the purpose of this survey as those identifying as Christians but rarely, if ever, showing the fruit of disciples of Christ and practicing Christian disciplines - could skew the research results if not first screened.

Quantitative survey participants were contacted in several ways. Those who attended SEU were sent an email asking them to complete a brief questionnaire. For those attending a local church, the leadership was contacted for permission to conduct a survey. The leadership then administered a link or QR code for the survey to their congregation.

A consent form was attached to the beginning of the survey. Participants were notified that by clicking “next,” they agreed to the terms outlined in the consent.

### **Data Collection, Research Instruments, and Procedures**

The quantitative survey was created using Google Forms. All results were housed on an online database for the form through Google, which were transferred to a spreadsheet for the data analysis.

The quantitative survey consisted of six parts. First, a consent form was given to ensure participants were over 18, willingly volunteered to take this survey, and understood no personal identifiers were recorded. They were notified that by clicking “next,” they agreed to the consent form.

Next, two screening questions were asked to try to ensure only genuine Christians completed the survey. Participants were asked if they could confidently say they had repented of their sins, trusted Jesus as Savior, and submitted to His leadership. They were also asked if they could confidently say they bore the fruit of being a disciple of Christ. Some of those characteristics were outlined in the question. These two questions helped eliminate the possibility that non-Christians took the survey.

Following these questions, the survey asked a series of demographic questions. The demographics included age, gender, level of education, type of employment, level of income, type of community lived in, ethnicity, denominational background, and the participant’s family’s faith background. These questions provided vital demographic information allowing the researchers to evaluate how these factors might have influenced participants' conversion experiences.

After these demographics, the survey asked participants about their personal faith background. The survey asked if the participant knew the specific moment they became a Christian, if their conversion was a progressive process, and how far they would rate themselves from Christ both on the day of their conversion (if their conversion was not progressive) and at the time they felt they were furthest from Christ. These last two questions implemented the Engel scale of evangelism.<sup>27</sup>

Following, the participants were asked to identify any barriers that kept them from coming to Christ. These personal faith factors have the potential to significantly affect one's conversion experience and the factors that helped lead them to Christ. By evaluating their personal faith journey, the researchers were able to pinpoint any variables that may have affected the participants' faith journey.

After these questions, the main section of the survey asked participants to identify which factor(s) played a role in their conversion, with a number of possible factors given. Participants were first asked which factors helped persuade them of the truth of the Gospel, with a list of factors given (including an open response option). Participants were then asked which factors helped persuade them to make a decision to submit to the leadership of Jesus, with the same list of possible factors given. The purpose of this section of the survey was to identify which factors influenced them toward Christ on their own faith journeys.

Finally, participants were asked to rank each factor they selected on its level of effectiveness using a Likert scale from one to five, one being "only created interest" and five being "extremely persuasive." Utilizing the Likert scale, researchers were not only able to identify which factors were persuasive in the Christian's conversion but to what degree they were persuasive.

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<sup>27</sup> See James F. Engel & Wilbert Norton. *What's Gone Wrong With The Harvest?* (Zondervan 1975).



### **Determining the Factors of Persuasion to Be Included in the Survey**

While the literature reviewed in chapter 2 gave some guidelines for considering traditional and non-traditional forms of Apologetics, more was needed to develop a substantial list of possible forms of persuasion for the survey. In the “Gospel as Truth” and “Submission to Jesus’s Leadership” questions, multiple possible factors of persuasion had to be listed for the survey to provide any significant results. The author developed a list of 9 possible persuasive factors using the literature review and personal experiences and intuition, which are listed in Appendix 1.

Under the presupposition that these factors should be biblically, ethically, and philosophically valid, five tests were proposed to determine whether a method or factor of persuasion is valid. The form of persuasion must be non-manipulative, biblically based or warranted, grounded in the truth, ethical, and speak to the human person and satisfy the God-given needs of the heart or mind. These criteria are applied to persuasive factors in principle rather than by how they are applied in practice.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Although the sample size did not contain enough diverse participants to quantify data based on demographic information, there were enough participants to propose answers to several research questions that relate more broadly to the research problem. Descriptive statistical findings were given for demographic information, factors that participants claimed to help persuade them of the truth of the Gospel and to submit to the leadership of Jesus, whether their conversion to Christ was perceived as progressive or an abrupt decision, and the kinds of barriers that initially kept them from coming to Christ.

From these descriptive statistical findings, several research questions were answered using the raw data. Additionally, several questions were evaluated using descriptive statistical techniques, as noted in chapter 4. Lastly, written responses to an open-ended question were provided for more intuitive evaluations.

### *Limitations*

There were several limitations to the quantitative study. First, participants were only 18 and older, eliminating children and young adults. Second, participant recruitment was directed primarily to those who lived in central Florida, including only a very narrow geographical region. Third, the survey was self-reporting, allowing for the possibility of dishonesty and bias. Lastly, because of the small sample size, only more general research questions were able to be answered. Because some demographics were not well-represented, it was difficult to compare members of different demographics and achieve statistically significant results.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the methodology for the qualitative study presented in this paper. The following chapter will present the data collected and its implications for the research questions.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis of Data

The findings achieved in the study are presented in the Data Analysis section of the Honors Thesis. A quantitative, non-experimental research design was used to address the thesis study's topic. A survey research approach represented the thesis study's specific research methodology. Seven research questions were formally stated in the study. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to analyze thesis study data. Thesis study data were analyzed using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v. 29). The following represents the reporting of findings achieved in the Honors Thesis study:

#### Descriptive Statistical Findings

The study's demographic identifying information was evaluated using descriptive statistical techniques. The study's demographic information was addressed specifically using the descriptive statistical techniques of frequencies (*n*) and percentages (%).

