

APOLOGETICS AND THE APOSTLE PAUL IN THE BOOK OF ACTS;

AN AGENDA FOR A VIABLE APOLOGETIC METHODOLOGY

By  
(A|va.)

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## INTRODUCTION

The enterprise of meaningfully communicating and defending the truth claims of Christianity to a God-alienated world has presented the Christian community with a serious challenge since its inception at about A.D. 30 (Acts 2). Whereas the command was given by the risen Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, to preach to "all nations" (Matthew 28:19), this task has not been limited by the passing of time or by geographical, linguistic or cultural barriers. In fact, the Christian community ultimately embraced a global endeavor to communicate the Christian message with no thought of cessation until Christ returns (I Corinthians 11:26).

It is just this nature of the ministry incumbent upon the Christian community which has thrust it into an active role of communicating Christian truth within the context of a wide spectrum of cultural peculiarities, as well as varying sociological structures and differing philosophical and theological beliefs. It is within this ever changing cultural, sociological, philosophical and theological milieu, with its corresponding world view, that the Christian community has been commanded to communicate in a meaningful way the truth-claims of Christianity. It is with this task that the Church has struggled perennially, seeking simultaneously to challenge the faulty world views of each culture in every generation as well as present the truth-claims of Christianity without alienating by censorious spirit the very ones it endeavors to reach.

This universal, timeless Christian responsibility involves what has been known historically as the work of apologetics. However, even in light

of what has been said and what traditionally is agreed to be the obligation of the Christian community, the mention of apologetics often arouses within the minds of many sincere Christians some very negative connotations. For some, the work of apologetics is seen as a perfidious attempt on the part of others to contaminate theology with secular philosophy. Others view it as extraneous to the responsibility of Christian witnessing, while some even perceive the work of apologetics as being a direct affront to the salvific work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11). Yet, there are others who consider the work of apologetics as some esoteric enterprise for the philosophically minded elite of Christianity.

Nonetheless, there are a number within evangelical Christianity who view the work of apologetics not only as scriptural, but essential to the success of the ongoing mission of the Church. Yet, this group is beleaguered by numerous intermural clashes concerning which apologetic method is the most biblical as well as most effective. Although this ongoing intermural conflict is for the most part entered into good-naturedly, there is an unmistakable adamant polarization of opposing views held within this contingent of the Christian community. Consequently, this polarization has not only created tension among those who see apologetics as a valid Christian endeavor, it has also increased confusion and nourished negativism among those already suspicious of the whole enterprise of Christian apologetics.

Unfortunately, this comes at a very critical time when the Christian consensus is fading -- especially from western societies -- and the Judeo-Christian base is evaporating under the heat of the many-faceted philosophy of secular humanism, as well as the onslaught of eastern thought in all its various forms. The result is that in many cases Christianity is either being out-right rejected or granted only equal status with other systems of

belief. This must not be tolerated by the Christian community. Christians must realize that other systems of belief, regardless how benign and innocuous they may appear on the surface, necessarily carry basic anti-Christian philosophical baggage, and this must be exposed. In fact, evangelical Christianity is rapidly losing the luxury of addressing men who embrace anything peculiarly Christian. The circle containing those who have a frame of reference for the Judeo-Christian faith is shrinking at an alarming rate, while the circle containing those with alien philosophies and world views is increasing proportionately. Consequently, large segments of society are left untouched by the message of Christianity. This is not to say that evangelical Christianity is not speaking, but that the message is communicated at a truth level beyond the comprehension of the hearer and is couched in religious words which have little or no real objective meaning for the hearer who has matured without any real Christian orientation.

It is true that there are certain movements within this country which may indicate a renewed influence of the Christian consensus. However, if the present conservative trend in this country back to a Judeo-Christian morality is to have any lasting meaningful effects, it must be accompanied by a strong Christian voice which challenges the anti-Christian philosophies latently entrenched in the mental repositories of the people. Seemingly, the present trend is more out of emotional reaction to the extremes of liberalism than it is the intellectual conclusion based upon the convincing message of the truth claims of Christianity. It is more out of pragmatism than it is the logical necessity of individual faith in God. Unless the Judeo-Christian base is re-established and men are brought to knowledge of the true God and the corollary world view, the present political and judicial victories will fade with the men who brought them to pass.

Therefore, there must be a renewed commitment to the real enterprise of apologetics, not as an intellectual game, but as a serious all-out attempt to reach the Twentieth Century man with the truth-claims of Christianity. Likewise, those who are committed to the necessity of the apologetic endeavor need to spend more time doing apologetics rather than simply arguing for their variety of apologetics. With the growing medical and technological advancements the assumed power of man will increase and the perceived dependence on God will decrease, and Christianity must challenge that society in boldness, confidence, and clarity with the truth-claims of Christianity at a truth-level that modern man can understand. If the Christian community is to stand in harm's way and not suffer a tactical defeat, it must get serious about the role of apologetics. However, at present the status of apologetics among fundamental Christians seems at best tolerated and at worst rejected. Yet, if the situation is perceived correctly, there will be some serious -- perhaps even irreversible -- implications for Christianity unless this attitude is reversed.

The problem appears to be at least two-fold. The first involves the attitudinal differences among Christians with respect to the status to be granted Christian apologetics. The second problem entails the sharp division among the pro-apologetic contingent with respect to methodology. It is, in fact, the critical theological/philosophical nature and the practical implications of this two-fold problem within evangelical Christianity which has provided the stimulus to address this matter.

This thesis will be an attempt to offer both responsible and biblical answers to the attitudinal and methodological problems presently hindering the effectiveness of the witness of the evangelical Christian community to a world which desperately needs to hear the Christian message. Attention

will be centered in, but not limited to, the Book of Acts. Several Lucan narrative passages which are destined to yield information germane to the subject of Christian apologetics will be examined in light of other propositional truth statements preserved in the New Testament. The chief end of all this is to offer a biblical view of the nature of apologetics and then present an apologetic agenda which will make a contribution toward a viable apologetic method which will honor God's Word, respect man's uniqueness, and yield an apology which reflects the spirit and truth of Christianity in its noblest sense. In essence, an apologetic methodology will be suggested which will answer other philosophies as well as man's basic needs and questions.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE NATURE OF APOLOGETICS

The communicative success for any meaningful informative discourse is proportionately related to the degree of perspicuity with which the subject matter is defined. Therefore, the logical priority of a chapter defining the nature and scope of apologetics is self-evident. Consequently, both a lexical definition as well as connotative implications assigned to the concept of apologetics as developed within the context of Christianity will be offered. To begin at this elemental level is not intended as an insult to the reader's intelligence, but rather to establish basic parameters for the discussion to follow. The attention given to the definitional dimension will not only provide information as to the essential nature of apologetics, but also suggest who in Christianity is responsible to do the work of apologetics.

#### TOWARDS A DEFINITION

The English word apologetics comes from the Greek word APOLOGIA, and according to W. E. Vine, it means "a verbal defense, a speech in defense . . . ." <sup>1</sup> Colin Brown offers a similar definition: "Gr. APOLOGEOMAI, speak in defense, answer; APOLOGIA, speech in defense, answer." <sup>2</sup> Moulton and Milligan refer to the Greek word APOLOGEOMAI as ". . . judicial verb . . . ." <sup>3</sup> Bernard Ramm expands the definition to include historical

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<sup>1</sup>W. E. Vine. An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. 4 volumes. (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), Vol. I, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>Colin Brown. gen. ed. Dictionary of N. T. Theology. 3 volumes. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers, 1976), Vol. 1, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup>James Moulton and George Milligan. The Vocabulary of the N. T. reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 66.

and linguistic insight:

The historical origin of apologetics is to be found in the legal procedures in ancient Athens. The plaintiff brought his accusations (KATEGORIA) before the court. The accused had the right of making a reply (APOLOGIA) to the accusation. The reply was an effort to show the falsity of the accusation; hence the accused attempted to "speak off" the charge. Hence we have the verb APOLOGESTHAI, "to make reply, to give an answer, to legally defend one's self"; and the noun APOLOGIA, "the answer given, the defense made"; and APOLOGETIKOS which refers to the art or skill of making one's reply or answer.<sup>4</sup>

While each lexical definition reveals the essential character of the term to be forensic in nature, the last part of this definition raises some important definitional distinctions. The apology is the defense itself while the term apologetics applies to the "art or skill" of making the apology. These distinctions will be honored throughout. In addition to these distinctions, other phrases used throughout the thesis need to be identified. The phrase "nature of apologetics" is employed to refer to the basic elements of an apology. However, this is not to say that every element must be present to have an apology, but only to point out what are generally accepted parts of a Christian apology. The phrase "scope of apologetics" is used to refer to the matters/issues addressed in the apology, while the phrase "apologetic method" speaks to the concern regarding which theological/philosophical system is accepted as the framework within which the work of apologetics is to be conducted.

Within the First Century the term APOLOGIA and its cognates were assimilated into the Christian vocabulary. Philippians 1:7 indicates some connotations of APOLOGIA as used within Christian conversation and literature. Paul writes from prison to his friends in Philippi,

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<sup>4</sup>Bernard Ramm. Varieties of Christian Apologetics. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 11.

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

-- New Scofield Ed. K.J.V.

The compound prepositional phrase, "in the defense and confirmation" grammatically refers to one enterprise. That is, Paul speaks of the defense (APOLOGIA) of the gospel and confirmation of the gospel as two inseparable endeavors of the one enterprise of confronting men with the truth claims of Christianity. J. B. Lightfoot supports this view with the following succinct comment regarding the compound prepositional phrase:

The two words, being connected by the same article, combine to form one idea. As ἀπολογία implies the negative or defensive side of the Apostle's preaching, the preparatory process of removing obstacles and prejudices, so βεβαίωσις denotes the positive or aggressive side, the direct advancement and establishment of the Gospel. The two together will thus comprise all modes of preaching and extending the truth.<sup>5</sup>

The indication is that the Apostle Paul understood the nature of Christian apologetics to include challenging and exposing false world views as well as declaring the truth-claims of Christianity. Subsequently, if the Apostle Paul reflects a normative attitude towards the nature of apologetics, then it can be assumed that the early Christians understood the proclamation of the Gospel as an indispensable part of a total apology. In virtually every account in the Book of Acts where Paul's APOLOGIA is recorded, the Gospel is found as part and parcel of his defense. However, this is only to be expected whereas, as shall be discussed later, Paul's APOLOGIA was founded squarely in the resurrection event. Obviously, it would be meaningless for Paul to mention the resurrection as a neutral time space event detached from other events. So when he mentioned the resurrection it can be assumed he did so within the context of the Gospel (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

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<sup>5</sup> J. B. Lightfoot. St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. (London: MacMillan and Co., 1913; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 85.

The point of surfacing this fact is to show that the term APOLOGIA came into the Christian vocabulary with all its forensic baggage and then the Christian community enlarged upon it. For the Christian community to make a defense for the Faith included proclaiming the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Not only was the resurrection central to Paul's defense of the Christian truth claims, it is central to the Gospel message. Hence, the resurrection has both philosophical as well as theological implications. The early Christians were encouraged to give a logical, coherent, responsible answer for their world view and within that context and as part of the defense they were to present the Gospel. This would in reality be a very natural thing to do as well as being a logical step in their defense. This was the nature of Christian apologetics in its embryonic stage.

Over the years, for the most part, the nature of apologetics has not changed, but the scope of apologetics has been affected considerably. This change to a large degree came about as a result of the periodical shifts in the point at which Christianity has been attacked. In order to appreciate how the nature of apologetics has remained rather constant over the years, several contemporary definitions of apologetics will be given. The first is somewhat lengthy, but addresses the issue rather handily. Apologetics is

... the establishment of the truthfulness of a world view; Christian apologetics attempts to enable believers to understand the implications of their faith to a fuller extent, philosophically and theologically construct the biblical framework of the Christian world-and-life view, and point out the inconsistencies and inadequacies of alternative perspectives.<sup>6</sup>

This definition, either implicitly or explicitly touches all the

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<sup>6</sup>Ronald B. Mayers. Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), p. 219.

bases essential to apologetics as understood by the early Church. Gordon Lewis gives a rather pithy definition, namely that apologetics is "the science and art of defending Christianity's truth-claims."<sup>7</sup> Bernard Ramm offers the following definition: "Christian apologetics is the strategy of setting forth the truthfulness of the Christian faith and its right to claim of the knowledge of God."<sup>8</sup> Francis Schaeffer suggests that apologetics is "that branch of theology having to do with the defense and communication of Christianity."<sup>9</sup>

The definitions of others could be cited at this point, however, they would bear a striking resemblance to those already introduced. The fact of the matter is that definitionally the nature of Christian apologetics has changed very little over the past 1900 years. However, this is not the case with either the scope or the methodological approaches of Christian apologetics. Regretably, it is in this area, namely the matter of apologetic methodology, that growing tension between apologists has developed. Speaking of evangelical apologetics, Kenneth Kantzer candidly writes,

It [Evangelical apologetics] drifted into a continual skirmish between "presuppositionalists" and "evidentialists" (some rationalist, some empirical, and some eclectic). No dominant school of apologetics rose to withstand the enemy of faith. The best minds among evangelical apologists seemed to be consumed with this internecine struggle within their own ranks.<sup>10</sup>

The differences between the "presuppositionalists" and the "evidentialists" must not be taken lightly. There are some core theological and

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon Lewis. Testing Christianity's Truth-Claims. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 340.

<sup>8</sup> Ramm, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer. The God Who Is There. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1968), p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Kantzer, Foreword to Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic, by Ronald B. Mayers. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), p. x.

philosophical differences at the heart of the two opposing methodologies. The main area of question in the matter of theology is primarily with respect to anthropology. In the matter of philosophy the differences emerge from varying epistemological and ontological perspectives. However, lest anyone misread what has been said, it should be pointed out that major points of doctrine essential to Christianity are not in question -- all these apologists in mind would be considered evangelical.

As has already been suggested, there are two ends of the present apologetic spectrum. On one end is the "presuppositionalist" and on the other is the "evidentialist", and it seems that the twain shall never meet. Of course, this is not to suggest that all apologists fall neatly into one or the other extreme (this word is not used in a pejorative sense). There are those who find themselves somewhere in between, but for the most part they will be identified with the side with which they most closely agree. Although there is another approach (sometimes fallaciously identified with presuppositionalism) known as fideism. This position embraces the idea that faith needs no reason or, as Geisler remarks, ". . . there are no rational ways to justify ones beliefs; faith alone is necessary."<sup>11</sup>

The "evidentialists" are those who,

. . . stress historical evidences and fulfilled prophecies to the neglect or denigration of theistic arguments because of their disdain for philosophy [and] are also rooted in inductive empiricism. This is particularly true in evangelical circles, though Norman Geisler is a notable exception.<sup>12</sup>

The evidentialist

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<sup>11</sup> Norman Geisler. Christian Apologetics. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Mayers, p. 88.

. . . begins in an a posteriori fashion with actual facts and argues epistemologically that the facts rightly interpreted have only one possible meaning, and in that sense carry their meaning with them in a self-interpreting manner.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Reymond summarizes the general characteristics of the evidentialist position when he writes,

Evidentialism, or *Intelligo et credo* ("I understand and I believe") -- systems stressing some form of natural theology as the point at which apologetics begins. Group characteristics here are the following: (1) a genuine belief in the ability and trustworthiness of human reason in its search for religious knowledge, (2) the effort to ground faith upon empirical and/or historically verifiable facts, and (3) the conviction that religious propositions must be subjected to the same kind of verification -- namely, demonstration that scientific assertions must undergo.<sup>14</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, firmly entrenched, is the presuppositionalist. This group ". . . begins a priori from the ontological perspective of creation, in having everything ultimately related to and interpreted by God's will and Word."<sup>15</sup> The presuppositionalists for the most part ". . . hark back, at least to some degree to Augustine",<sup>16</sup> while evidentialists find Aquinas common to their cause. Cogently and somewhat simplistically stated, "Presuppositionalists want to begin with God, evidentialists with ourselves . . . ."<sup>17</sup> However, a more complete definition of the presuppositionalist position is offered by a presuppositionalist, Robert Reymond.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>14</sup> Robert L. Reymond. The Justification of Knowledge. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Mayers, p. 198.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

Presuppositionalism, or Credo ut intelligam ("I believe in order that I may understand") -- systems presupposing the primacy of special revelation as providing the ground for the total theological enterprise. Group characteristics are the convictions that (1) faith in God precedes understanding everything else (cf. Hebrews 11:3), (2) elucidation of the system follows faith, (3) the religious experience must be grounded in the objective Word of God and the objective work of Christ, (4) human depravity has rendered autonomous reason incapable of satisfactorily anchoring its truth claims to anything objectively certain, and (5) a special regenerating act of the Holy Spirit is indispensable for Christian faith and enlightenment.

Names generally associated with these positions would include Cornelius Van Til for the presuppositionalist and John Warwick Montgomery for the evidentialist.<sup>19</sup> Of course, these categorical definitions may involve oversimplifications and/or generalizations, but nonetheless they do serve as reference points which facilitate discussions with respect to apologetic methodologies and these categories will be mentioned later. Therefore, though the purpose of this thesis is not to develop the history of apologetic methods, it has been necessary to define for the reader the difference between presuppositionalism and evidentialism, because it is between these two groups that the bulk of tension exists. The priority of these definitions will become evident as the thesis material develops.

#### SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE FOR DOING APOLOGETICS

It has already been inferred from the discussion relating to the definition of APOLOGIA that the early Christians were involved at some level

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<sup>18</sup>Reymond, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup>It is suggested that the reader consult any of the many works by Van Til, including The Defense of the Faith, or a book by Rushdoony on the philosophy of Van Til, entitled, By What Standard, in order to get a more complete picture of classic presuppositionalism. Also History and Christianity, by J. W. Montgomery may be consulted for insight into the evidentialist approach.



with the enterprise of apologetics. However, a case must be made not from inference, but from the explicit teaching of Scripture that in fact, early Christians were involved by necessity and command in the work of apologetics.

It is obvious from reading the bulk of English translations that the word apologetic does not appear in the English New Testament as a translation of the Greek Word APOLOGIA. However, in the Greek text,

Both the verb (APOLOGESTHAI) and the noun (APOLOGIA) occur in the New Testament but they are never translated either by "to make apologetical defense" or to make an "apology". Such expressions as "to make reply" or "to give answer", or "to make one's defense" are used.<sup>20</sup>

This stands as incontrovertible evidence that the early Christians had apologetic nomenclature in their vocabulary even though the fact has been somewhat obscured by English translations. However, this apologetic vocabulary extends beyond such words to include other "intellectual" words, as John Stott points out:

Now all the verbs Luke uses here of Paul's evangelistic ministry -- to argue, to explain, to prove, to proclaim and to persuade -- are to some extent "intellectual" words. They indicate that Paul was teaching a body of doctrine and arguing towards a conclusion. He was seeking to convince in order to convert.<sup>21</sup>

However, not only did early Christians have apologetic vocabulary, the New Testament records activity explicitly identified as an APOLOGIA as part of the early Christians' ministry. At this point some passages will be cited where the word APOLOGIA is used in the context of such activity. Later other passages will be examined in detail, but the purpose of introducing scriptural evidence at this point is to establish a biblical precedent for doing apologetics. Although such activity may not have been highly

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<sup>20</sup> Ramm, p. 11

<sup>21</sup> John R. W. Stott. Your Mind Matters. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), p. 47.

developed, nonetheless, the early Church did in fact regard certain Christian activity under the technical term APOLOGIA as the following passages will indicate.

In Acts 19:33, Alexander the Jew attempted to make an APOLOGIA for the truth of Judaism before the angry mob at the temple of Diana in Ephesus. In Acts 24:10, Paul, after being arrested for his Christian faith, gave a verbal APOLOGIA before Felix in order to answer the accusations lodged against him by religious Jews. In Acts 25:8, Paul makes a similar APOLOGIA before Agrippa. All of these instances involving the Apostle Paul appear to be formal defenses as indicated by the context. In II Timothy 4:16, Paul speaks of his "first defense" (APOLOGIA) which seems to imply another reference to a formal defense against charges brought against him because of Christian truth he proclaimed. Hendriksen's comment is enlightening:

There had been another trial. In that first defense no one had taken Paul's side. It is readily understood why Paul speaks of the trial as a defense (literally "apology" in the sense of speech in vindication from accusation), for that had been his part in it. In that formal trial, then, Paul had stood alone.<sup>22</sup>

In I Corinthians 9:3, Paul speaks of being ready to give his critics an answer (APOLOGIA). Here the context seems to indicate an informal defense. However, that in no way minimizes the importance of the defense, nor does it suggest any less skill involved in building a case against the opponents and for the truth. At any rate, whether the situation demanded a formal or informal presentation, the idea of an APOLOGIA is that of a logical, rational, coherent presentation of all and any facts pertinent and necessary to the

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<sup>22</sup>William Hendriksen. Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 325.

nature of the accusation and the condition of the accused. This in the main appears to be the essence of the nature of early Christian apologetics, Paul being the quintessence of the apologists.

For the early Christians, accusations against the Christian truth-claims they lived and proclaimed were commonplace. As a consequence, it became necessary for the Christian community to responsibly respond to such accusations from whatever sociological, political, or religious sector they came. This response was known as an APOLOGIA -- a defense. This apologetic activity was not necessarily some systematized discipline, but rather the result of the necessity of the hour. If Christians and Christianity were to survive in a hostile environment, there needed to be a rational apology given to dismantle both formal and informal accusations thrown up against Christianity.

#### **HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR DOING APOLOGETICS**

It has been shown that according to the New Testament record, at least Paul and a few other early Christians were involved in the enterprise of apologetics. It is now time to take a brief look at history in an attempt to ascertain whether or not the following generations of Christians continued in the early Church tradition of doing apologetics. While this thesis is not primarily concerned with the history of apologetics, it is necessary to the argument of the thesis to establish a train of apologetic activity from the early Church to now. Such a train of activity will give historical verification to the notion that the Church has always considered the enterprise of apologetics to be part and parcel of Her witnessing ministry.

Bernard Ramm assures the reader that there is a traceable line of apologetic activity throughout church history.

The apologetic activity of Christ and his apostles was continued in the early Church. It too was subjected to a variety of accusations -- Christians were cannibals, or immoral, or they were undermining the Roman empire, or they were gullible -- and to these accusations its great leaders gave their defense (APOLOGIA). In fact the earliest theologians of the Church were called apologists and the greatest treatise of the pre-Augustinian era was Origen's famous work, Against Celsus.<sup>23</sup>

Ronald B. Mayers in his book Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic, devotes a whole chapter on historical evidence that shows the Church has always been involved at some level with the work of apologetics. The summary to that chapter is introduced here.

Each of the Church Fathers was concerned with the immediate problems at hand: Polycarp treated heresy with contempt, Ignatius specifically battled Docetism, and Irenaeus fought Gnosticism; particular charges against the Christians were met by Athenagoras, and by the writer of Diognetus through lifestyle apologetics; and Justin attempted to contrast Christianity with Greek philosophy.

These two comments take the Church up through and including the Fifth Century and share the same conclusions as Colin Brown, who reports, "In the early Church apologists like Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tertullian and Origen raised the apology to the status of a distinct genre of theological literature."<sup>25</sup>

Both Avery Dulles<sup>26</sup> and noted Church historian Philip Schaff<sup>27</sup> provide ample proof that the Church has been involved to some degree in the work of apologetics through the centuries. The scope and methodological approaches have varied with the times, but the basic nature of apologetics has historically remained the same right to the present hour when there has

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<sup>23</sup>Ramm, p. 12

<sup>24</sup>Mayers, p. 195.

<sup>25</sup>Brown, p. 51.

<sup>26</sup>Avery Dulles. A History of Apologetics. (New York: Corpus Books, 1971).

<sup>27</sup>Philip Schaff. History of the Christian Church. 8 volumes. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970).

been an apologetic renaissance within some circles of Christianity.

### **WHO SHOULD DO APOLOGETICS?**

The last issue to be addressed in this chapter is the matter of who within the Christian community is responsible for giving a Christian apology. It has already been demonstrated that apologetic activity is indeed biblical and that the Church through the centuries in some degree and fashion has been involved in the work of apologetics. Likewise, the nature of such activity has been outlined and a working definition of apologetics has been suggested. With these things in mind, attention will now be turned to I Peter 3:15, in pursuit of an answer to the question, Who should do apologetics? The Apostle Peter writes:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. I Peter 3:15 (New Scofield ed. K.J.V.)

This text is relevant to the present study because the word translated "answer" is the Greek word APOLOGIA. In this verse some people are being exhorted to give an APOLOGIA when asked about why they believed the Christian message. Whereas there are two pronouns used in the verse, it is necessary to establish their antecedent. This endeavor brings the exegete to the first verse of the first chapter.

The opening verse of chapter one makes it clear that the Apostle Peter is addressing believers who had been "scattered" because of persecution. In fact, it had been their allegiance to the Christian faith which was responsible for this persecution. According to rules of grammar, the antecedent of the second person plural possessive pronoun "your" and the second person plural pronoun "you" in verse fifteen of chapter three is none other than the believers mentioned in verse one of chapter one. Such believers

were to be ready to give an answer (APOLOGIA) to "every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Remember, the context suggests these believers are undergoing persecution, so the inquiry regarding their "hope" would more than likely be a hostile one. But in spite of that (or because of that) they are to be ready to give an APOLOGIA of their Christian hope. This is true not just for a few well-trained Christians, but every Christian.

Robertson comments on this exhortation, "ready with a spoken defense of the inward hope. This attitude calls for an intelligent grasp of the hope and skill in presenting it."<sup>28</sup> The indication of the verse is that such is the responsibility of each Christian. The enterprise of apologetics, at least in its basic form, is not just a professional enterprise, but is normative for all Christians. Colin Brown concurs with these words, "The word is used in I Pet. 3:15 of the defense or reply which the Christian should be ready to give of his hope to outsiders and opponents."<sup>29</sup> The word "hope" is used in a technical sense to speak of the total Christian salvation package with the emphasis on the anticipated return of Christ and the ensuing glory (Titus 2:13). This fact likewise reinforces the truth that each Christian is responsible to give a personal APOLOGIA since each Christian is a possessor of this "hope".

Other implications of this verse include the fact that the Christian "hope" is something more than a feeling, an intuition. It can in fact be communicated and defended in a meaningful way. The Christian hope is objective and definitive, so much so that it can be expressed and defended in a logical, rational fashion. If such were not the case, Peter's command to

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<sup>28</sup> Archibald T. Robertson. Word Pictures in the New Testament. 6 volumes: General Epistles and the Revelation of John. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), Vol. 6, p. 114.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, p. 51.

give a defense of the hope would be meaningless. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Christian to be prepared to make a case for his personal belief in Christianity and to give substantial evidence why the Christian beliefs are to be accepted over other religious systems. Any Christian who desires to fulfill the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20) will of necessity, and must by command, be ready to give an APOLOGIA for his Christian belief.

In summary, this chapter has surfaced a basic biblical definition of the nature of apologetics, that is, the basic thrust of an apology as it pertains to Christianity. It has been suggested that the nature of apologetics involves both the defense of the Christian truth-claims and the witnessing to the Christian Faith. Such an apology generally includes the two-fold operation of showing the fallacies of other systems of belief, however unstructured they may be, as well as making a positive case for Christianity. Obviously, at times the false system(s) of belief will be so weak and inconsequential to the person addressed that little, if any, time will need to be allotted to showing the fallacy thereof. An apology must not of practical necessity contain this negative dimension, although such is an accepted part of the work of apologetics. The point of an apology is to meaningfully communicate in a rational, coherent fashion the truth-claims of Christianity. If, due to the nature of the situation, it becomes necessary to strip a faulty set of beliefs of all its cover before the person is ready to listen to the Christian message, then the apology must include such apologetic work.

Both Scripture and history witness to the fact that apologetic activity is both biblical and normative Christian behavior. According to I Peter 3:15, this activity at some level of communication, is the responsibility of every Christian. To argue against Christian apologetics as being neither biblical activity nor normative activity for all Christians is to

dispute both the scriptural as well as the historical witness. Indeed, Scripture commands that every Christian is to be prepared to give an apology for the Faith which of necessity requires some level of involvement in the enterprise of apologetics. However, the method employed in the dispatch of the apologetic responsibility is yet to be discussed. Nonetheless, this chapter provides the scriptural basis as well as the logical foundation to justify the pursuit of the thesis, namely, a viable apologetic method for the Church.



## CHAPTER TWO

### ISSUES WHICH SHAPE APOLOGETIC METHODS

The matter of apologetic methodology is one that is influenced by more than simple pragmatic concerns. Those embracing any one particular apologetic method do so under the influence of certain theological and philosophical commitments. At the mention of "theological" and "philosophical" there might be some who would immediately conclude that this enterprise of apologetics is only for the theologian or the philosopher. Such a conclusion would be erroneous and, whereas these terms will be used intermittently throughout the thesis, it will be the better part of wisdom to remove some of the preconceived definitional baggage usually associated with them.

Both terms ("theological" and "philosophical") should not be considered exclusively as professional terms. It must be understood that both terms have technical and non-technical connotations. There are people who vocationally devote their lives to the study of either theology or philosophy. In that case, the terms would have professional or technical implications and, regrettably, that is the only way most people ever consider the terms. However, there is a perfectly legitimate sense in which these two terms are used in a non-technical context, a sense in which, for example, all Christians are theologians. Mayers defines theology (systematic, not natural theology) as

The study of God within a given religion; in Christianity the systematization of cognitive propositions that are only known through God's self-revelation; the sum of biblical teaching.<sup>30</sup>

Peter's command for all believers to ". . . grow in grace and in the

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<sup>30</sup> Mayers, p. 228.

knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18) places all Christians as those who should be given to the study of theology. It is in this non-technical sense that "theologian" is a valid term for all Christians. The same is true for the term "philosophy", that is, everybody has a world view whether or not he can or has formulated it into some succinct system. Technically, however, a definition of "philosophy" is not necessarily so simple. Cornelius Krusé writes,

The term, derived from two Greek words (*φίλος* and *σοφία*), means a lover of wisdom or knowledge. It is sometimes used to denote a system of speculative beliefs, as when we speak of the Kantian philosophy, or a set of convictions on important issues, as when we speak of a certain man's philosophy of life. In the latter sense, perhaps everyone has a philosophy, formulated or not.<sup>31</sup>

Another writes concerning the difficulty in arriving at an all-inclusive definition of "philosophy",

It is difficult to determine whether any common element can be found within this diversity and whether any core meaning can be discovered for philosophy that could serve as a universal and all-inclusive definition. But a first attempt in this direction might be to define philosophy either as "a reflection upon the varieties of human experience" or as "the rational, methodical, and systematic consideration of those topics that are of greatest concern to man." Vague and indefinite as such definitions are, they do suggest two important facts about philosophizing: (1) that it is a reflective, or meditative, activity and (2) that it has no explicitly designated subject matter of its own but is a method or type of mental operation (like science or like history) that can take any area or subject matter or type of experience as its object.<sup>32</sup>

In light of these definitions or observations about philosophy, it seems consistent with such to suggest that in a sense, all men philosophize.

Possibly an illustration using a word which can be viewed more objectively will help. Consider the word "evangelist". This word is used

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<sup>31</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica. 15th ed., s.v. "Philosophy" by Albert William Levi.

<sup>32</sup>Collier's Encyclopedia. 1955 ed., s.v. "Philosophy" by Cornelius Krusé.

in both the technical and non-technical sense almost every day in the Christian community. There is a sense in which the term is used technically of a person who has accepted as a life-time ministry the work of evangelizing. However, there is another context in which the word is used in a non-technical sense when it speaks of all Christians whose responsibility it is to evangelize those around them. Maintaining these connotative distinctions while recognizing some practical similarities will contribute to a better understanding of the following discussion.

Having made some preliminary statements of caution regarding the words "theological" and "philosophical", it is time to turn to examining what theological, philosophical and historical issues are generally accepted as influencing the direction of apologetic methodologies. This will in turn enable an objective evaluation of the apologetic method suggested in this thesis to see if in fact it addresses the major issues common to all apologetic methods.