Table 1 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis of the study's demographic identifying information of participant gender, ethnicity, age, educational level, and denominational affiliation:

**Table 1: Demographic Variables (Gender; Age; Ethnicity; Education Level; and Denominational Affiliation)**

Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative %
Gender			
Female	36	67.92	67.92
Male	17	32.08	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
Age			
18-20	24	45.28	45.28
21-29	14	26.42	71.70

30-39	4	7.55	79.25
40-49	5	9.43	88.68
50 and Over	6	11.32	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
Ethnicity			
African American	1	1.89	1.89
Hispanic	5	9.43	11.32
Caucasian	47	88.68	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
Education Level			
High School or Equivalent	5	9.43	9.43
Some College	36	67.92	77.36
Bachelor's Degree	8	15.09	92.45
Master's Degree	4	7.55	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
Denominational Affiliation			
Pentecostal	12	22.64	22.64
Denominational	17	32.08	54.72
Non-Denominational	23	43.40	98.11
Missing	1	1.89	100.00

Table 2 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis of the study's demographic identifying information of participant community-type, employment status, income, and conversion "moment" status:

**Table 2: Demographic Variables (Community-Type; Employment Status; Income; and Conversion Status)**

Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative %
Community Type			
Urban	16	30.19	30.19
Rural	3	5.66	35.85
Suburban	33	62.26	98.11
Missing	1	1.89	100.00
Employment Status			
Unemployed	21	39.62	39.62

Part-Time Employment	17	32.08	71.70
Full-Time Employment	15	28.30	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<b>Income</b>			
\$10,000 or Less	32	60.38	60.38
Over \$10,000 to \$40,000	9	16.98	77.36
Over \$40,000 to \$90,000	8	15.09	92.45
Over \$90,000	4	7.55	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00
<b>Conversion Moment</b>			
No	14	26.42	26.42
Yes	39	73.58	100.00
Missing	0	0.00	100.00

Table 3 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis of the study's participant factors for the constructs of "helped persuade you of the truth of the Gospel (short handed to 'Gospel as Truth')" and "helped persuade you to make a decision to submit to the leadership of Jesus (short handed to 'Submission to Jesus's Leadership')", along with "Barriers in Coming to Christ":

**Table 3: Factors (Gospel as Truth; Submission to Jesus' Leadership) and Barriers in Coming to Christ**

Construct/Factors	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Factors: Gospel as Truth</b>		
Rational Apologetics	23	43.40
Witness Apologetics	26	49.06
Imaginative Apologetics	10	18.87
Church's Witness	29	54.72
Coherence of the Gospel	24	45.28
Miracles/Providence	18	33.96
Observed Personal Change	12	22.64
Experience with Art	8	15.09
Experience of God's Presence	32	60.38
Unsure	4	07.55

Missing	3	05.66
<b>Factors: Submission to Jesus' Leadership</b>		
Rational Apologetics	19	35.85
Witness Apologetics	24	45.28
Imaginative Apologetics	6	11.32
Church Witness	24	45.28
Coherence of the Gospel	18	33.96
Miracles/Providence	13	24.53
Observed Personal Change	4	07.55
Experience with Art	7	13.21
Experience God's Presence	32	60.38
Unsure	3	05.66
Missing	3	05.66
<b>Barriers: Coming to Christ</b>		
None	20	37.74
Intellectual	9	16.98
Emotional	13	24.53
Volitional	7	13.21
Missing	4	7.55

Table 4 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis for how many participants selected *only* Rational Apologetics compared to how many selected other factors in the “Gospel as Truth” question:

**Table 4: Participants who selected only Rational Apologetics compared to those who (also) selected another factor**

Number of Factors Selected	<i>n</i>	%
Only Rational Apologetics	2	3.77
Factor Other than Rational Apologetics	51	96.23

Table 5 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis for how many total factors participants selected in the “Gospel as Truth” question:

**Table 5: Number of Total Factors Selected for “Gospel as Truth”**

Number of Factors Selected	<i>n</i>	%
Seven Factors Selected	3	07.55
Six Factors Selected	5	07.55
Five Factors Selected	10	18.87
Four Factors Selected	6	11.32
Three Factors Selected	11	24.53
Two Factors Selected	9	15.09
One Factor Selected	9	15.09
Missing	0	0

Table 6 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis for how many participants selected Rational Apologetics for “Gospel as Truth” compared with how many participants selected Rational Apologetics and either Witness Apologetics or Church’s Witness in “Gospel as Truth”:

**Table 6: Selection for Rational Apologetics and Rational Apologetics and either Witness Apologetics or Church’s Witness**

Construct/Factors	<i>n</i>	%
Rational Apologetics	23	43.40
Rational Apologetics and Either Witness Apologetics or Church’s Witness	17	32.08

Table 7 contains a summary of finding for the descriptive statistical analysis of the study’s demographic identifying information of participant factors for the constructs of “Barriers in Coming to Christ”:

**Table 7: Descriptive Statistics Summary Table: Barriers in Coming to Christ**

Construct/Factors	<i>n</i>	%	Cumulative %
<b>Barriers: Coming to Christ</b>			
None	20	37.74	37.74
Intellectual	9	16.98	54.72
Emotional	13	24.53	79.25
Volitional	9	16.98	96.23
Missing	2	3.77	100.00

Table 8 records participants' written answers for the open-ended question "What was missing in your journey to Christ that you would have found helpful as you considered becoming a follower of Jesus?"

**Table 8: Things missing in the journey to Christ**

N/A
Evidence for the Gospel
Evidence for the truth of the Gospel
Christians who better exemplified Christ
People who lived out their faith in a more obvious way. Also, Christians who asked hard questions and made sure to check in with their church members and their faith journey.
I would have appreciated it if my childhood church had been more intentional about answering some of the hard questions about faith. I do not remember them offering many opportunities for us to discuss those issues in a church sponsored environment
It took me a long time to realize that I needed to just have faith the God saved me instead of constantly doubting my salvation. No one told me I didn't need to have a feeling like all the stories of people who suddenly feel so happy after making a decision to follow Jesus. Even after more officially giving my life to Jesus, I struggled with tremendous doubts for years. I would've started trying to more live like a Christian instead of being stuck feeling fear and guilt.



a church that was more involved in answering people's questions about faith. My dad helped because he was the pastor, but it would have also been helpful for the rest of the congregation to participate in that.