Bernard Ramm isolates and identifies ten issues which he believes are crucial to the development and discussion of any apologetic method.<sup>33</sup>

Gordon Lewis reduces the number to five:

Five issues call for careful consideration: (1) the logical starting point, (2) common ground or point of contact with non-Christians, (3) the test for truth, (4) the role of reasoning, and (5) the basis of faith in God, Christ, and Scripture.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>In the book, Varieties of Christian Apologetics, Ramm lists and discusses the following ten issues involved in Christian apologetics: What is the relationship between philosophy and Christianity? What is the value of theistic proofs? Must the apologist work with some theory of truth? What is the importance of the doctrine of sin for apologetics? What is the character of revelation? What kind of certainty does Christianity offer? Is there a common ground between believer and unbelievers which forms a point of contact for conversation and argumentation? What is the character of faith? What is the status of Christian evidences? What is the relationship between faith and reason? pp. 17-27.

<sup>34</sup>Lewis, p. 285.

It is obvious in comparing Ramm with Lewis that regardless of the number of issues into which the matter is divided, similar basic theological, philosophical and historical ground is covered.

In a recent publication, Ronald B. Mayers addressed the same subject and divided the discussion into seven issues.<sup>35</sup> Both Ramm and Mayers use similar phraseology in their respective identification of the issues involved, however, they differ at the point regarding the number of issues into which the discussion is to be divided. So, with small differences set aside, there is a consensus of opinion among the apologists with respect to the theological, philosophical and historical issues which must be addressed if there is to be a meaningful discussion or development of Christian apologetics. With this in mind, it is necessary that these issues provide the general direction in which the discussion in this thesis will flow. They will in essence police the discussion so that the investigation of the selected biblical texts will yield material germane to the true nature of Christian apologetics.

For purposes of this thesis, the discussion will be divided into four explicit issues which are similar to Lewis' five. These will provide an abbreviated but adequate framework for developing a viable apologetic from the example of the early apostles in general and the Apostle Paul in particular. While only four issues will be addressed explicitly, they must of necessity touch all ten implicitly. The four selected are: (1) What is the logical starting point? (2) Is there common ground between believer

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<sup>35</sup>(1) What is the role of philosophy in Christian theology and apologetics? (2) How are reason and faith related? (3) Of what significance is the doctrine of sin for the Christian apologetic? (4) Do the theistic proofs have worth for convincing the unbeliever? (5) To what extent may a believer and unbeliever form a shared point of contact on common ground? (6) Are historical Christian evidences important, or even possible, as evidence for the unbeliever? (7) What degree of certainty is there in the truthfulness of Christianity? Mayers, Both/And: A Balancec Apologetic, pp. 214-217.

and unbeliever? (3) What is the relationship between faith and reason?

(4) Is there a test for truth?

At this point, it is necessary to offer a word of explanation by way of justification for selecting only four issues as a guide in developing a viable apologetic. It must be understood that regardless how many issues one divides the discussion into, they form a system. Hence, by virtue of the nature of a system, no part is in total isolation from the whole. The position adopted for one issue in the system of logical necessity dictates general tenets of other issues in the system or else it is not a true system. Consequently, each point in and of itself is insufficient to argue against another full-blown system. Even when one speaks of a particular issue, it is impossible to do so without the influence of other philosophical and theological predispositions of the mind. Therefore, any apologetic system is just that, it is a system which definitionally implies there is an internal interdependence. Each part of the system, while of necessity must evidence its own internal consistency, must also form a coherent part of the whole without which there is no true system. If this challenge is accepted and complied with, the four issues selected will in fact serve adequately in meaningfully addressing the issues in Christian apologetics and will provide a sufficient guide for the development of a viable apologetic for the Church.

Furthermore, it will be helpful to realize that isolation and categorization are beneficial techniques in problem solving and for lucid formulation of certain positions. However, they must not be leaned upon too heavily, lest they end in fragmenting the system and hence destroy the very thing they were intended to construct. There must be a logical flow within the system which produces a unified whole. If this concept is adhered to with intellectual honesty, the four issues selected will in fact provide a

sufficient number of touchstones in order to construct a viable apologetic for the Church. At this point a delineation of the nature of each of these four categories will be submitted.

#### A LOGICAL STARTING POINT

This question broaches the subject of the epistemological base from which the truth-claims of Christianity are to be set before the unbeliever.

Gordon Lewis succinctly summarizes what is involved:

We must decide whether to initiate a test of Christianity's truth-claims by attending first to facts alone, facts and categories, indemonstrable axioms of Christianity, presuppositions of Christianity's truth, mystical experiences of God, or a tentative Christian hypothesis to be tested.<sup>36</sup>

This seems to cover the possible approaches, from the pure empiricist to those of the mystical inclinations. However, at this point the purpose is not to select one of the suggestions as being the best logical starting point, but only to surface the nature of the material involved in this issue. In fact, this is the limited objective at this time for each of the four issues being considered. Later, after dealing with several biblical texts, attention will once again be turned to these four issues in an attempt to give biblical answers which will in turn provide a normative base on which a viable apologetic for the Church can be constructed. That is, answers will be given which will assist every believer to effectively give a defense of the hope that is within him.

The matter of a logical starting point is crucial, because it will more or less shape the remainder of one's apologetic approach. The mind set with which the believer confronts the unbeliever with respect to the capacity and receptivity of the unbeliever's mind with regard to the truthfulness of the

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<sup>36</sup> Lewis, p. 287.

truth-claims of Christianity will determine at what point and in which fashion an appeal will be made to the unbeliever for the truthfulness of Christianity. Pitfalls to be avoided in a logical starting point include, but are not limited to, circular reasoning, total subjectivity, or granting reason a status unwarranted by a biblically balanced view of man.

#### IS THERE COMMON GROUND BETWEEN BELIEVER AND UNBELIEVER?

This issue zeros in on the ontological peculiarities of the unbeliever with respect to the mind. One's view of the effect of the Fall on man's mind will shape the response to this question. This will in turn determine the language adopted to confront the unbeliever with the truth-claims of Christianity. Lewis surfaces the basic thrust of this question when he writes,

Having begun to test Christianity's truth-claims, we wonder what court of appeal can hear the case. Can we check out these proposals by anything held in common between believer and unbeliever? Do all men, irrespective of Christian convictions, face similar observable facts, employ the same general principle of non-contradiction, and find themselves accountable to certain basic principles of right and wrong?<sup>37</sup>

Both epistemological and ontological implications are involved. Not only does the question involve whether observable facts are common to both believer and unbeliever, but also is there any commonable interpretation of those observable facts?

Bernard Ramm elucidates this point and reveals the difficulties involved.

If a Christian draws a circle before the non-Christian and says, "The matters in this circle are common to both of us, so let us debate them to a conclusion", then it could be said to him, "You have conceded that there is some territory -- namely that circle which you just drew -- about which God has spoken no word, and therefore the argument may go

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<sup>37</sup>Lewis, p. 288.

one way or the other; but in that God is sovereign Creator no such circle exists and the argument can only go one way, namely God's way.

Then the Christian who drew the circle replies, "If no such common ground exists, then no matter what I say to the non-Christian it will sound like meaningless chatter. God does not expect a man to believe meaningless chatter; so some circle must exist for Christian communication."

There is the paradox: grant the circle and deny God's sovereignty;<sup>38</sup> deny the circle and eliminate any communication of the gospel.

It is not necessary to accept Ramm's total scenario to realize the problems inherent in this issue regardless which way one goes -- that is, if it is to be a rigid either/or choice. There are those like Van Til who will say there is no epistemological common ground between the believer and the unbeliever, others of the evidentialist's persuasion, stress "the publicly observable facts presented to all alert people independent of their religious perspectives."<sup>39</sup> This is how the differences work out in this issue between the presuppositionalist and the empiricist, respectively. However, it is not the purpose at this time to discuss the pros or cons of the different positions, but only to alert the reader to what is involved in the issue.

#### **WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON?**

Here the issue centers in whether or not reason has a status whereby it can judge revelation. However, the issue is somewhat more involved, for it must inevitably address the more difficult question of the relationship between faith and reason. Ramm writes,

This is one of the most customary formulations of the problem of Christian apologetics. Yet it is a most ambiguous formulation. The question really contains a cluster of questions. First of all we note that faith is a manner in which we accept something or receive something: so the real issue is not between faith and reason but between reason and that which faith accepts.<sup>40</sup>

This is a welcome distinction because faith is not an epistemological word,

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<sup>38</sup>Ramm, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup>Lewis, p. 288.

<sup>40</sup>Ramm, p. 28.



strictly speaking. No one knows anything by faith -- faith is assent to knowledge, not the awareness or discovery of knowledge. As Lewis affirms, "Faith is an act of the will directed by truth to an object which is real."<sup>41</sup> Lewis then continues to penetrate this issue by asking, "If knowledge is necessary to faith, the question inevitably arises, how much knowledge?"<sup>42</sup> If faith is assent to knowledge, does reason have a right to judge the validity of that knowledge whether it comes from special revelation or natural revelation?

In a responsible discussion of this question, the suggestion is not that reason can judge the truthfulness of revelation and weed out anything reason judges false. The question is to what extent does reason have right to judge the reasonableness of Christianity? As Lewis writes, "Exactly what can reason do to check out truth?"<sup>43</sup> Should the truth-claims of Christianity be subjected to the scrutiny of man's reason -- that is, unsaved man's reason? "To what extent is revelation under the canons of logic, evidence, fact, and to what extent is logic, evidence, fact, under revelation?"<sup>44</sup> Or we might ask, is it biblical for Christians to appeal to the unbeliever's reason as a factor in judging the validity or truthfulness of the Christian truth? Do evidences persuade men of truth because of the function of reason on the part of the unbeliever? Should the Christian simply give out the Gospel and appeal to men to believe as the Holy Spirit enables them without verifying the Christian message in any fashion? Practically speaking, this will determine not only whether the Christian will

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<sup>41</sup>Lewis, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid, p. 291.

<sup>44</sup>Ramm, p. 27.

feel obligated to form an argument for Christianity, but how this argument is to be formed. Also it will dictate the degree to which the Christian will sense a responsibility to answer honest questions concerning the truth-claims of Christianity. So this issue is not a benign factor in the overall scheme of an apologetic system.

#### IS THERE A TEST FOR TRUTH?

The thrust of this question concerns the matter of whether or how the truth-claims of Christianity can be tested for truthfulness. The word "truthfulness" is used here in a very absolute sense, that is, for true truth. The distinction is necessary because there is a difference between being truth and being truthful. Being truth is an absolute, unaffected by time or event, for example, Jesus is truth (John 14:6). Being truthful, on the other hand, is to act as opposed to a state of being and is often altered or effected by time or events. So when the word "truthfulness" is employed in this thesis it is meant to convey the idea of the true truth as a quality or a state of being.

Concerning the issue of a test for truth, Ramm writes,

A theory of truth is some principle which a philosopher adopts which, when applied to claims to knowledge or truth, will separate the true from the false.<sup>45</sup>

A test for truth involves truth-claims about events, but not the event itself. An event can be neither true nor false, only the interpretation of the event can be true or false. Therefore, it is the truth-claims of Christianity which are to be tested for truth which is the essence of this question. With the many truth-claims of conflicting religious systems, the question is, "Is there a test for truth whereby Christianity can be shown true and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

other claims as being false?"

The division of opinion over this issue within Christianity is reflected in the following general summary by James Grier:

The revelational rational-empiricist insists that all claims to religious authority must be tested the same way that all truth claims are tested, i.e. by the inductive scientific method. The Bible must be subjected to factual tests and will be shown to be true beyond reasonable doubt when checked by history.

The second approach is an autopistic stance (i.e. worthy of faith in itself) which asserts that the self-testimony of Scripture is sufficient to establish its authority. Autopistic apologetics presupposes that the Bible is true and then argues from the Bible to show that it is authoritative.<sup>46</sup>

Obviously this summary is from the viewpoint of the two extremes and does not take into account any who might hold a modified view of either extreme. Nonetheless, it serves the present purpose well in pointing out the two extremes. This statement does not deal with the different approaches to tests for truth. Some of the more common tests for truth are known as Correspondence, Coherence, Consistency, or Systematic Consistency, but at this time these will not be developed.<sup>47</sup> It is sufficient at this point to simply state the problem and show the two extreme positions which answer the question.

#### CONCLUSION

The duty of this chapter has been to demonstrate the importance of understanding the issues involved in doing Christian apologetics and to enumerate those issues as other apologists have worked them out. Along with this, there has been an attempt to make a case that the issues involved

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<sup>46</sup> James M. Grier, Jr. "The Apologetic Value of the Self-Witness of Scripture". Grace Theological Journal. LILX (Spring 1980), p. 72.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion on this subject, one might consult chapter eight of Norman Geisler's book, Christian Apologetics.

are issues that all believers must deal with even though they may not have a formalized statement regarding such. Of course, not all issues will need to be addressed in every case, but the Christian needs to have a basic position on each in order to avoid contradiction in witnessing and confusion in the mind of the unbeliever. These matters are not esoteric in nature, but rather belong to the realm of everyday theology in the living practiced by every Christian. Some will find the need to refine their system more than others, but all need to be able to articulate to some degree what they understand to be the biblical position on each issue. Up to this point, the four issues selected have been defined and to some degree discussed, leaving the remainder of the chapters to examine biblical material in order to arrive at biblical answers. This quest for answers is not for curiosity's sake, but rather to provide a base normative for all Christianity on which a viable apologetic can be constructed which has practical serviceability for all Christians.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ANTHROPOLOGICAL ACUMEN FOR THE PAULINE APOLOGETIC

The four issues of Christian apologetics with which this present work is concerned revolve around material which is anthropological in nature. Whereas the enterprise of apologetics is the act of one member of the human race communicating truth-claims to another member of the human race, it is absolutely essential to understand man. Furthermore, inasmuch as apologetics in this context deals with Christian truth-claims, it is not only necessary to know the truth-claims, it is paramount to have a Christian understanding of man. One must understand the ontological peculiarities of man in contradistinction to the rest of creation -- a being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). This then will be the burden of this chapter, namely to assimilate anthropological material from Romans 1:18-20 and Romans 2:14-15 for the purposes of gaining Paul's understanding of man in the areas of ontology and epistemology. This is not to infer that these are the only texts relevant to the subject, but they do yield basic anthropological information and one can be assured that what is surfaced here will not be contradicted elsewhere in Scripture. In light of these selected texts, conclusions will be drawn concerning why man is the way he is and what (if any) epistemological limitations would be ascribed to the non-Christian as it relates to the work of apologetics.

An examination of Romans 1:18-20 and Romans 2:14-15 will make at least two contributions. The first is that it will provide critical (not comprehensive) anthropological data germane to the study of apologetics. The second is that it will establish some propositional truth statements which will provide the interpretive base for properly exegeting the narrative

material in the Book of Acts. Since the bulk of material to be considered in the Book of Acts involves the Apostle Paul, the comments in Romans will yield appropriate anthropological truth statements by which his apologetic approach may be interpreted.

#### ROMANS 1:18-20

It is necessary for exegetical reasons to be familiar with the larger context in which these verses are lodged, however, the focus of attention will be directed on verses 18-20. For the sake of convenience and exegetical priority the main section of the passage under consideration will be quoted in its entirety from the New Scofield edition of the King James Version:

- <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness,  
<sup>19</sup> because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shown it unto them.  
<sup>20</sup> For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.  
(Romans 1:18-20).

In this passage (the larger context includes 1:18-3:20) the Apostle Paul is building an argument in which he moves logically from the message of the Gospel (Romans 1:15-17) to why men need to hear the Gospel. This passage is not primarily a treatise on ontological or epistemological priorities, but rather an argument designed to show the universality of sin and why in such a case all men are without excuse and guilty before God (Romans 2:1; 3:19). While this is true, it does not negate the fact that this passage is pregnant with both epistemological and ontological data which makes an appreciable contribution to the construction of a viable apologetic.

Verse 18 begins by speaking of God's wrath and why it is revealed from heaven. The reason given is that men "hold the truth in unrighteousness". Judgment comes primarily because of what man does in light of what he knows and not simply because of what he does. That is, it is not just the act(s) of man practiced in an epistemological vacuum for which the wrath of God comes, but because of the act(s) of man are seen by God in relation to what all men know (Romans 3:19; 3:23). In light of this, the indication is obvious, namely, that this passage has epistemological significance.

The first word which needs attention is the word translated "hold" (KATECHONTON), which here is the present active participle form of the verb KATECHŌ. David Turner explains that there are two possible interpretations of this verb:

The verb κατέχω has two legitimate ideas in the NT, "to hold fast" and "to hold down". The basic question here is whether Paul simply states that the unsaved "hold" (= "possess, have", AV) the truth or "suppress" (= "hinder, hold down", NIV, NASB) it. . . . The second alternative seems to fit the contextual argument much better. However, the two possibilities are complementary, not contradictory. If the unsaved possess the truth in an unrighteous state, they are actually suppressing it. Likewise, the suppression of truth seems to presuppose the possession of it. . . . Although the unsaved attempt to obliterate the truth, it is inherent in their very beings.<sup>48</sup>

Whichever way one takes the verb KATECHŌ, it seems evident that all men possess something called "truth". Whatever is involved in this idea of "truth", the knowledge of it must be universal, because it forms the basis for God's judgment of man and that judgment is universal. Also, whereas the tense implies continuing action, it can be assumed that all unsaved men hold down this truth, but with different or varying intensity. Further comment on this matter will be reserved for later.

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<sup>48</sup>David Turner. "Cornelius Van Til and Romans 1:18-31". Grace Theological Journal. 2:1 (Spring, 1981), p. 52.

Verse 19 contains two phrases which require some judicious investigation. The first phrase is ". . . that which may be known of God . . . ." The question which arises at this point is what kind of knowledge is referred to, is it potential or actual knowledge? Vincent suggests it should be understood as,

. . . that which is known, the universal sense in the New Testament, signifying the universal objective knowledge of God as the Creator, which is, more or less, in all men.<sup>49</sup>

Paul explains that this knowledge of God is actual, real knowledge. This is not to suggest that it is exhaustive knowledge about God, but it is real, meaningful knowledge -- knowledge all men have which becomes the basis of God's judgment of men, depending on how each responds to this knowledge.

The next phrase which is prepositional in nature is used to qualify the location of this knowledge. Therefore, this phrase is crucial to the argument from the epistemological perspective. Paul reveals that this knowledge is manifest "in them" (EN AUTOIS ). David Turner suggests three possible ways this phrase could be translated:

Three views have been suggested, each of which is grammatically possible: (1) God is manifest within each man's conscience, (2) God is manifest among men collectively, and (3) God is manifest to men (= simple dative of indirect object αὐτοῖς, 1:19).<sup>50</sup>

A. T. Robertson adheres to the first possibility. He writes, "Manifest in the (PHANERON EN AUTOIS). In their hearts and consciences."<sup>51</sup> Even Emerton and Cranfield who understand EN AUTOIS to refer to God

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<sup>49</sup>Marvin R. Vincent. Word Studies in the New Testament. 4 volumes. The Epistles of Paul. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprint ed., 1969), Volume 3, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup>Turner, p. 54.

<sup>51</sup>Archibald T. Robertson. Word Pictures in the New Testament. 6 volumes. The Epistles of Paul. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), Volume 4, p. 328.



being manifest "'in their midst' rather than 'within them'"<sup>52</sup> still conclude;

In their midst and all around them and also in their own creaturely existence (including of course what is inward as well as what is external) God is objectively manifest: His whole creation declares Him.<sup>53</sup>

However, it seems best to understand the preposition EN in its primary meaning of "in or within".<sup>54</sup> Verses 21 and 28 support this view, for both indicate that man has this knowledge within him. Furthermore, since this knowledge is universal, and in all men by no sense process of their own (for God is responsible for it being there), this knowledge must of necessity be inherent knowledge.

Verse 20 explains how the "things" of God are known to man through creation. However, this does not contradict the fact of this knowledge being innate, but rather explains how these innate truth/ideas come to a level of awareness in each man. Paul is arguing that the internal knowledge which is part of man by virtue of creation is stimulated and aroused by the external (to man) portion of creation. The innate truth/ideas provide the interpretive grid by which each man understands his experience in God's world. There is a real correspondence between the internal aspect of God's natural revelation (innate ideas) and the external aspect of God's natural revelation because both reflect the mind of God. Man knows the first because it is innate, the second through the senses, however, it is the innate that makes the sensory information from the external meaningful as opposed to non-meaningful. Consequently, man's existence is not only

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<sup>52</sup>J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield, gen. eds. The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Book of Romans. 6th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1975), p. 113.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>54</sup>H. E. Dana and Julius Mantey. A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament. (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1927), p. 105.

meaningful and objective in relation to the rest of creation in general, but with other men in particular. Since each man is created in the image of God, this "imageness" contains certain knowledge, making it possible for one man to talk to another man about their common world in meaningful conversation. It is at this point that ontological implications surface. That is, ontologically man is part of the created order, although economically he is over the rest of "earth creation". Consequently, God, of reasonable necessity (i.e., God is a reasonable Being who must act accordingly), equipped man with epistemological abilities so that his experience in this world would have meaningful possibilities. As Francis Schaeffer comments,

It is not surprising that if a reasonable God created the universe and put me in it, he should also give a correlation of the categories of my mind to fit that which is there, simply because I have to live in it.<sup>55</sup>

Here he is not speaking only of Christians, but of all men because there is an ontological sameness with all men, for all are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

Genesis 1:26-27 propositionally states that God created man in His own image. If this is to be taken literally, then the implications are that there is some shadow correlation between God and man within both epistemological and ontological spheres. Concurring with this, Ronald Nash writes,

To be more specific, God has endowed humans with structure of rationality patterned after the divine ideas in His own mind: we can know truth because God has made us like Himself. This helps explain how we can know not only the eternal Forms but also the creation that is patterned after these Forms. We can know the corporeal world because we first know and understand the intelligible world.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer. He Is There and He Is Not Silent. (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), p. 76.

<sup>56</sup> Ronald Nash. The Word of God and The Mind of Man. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 81.

In another place Nash expands the implications of man being made in God's image,

God created humans with a structure of rationality patterned after divine Forms in His own mind. This innate knowledge is part of what it means to be created in the image of God. In addition to knowledge of forms, knowledge of the world is possible because God has also patterned the world after the divine ideas. We can know the corporeal world because God has given man a knowledge of these ideas by which we can judge sensations and gain knowledge.<sup>57</sup>

Admittedly, not all evangelicals would necessarily agree with Nash at this point, however, he argues that his observations are the logical extension of the Logos doctrine of the New Testament. Nash concludes,

He (Augustine) believed that the Logos teaching of the New Testament and the early Church fathers entailed a similarity between the rational structure of the human mind and the rational structure of the divine mind.<sup>58</sup>

The point is that all men have something called "truth" within them because they are created by God and in His image. This innate knowledge provides the ideas or at least corresponding categories to man's external world by which he interprets his world and by which there is the confirmation that God is (Romans 1:20). Because man is part of the total creation, he cannot abdicate his relationship with creation and declare himself a neutral observer. His ability to understand his world is due to the nature of his being. Therefore, it can be assumed that if such is true, there does exist some epistemological common ground between the believer and the unbeliever, and since man is a rational being, reason is not alien to spiritual matters. It must be admitted men cannot reason themselves into the Kingdom of God, however, they may be reasoned to it.

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<sup>57</sup> Nash, p. 90.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

ROMANS 2:14-15

For the same purposes stated earlier, this portion will be quoted from the New Scofield edition of the King James Version.

- <sup>14</sup>For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves;
- <sup>15</sup>who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. (Romans 2:14-15).

Johnson gives a good synopsis of chapter two of Romans which will serve handily as preliminary remarks to an examination of vv. 14 and 15.

In the early part of Romans 2, Paul indicates that God's judgment will be based not according to the "person" (v. 11) but according to whether a person has done "good" or "evil" (vv. 9-10). There is no indication that "good" and "evil" is restricted to the biblical context alone, although written norms would certainly not be excluded.

Further in the chapter Paul mentions that when the Jew breaks the written Law "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles" (v. 24). Here the point seems to be that the pagan could only condemn the Jew for breaking the Law if there was some essential relationship between the Gentiles' own moral standards and the written Law of Moses.<sup>59</sup>

In verse 14, Paul explains that Gentiles who were not the formal recipients of the codified Law of God, known as the Decalogue, did "by nature the things in the law". The first word to be considered is the word "nature" (PHUSEI). A. T. Robertson comments on this word by saying simply, "By nature (PHUSEI). Instrumental case of PHUSEI, old word from PHUŌ, to beget."<sup>60</sup> However this word appears in Romans 2:27, W. E. Vine suggests the following meaning, ". . . origin, birth, Rom. 2:27, one who by birth is a Gentile . . . ." <sup>61</sup> Colin Brown cogently remarks that the primary meaning

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<sup>59</sup>Alan Johnson. "Is There a Biblical Warrant for Natural-Law Theories?" Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 25:2 (June 1982), p. 195.

<sup>60</sup>Robertson, p. 336.

<sup>61</sup>W. E. Vine. An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. 4 volumes. (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), Volume 3, p. 103.

is " . . . source, commencement, origin, descent . . . and also the lineage of adults or of children (Aristot. Met. 1014<sup>b</sup> 1b; e.g. KATA PHYSIN HYION, 'his son in the line of descent' . . . ." <sup>62</sup> The implications of this word seem to indicate something which is natural to man by virtue of physical birth. In other words, even men without the written Law from God know certain things from birth, i.e. innate truth/ideas. This knowledge is neither contrary to, nor supplemental to the written Law. In fact, the context indicates that this "birth knowledge" bears a striking resemblance to the content of the written Law of God as implied in the words, "do by nature things contained in the Law."

Verse 15 amplifies this thought as Paul states clearly that there is a "law written in their hearts". This does not teach that all men have the same level of awareness of such knowledge. It could be suggested that the level of awareness is directly proportionate to the degree of intensity with which any individual suppresses that knowledge. Be that as it may, moralistic ideas appear to be a part of the innate truth/idea repertoire of all men, although such knowledge may, for various reasons, be at a non-conscious level of activity within a person's thinking. Nonetheless, regardless how passive such knowledge may seem in the voluntary thought process, it still influences the predispositions of the mind.

Anthropologists report that all societies have some form of a moral structure, as Alan Johnson points out,

Incidentally, in regard to the content of NML [Natural Moral Law] it is encouraging to see that recent anthropological studies have confirmed the essential moral structure of all human societies and

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<sup>62</sup> Colin Brown, ed. Dictionary of New Testament Theology. 3 volumes. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), Volume 2, p. 656.

have shown that there do in fact exist more universal moral principles among all human communities from which specific local norms are derived.<sup>63</sup>

C. S. Lewis likewise accepted the fact that certain predispositions of the mind are universally evident. That is, certain moralistic truth/ideas are common to all men because God has placed such in all men. Lewis, after building a case that the Law of Nature (as he called it), i.e. Right and Wrong, is universal and innate, turns to address objections.

I know that some people say the idea of a Law of Nature or decent behavior known to all men is unsound, because different civilisations and different ages have had quite different moralities.

But this is not true. There have been differences between their moralities, but these have never amounted to anything like a total difference . . . . Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to -- whether it was only your own family, or your fellow countrymen, or everyone. But they have always agreed that you ought never to put yourself first. Selfishness has never been admired. Men have differed as to whether you should have one wife or four. But they have always agreed that you must not simply have any woman you liked.<sup>64</sup>

In discussing the matter of moral values, Colin Chapman writes,

Sartre was critical of French radicalism towards the end of the nineteenth century because it held onto traditional values long after their basis had been dissolved.<sup>65</sup>

Yet even among those who subscribed to atheism, there was a compelling need for a moral structure for society. Sartre was right philosophically, for if there was no God, a moral structure seemed inconsistent. Sartre explains their thinking (with which he disagreed).

Towards 1880, when the French professors endeavored to formulate a secular morality, they said something like this: God is a useless and costly hypothesis, so we will do without it. However, if we are

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<sup>63</sup>Johnson, p. 197.

<sup>64</sup>C. S. Lewis. Mere Christianity. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943), p. 19.

<sup>65</sup>Colin Chapman. A Case For Christianity. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), p. 212.

to have morality, a society and a law abiding world, it is essential that certain values should be taken seriously; they must have an a priori existence ascribed to them. It must be considered obligatory a priori to be honest, not to lie, not to beat one's wife, to bring up children and so forth; so we are going to do a little work on this subject, which will enable us to show that these values exist all the same, inscribed in an intelligible heaven although, of course, there is no God.<sup>66</sup>

Admittedly, Sartre saw the inconsistency of such a position, but the notable thing for this study is that even though these did not want God, they felt the necessity of having values which they concluded had "a priori existence" which would be considered as being "obligatory a priori". Such thinking is difficult to explain apart from recognizing that there is a moral law which God has put in every man's soul.

The point of all this is to show that universal human experience provides evidence that there are certain things all men know, either in the form of latent knowledge or active knowledge. In the case of latent knowledge the mind is so influenced to be predisposed to think according to certain moralistic modes, while active knowledge influences voluntary choices and evaluations. Men can know certain truth about God, that He is powerful, He is Creator, as well as something about His Godhood (attributes) (Romans 1:20). Also, man has certain innate moral codes which bare resemblance to the moral code expressed in the Decalogue (Romans 2:14-15). This information, though not always obeyed or accepted, is nonetheless present in all men and they are accountable for what they do with that knowledge. Man may not always do that which is moral, but he can still distinguish between a moral and an immoral act at some level. This law

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<sup>66</sup> Existentialism and Humanism, trans. by Philip Mairet, p. 33, quoted in Colin Chaplin, A Case for Christianity. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), p. 212.

written on the hearts of all men, may be suppressed, rejected and denied, but it still remains even though it may manifest itself in some twisted fashion. The fact that it is there by the creative design of God, being part and parcel of man being made in the image of God is a point well made by Bruce Waltke.<sup>67</sup>

In summary, it appears that Paul considers man's ontological uniqueness, as one made in the image of God, to be a matter of importance which needs to be understood if one desires to construct a viable apologetic. This ontological uniqueness has far-reaching epistemological implications which are necessary to be understood if a biblical answer is to be given to such questions as, What is the logical starting point? Is there common ground between the believer and unbeliever? What is the relationship between faith and reason? and, Is there a test for truth? It should begin to be clear as to why this chapter had to have its place in the argument for a viable apologetic.

Because man is made in the image of God, even though he is now a fallen creature, the innate truth/ideas are still present. Those who argue that the Fall marred the image beyond recognition, need to be reminded that part of the Fall includes man knowing good and evil (Genesis 2:17). As such, whereas Adam produced after his kind (Genesis 5:3), all who came after had the innate knowledge necessary to distinguish between good and evil to some extent.

Consequently, the implications are that some epistemological common ground must exist between the believer and the non-believer. As Johnson observes,

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<sup>67</sup>For an interesting but brief discussion of this subject one might read an article by Bruce Waltke, "Reflections From the Old Testament on Abortion", Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 19:1 (Winter, 1976), pp. 3-13.



There is a universal knowledge of God and his will available to all persons apart from Biblical revelation. This knowledge when perverted to idolatry and injustice becomes the basis of God's just judgment and condemnation. Creation itself bears witness to the Creator and his nature (vv. 20, 26, 27). Paul not only identifies certain acts as "against nature" (vv. 26, 27) but indicates that pagans who practice or approve of such sins mentioned in vv. 29-31 "know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die" (v. 32). Exegetically this passage seems to affirm that there exists an unwritten universal moral knowledge accessible to all men as men, that this knowledge comes from God (though men may not so acknowledge it), that this knowledge is at least partially known through the structure of human social relations as God has created them, and that men sense at some point a serious accountability for breaking these principles.<sup>68</sup>

The level at which the epistemological encounter will meet with meaningful communicative thought forms between believer and non-believer will depend to a large degree on the cultural influence in general and the degree of intensity with which the individual suppresses the truth in particular. Undoubtedly, these two are not mutually exclusive factors.