I accepted the Lord Jesus into my life when I was around 6 years old, while my parents had just recently divorced. Something I would say that was missing in my journey was churches who accepted families who had gone through divorces, instead of just turning them away and shutting us out.

The information and evidence to prove that faith doesn't have to be blind. There have been quite a few seasons in my faith journey that I've questioned things (i.e. our canon, the doctrine of the trinity, supernatural demonstrations, etc) but felt as if I asked questions then I'd have "weak faith." Yet, I don't think I had small faith, but I just lacked the evidence and knowledge of why we (The Church) believe and do the things that we do. I wish these things were talked about more in congregational and discipleship settings. Don't get me wrong, there's always more to learn about Jesus' ministry on earth and even the Beatitudes (things frequently preached about), but what if our Church equipped and taught the people why we know that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection truly occurred? I hope this helps. Great survey.

Christians and pastors who encouraged questions and eagerly answered them.

I was blessed to grow up in a strong Christian household with parents and grandparents who pushed me to be close to Jesus through their examples and how they raised me (in the church, taught school based on biblical view, etc). I believe this is why I initially came to Christ at a young age, but I have grown deeply in my own faith through the individual things I have gone through and questions I have worked out about God. I think that if I had not have had my upbringing, it would have been a lot more difficult to come to God. I believe that Christians who exemplify the character of Christ are a humongous factor in someone coming to believe in God.

I think it would have helped me to have Christians around me who loved me just for being a human being instead of praising me for the good works or accomplishments I did. I struggled with placing my value on the good things I did. When I realized how broken I was and how much I needed Jesus, I feared that people would not love me because of my brokenness. However, my family and some good friends showed me Christ's love and showed me that they loved me, despite my brokenness.

Being involved in a faith community to disciple me better would have been better. I began church at 12 years old and attended youth groups. We had so much fun and played fun games. At 14 I changed churches and there was a Young Adults ministry that provided the teaching and discipleship I needed to become more like Christ. I had friends who encouraged me to walk out my faith.

One thing that would've been helpful was an explanation of the complete biblical story from the Old Testament to the New Testament, including the historical context of the authors and

their audience. This is something that I didn't have until my Old Testament and New Testament Interpretation courses at SEU. Seeing the full picture of God's plan of salvation for humanity completely changed the way I understood the Gospel and how I was to live and preach it to others.

A decent church family

People that showed the character of Christ.

Christian's who better walked in the balance of what it looks like to ACTUALLY follow Christ. no façades, but people who loved Jesus and still made mistakes.

I had a wonder church and it's leadership, a great group of Christian friends probably the two most needed areas would have been stronger accountability in a small group setting plus more support from family. It was not necessarily negative but could have been more pro active support.

I was raised in a Roman Catholic Church and God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit seemed out of reach – elevated. God was judgmental. We were discouraged from reading the Bible for ourselves. A personal relationship with the Trinity was never taught. So being exposed to God's word on a personal level and having an understanding of the mercy and grace and salvation/redemption of Jesus was missing. I didn't even realize miracles happened every day. No one showed me how to look for them – see them and be thankful for them.

I would have considered it helpful to have someone talk me through what real devotion looked like.

Self forgiveness

I wish that my church talked more about the logical evidence and truth of the Gospel. I became a christian at a young age at a youth camp. A lot of my decision stemmed from the witness of people around me, but as a younger christian I knew God existed, because I had seen miracles and His power at work. But as someone who thinks very logically, I think a lot of challenges I had early on in my faith with doubt could have been avoided with the "proof" of why historically, mathematically, scientifically the Gospel is the best option.

My understanding and willingness to do the work, that would of got me where I am today.  
I look back and wish I had seeked him more

A church was missing. In the early stages of my conversion I had bought into some false propaganda about church and Christians in general that kept me from attending church services. It was my child attending VBS and later Wednesday youth that sparked the thought that maybe I should attend a service. I'm so glad I did.

a bolder expression of Apologetics from the church at middle / high school ages.

I was saved after being led to repentance by my children's pastor and mother. I was a very young age and so there wasn't much I genuinely questioned or would have done differently

My family just started going to a non denominational church here in Lakeland and I saw it in someone there at the church and it had me ask questions and then came to Christ.

A church that drew me into fellowship and disciplined me intentionally and comprehensively.

Realizing the difference between worldly Christian or True Christian.

Not being shunned because of the path I was on, when I needed help

Someone clearly presenting the Gospel to me.

A friend or a Pastor that show me the way. God give a proof of his power

Nothing, i met the right person to teach me a guide me. She was lovely and without any judgment. My Pastor and mother in faith.

A church that exemplified the spiritual encounter I experienced. Ongoing spiritual mentorship.

I really didn't have much of a journey to Christ before I became a follower of Christ. I believed in God, and when presented with the Gospel, it became alive. I suppose it was the power of the Gospel unto salvation that openend my eyes.

It took about 18 months after a clear presentation of the Gospel for me to respond. I think that I never saw, heard, or experienced the message of Christ's love andnif I did I might have responded earlier but God in His sovereign grace opened my eyes at the perfect time.

Some quiet time in the dark

The understanding of the supernatural grace of God

Christian's who weren't so judgmental and closed off. Christian's who fought with love and no words. Christian's who don't yell in a microphone about going to hell because that isn't the way to share the Gospel.

I think just being surrounded by people in Christ, I never had that before. when you are around like-minded people who love God or want more out of life. being with people who feel the same can make your walk with God even more special, If I had been brought up in a Christian environment then I believe I would have stayed in the church and been saved in much younger years

I think a stronger understanding of the spiritual realm and its implications in our day-to-day lives. I grew up being a Christian but didn't realize that multiple things I was interested in or

dabbled in would turn out to be very demonic. There were some things I realized probably weren't great but failed to recognize the severity. I think that had these things been explained to me, I would have been spared the spiritual repercussions I endured. I do not regret them, rather, out of objectivity, I say these things.

I honestly think I was graced enough with so many different aspects to my walk with Christ. I think the only thing that would've have been great was having church leadership that encouraged women in ministry. But, other than that, everything was honestly a great experience in all areas.

surrounding myself with other Christ followers

More rationalizations and willingness to address hard questions.