It was suggested earlier that the present tense of the participle "hold, suppress" may indicate that while all men hold down the truth, they do not all do it with the same degree of intensity. At the risk of being premature in the development of the argument for a viable apologetic, it seems to this student that the idea of men suppressing the truth with varying intensity explains why men are found at different levels of receptivity when confronted with the Gospel. This being the case, it is not necessarily the depths of personal sin into which one has plunged, but rather the degree of intensity with which one has suppressed the truth that will determine his immediate response to the truth-claims of Christianity. This then is the task in apologetics, namely to be sensitive to this fact, i.e. at what point the hearer is, in relation to the innate truth/ideas. And no matter

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<sup>68</sup> Alan F. Johnson, p. 195.

how calloused a person may seem, go far enough, and at some point a place of beginning for meaningful communication of Christianity's truth-claims will be found. The next three chapters will be devoted to examining the apologetic example of the Apostle Paul as he finds that point of beginning and builds a case for Christianity for his hearers. The Apostle Paul's anthropology was more than a formal theological position to be defended in ecclesiastical circles, rather, it helped shape his world view and profoundly influenced his approach in confronting men in his world with the truth-claims of Christianity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PAUL'S APOLOGIA AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA: ACTS 13:14-43

The attention of this chapter and the two which follow will be focused on three narrative passages from the Book of Acts, with each chapter dealing with one of the three texts. Up to this point, the first chapter set forth historical and scriptural evidence for doing Christian apologetics. Also, the point was made that in a general sense of the word, every Christian is responsible to be prepared to give an apology. Chapter two isolated and discussed four philosophical/theological issues which must be addressed when discussing and/or developing an apologetic method. In chapter three, anthropological acumen was gathered from several passages in Romans which had ontological and epistemological significance as it relates to the work of apologetics. The next exercise is to observe the Apostle Paul declaring and defending the truth-claims of Christianity before various types of persons. Although the word APOLOGIA does not appear in any of the texts selected, the spirit and nature of Paul's speech in each case undeniably reflects a true embodiment of what is entailed definitionally by the word APOLOGIA. Therefore, it is not anticipated that there will be any valid objection to the suggestion that these three passages in particular, and others incidentally, will provide a biblical example for doing the work of apologetics.

Before going on, however, a few comments will be made concerning the reason for selecting the three particular Acts passages. Acts 13:14-43 finds Paul at Antioch in Pisidia before a Jewish crowd. They were acquainted with biblical history and had some theological nomenclature which was oriented to the Judeo-Christian God. The setting for Acts 14:15-18 is in Lystra where Paul is before a pagan religious crowd. They had no background in biblical

history, no true God language in their vocabulary, and were in bondage to heathenism. They were, in fact, people who had "suppressed" the "truth" to the point it had become an ugly and distorted representation of true worship. Acts 17:22-34 deals with the Apostle Paul when he was at Athens. He was addressing a group of intellectual philosophers who had an intellectual-religious system as opposed to those at Lystra who had an emotional-oriented religious system.

Each of these passages has been selected in order to observe Paul before various audiences so that his methodology before each might be compared and/or contrasted with the other. This approach is intended to demonstrate which factors of Paul's apologetic method are normative in all cases and those which may be relative to the situation. With this in mind, the last matter will be to synthesize the material and conclude with a viable apologetic for the Church, based on Paul's example.

#### BACKGROUND AND EXEGESIS

Paul and Barnabas were at this time on their first missionary journey, having been sent out by the Church at Antioch of Syria. Antioch in Pisidia was populated to some extent with Jews and Jewish proselytes as the text indicates (13:43). The record states in verse 14 that Paul and Barnabas " . . . went into the synagogue on the sabbath day . . . ", and some, such as Conybeare and Howson,<sup>69</sup> indicate that this happened shortly after Paul's arrival, i.e. on the first sabbath after the arrival. However, Ramsay thinks otherwise,

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<sup>69</sup>W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson. The Life and Epistles of St. Paul. reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), p. 138.

It seems, however, not possible that such powerful effect as is described in v. 44 should have been produced on the whole city within the first ten days after they arrived in Antioch.<sup>70</sup>

Whether it was the second sabbath or a longer span of time, the results were the same, namely that the city was divided over Paul's message.

Verse 14 reveals in the words "sat down", that Paul did not make a spectacle of himself. He, along with his traveling companions, had the social etiquette to respect the religious order of the day. They were visitors, visitors with a message, but they would not be obnoxious by exercising bad manners. Their manners were as noble as their message.

Verse 15 records that after the reading of the law and prophets, opportunity was extended to others to address matters germane to the gathering. The ruler(s) was (were) responsible for taking charge and keeping order in the meeting. F. F. Bruce writes,

The functions of an ἀρχισυναγωγός (Heb. rōsh ha-keneseth, "head of the synagogue": cf. Lk. viii.41, ἀρχων τῆς συναγωγῆς) were to take charge of the building, see that nothing unseemingly happened in it, make arrangements for public worship, appoint members of the congregation to read the prayers and lessons, and invite fit persons to speak.<sup>71</sup>

This custom can be observed in Luke 4:19 as well.

In verse 16, Paul judiciously takes advantage of the opportunity to speak. "Beckoning with his hands" was a gesture as ". . . an appeal for silence and attention".<sup>72</sup>

Verses 17-41 report the substance of the message, which is primarily a review of biblical history and reciting fulfilled prophecy, which is much like Stephen's address in Acts 7:1-53. F. F. Bruce writes,

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<sup>70</sup>William M. Ramsay. St. Paul: The Traveller and The Roman Citizen. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897; reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), p. 99.

<sup>71</sup>F. F. Bruce. The Acts of the Apostles. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951; reprint ed., 1984), p. 261.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

Like Stephen's defense, it begins with a historical summary, which is by no means a repetition of Stephen's, but extends from the Exodus to David, and provides an introduction to the presentation of Christ as the Son of David.<sup>73</sup>

Philipp Vielhauer suggests that,

The structure and content of Paul's speech in Acts 13 is most closely akin to the Petrine speeches in the first part of Acts. . . . The introductory part, which is a brief resume of Israel's history (vss. 16-20), has a parallel in Stephen's speech . . . .<sup>74</sup>

In each case the audience is Jewish or in a Jewish context, so similarities in approaches are not unexpected.

Verses 30-37 form a section on the subject of the resurrection of Christ, which forms the keystone, as it were, in Paul's argument. Peter follows a similar pattern (Acts 2:24; 3:26; 4:10; 10:40). Commenting on the importance of the resurrection, F. F. Bruce writes, "Paul regards the resurrection of Christ as the fulfillment of the 'sure mercies' or 'holy and sure blessings' (RV) promised to David."<sup>75</sup> This would strike a tender note in the heart of every Jew in the light of the Kingdom promises given David (II Samuel 7:4-7; I Chronicles 17:3-15). Of course, Paul was looking beyond David to David's greater Son who alone could forgive sins and secure blessings.

Regarding this resurrection section, Haenchen has some succinct, insightful comments:

Verse 30: Here begins a section on the Resurrection extending to v. 37. First its factuality is declared in what has now become a fixed form of words (cf. 3:15 and 4:10).

Verse 31: Then comes the confirmation of this fact through the appearances of Jesus. I Cor. 15:5 shows that a formula constructed with  $\acute{\omega}\phi\theta\eta$  existed from early times.

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>74</sup>Philipp Viehauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts", in Studies in Luke-Acts. eds. L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 44.

<sup>75</sup>F. F. Bruce, p. 270.

Verse 32f.: The proclamation of the Resurrection of Jesus now follows, on the basis of the apostolic witness. . . . Three ideas are here propounded: 1. Jesus is risen; 2. thus the promise to the fathers is filled; 3. this is the burden of our message.

Verse 34: Jesus' resurrection has now been certified by eyewitness (verse 31) and scriptural proof. . . . That Jesus was 'no more to return to corruption' is attested by citation of Isaiah 55:3 LXX.

Verse 35. with its citation of Ps. 16:10.

Verse 36. We now come to the conclusive statement -- prepared by two biblical expressions: 'David . . . saw corruption.' . . . 'After he had served his own generation' shows that David's personal significance was limited.

Verse 37. In conclusion Jesus' imperishable resurrection is contrasted once again with the transitory life of David. This gives Jesus his significance for us, which is unfolded in verse 38f.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, A. T. Robertson writes,

So here also are found the resurrection of Jesus (13:30f) and the Sonship of Jesus (verse 33). The Messiahship of Jesus is proven by his resurrection from the dead (32, 34).<sup>77</sup>

Robertson recognizes that the resurrection is the focal point on which the argument turns. "The resurrection is discussed more at length as the heart of the great message (30-37) and in accord with the Scriptures."<sup>78</sup>

Paul brings his audience to the need for forgiveness of sins through faith in the resurrected Christ. He moved them from the Exodus to the Resurrection to their need of personal justification through the resurrected One. Paul used fulfilled prophecy, eyewitness testimony, and scriptural testimony to move his audience from mere external worship to a need for personal justification -- from the external law to the greatness of the grace of God (v. 43). It has been suggested that possibly ". . . Paul here based his sermon on the passages of the law and the prophets that had just been read. . . ."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Ernst Haenchen. The Acts of the Apostles. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), pp. 410-412.

<sup>77</sup>A. T. Robertson. Epochs in the Life of Paul. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 112.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>79</sup>A. T. Robertson. Word Pictures in the New Testament. 6 volumes, Acts. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), Volume 3, p. 187.

If such is the case, it would reveal something of Paul's skill in delivering a message which often created tension among his hearers. At any rate, this preliminary information will serve as a framework from which apologetic considerations will be examined.

#### LOGICAL STARTING POINT

Paul begins his remarks by starting with God -- not as Creator, but as the God of Israel. He could be assured that such a place of beginning would not be rejected out of hand by his audience, in view of the fact that "the synagogue service in the first century consisted [among other things] of (1) the Shēma' ('Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one') . . . ." <sup>80</sup> These people were Jews, people who were the recipients of the written law of God of which a portion had just been read in their hearing (v. 15). Although they had not obeyed all that God had spoken, they were not guilty of suppressing the truth within them with any degree of intensity. That God is, was something they did not deny (Psalm 14:1).

When Paul said "God", both he and his hearers were in agreement with the basic ontological content of the term. Therefore, Paul's logical starting point was the God of Israel, which was undoubtedly beginning at a very high truth-level. <sup>81</sup> However, because of the nature of his audience, he was able to begin there and speak meaningfully to the people without going back

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<sup>80</sup>F. F. Bruce, p. 260.

<sup>81</sup>Throughout the discussion, the term "truth-level" will be used. A point of clarification is in order. The use of the term (this student knows of no other writer who uses the phrase) does not imply that there are degrees of truthfulness within the truth-claims of Christianity. Such claims are absolute. Rather, the phrase is meant to indicate the nature and complexity of any truth statement concerning God. For example, an elementary truth level statement concerning God is one that is supported by the observable and cognizable facts of natural revelation, i.e. God is Creator.



further. "God" was a point at which he could begin and on which He could build his defense, and although there would be some sharp differences over what this God was presently doing, there was little debate as to who He is.

At this point, Paul sounds much like a presuppositionalist. The Apostle Paul begins his defense by postulating God, which, for his Jewish hearers would raise no objections. However, Paul does not move directly to the Gospel, but rather he demonstrates skill in verifying and clarifying his starting point by citing historical evidence to clearly identify "God" as the God of Israel (vs. 17). The evidence he submits is not to prove God, but to verify that God is and to clarify ontologically what kind of a God He is. He is not only a God who works in history (vv. 17-22), but He speaks of history before the event (vv. 22, 23, 29). This historical review not only verifies God to be who He claimed to be (the God of Israel), but it clarifies ontologically what kind of a God He is so that both Paul and his hearers can understand the past and present implications of interpreting history within a proper theistic world view. God's past care and power to help Israel put the death, burial and resurrection of Messiah within the context of a Judeo-Christian theistic world view. Also it supplied further evidence for interpreting the sequence of events of the Gospel as a God-event as fulfillment of a previous word from God (vv. 29, 33).

Paul postulates God and then uses evidences to verify that God is and to clarify who God is. Starting with God is necessary in order for Paul to build a proper philosophical and theological context within which the Gospel message could have true meaning.

#### **COMMON GROUND**

There is both ontological and epistemological common ground at this

point. The ontological common ground is found in the fact that both Paul and his audience belonged ethnically to the Jewish community, and, of course, more generally speaking they, as all men, were part of the same creation. Epistemologically they both were inheritors of the Jewish Scriptures. Basically, their understanding of God ontologically was founded in the same holy Documents. They shared a common beginning, common heritage, and common history. Such matters provided a point of contact from which Paul could build his case for the truth-claims of Christianity. The biblical history, God's saving acts in the community of Israel and His working in their midst was knowledge common to both speaker and hearers.

When Paul finished speaking, nobody stood up and asked him what in the world he had been talking about (vv. 42-43). Whereas biblical history provides the foundation for understanding the Gospel, Paul's use of common ground not only provided a meaningful point of contact with his hearers, it led nicely to the claims of Christianity. Also, if as has been suggested, Paul's message centered around what had just been read from the law and the prophets (v. 15), then that would strengthen the idea that Paul recognized the epistemological common ground and capitalized on it.

#### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON**

It has already been suggested that the problem in confronting the Jew was not so much who God is, but what God has done. As F. F. Bruce points out,

But many of the apostles' hearers among the Jews were conscious of an insuperable difficulty. How could the crucified one be the Messiah? From every point of view but the apostles', the crucifixion of Jesus must have constituted a handicap when they spoke of Him in public, and in fact an account had to be given of His crucifixion in every phrase of Christian witness and apologetic. To Jews the crucifixion of Jesus

was a formidable obstacle in the way of believing Him to be their appointed Messiah; how could the Messiah, on whom the blessing of God rested in a unique degree, have died the death on which the curse of God was expressly pronounced?<sup>82</sup>

With this stumbling block (I Corinthians 1:23) firmly in place in Jewish thinking, how could it be possible to get by it when dealing with the truth-claims of Christianity? To avoid the message of crucifixion would be to render the claims of Christianity empty, and to speak of it to the Jew was to instigate physical hostilities. Paul must not avoid this essential part of his message. There, he made the proclamation,

. . . based upon the fact that God had raised Him [Jesus] from the dead; whatever significance might be attached to the form of death which He died, it must be subject to the undoubted significance of His resurrection.<sup>83</sup>

At this juncture it is suggested that the text is clear: Paul appealed to the reason of his hearers to judge the reasonableness of the crucifixion in light of the resurrection. Paul's argument is logical and lucid. He begins by reviewing past Jewish history (vv. 17-23); he then moves to the ministry and testimony of John the Baptist regarding Christ (vv. 24-25); next came his appeal to the crucifixion as a part of fulfilled prophecy (vv. 26-29). Finally, he addresses the matter of the resurrection, giving eyewitness testimony (v. 31) and scriptural testimony to the resurrection (vv. 32-36). At the end of his speech the concern is that ". . . these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath" (v. 42). The word translated "words" is the Greek word RHĒMA . W. E. Vine quotes Abbot-Smith in saying that RHĒMA means "the articulated expression of thought".<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>F. F. Bruce. The Defense of the Gospel. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), p. 16.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>84</sup>W. E. Vine, p. 230.

The word translated "preached" is the Greek word  $\text{LALĒO}$  of which the same authority says regarding its meaning that it refers ". . . to the words conveying the utterance . . . ." <sup>85</sup> Their language clearly expressed their desire to hear the same expressed thought in the same words of content as they had just heard. Paul had given a reasonable explanation of what God was doing, appealing to their reasoning powers through the words he used and the line of argument he presented.

Paul was not compromising the authority of revelation, but he was appealing to his hearers in a meaningful fashion with thought forms which had objective content in order that they might see the reasonableness of what God was doing and had done. All of this was in light of the fact they conceded that God was, and that He had spoken. In a reasonable, logical manner, Paul demonstrated how the events in history, including the crucifixion and resurrection event, were in keeping with what Scripture said. Paul was not appealing to reason to judge the truthfulness of revelation, but only to show the reasonable relationship between what God had said and events in history. Robertson refers to Paul's address as a ". . . skilfull argument" <sup>86</sup> and that "the sermon, as a whole, is a masterpiece of skill and adaptation in a difficult situation. His addresses will repay study, as reported in Acts, for this adaptation to time, place, audience." <sup>87</sup> Both the form of his message and the concluding response of his hearers indicate Paul was not adverse to appealing to man's reason in the context of sharing the truth-claims of Christianity. This seems to square with Paul's view of man

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<sup>85</sup> W. E. Vine, p. 230.

<sup>86</sup> A. T. Robertson. Epochs in the Life of Paul, p. 113.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

as indicated in chapter three. Paul wanted his hearers to exercise faith in God, but this faith must not be a "leap" experience, but rather a commitment, a trust in a reasonable truth/idea message -- Paul did not appeal to credulity, but to reason.

#### **A TEST FOR TRUTH**

Of the four issues, this is undoubtedly the most difficult to deal with from a narrative passage. Whatever is said must be based on inference more than explicit statements. This is true, at least, in the passage under consideration in this chapter.

Judging from Paul's message, it seems that his appeal for truthfulness of the truth-claims of Christianity is based on the fact that they correspond with what really is and that there is an internal coherence within the claims of Christianity. Paul moves back and forth between what the Old Testament said and what happened, showing that there was a correspondence between what God had said and what really happened. He calls in eyewitnesses to verify what happened concerning Christ's resurrection was, in fact, congruous with what God had said (vv. 30-36). He shows that it is possible to move through the law and the prophets to the present corpus of Christian truth -- that there is a logical coherence to all the truth-claims. This is the strength of his argument to the Jews -- the fact that the total claim is coherent.

#### **THE RESULTS**

Paul's reasoning in the synagogue had positive results on those who heard. Not only Jews, but many religious proselytes (Gentiles) were impacted by Paul's message (v. 43). His argument was so convincing that the next

sabbath "almost the whole city" came to hear Paul and, as a result, many Gentiles were saved (v. 48). It is interesting to note that this method not only impacted Jews, it convinced Gentiles as well. This fact can no doubt be attributed to the influence of Judaism on the city prior to Paul's arrival, as well as the genius of Paul's apologetic methodology which was greatly used by the Spirit of God to bring men to Christ.

In summary, Paul started with God, used the common ground of biblical history, appealed to reason as a factor for believing the Christian message and demonstrated the claims to be true, because they correspond with what really is and they form a coherent truth system. However, in this case the truth-claims are not only shown to square with reality, but also, because of the nature of his audience, he demonstrated that they square with who God is. As has already been stated, this approach is similar to both Stephen's and Peter's when dealing with a Jewish audience. It was not because they were ethnically Jewish that this was possible, but because of their relationship to God's Word -- they had it and the Gentiles did not. All of this brings one to the conclusion that the approach could apply to any today who have a knowledge of the Judeo-Christian Faith. Paul's passing example here seems to exemplify the art of doing historical apologetics.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PAUL'S APOLOGIA AT LYSTRA: ACTS 14:15-18

This is the second of the three Lucan passages selected as narrative texts where Paul's apologetic methodology can be observed. Although Paul and Barnabas are both involved in the incident under consideration, the text clearly indicates that Paul was the "chief speaker" (v. 12). Therefore, it seems consistent with the text and in keeping with the purpose of this thesis to accept this speech as that of the Apostle Paul.

#### BACKGROUND AND EXEGESIS

Contextually, the setting for this speech was largely influenced by an antecedent event in which Paul healed a man crippled from birth (vv. 8-11). This miracle induced the people of Lystra to conclude that Paul and Barnabas were gods (vv. 12-13). Apparently, this association was predicated on a legend that had prevailed in the area for many years. According to the legend, two gods, Zeus and Hermes, had visited a couple with extraordinary events resulting. Tenney writes,

The story is palpably mythological, but it illustrates the popular belief that the gods occasionally visited earth in the guise of mortal men. Sculptured images depict Zeus as a tall, dignified figure wearing a full, curly beard. Hermes was slight, agile, and youthful. It is not surprising that the populace, after seeing the restoration of the cripple, and knowing the ancient legends, should have identified Barnabas and Paul with these two.<sup>88</sup>

Bruce writes, "These names may represent native gods of Lycaonia identified with the Greek Zeus and Hermes. Jupiter and Mercury were the corresponding Roman gods."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Merrill C. Tenney. New Testament Times. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 230.

<sup>89</sup>Bruce. The Acts of the Apostles, p. 282.

The miracle of healing ignited the religious passion of the city and mass religious hysteria erupted. Seemingly, in all the religious bedlam, Paul and Barnabas at first were not cognizant of the crowd's real intentions. Verse 13 reveals the substance of their intentions which, in the main, were to offer a sacrifice in honor of the presence of Paul and Barnabas who the frenzied crowd perceived to be gods. At last, as the priest began preparations, the apostles realized the blasphemous intentions of the people and became alarmed over the implications of such actions. Tenney suggests a possible reason as to why Paul and Barnabas were somewhat delinquent in their response to this religious development:

Because of the unfamiliar languages, the apostles were unaware of the crowd's intentions until they were ready to offer the animals. The majority of the people were not Hellenistic Greeks, nor Latin-speaking colonists, but native Lycaonians who spoke their own dialect.<sup>90</sup>

Due to the volatile nature of the situation and the frenzied state of the crowd, Paul's appeal had to be forceful and to the point. Time was not a luxury to be enjoyed, so the message had to be clear and concise and an effective point of contact had to be found so as to get their attention.

In verse 14, Paul and Barnabas not only make a verbal appeal, but they demonstrate their vehement disapproval of being worshipped as gods by tearing ". . . their clothes as a sign of horror at the blasphemy."<sup>91</sup>

In verse 15, the phrase "of like passions" carries the idea ". . . 'of like nature' more exactly and affected by the sensations, not 'gods' at all."<sup>92</sup> That is, Paul attempts to challenge their world view

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<sup>90</sup>Tenney, p. 232.

<sup>91</sup>Haenchen, p. 428.

<sup>92</sup>A. T. Robertson. Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume 3, p. 210.



which sought to explain miracle-events by having a system of many gods. He tells them that he is a man, a non-god. Not only is Paul non-god, so are their idols. Paul refers to the gods of Jupiter and Mercury as "vanities". "He boldly calls the worship of Jupiter and Mercury and all idols 'vain' or empty things, pointing to the statues and the temple."<sup>93</sup> After his negative comments, Paul moves to the one true God, "the living God who made heaven and earth . . . ." He argues that the living God is the sovereign Creator. As Robertson says, "The one God, is alive and is the Creator of the Universe, just as Paul will argue in Athens (Acts 17:24)."<sup>94</sup>

Concerning verse 16, Robertson says,

Paul here touches God in history as he did just before in creation. God's hand is on the history of all the nations (Gentile and Jew), only with the Gentiles he withdrew the restraints of his grace in large measure (Acts 17:30; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28), judgment enough for their sins. To walk in their ways (POREUESTHAI TAIS HODOIS AUTON). Present middle infinitive, to go on walking, with locative case without EN. This philosophy of history does not mean that God was ignorant or unconcerned. He was biding his time in patience.<sup>95</sup>

Verse 17 quickly affirms that although God's policy in dealing with the Gentiles was seemingly one of "hands off", God did not leave them without a witness. Haenchen writes, "'And yet', God did not leave himself unattested, 'in that he did good, and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons', thus 'filling your hearts with food and gladness'."<sup>96</sup> Bruce asserts that this verse states ". . . Paul's insistence that the creation bears witness to God."<sup>97</sup> Robertson makes the point that the two verbs "gave" and "filling" are, in fact, participles; this being the case, such acts

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>96</sup> Haenchen, p. 428.

<sup>97</sup> F. F. Bruce. The Acts of the Apostles, p. 284.

characterize God's normative activity even among Gentiles.

Note two other causal participles here parallel with AGATHOURGON [to do good], viz., DIDOUS ("giving you") present active of DIDOMAI, EMPIPLON ("filling") present active of EMPIMPLAO (late form of EMPIMPLEMI). This witness of God (his doing good, giving rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness) they could receive without the help of the Old Testament revelation.<sup>98</sup>

In light of this, Paul's point is clear. The Lycaonians had no excuse for not knowing this living Creator God, because their own experience as a part of creation testified of God. Robertson candidly writes,

Paul does not talk about laws of nature as if they governed themselves, but he sees the living God "behind the drama of the physical world" (Furneaux). These simple country people could grasp his ideas as he claims everything for the one true God.<sup>99</sup>

Verse 18 records that the argument was effective, although not without a strong challenge, as is indicated by the words "scarce restrained". Paul had masterfully won the argument and turned the crowd, if not necessarily to God, at least from the pagan notion that Barnabas and he were gods.

#### LOGICAL STARTING POINT

Paul's apologetic methodology employs the use of antithesis, which at least implies that Paul considered the law of non-contradiction to be a universal concept among men, which in turn strongly suggests that it is an innate concept/idea.<sup>100</sup> The argument in the main proceeds in this fashion:

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<sup>98</sup> A. T. Robertson. Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume 3, p. 212.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 212-213.

<sup>100</sup> The fact that Paul had not been in this place before, nor had he had any in-depth philosophical debate with them, there is no way he could have been sure that they would understand the law of non-contradiction. Therefore, Paul must have considered it a universal concept and, if universal, then apparently innate. Otherwise, Paul could have no assurance that his hearers would understand his logical appeal and considering the intensity of the moment, it was no time for guess-work. The conclusion seems to be valid, namely that Paul believed the law of non-contradiction to be a part of the innate concepts/ideas of man.

we are not gods (nor are your other deities true gods), the Creator God is the only God. Hence, the true and living God is set in contradistinction to other gods. This is then followed by a dynamic, pithy logic based on the evidence of natural revelation and the course of nature, demonstrating that the true God not only does miracles, He created all things, sustains all things and provides all things. The force of the apology seems to be that only a God who does all this is in fact the only one qualified to effect the miracle.

Paul's starting point is the G-O-D concept as it was in Acts 13:17, but here he begins in a negative tone and then posits the true God as Creator, not as the God of Israel. It will be remembered from an earlier discussion that a legitimate part of apologetics is the challenging of false religious systems and their corollary world views. Paul does this very thing here because of the nature of the situation.

Although the particulars are different from the Acts 13:14-43 passage, the basic apologetic methodology is to start with the G-O-D concept at the highest possible truth-level concerning God. At Antioch in Pisidia, because of the religious frame of reference of the people, Paul argued from God as the personal God of Israel to the resurrection. However, the audience at Lystra shared no such knowledge of special revelation and, therefore, Paul began at a very elementary truth-level, namely that God is Creator of all things. He appealed to the evidence of natural revelation to verify his postulate that God is, as well as using it simultaneously to clarify who this God is. His postulate was verified and clarified by natural revelation, because this audience had no frame of reference for special revelation.

Mayers comments,

Paul gave no quotation of the Old Testament or references to the Jewish patriarchs, the Mosaic Law, or the prophets. But there was the announcement of the "good news" concerning the "living God" which had "made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them".<sup>101</sup>

Natural revelation is adequate for providing evidence sufficient to support the postulate of God's existence and obvious enough to clarify the identity of God (Romans 1:20). Paul speaks of natural revelation (v. 15), the course of human history (v. 16), and the fact of "common grace" (v. 17) to verify and clarify his postulate. Mayers also agrees on the adequacy of natural revelation as evidence for God's existence.

Although God has allowed the various nations their independence (14:16), He has always given evidence of His existence by providing the necessary things of life. Paul thus presented a case based on natural revelation.<sup>102</sup>

Paul's appeal to evidence to verify and clarify his postulate that God is Creator demonstrates the intellectual honesty with which Paul confronts his audience, as well as his respect for their "imageness". Paul does not act immorally in his apologetic methodology either by manipulating their minds by appealing to their emotions, or insulting their God-given ability to think with facts by simply giving them several truth statements to believe for no other reason than the fact he claimed God had spoken. It must be remembered that this audience did not even acknowledge the basic elements of God's being, let alone the fact He had spoken. There needed to be a logical argument supporting the truth-claim that God is, to verify and clarify God's being, in order to make the point that He has acted and spoken in history. Paul realized such an argument can in fact be developed, using natural revelation and appealing to the "imageness" of man to provide the proper interpretive grid work to understand the point of his APOLOGIA.

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<sup>101</sup> Mayers, p. 163.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

This epistemological implication of man's ontological distinctiveness is well stated by John R. W. Stott.

This assumed ability of man to read what God has written in the universe is extremely important. All scientific research depends upon it, upon a correspondence between the character of what is being investigated and the mind of the investigator. This correspondence is rationality.<sup>103</sup>

Paul's view of creation in general and man in particular (Romans 1:18-20; 2:14-15) determined and shaped his logical starting point and the course of his APOLOGIA. He confronted men, appealing to their innate knowledge of a moral law (Romans 2:14, 15) and pointing to creation in general as evidence for God's existence. Depending on the intensity with which each man suppresses this God-knowableness (Romans 1:18), Paul indicates that all men can understand God at some truth-level. Stott concurringly observes,

It is quite true that man's mind has shared in the devastating results of the Fall. The "total depravity" of man means that every constituent part of his humanness has been to some degree corrupted, including his mind, which Scripture describes as "darkened". Indeed, the more men suppress the truth of God which they know, the more "futile", even "senseless", they become in their thinking.<sup>104</sup>

Apparently, in the case of the Lycaonians, this knowledge of God had been radically suppressed and as a result their concept of G-O-D had become twisted and ugly as indicated by their perverted form of worship. Likewise, their internal interpretive grid work (that which is a part of "imageness" and corresponds to the realities of creation) had also been effected, resulting in a faulty world view.

Therefore, it was necessary for Paul to begin with the G-O-D concept with which they could identify and then verify and clarify the Judeo-Christian view of the true God. At the same time he skillfully constructed a

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<sup>103</sup> John R. W. Stott. Your Mind Matters. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), p. 19.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

corollary world view which supported his postulate and which was communicated in meaningful terms, understandable to his hearers because of their basic common ontological uniqueness ("imageness"). Though Paul's understanding of God was greatly influenced by special revelation, he would not be presumptuous with his audience. For them, Paul starts with a very elementary truth-level postulate, that God is Creator. The G-O-D concept is not foreign to his hearers and the fact of "Creator" was verifiable by appealing to natural revelation which is available to all. Such would not only verify that God is, but also it would begin to clarify who God is.

It is worthy of mention that in both situations observed to this point, Paul's apologetic methodology begins with God. However, the mindset of his audience and their relationship to special revelation determined at what truth-level he would make his statement about God. At Antioch in Pisidia, Paul was able to confront his audience with a rather high level truth statement about God because of their relationship to special revelation and their resulting world view. On the other hand, at Lystra he encountered a non-Jewish audience. These were Gentiles who were without the external law (special revelation) and who had radically suppressed the God-knowledge from within. As a result, their God-knowledge was distorted and their world view was insufficient to consistently explain the world as it was or to properly interpret the miracle-event which had just happened in their midst.

Nonetheless, regardless how radically the inward truth of God is suppressed, it cannot be banished entirely from the human soul. It may be distorted but never destroyed. No matter how ugly and twisted the form this God-knowledge assumes, man remains incurably religious. Van Til concludes,

that all men ". . . are made in the image of God and as such have the ineradicable sense of diety within them."<sup>105</sup>

#### COMMON GROUND

The point of contact between this Jewish communicator and his pagan Gentile audience is that of natural revelation. F. F. Bruce writes,

Instead of the arguments from prophecy and miracle which were so freely used when the gospel confronted Judaism, the apostle on this occasion appealed to God's natural revelation as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, to His "common grace" in fact.<sup>106</sup>

Paul appealed to creation as a point of contact with the non-Christian so that an argument could be developed for the purpose of verifying the postulate that God is, as well as clarifying who this God is. Paul's point will be that the only One who adequately explains the world as it is, is the Judeo-Christian God. Creation is the point of common ground, as alleged by John Stott,

Although it is a proclamation without speech, a voice without words, yet as a result of it all men to some degree "know God". This assumed ability of man to read what God has written in the universe is extremely important. . . . Man is able to comprehend the process of nature. They are not mysterious. They are logically explicable in terms of cause and effect. Christians believe that this common rationality between man's mind and observable phenomena is due to the Creator who has expressed his mind in both.<sup>107</sup>

So, in Acts 14:15, Paul identifies God as the One ". . . who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that are in them." The factors at work are two-fold: man's inherent knowledge (innate ideas) which forms a corresponding

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<sup>105</sup> Cornelius Van Til. A Christian Theory of Knowledge. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 292.