I grew up believing in the truth of the Gospel. But I did not have Christian community or leaders to teach and disciple me. I had some knowledge, but no relationship with Christ. It was not until I heard the Gospel preached at youth group freshman year of high school when I began a relationship with Jesus. So I would say, it would have been helpful to have people pursue me and lead me. I was always believing, just ignorant to how to walk with God. If I was a part of a church or Christian community while in middle school (the years I did not go to church), maybe I would have begun my relationship with Him then.

Community of Christ followers

The reality of his grace for my life

None

People of the church actually acting on their faith and not being fake. People who learn to show Jesus outside of Sundays and don't judge for no reason.

Honestly, just the realization that I needed Christ to be my cornerstone and hold everything together. Also the realization that I was set free, but I needed guidance on how to live free.

Learning biblical knowledge over constantly being told the same things are right and wrong.

### Findings by Research Questions

The study's topic was more specifically addressed through the statement of seven research questions. The research questions #2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 are presented as raw data and were not tested for statistical significance. Research questions #1 and 6 were tested for statistical

significance. The probability level of  $p < .05$  represented the threshold value for study findings to be considered statistically significant within the research questions #1 and 6. The following represents the reporting of findings by research question stated in the study:

#### Research Question #1

*Will study participant perceptions of whether their conversion was progressive rather than an abrupt decision be reflected at a statistically significant level?*

The Binomial Test was used to assess the statistical significance of study participant perceptions of their conversion was progressive rather than an abrupt decision based upon the null value of .50. As a result, study participant perceptions of their conversion was progressive rather than an abrupt decision was statistically significant ( $p \leq .001$ ) favoring the "Yes" category of the analysis.

Table 9 contains a summary of finding for study participant perceptions of their conversion was progressive rather than an abrupt decision:

**Table 9: Binomial Summary Table: Study Participant Perceptions of Whether Their Conversion was Progressive rather than an Abrupt Decision**

Group	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency
Yes	47	.50
No	6	.50
$P \leq$ to .001		

#### Research Question #2

*How many participants selected a factor other than Rational Apologetics for "Gospel as Truth"?)*

Of the 53 participants, 2 respondents selected *only* Rational Apologetics as a factor for “Gospel as Truth”. 51 of 53 participants either did not select Rational Apologetics or selected Rational Apologetics and another factor(s).<sup>28</sup>

### Research Question #3

*How many participants selected multiple factors for “Gospel as Truth”?*

Table 5 provided the statistical analysis for the number of total factors selected for “Gospel as Truth.” The table represents the raw data and no test for statistical significance was provided. 44 of 53 participants selected two or more factors, indicating that 83.02% of participants claimed multiple factors helped to persuade them of the truth of the Gospel.

### Research Question #4

*Of participants who selected Rational Apologetics as a factor for the “Gospel as Truth” question, how many also selected either Witness Apologetics or Church’s Witness?*

As indicated by table 6, 23 of 53 participants selected Rational Apologetics as a factor that helped persuade them of the truth of the Gospel. Of those 23 participants, 17 also selected that either Witness Apologetics or Church’s Witness was also a factor. This indicates that 73.91% of participants who claimed that Rational Apologetics was a factor that helped to persuade them of the truth of the Gospel also claimed either Witness Apologetics or the Church’s Witness was also a factor.

### Research Question #5

*Did the frequency of selection for each apologetic factor differ in the “Gospel as Truth” question compared to “Submission to Jesus’s Leadership” question?*

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<sup>28</sup> Note: One respondent selected both “Rational Apologetics” and “Unsure”. This was considered to be a misunderstanding on the part of the respondent as was counted as only selecting Rational Apologetics.

As table 3 indicates, the frequency of selection for each factor differed between “Gospel as Truth” and “Submission to Jesus’s Leadersip.” All 9 factors were analyzed, and the frequencies for each factor differed except for Presence of God, which stayed the same.

#### Research Question #6

*Were the “Barriers in Coming to Christ” equally distributed across the four categories identified for study purposes?*

A Chi-square GOF test was conducted to evaluate whether the “Barriers in Coming to Christ” was equally distributed across all categories. There were four categories represented in “Barriers in Coming to Christ”: None, Intellectual, Emotional, and Volitional. The results of the GOF test were non-statistically significant ( $\chi^2(3) = 6.33, p = .10$ ), indicating the null hypothesis (the levels of “Barriers in Coming to Christ” are equally likely) must be retained. Considering the non-statistical significance of the GOF test, the differences between observed and expected frequencies were not statistically significantly different for the barrier categories of “None”, “Intellectual”, “Emotional”, and “Volitional”.

Table 10 contains a summary the findings of the Chi-Square GOF test for “Barriers in Coming to Christ”:

**Table 10: Barriers in Coming to Christ**

*Chi-Square GOF Test Summary Table: Barriers in Coming to Christ*

Barrier Category	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency
None	20	12.75
Intellectual	9	12.75
Emotional	13	12.75
Volitional	9	12.75

*Note.*  $\chi^2(3) = 6.33, p = .10$ .

### Research Question #7

*Did participants report a diversity of missing elements that they believe would have been helpful in their journey to Christ?*

As Table 8 documents, participants noted a variety of elements that were missing in their journey to Christ that they believed would have been helpful. These elements are wide-ranging, including a lack of evidence for the Gospel, answers to tough questions about Christianity, and Christians better living out their faith.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**



This paper began by explaining what the author perceived to be an essential problem in the field of Apologetics: that the traditional view of Apologetics - which understands the discipline to involve primarily rational arguments - is too narrow. It was proposed that there may be non-traditional forms of Apologetics that do not explicitly focus on intellectual arguments but may still be valid forms of Christian persuasion. The concern of this paper is that if the Church's view of the scope of Apologetics is truncated, so will its effectiveness. A nuanced definition of Apologetics was given in the introduction, which defines Apologetics as the art and science of providing and presenting reasons for the truth of the Gospel and the necessity to follow Jesus, which the Holy Spirit may use to address the thoughts, feelings, and will of the individual.