<sup>106</sup> F. F. Bruce. The Defense of the Gospel. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 35.

<sup>107</sup> Stott, p. 19.

grid by which to interpret his world and the God-revealing nature of creation. As Stott says, God "has expressed his mind in both" -- both man and creation.

In verse 16, Paul uses history as a theological touchstone, showing that the course of human history is controlled by the God who created the universe. He appeals to the manifest goodness of God as evidenced by His supply of man's everyday basic needs. The tense of the verbals used to express this thought indicate that this "common grace" of God has been operative throughout the flow of human history. Now granted, if this was all that was involved, it might be argued that this would be scant support of the postulate that God is. However, it is not just that Paul says these things, but that his hearers have an internal witness (regardless how muffled or distorted) that provides the interpretive grid with which they can understand the truth Paul speaks. This internal witness which corresponds to the world that is, is present because man is made in the image of God (this being the point of chapter three). Paul was not speaking in a vacuum, his hearers were not neutral observers; they thought according to certain innate ideas; their minds were predisposed to think according to certain concepts because of the fact they were made in the image of God. This innate knowledge provided complementary internal evidence to the external evidence of creation in general and both were crucial to Paul's apologetic method.

Paul moved from creation in general (v. 15), to the movement of human history (v. 16), and then to the common grace of God as witnessed in everyday life in order to verify and clarify his postulate and to make his case that only the Judeo-Christian God is adequate to explain life as it really is -- all else is vanity.

The Apostle Paul says of God, that He did not leave ". . . himself without a witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and



fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (14:17)." This not only identifies Paul as one of those in the human race (the use of the editorial "us"), but the language touched a responsive chord in the hearts of the audience at Lystra. Paul was sensitive to their thinking and wisely selected one anthropological implication of God as Creator which would touch the audience at Lystra at a point of their own religion. Their gods were Zeus and Mercury and the legend concerning these two falls along this vein:

Zeus, the father of gods and men, and Hermes, his messenger, had appeared in human form to visit the people of Phrygia and had been uniformly treated with coldness and discourtesy. Upon visiting a straw hut of the old couple, they were welcomed and afforded the best entertainment that they could give. Baucis and Philemon noted that though the guests drank freely of the wine which they provided, the bowl never seemed to be drained.<sup>108</sup>

Paul's message related that the natural result of God being Creator is not that men provide for the gods, but that God provides for men. If there is any gladness in life, it is because God is actively involved in men's world. Paul's use of natural revelation as common ground enabled him to meaningfully address their rational faculties in order to develop an apology which ultimately resulted in arresting their attention and stopping them from sacrificing to Barnabas and himself (14:18).

His objective had been to turn them from their false content of G-O-D and consequently abort their blasphemous intentions. He argued the true God to be Creator of the universe and Sustainer of life. Although this does not reveal a full-blown apologetic, it does show the effectiveness of this approach to change man's thinking about his "gods". After all, this is the first step in such cases, namely for people to turn from their idols and then turn to God (I Thessalonians 1:9). This result reflects the

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<sup>108</sup>Tenney, p. 229.

effectiveness of Paul's apologetic methodology in general and his use of natural revelation as common ground in particular.

#### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON**

The point has been made repeatedly in this chapter that the Apostle Paul appealed to the rational faculties of his hearers to understand his message in his apology. Paul's message was not just a series of verses hurled at his hearers; in fact, no verse was quoted, although the Christian can readily see many theological implications of special revelation. His argument was logical and at every point possible he touched his audience where they were ontologically and epistemologically. He did not threaten them with the swift and sure judgment of God if they did not desist in their blasphemous intentions. This is in harmony with Paul's teaching in Romans that "the goodness of God" leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Instead, as Bruce writes, they tried ". . . to show the folly of all idolatry and to lead their hearers to the knowledge of the true God."<sup>109</sup> Paul tried to give evidence for this "goodness of God" so that his appeal for them to believe would be reason not credulity. Mayers refers to the speech as Paul's "argument".<sup>110</sup> It seems clear that here, if only by implication, Paul appeals to man's reason to judge the reasonableness of the message, otherwise there would have been no need to produce evidence from creation in order to make his case. Human reason of theological necessity must be able to make sense of what creation says, namely that there is an all-powerful God (Romans 1:20). As Nash observes,

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<sup>109</sup> Bruce, The Defense of The Gospel, p. 35.

<sup>110</sup> Mayers, p. 164.

Reason has an intrinsic relationship to God, it has cosmic significance. Christians believe the rational world is the projection of a rational God who objectifies His eternal thoughts in the creation and who endows the human creature, the apex of His creation, with the image of God which includes a structure of reason similar to God's own reason.<sup>111</sup>

To reject the role of reason in an apologetic enterprise is to reduce the apology to a harangue with an appeal to credulity and fideism. However, this is not attributing to reason the prerogative of judging the truthfulness of revelatory propositional truth statements of special revelation. Rather, it is an appeal to reason to make sense of what God has said or done. Such a role for reason must be accepted as valid if Christianity is to rise above fideism. However, reason must be denied the right as ultimate judge of the truthfulness of special revelation, because to grant otherwise would result in an epistemological usurpation of reason over revelation.

#### **A TEST FOR TRUTH**

Due to the fact of the abbreviated nature of the apology in Acts 14:15-18, it seems philosophically unwise to draw too much from the passage on the matter of a test for truth. However, in light of the form of Paul's argument, it would seem safe to say that he implicitly appeals to a correspondence theory. He challenges his hearers to consider what he is saying about the Judeo-Christian God in light of what they know to be true in their world. One might also make a case for the fact that Paul indirectly uses a pragmatic test for truth. That is, he identifies himself as a member of the human race (a non-god) and, as such, he had believed on this God -- consequently, he knew these things to be true. Therefore, he came to preach the

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<sup>111</sup> Nash, p. 69.

good news to them (v. 15) because it had worked for him.

### THE RESULTS

The effectiveness of Paul's apologetic approach in terms of response may seem to be rather insignificant. However, verse 20 speaks of disciples from the city -- whether they were the disciples who came with Paul or were some who had turned to the living God, the text does not say. Robertson makes an interesting comment concerning verses 19 and 20,

They dragged Paul out of the city and left him as a dead man. The real disciples in Lystra, for there were some (Timothy, for instance, whose father was a Greek and whose mother was a Jewess), gathered in a circle around the body in sorrow. Probably Timothy was in that circle.<sup>112</sup>

Whether or not Timothy was there or if the disciples were in fact, the result of Paul's apology is not necessary in order to judge the effectiveness of the address. The results were indeed momentous, for the crowd was stopped and their thinking altered enough so that it took the persuasive Jewish trouble-makers from Antioch to stir the people against Paul. When the frenzied pitch and religious fervor of the crowd is considered, the effectiveness of Paul's apology has greater value. His apologetic method provided the needed approach to insure maximum effectiveness of his apology. He challenged them at a truth-level about God comprehensible to them and then supported his statement with evidence from natural revelation, which at the same time constructed a monotheistic world view which in turn would provide the proper context in which to understand the message of Christ. Therefore, not only was their G-O-D concept challenged, but their corollary world view was shown to be inadequate to explain the course of nature in general and the miracle-event in particular.

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<sup>112</sup>A. T. Robertson. Epochs in the Life of Paul. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 118.

Merrill Tenney has a rather succinct summary of this passage:

Luke's record of Paul's address on this occasion is an illuminating example of accomodation to the psychology of a rural pagan audience. It contained no appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures, for the Lycaonian Gentiles would have possessed no knowledge of these writings. Paul appealed to their consciousness of "a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea . . . ." Since pagan belief credited rain and crops to the kindly intervention of the gods, Paul had a basis of understanding with his hearers and succeeded in deterring them from their idolatrous purpose.<sup>113</sup>

Paul's apology was effective, because it was lodged in a proper apologetic method. This last statement is speaking strictly methodologically, however, (and equally important) theologically speaking, it was not just the message, it was the Spirit of God using the message, apart from which there can be no spiritual results (John 16:8-11; Acts 1:8).

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<sup>113</sup>Tenney, pp. 233-234.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PAUL'S APOLOGIA AT ATHENS: ACTS 17:22-34

Having observed Paul at Antioch in Pisidia and at Lystra before the respective audiences, attention is now directed to Paul's apology for the Christian Faith before the group at Mars Hill in Athens. This is the last of the three Lucan texts selected to be juxtaposed for the purpose of determining which apologetic approaches appear to be normative to each situation and which are peculiar to a certain situation. The purpose of this investigative enterprise is to compile apologetic data which will contribute to the development of a viable apologetic for the Church in any generation. Whereas Paul's speech at Athens indicates a rather logically complete apology before Gentiles, it will undoubtedly yield greater apologetic methodological acumen than the Acts 14:15-18 speech. Consequently, this speech will serve as a sort of Pauline apologetic paradigm whereby gaps in other abbreviated speeches (abbreviated, at least in the record of what was said) may receive approximate content. It will be the burden of chapter seven to do the analytical work of comparing and contrasting the apologetic approaches surfaced in chapters four, five and six.

#### BACKGROUND

Although the specific passage under consideration includes only verses 22 through 34 inclusively, it is necessary, for hermeneutical reasons, to go back to verse 16 in order to gain a proper contextual understanding. Verse 16 records that the "city was wholly given to idolatry". Then verse 17 informs the reader that Paul went to the synagogue and "disputed with the Jews". It is interesting that the Jews lived where idolatry was so prevalent,

but apparently never spoke against it. They had succumbed to the isolation syndrome as have so many in the Twentieth Century Church.

Paul also went to the marketplace where he disputed "daily with them that met with him". This led to confrontation with the Epicureans and the Stoics. Concerning the teaching of the Stoics, Yamauchi writes,

Stoics were pantheists; they taught that the universe was permeated and governed by a god who created everything out of his own being, an "intelligent fiery breath" or, as one modern writer has described it, "a perfectly good and wise gas". . . . The Stoics believed that man himself, and especially his mind, was divine. . . . The Stoic aimed to live in harmony with the universe, by conforming his will to Providence. He strove to achieve self-sufficiency -- also a favourite concept of the Cynics -- and to avoid passion.

. . . The Stoics looked upon suicide as the highest proof of human freedom. They were either agnostic or indifferent about whether man is immortal. They believed the soul is destined to be reabsorbed into the world soul at the end of the world.<sup>114</sup>

Concerning the Epicureans, the same authority writes,

Epicurus took up the ideas of Democritus of Abdera who held that the world and everything in it was made up of the chance combinations of tiny indivisible atoms. Though gods may exist, they are far away and have no interest in human affairs. We must therefore rid ourselves of all superstitions and the fear of death.

. . . True happiness consists in a life free from pain, lived in quiet obscurity, surrounded by friends. Epicurus himself was far from being a hedonist who lived for the pleasures of the flesh.

. . . The Epicureans did not believe in immortality. They would have considered the idea of a resurrection ridiculous. At death, they believed, the atoms which make up a person merely disintegrate to reform again. An Epicurean epitaph reads: "I was not, I was, I am not, I do not care."<sup>115</sup>

The Stoics were pantheists and the Epicureans were naturalists. They collectively challenged Paul at the point of his message concerning Jesus and the resurrection (v. 18). In fact, they called him a "babblor". Regarding this term, Robertson comments,

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<sup>114</sup> Edwin Yamauchi. Harper's World of the New Testament. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981), p. 53.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

The word for "babblers" means "seed-picker" or picker up of seeds (SPERMA, seed, LEGŌ, to collect) like a bird in the agora hopping about after chance seeds. . . . It means, What would this picker up of seeds wish to say, if he should get off an idea? It is a contemptuous tone of supreme ridicule and doubtless Paul heard this comment.<sup>116</sup>

Verse 19 explains that Paul was taken to Mars Hill to give an account of his philosophy of life. Yamauchi related,

When Paul went to Athens he preached to the Court of the Areopagus. The Areopagus (Mars Hill) was a low hill below the Acropolis, which served as the site of the supreme court in Classical Athens. By Paul's day the Areopagus Court met in the Royal Stoa -- where Socrates was tried.<sup>117</sup>

According to F. F. Bruce, Paul was brought to the Areopagus because he " . . . appeared to be commending foreign divinities, and so rendered himself amendable to the jurisdiction of the Areopagus (verses 18, 19)."<sup>118</sup>

Concerning the matter of "strange gods", Robertson comments, " . . . They think that Paul preaches two gods (one Jesus, and the other the Resurrection). The Athenians made gods out of abstract virtues."<sup>119</sup> It is evident from this comment that Paul had spoken of the resurrection with much intensity and dogmatism, that is, seemingly it formed the theological/historical hinge on which his whole message turned.

Within this contextual background it is now logically appropriate to consider the form and content of Paul's apology in light of the four apologetical issues outlined in chapter two. However, in view of the fact that this speech is rather lengthy, exegetical considerations and comments will be handled within each section dealing with apologetic issues. Although this is a methodological deviation from chapters four and five, it is

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<sup>116</sup>Robertson. Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume 3, p. 281.

<sup>117</sup>Yamauchi. Harper's World of the New Testament, p. 53.

<sup>118</sup>F. F. Bruce. "Paul and the Athenians". Bible and Spade. 6:3 (Summer, 1977), p. 84.

<sup>119</sup>A. T. Robertson. Epochs in the Life of Paul. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974, pb. ed.), p. 159.



believed it will lend to greater perspicuity in the analytical discussion.

#### LOGICAL STARTING POINT

As in Acts 14:15-18, Paul adopts as his starting point a very elementary truth-level, postulating that God is. He does not develop theistic arguments as proof that God is, but he uses a cosmological premise in verse 28 to verify and clarify his initial postulate. Both the ontological distinctiveness of man in general and his religious activity in particular assure Paul that "God" is a valid logical starting point. However, Paul does not assume that his audience has accurate epistemological orientation as to the ontological distinctive of this Being, that is, according to the Judeo-Christian truth categories. But he does assume that both he and his hearers agree that something is, which can be referred to by the G-O-D word. In essence, Paul does not initially criticize the Athenians for their false ontological content for the G-O-D word, rather he uses the G-O-D concept as the starting point and then proceeds to give Judeo-Christian content to the concept. Such language was understandable in concept (not content) to the religious Athenians. The beginning of Paul's argument was designed to give Judeo-Christian content to the G-O-D word. However, at one point in the argument, namely at the point on the resurrection, tension developed between Paul and his hearers, but initially, his starting point was not rejected out of hand.

Paul's opening words to the Athenians are, "I perceive that in all things ye are very religious" (17:22). Bahnsen writes,

As Paul began his Areopagus apologetic, he began by drawing attention to the nature of man as inherently a religious being (v. 22 cf. Rom. 1:19; 2:15). The term used to describe the Athenians in verse 22

(literally "fearers of the supernatural spirits") is sometimes translated "very religious" and sometimes "somewhat superstitious". There is no satisfactory English equivalent.<sup>120</sup>

Paul continues by addressing the subject of an altar he found, ". . . with this inscription TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him I declare unto you" (17:23). This confirms that these people, though philosophically intellectual, had suppressed the truth in them (Romans 1:18), and as a result their "foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21) concerning who the true God is. They did not reject the G-O-D concept, they simply lacked true content for the concept as a result of intense suppression of universal, knowable God-truth. This created an epistemological problem for them and resulted in ontological misgivings concerning what kind of a Being should have the G-O-D ascription.

Paul addresses their epistemological problem when he says, ". . . ye ignorantly worship . . ." (17:23). The word "ignorantly" means "without knowledge". A. T. Robertson writes, "in ignorance (AGNOOUNTES). Present active participle of AGNOEŌ, old verb from same root as AGNŌSTOS to which Paul refers by using it."<sup>121</sup> You worship an unknown god with "unknowing" worship is the sum of Paul's point.