Based on a theoretical body of knowledge derived in part from the literature review in chapter 2, a study was conducted to determine what factors Christians found persuasive as they considered the truthfulness of the Gospel and the decision to submit to Jesus's leadership. A quantitative survey was created through Google Forms. The survey included questions about general demographic questions, the respondent's faith background, the nature of their journey to Christ, which factors helped persuade them of the truth of the Gospel and to submit to Jesus's leadership, and what was missing in their journey to Christ that they would have found helpful. The results were analyzed by looking at the raw data or performing statistical analysis.

This study consisted of six questions. This first question asked, "Will study participant perceptions of whether their conversion was progressive rather than an abrupt decision be reflected at a statistically significant level?" Of the 53 participants, 47 answered "Yes" and 6 "No." The results were statistically significant, with the probability being less than or equal to .001.

The second question asked, "How many participants selected a factor other than Rational Apologetics for "Gospel as Truth")?" 51 of 53 participants either did not select Rational Apologetics or selected Rational Apologetics along with another factor(s).

The third question asked, "How many participants selected multiple factors that helped persuade them of the truth of the Gospel (referred to in the data analysis as 'Gospel as Truth')?" 44 of 53 participants, or 83.02%, selected two or more factors. 37 participants selected three or more factors, and 4 selected seven factors they considered persuasive.

The fourth question asked, "Of participants who selected Rational Apologetics as a factor for the "Gospel as Truth" question, how many also selected either Witness Apologetics or Church's Witness?" Of the 23 participants who selected Rational Apologetics, 17 also selected either Witness Apologetics, Church's Witness, or both.

The fifth question asked, "Did the frequency of selection for each apologetic factor differ in the 'Gospel as Truth' question compared to the 'Submission to Jesus's Leadership' question?" Although, due to the limited responses, this research question was not analyzed for statistical significance, it is worth noting that all 9 factors except for Presence of God differed between the two questions.

The sixth question asked, "Were the 'Barriers in Coming to Christ' equally distributed across the four categories identified for study purposes?" The results were not statistically significant but were high enough to be considered for further research ( $p=.10$ ).

The seventh question asked, "Did participants report a diversity of missing elements that they believe would have been helpful in their journey to Christ?" The free responses in table 8 above demonstrate that participants provided various perceived missing aids.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

This study sought to determine whether non-traditional forms of Apologetics were persuasive in Christians' journeys to Christ as they considered the truthfulness of the Gospel and the decision to submit to Jesus's leadership. The study appears to provide rich data to answer the research questions listed above and produces several implications worth exploring in further research.

Participants were asked whether they considered their conversion to Christ as progressive rather than an abrupt decision. An overwhelming majority answered "Yes," lending a statistically significant result. This suggests that many people, as they consider the truthfulness of the Gospel and the decision to submit to Jesus's leadership, are slower to be convinced and decide than many Christians would like or expect. Although some may have a "Saul of Tarsus" moment, most participants in this survey made their journey to Jesus progressively. This suggests that evangelizing Christians may need to be more patient as unbelievers consider the call to follow Jesus.

The central question of this study was whether Christians found non-traditional apologetic factors persuasive as they considered the truthfulness of the Gospel. Only 2 respondents selected *only* Rational Apologetics as a persuasive factor. This indicates that 51 of the 53 participants either did not consider Rational Apologetics a persuasive factor in their journey to Christ or found Rational Apologetics *and* another factor(s) persuasive. Indeed, 23 out of 53, or 43.40% of participants, did not select Rational Apologetics at all. Although the sample size was relatively small, the difference between the two constructs strongly suggests that Rational Apologetics is *not* the only persuasive factor in someone's journey to Christ!

Most participants also selected multiple factors they claimed were persuasive in their journey to Christ. As noted above, 83.02% of participants selected two or more factors in the

“Gospel as Truth” question. Many selected multiple factors that they considered to be persuasive. This suggests that in many Christians’ experiences, these persuasive factors were a cumulative effect and that many did not come to be persuaded of the truth of the Gospel through only one factor. Those desiring to be effective evangelists should perhaps consider taking a holistic approach to Apologetics.

As noted above, 17 of the 23 participants who selected Rational Apologetics also selected either Witness Apologetics, Church’s Witness, or both. This suggests the possibility that, for many, an experience with Rational Apologetics was accompanied by an experience of someone who faithfully represented the character of Christ or a church that was a positive witness to the community. While the survey does not determine whether Rational Apologetics was viewed as more persuasive when coupled with either Witness Apologetics and a Church’s Positive Witness, the data provided would be a good reason to consider a further study on this question.

The survey also demonstrated that the frequency of the selection of factors for “Gospel as Truth” and “Submission to Jesus’s Leadership” differed. This suggests that some had different reasons for believing the Gospel is true than deciding to submit to Jesus’s leadership. While the data pool is not large enough to offer clarification, this is a possible direction for further research. The results for “Barriers in Coming to Christ” were not statistically significant but were high enough to be considered for further research ( $p=.10$ ).

Lastly, the free responses to the question of what was missing in the Christian’s faith journey provide valuable raw data for Christians to consider as they seek to help unbelievers make steps towards Christ. Elements said to be missing included a willingness to explore the tough questions of the Christian faith and those who positively represented Christ. Stories like

these could no doubt be multiplied beyond measure, and the findings listed above, although not quantified, are enough to spark good conversations and healthy introspection within the Church.

### **Reflections on the Study**

Apologetics has been defined in numerous ways by many theologians, and it has long been seen as a discipline in harmony with evangelism. The common conception of Apologetics in the West that views the content of Apologetics as essentially involving rigid philosophical and historical arguments, however, faces many difficulties when practically applied. Many have noticed these difficulties and the ensuing issues they bring and have advocated for a new way of doing Apologetics. They have also called for a broadening of the scope of Apologetics.

The human person is a complex essence composed of thoughts, feelings, a will, and more. The Holy Spirit may use influences as diverse as the human person to draw individuals to Christ, including but not limited to rational arguments. This paper has called for the Church to consider a broader scope of Apologetics and Christian persuasion. If the apologist assumes that Christian persuasion is only to present rational arguments, then the scope of persuasive factors which the Holy Spirit may use to draw people to Christ will be truncated. However, if the apologist considers other *valid* forms of Christian persuasion, the case for Christianity will become more robust, holistic, and, therefore, more effective.

Nevertheless, apologists must carefully consider what forms of persuasion are ethically and biblically valid. Some forms of persuasion - such as modern advertising methods - are effective but are neither ethical nor demand that the proposition is true. The Gospel calls for a different kind of persuasion which is only valid if it is true and not presented in a manipulative manner. The Holy Spirit's work of drawing an individual to Christ is grounded in the truth of the Gospel. Therefore, the apologist's methods of persuasion must be grounded in the truth, too.

How, then, should apologists determine which forms of persuasion are ethically and biblically valid? The criteria given in chapter 3 may be a helpful guide. Using these criteria as a filter, the factors of persuasion which the Holy Spirit may use to draw people to Christ become numerous, holistic, and exciting. With a careful examination of the Bible and the current culture, some creative thinking, and prayerful, Spirit-assisted reflection, the apologist may find at his or her disposal an arsenal of persuasive tactics.

This nuanced view of Apologetics suggests a new definition of Apologetics which broadens its scope: the art and science of providing and presenting reasons for the truth of the Gospel and the necessity to follow Jesus, which the Holy Spirit may use to address the thoughts, feelings, and will of the individual. The 9 factors presented in this survey may be a good starting point to describe the various forms of Apologetics the Spirit may use, but it does not set the limit.

### **Strengths of the Study**

This study had several strengths. First, the novelty of this study provides fresh insight into the disciplines of Apologetics and evangelism. Because many of the participants in this study were in their 20's, this study helps to clarify the context of conversions in younger generations. Furthermore, the data collected through this study was sufficient to begin answering the research questions proposed in the introduction. The data yielded very interesting and relevant results that will hopefully spark new waves of research.

### **Areas for Future Research**

There are several areas of future research that could build off of this study. If the study was duplicated with more participants, there are several other analyses that could be performed. Future studies could collect a larger data pool to analyze the responses of people from various

demographics. They could also closely analyze the differences between factors selected for “Gospel as Truth” and factors selected for “Submission to Jesus’s Leadership.”

Furthermore, a future study could more closely analyze the barriers that initially kept people from coming to Christ. Participants could be surveyed about any intellectual, emotional, or volitional barriers that contributed to their decision not to follow Jesus. The study could also analyze how those barriers were resolved.

### **Final Thoughts**

This thesis seeks to expand the Church's understanding of the scope of Apologetics by offering a nuanced view of Apologetics and providing tangible evidence that the Holy Spirit uses multiple, diverse factors to persuade individuals of the truth of the Gospel and the necessity to trust in Christ. This definition demands a different kind of apologist. This kind of apologist is one whom the Spirit has transformed into the image of Christ, who is part of a faithful community of believers representing Christ to the world, able to gracefully and truthfully expound the story of the Gospel and its ability to explain the world, presents logical reasons for the truth of the Gospel, lives out the Gospel in his or her life and church community, prays for the miraculous power of God in the lives of others, and handles objections and answers with wisdom, all through the power of the Spirit at work in his or her life. May God raise up such laborers in His Church!

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## Appendix 1

### Survey Questions

- I. Have you repented of your sins, put your trust in Jesus as Savior and submitted to His leadership? Please do not continue the survey if you cannot confidently answer affirmatively.
  - A. Yes
  
- II. Does your life bear the fruit of being a disciple of Christ, including a growing closeness with God, a love for His word, a desire to see others come to Christ, and a desire to be separated from sin? Please do not continue the survey if you cannot confidently answer affirmatively.
  - A. Yes
  
- III. Age
  - A. 18-20
  - B. 21-29
  - C. 30-39
  - D. 40-49
  - E. 50-59
  - F. 60-64
  - G. 65 or older
  
- IV. Gender
  - A. Male
  - B. Female
  
- V. Level of Education
  - A. Some High School
  - B. High School diploma or equivalent

- C. Some college
  - D. Bachelor's degree
  - E. Master's degree
  - F. Ph.D. or doctoral degree
- VI. Employment
- A. Unemployed
  - B. Part time
  - C. Full time
- VII. Level of Income
- A. 0-\$10,000
  - B. \$10,000-40,000
  - C. \$40,000-90,000
  - D. \$90,000-150,000
  - E. \$150,000 +
- VIII. Type of Community
- A. City or urban community
  - B. Suburban community
  - C. Rural community
  - D. Other
- IX. Ethnicity
- A. Caucasian
  - B. African-American
  - C. Asian

- D. Latino or Hispanic
  - E. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
  - F. Other
  - G. Prefer not to say
- X. Denomination
- A. Catholic
  - B. Eastern Orthodox
  - C. Anglican
  - D. Baptist
  - E. Lutheran
  - F. Presbyterian
  - G. Methodist
  - H. Pentecostal
  - I. Non-denominational
  - J. Other
- XI. Family's faith background (Note: choose the answer that most accurately describes your family's faith background, even if not all the criteria applies):
- A. Practicing Christians - your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) identified as Christians and exemplified the fruit of being a disciple of Christ, such as a growing closeness with God, a love for His word, a desire to see others come to Christ, and a desire to be separated from sin. Your family practiced Christian disciplines such as prayer, Scripture reading, worship, and/or church attendance.

- B. Nominal Christian - Your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) identified as Christians but rarely, if ever, showed the fruit of followers of Christ or practiced Christian disciplines such as prayer, Scripture reading, worship, and church attendance.
  - C. Your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) were indifferent toward spiritual matters.
  - D. Your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) identified with another religion
  - E. Your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) were directly opposed to Christianity.
  - F. Other (please explain):
- XII. Do you know the specific moment you became a follower of Jesus?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
- XIII. Would you say your conversion to Christ was progressive rather than an abrupt decision?
- A. Yes
  - B. No
- XIV. Immediately prior to your conversion (I.e., the same day you decided to become a follower of Christ) , how far were you from Christ? [The question is exempt if the answer to the previous two questions were “no”]
- A. Hostility to the Gospel
  - B. Awareness of the supernatural
  - C. No effective knowledge of Christianity
  - D. Initial awareness of Christianity
  - E. Interest in Christianity
  - F. Awareness of the basic facts of the Gospel
  - G. Positive attitude to the Gospel

- H. Awareness of personal need
  - I. Challenge and decision to act
  - J. Repentance and faith
- XV. Prior to conversion, what was the furthest you ever found yourself from Christ?
- A. Hostility to the Gospel
  - B. Awareness of the supernatural
  - C. No effective knowledge of Christianity
  - D. Initial awareness of Christianity
  - E. Interest in Christianity
  - F. Awareness of the basic facts of the Gospel
  - G. Positive attitude to the Gospel
  - H. Awareness of personal need
  - I. Challenge and decision to act
  - J. Repentance and faith
- XVI. Identify any barriers that initially kept you from coming to Christ:
- A. Intellectual barriers (e.g., you viewed Christian beliefs as false or incomprehensible)
  - B. Emotional barriers (e.g., anger toward God, not understanding why God would allow evil, etc.)
  - C. Volitional barriers (e.g., you did not want to become a Christian because you viewed it as too morally restraining)
  - D. Other (please explain):

- XVII. Select which factor(s) helped persuade you of the truth of the Gospel (Note: the phrase “positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel” indicates that this factor either led you to believe the Gospel is true or helped you come closer to believing the Gospel is true. The phrase “Gospel” means that body of facts which Paul expressed in 1 Corinthians 15 - that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again in a Resurrected body):
- A. Rational Apologetics - you encountered logical evidence and arguments for the truth of the Christian faith (e.g., arguments for God’s existence, the historical trustworthiness of the Bible, the Resurrection of Christ, etc.).
  - B. Witness Apologetics - someone represented the character of Christ in a positive way that affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
  - C. Imaginative Apologetics - you read or heard a fictional story that illustrated Christian truths, resonated with your heart’s longings for God, and/or presented a view of the Gospel that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
  - D. Church’s witness - a church in your area made a positive impact on you and/or your community that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
  - E. Coherence of the Gospel and ability to make sense of the world - you heard an accurate presentation of the Gospel that made sense to you and made sense of the world in a way that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.



- F. Miracles/providence - you witnessed or heard of a miracle in the name of Jesus that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
- G. You noticed a positive change in someone who became a disciple of Christ that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
- H. Your experience with some form of art (e.g., paintings, music, etc.) inspired a sense of beauty within you and produced a longing for the transcendent, which led you to seek God.
- I. You experienced God's presence or had a spiritual encounter in which God and the Gospel became real to you, and this positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
- J. I am unsure of any factors that persuaded me; I simply believed without a specific reason(s).
- K. Other (open-ended):

XVIII. On a scale of 1-5, rank each factor on its effectiveness to help persuade you of the truth of the Gospel:

XIX. Select which factor(s) helped persuade you to make a decision to submit to the leadership of Jesus (Note: this question is different from the above question. The above question asked which factors helped persuade you that the Gospel is *true*. This question asks which factors, if any, helped you make a *decision* to follow Jesus):

- A. Rational Apologetics - you encountered logical evidence and arguments for the truth of the Christian faith (e.g., arguments for God's existence, the historical trustworthiness of the Bible, the Resurrection of Christ, etc.).

- B. Witness Apologetics - someone represented the character of Christ in a positive way that affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
- C. Imaginative Apologetics - you read or heard a fictional story that illustrated Christian truths, resonated with your heart's longings for God, and/or presented a view of the Gospel that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
- D. Church's witness - a church in your area made a positive impact on you and/or your community that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
- E. Coherence of the Gospel and ability to make sense of the world - you heard an accurate presentation of the Gospel that made sense to you and made sense of the world in a way that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
- F. Miracles/providence - you witnessed or heard of a miracle in the name of Jesus that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
- G. You noticed a positive change in someone who became a disciple of Christ that positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.
- H. Your experience with some form of art (e.g., paintings, music, etc.) inspired a sense of beauty within you and produced a longing for the transcendent, which led you to seek God.
- I. You experienced God's presence or had a spiritual encounter in which God and the Gospel became real to you, and this positively affected your view of the truthfulness of the Gospel.

- J. I am unsure of any factors that persuaded me; I simply believed without a specific reason(s).
- K. Other (open-ended):
- XX. On a scale of 1-5, rank each factor on its effectiveness to help persuade you of the truth of the Gospel:
- A. Only created interest
  - B. Slightly persuasive
  - C. Moderately persuasive
  - D. Very persuasive
  - E. Extremely persuasive
  - F. I did not select this factor
- XXI. What was missing in your journey to Christ that you would have found helpful as you considered becoming a follower of Jesus (e.g., evidence for the truth of the Gospel, Christians who better exemplified the character of Christ, a church that was more involved in answering peoples' questions about faith, etc.)?

**Appendix 2**  
**Consent Form**

Title: Expanding the Church's Understanding of the Scope of Apologetics and Its Use in Evangelism

Investigator(s): Dr. Joseph Davis, Jonathan Dinkins

Purpose: The purpose of the research study is to determine which factors helped persuade Christians of the truth of Christianity prior to their conversion. You must be 18 years or older to participate.

What to Expect: This research study is administered online. Participation in this research will involve the completion of one online questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask for you to answer multiple, select all that apply, open-ended, and ranking answer questions. You are expected to complete the questionnaire only once. It should take you about 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this project which are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. However, this research may provide further information to Christian leaders about effective forms of Apologetics.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participation.

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

Confidentiality: This questionnaire will ask you to provide basic personal information such as gender. This information will be stored along with your responses for five years in a locked and password-protected computer. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

Student Name: Jonathan Dinkins, [jhdinkins@seu.edu](mailto:jhdinkins@seu.edu)

Advisor Name: Dr. Joseph Davis, [jhdavis@seu.edu](mailto:jhdavis@seu.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at Southeastern University [IRB@seu.edu](mailto:IRB@seu.edu) It is recommended that you print a copy of this consent page for your records before you begin. If you choose to participate: Please, click I CONSENT if you choose to participate. By clicking I CONSENT, you are indicating that you freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this study and you also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age.

### **Appendix 3**

#### **CITI Certificates**



Completion Date 02-May-2022  
Expiration Date 01-May-2025  
Record ID 48720627

This is to certify that:

**Jonathan Dinkins**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher**

(Curriculum Group)

**Social & Behavioral Research**

(Course Learner Group)

**1 - Basic Course**

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Southeastern University**



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Completion Date 17-Sep-2022  
Expiration Date 16-Sep-2025  
Record ID 51574986

This is to certify that:

**Joseph Davis**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher**

(Curriculum Group)

**Social & Behavioral Research**

(Course Learner Group)

**1 - Basic Course**

(Stage)

Not valid for renewal of  
certification through CME.

Under requirements set by:

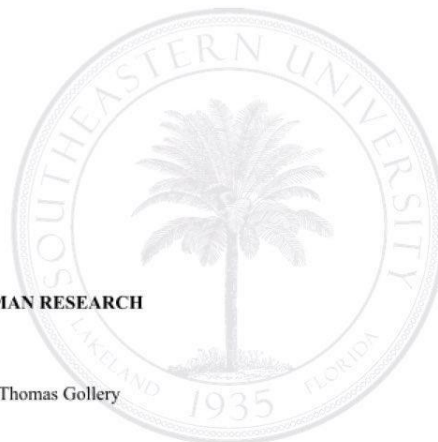
**Southeastern University**



Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wafcd4cc-dfcs-44d0-a12f-e5a56d9c53ab-51574986](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wafcd4cc-dfcs-44d0-a12f-e5a56d9c53ab-51574986)

## Documentation of IRB Approval

SOUTHEASTERN  
UNIVERSITY



### NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

**DATE:** February 1, 2023

**TO:** Jonathan Dinkins, Joseph Davis, Thomas Gollery

**FROM:** SEU IRB

**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Expanding the Church's Understanding of the Scope of Apologetics and Its Use in Evangelism

**FUNDING SOURCE:** NONE

**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** 23 MT 02

**APPROVAL PERIOD:** Approval Date: February 1, 2023    Expiration Date: January 31, 2024

Dear Investigator(s),

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled, Expanding the Church's Understanding of the Scope of Apologetics and Its Use in Evangelism. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol.

Any changes require approval before they can be implemented as part of your study. If your study requires any changes, the proposed modifications will need to be submitted in the form of an amendment request to the IRB to include the following:

Description of proposed revisions;  
*If applicable*, any new or revised materials;  
*If applicable*, updated letters of approval from cooperating institutions

If there are any adverse events and/or any unanticipated problems during your study, you must notify the IRB within 24 hours of the event or problem.

At present time, there is no need for further action on your part with the IRB.

This approval is issued under Southeastern University's Federal Wide Assurance 00006943 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the IRB's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Rustin Lloyd  
 Chair, Institutional Review Board  
 irb@seu.edu



## **Recruitment Email Scripts**

### **Email to Local Churches**

Hello,

My name is Jonathan Dinkins. I am a biblical studies major at Southeastern University, a Christian University in Lakeland, Florida. To fulfill a requirement for the honors program, I am writing a thesis on expanding the church's understanding of the scope and breadth of Apologetics in evangelism.

Apologetics - the defense of the Christian faith - has long been an important discipline of study to Jesus-followers. In our culture, many have seen the Holy Spirit use Apologetics to draw people to Christ. Apologetics is often associated with logical philosophical and historical arguments for the existence of absolute truth, God, miracles, the inerrancy of Scripture, and the deity of Christ. In my thesis, however, I contend that Apologetics is that but also much more. Properly understood, bible-centered Apologetics is a robust, holistic approach to persuading people of the truth of the gospel and their need for Jesus, not through emotional or intellectual manipulation but through Jesus-followers who embody the gospel message and give numerous reasons why the gospel is true and why people need Jesus.

This is where your church comes in. Part of my thesis will include a survey of faithful Jesus-followers' story of how they came to believe in the truth of the gospel and commit themselves to Christ. My survey will ask people about their faith story and what factors the Holy Spirit used in their lives to show them the truth of the gospel and their need for Jesus. In an attempt to get a large sample size of Christians, I have reached out to your church asking for your help. Would you be willing, in any way the leadership deems appropriate, to help me get my

survey out by sharing it with the congregation? This can be done in numerous ways. For example, the survey can be given through a QR code during Sunday worship, posted on social media, given in small groups, or spread word of mouth. My hope is that this survey will assist the body of Christ to better understand and reach those who do not yet have a relationship with Jesus. Survey results could also be shared with your church so that the leadership better knows the congregation. If this is a possibility, I would love to hear back from you and answer any questions you may have! I appreciate your time and consideration!

- In Christ,

Jonathan Dinkins

P.S. This survey has been approved by the IRB board of Southeastern University.

### **Email To The School of Honors**

Hello everyone! My name is Jonathan Dinkins, and I am an Honors Student in the Barnett College of Ministry & Theology. I am conducting a survey titled "Expanding the Church's Understanding of the Scope of Apologetics and Its Use in Evangelism". Since you are a student at Southeastern University, I am extending an invitation for you to participate in this survey for my thesis research study.

The purpose of this research is to study the factor(s) that influenced Jesus-followers' view of the truthfulness of the Gospel. This study hopes to collect data about Jesus-follower's journey to Christ and the factors that led them to believe Christianity is true.

For this survey, you will answer a few questions about your demographics, personal faith background, and journey to Christ. These questions include multiple choice, select all that apply, and open response questions. It should only take you about fifteen minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent and

participation in this survey at any time. The IRB has approved all survey questions. All of your responses will remain confidential, and there are no risks associated with the completion of this survey.