Concerning the "Unknown God", Haenchen makes a very interesting and helpful comment,

Paul concludes from this devotion that the heathen live at one and the same time in a positive and negative relationship with the right God: they worship him and yet do not know him -- they worship him indeed, but along with many other gods! Still, this altar shows that Paul introduces no "new gods": the accusation raised against Socrates cannot validly be made against Christianity. Out of the ignorance of the Athenians concerning this God, it inevitably follows that Paul must proclaim him.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen. "The Encounter of Jerusalem With Athens". Ashland Theological Bulletin. 31:1 (Spring, 1980), p. 22.

<sup>121</sup>A. T. Robertson. Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume 3, p. 286.

<sup>122</sup>Haenchen, p. 521.

This strengthens the suggestion that Paul's starting point is the elementary truth-level hypothesis that God is and explains why the G-O-D concept was not rejected out of hand by his hearers.

As Paul begins his speech, he does so in a fashion designed not to alienate them. He does not scathe them with truculent speech. Paul is sensitive to where his hearers are at theologically and epistemologically, and he wants to reach them, not castigate them. Arthur Rutledge speaks to this matter and also affirms that the G-O-D concept is the logical starting point for the Apostle on this occasion:

Nowhere did Paul exhibit his skill in dealing with pagan worshippers as at Athens. Without attacking their idolatry he referred to the idol inscribed "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD", declaring that the One whom they recognized by that idol was the living God. Starting there he moved on to affirm the resurrection of Christ.<sup>123</sup>

It is not essential to Paul's starting point that his hearers agree as to who this God is in the same ontological categories as Paul. In fact, that will be the burden of his argument, namely, to demonstrate who God is. He will lead his audience along and logically demonstrate to them that this Being is, in fact, the only God, i.e. the personal, triune, Judeo-Christian God. This would be a challenge to their thinking, that this God can be known in such objective terms. Van Til writes,

Even among the cultured it was in good style to recognize the fact that there was more in heaven and on earth than they had yet dreamed of in their philosophy. They believed in "the mysterious universe", they were perfectly willing therefore to leave open a place for "the unknown". But this "unknown" must be thought of as the utterly unknowable and indeterminate.

It seems to be the case, as taught by Scripture and supported by experience,

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<sup>123</sup> Arthur B. Rutledge. "Evangelistic Methods in Acts". Southwestern Journal of Theology. 17:1 (Fall, 1974), p. 44.

<sup>124</sup> Cornelius Van Til. Paul at Athens. (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1978), p. 6.

that all men have this religious bent which to a lesser or greater degree corresponds to the God of creation, depending upon the degree of intensity with which one suppresses the inherent God-knowledge. Romans 1:19-23 is a spiritual paradigm of the human race and makes the point that no matter how distorted sinful man may make the G-O-D concept, he still must have something to worship (Romans 1:21-23).

Psalm 14:1 admits that "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God", but that statement is not an outright denial of the G-O-D concept, only a denial of a personal God. Keil and Delitzsch comment on this verse by saying, "The  $\text{בְּלִיַּיִם}$  is not content with acting as though there were no God, but directly denies there is a God, i.e. a personal God."<sup>125</sup> Even when the atheist denies the personal God, he cannot escape the fact that he still has a G-O-D concept, regardless how distorted and ugly it may be by biblical standards. Push any man back far enough philosophically and if he is intellectually honest, he will have to confess some recognition of something which relates to the G-O-D concept. Carnell, quoting Calvin, says, "'We lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by natural instinct, possesses some sense of a Deity'".<sup>126</sup>

From Paul's mindset, he begins with God as Creator as an elementary truth-level postulate, appealing to the G-O-D concept in his hearers as a logical starting point. From there Paul skillfully fills in the lines to give a Judeo-Christian theistic meaning to the G-O-D word. When this was successfully done, the need for "other gods" disappeared, because He is the sufficient, knowable God -- Lord of time and eternity.

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<sup>125</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch. Commentary on the Old Testament. 10 volumes. (1971) Psalms. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), Volume 5, p. 204.

<sup>126</sup> Edward J. Carnell. An Introduction to Christian Apologetics. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), p. 158.

Christians should have no fear that in beginning with God, the non-Christian will be able to bring them to a place where Christianity has no answer. Regardless what man erects as a god, Christianity knocks it down and shows the personal, infinite, triune Creator God to be superior. The Christian apologetic can start with God without fear that such will lead to a philosophical impasse or result in a charge of religious credulity, because He is the God who is really there. Schaeffer writes,

You can carry out your intellectual discussion to the end of the game, because Christianity is not only true dogmas, it is not only true to what God has said in the Bible, but it is also true to what is there, and you will never fall off the end of the world! It is not just an approximate model; it really is true to what is there.<sup>127</sup>

Paul worked from God and then demonstrated by observable evidence the logical necessity of his starting point and in doing so, dismantled the other gods. In light of this, it seems reasonable to conclude that this proves a valid starting point in any apologetic enterprise, however, that conclusion will be demonstrated in chapter seven.

#### COMMON GROUND

After positing God, Paul immediately moves to a place of common ground with his hearers, namely the subject of Creation (theologically referred to as natural revelation). Creation provides the common ground on which the argument will be developed for the purposes of verifying and clarifying the postulate that God is. F. F. Bruce confirms this understanding.

Remember that he [Paul] has now for several years been a successful evangelist in the pagan world -- a fact which despite his own modest disclaimer, implies considerable persuasiveness in speech and approach, including the ability to find and exploit an initial area of common ground with his hearers, apart from which any attempt at communication would be fruitless.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer. He Is There and He Is Not Silent. (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), p. 17.

<sup>128</sup>F. F. Bruce. "Paul and the Athenians". Bible and Spade. 6:3 (Summer, 1977), p. 91.

It will be helpful to submit Stott's quote again at this point:

Although it is a proclamation without speech, a voice without words, yet as a result of it all men to some degree "know God". This assumed ability to man to read what God has written in the universe is extremely important. . . . Man is able to comprehend the process of nature. They are not mysterious. They are logically explicable in terms of cause and effect. Christians believe that this common rationality between man's mind and observable phenomena is due to the Creator who has expressed his mind in both.<sup>129</sup>

Romans 1:20 explains why creation is a valid point of contact between the Christian and the non-Christian in any discussion about God. This truth is expanded in Romans 10:14-18. Man is alerted to the fact that what is about him is the result of creation due to the "createdness" of his world. Alan Johnson writes, "Man perceives in the created existence not only his own finiteness, but because of God's revelation to him he knows his creatureliness."<sup>130</sup> Cranfield writes concerning the fact that such knowledge is " . . . manifest in them" (Romans 1:19) means,

In their midst and all around them and/also in their own creaturely existence (including of course what is also inward as well as what is external) God is objectively manifest: His whole creation declares Him.<sup>131</sup>

And if God is Creator, then He is in need of nothing (17:25). Instead, the true God is the Giver of all things. As Conzelmann writes,

The train of thought is this: the assertion that God is the creator is immediately given a critical turn: he needs nothing. That is a philosophical truism which was to spread widely throughout both Judaism and Christianity. He is not the receiver but the giver, a contrasting statement that is also found elsewhere. The specific deduction made from this is fundamental criticism of the building of temples, a criticism known among Stoics since Zeno (cf. Seneca).<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Stott, p. 19.

<sup>130</sup>Alan F. Johnson. The Freedom Letter. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 38.

<sup>131</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield and J. A. Emerton, Gen. Eds. The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Romans. Volume 1. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), p. 114.

<sup>132</sup>Hans Conzelmann. "The Address of Paul on the Areopagus". Studies in Luke-Acts. Eds. L. Keck and J. L. Martyn. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 221.

Paul's starting point is God, the common ground for his argument is founded in the "createdness" of man and his world (natural revelation). From this point, Paul moves his argument along to show the anthropological implications of "createdness". Bruce remarks that "since the creator of all things in general is creator of the human race in particular, Paul moves from the doctrine of God to the doctrine of man."<sup>133</sup> The first implication being that of the oneness of the human race -- ontological oneness -- "And hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth . . ." (v. 26). Bruce says, "But Paul affirms that mankind is one in origin, all created by God and all descended from a common ancestor. Before God, all human beings meet on one level."<sup>134</sup>

The second anthropological implication is that man has a limited influence on the totality of his world, that is man is ultimately not in control of history -- God is! If God is the Giver of all things, then man is dependent on God, and if God is Creator of all things, then God is ultimate to all. Since God gives even in the realm of the physical, He must of necessity control the context within which the giving takes place (vv. 25, 26); God is both the Designer and Controller of history. Bruce writes,

The "allotted periods" (vs. 26) are to be identified either with the sequence of seed-time and harvest (as in the speech at Lystra) or with the epochs of human history (as in the visions of Daniel).<sup>135</sup>

It seems possible that the Apostle had both ideas in mind when he spoke and was ready to defend either.

In verse 27, Paul makes the point which has been repeated throughout

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<sup>133</sup> Bruce. "Paul and The Athenians", p. 88.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

this thesis, and that is, there exists from an anthropological perspective an epistemological affinity between man and God. Paul reports that men should "seek the Lord" because God "is not far from each one of us." This latter statement does not seem to be a reference primarily to God's immanence, but rather, as Haenchen writes, ". . . the speaker does not take these expressions to mean spatial nearness of God (although it is not denied), but rather God's relationship to men = God's creation of mankind . . . ."136

In verses 28, 29, Paul continues his apology by appealing to the Athenians on the basis of the two anthropological implications which had been recognized (though distorted) by two of their own poets which forms further common ground between Paul and his hearers. Paul introduces two quotations from their poets as evidence corroborating biblical truth as well as evidence that no matter how intensely man suppresses the truth of God in natural revelation, traces of its influence in man's thinking are obvious. Stonehouse writes,

Paul maintained that even pagans remained confronted with the revelation of God in nature, and that this contact with revelation rendered them inexcusable (Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:19ff). This confrontation with the divine revelation had not been without effect upon their minds since it brought them into contact with the truth, but their basic antipathy to the truth was such that they suppressed it in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Thus while maintaining the antithesis between the knowledge of God enjoyed by His redeemed children and the state of ignorance which characterized all others, Paul could allow consistently and fully for the thought that pagan men, in spite of themselves and contrary to the controlling disposition of their minds, as creatures of God confronted with the divine revelation were capable of responses which were valid so long as and to the extent that they stood in isolation from their pagan systems. Thus, thoughts which in their pagan contexts were quite un-Christian and anti-Christian, could be acknowledged as up to a point involving an actual apprehension of revealed truth.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup>Haenchen, p. 525.

<sup>137</sup>Ned Stonehouse. Paul Before the Areopagus and Other New Testament Studies. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 29-30.



The first pagan reference comes from " . . . the fourth line of a quatrain attributed to Epimenides, the Cretan . . . ." <sup>138</sup> Paul writes, "For in him we live and move, and have our being . . . ." Then he goes on to say, "For we are also his offspring" in which he alludes to some lines . . . from the poem on Natural Phenomena by Aratus of Cilicia. This pagan opens with a passage about Zeus -- Zeus the supreme being of Greek philosophy, rather than Zeus the amoral head of the Greek mythological pantheon. <sup>139</sup>

Paul uses this epistemological common ground to build a bridge from the pagan concept of G-O-D to the true Judeo-Christian concept of God. It not only provides the point of contact, it also demonstrates ". . . that ungodly thinkers have not eradicated all idea, albeit suppressed and distorted, of the living and true God." <sup>140</sup> Paul builds his apologetic argument and corollary theistic world view at this point by use of a philosophical approach in which he makes a case for the true God by mentioning pagan thoughts about G-O-D without depreciating his categories in the process. Bruce points out,

The "delicately suited allusions" to Stoic and Epicurean tenets which have been discerned in the speech, like the quotations from pagan poets, have their place as points of contact with the audience, but they do not commit the speaker to acquiescence in the realm of ideas to which they originally belong. <sup>141</sup>

In these two verses, Paul introduces a cosmological premise supported by their own poets to verify and clarify his initial postulate, that is, man's contingency and God's ultimacy. He takes facts observable to all men -- but misinterpreted by their faulty world view -- and places them within a proper

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<sup>138</sup> Bruce, The Defense of the Gospel, p. 44.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Bahnsen, p. 29. It should be pointed out that Bahnsen would not be in complete agreement with the matter of epistemological common ground as developed in this thesis.

<sup>141</sup> Bruce, "Paul and the Athenians", p. 92.

theistic world view, giving true meaning to the facts which correspond to reality. Again, Bruce has summarized this point succinctly:

It is not suggested that even the Paul of Acts (let alone Paul whom we know from his letters) envisaged God in terms of the Zeus of Stoic pantheism, but if men whom his hearers recognized as authorities had used language which could corroborate his argument, he would quote their words, giving them a biblical sense as he did so. Paul's concern was to impress on his hearers the responsibility of all men, as God's creatures into whom he has breathed the breath of life, to give him honor which is his due. And honor is not given when the divine nature is depicted in material forms.<sup>142</sup>

In verse 29, Paul argues that it is inconsistent with natural revelation (of which man is a part), as well as incongruous with a consistent world view, for man to make God like man. Haenchen cogently instructs, "What originates in our artistic ability and considerations, and therefore stands under us, cannot portray the divine, which stands over us."<sup>143</sup>

Verse 31 reveals an element of the concept of judgment. This concept is not foreign even to those who radically suppress the God-knowledge within them (Romans 1:31), so Paul's mention of the concept would not create immediate objections. How appropriate it was for Paul to introduce the concept of "judgment" while standing before this tribunal. This reveals Paul's sensitivity to each situation and his wisdom to use language which accommodates his hearers' frame of reference. He spoke of a judgment not by mortal men of other's character which is so often influenced by the corruptness of human nature, but of a judgment by God "in righteousness". Paul's line of reasoning was founded squarely in the language and concepts familiar to his audience. But with this, he introduced a whole new dimension to such concepts which in turn verified and agreed with his starting point -- the

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Haenchen, p. 525.

Judeo-Christian God who is really there. While they were judging his system, he was speaking to them of the God who would one day judge the world.

The certainty of this day of judgment is revealed in the word "assurance". A. T. Robertson's comments are helpful.

Whereof he hath given assurance (PISTIN PARASCHON). Second aorist active participle of PARECHO, adverb to furnish, used regularly by Demosthenes for bringing forward evidence.<sup>144</sup>

F. F. Bruce writes,

God; it is stated, has confirmed the certainty of the coming day of judgment by raising from the dead the man through whom that judgment will be delivered.<sup>145</sup>

Bahnsen states,

After His resurrection Christ charged the apostles "to preach unto the people and to testify that this is he who is ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). Paul declared this truth in the Areopagus apologetic, going on to indicate that God had given "assurance" or proof of the fact that Christ would be mankind's final Judge. This proof was provided by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.<sup>146</sup>

The implications are clear, namely that if there is no resurrection, there is no day of judgment. This is the prospective aspect of Paul's argument. The retrospective aspect is that if there is no resurrection, God is not the kind of God who works in human history or speaks within history. If there is no resurrection, there is no validity to the truth claims of Jesus or to the prophetic word of the Old Testament. To claim there is no resurrection also casts doubt as to whether this God acts in human history, Paul's argument falls into speculation, and the whole matter of the Judeo-Christian God is in question. But Paul speaks with certainty on the point

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<sup>144</sup> Robertson. Word Pictures in the New Testament. Volume 3, p. 291.

<sup>145</sup> Bruce. "Paul and the Athenians", p. 93.

<sup>146</sup> Bahnsen, p. 35.

of the resurrection of Christ for it had been verified by eyewitnesses, including himself (I Corinthians 15:5-8; Acts 9:5).

Up to this point in the defense before the Council, Paul had a hearing; however, when he appealed to the doctrine of the resurrection he was immediately cut off. The whole argument seems to stand or fall on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is just this point which verifies his initial starting point, his interpretation of who God is, as well as supporting his doctrine of coming judgment. It has been suggested that he could have avoided this unpleasant confrontation simply by substituting the doctrine of immortality for the resurrection. Immortality simply suggests that the soul lives on, whereas resurrection involves not only the soul but the body as well. The view of immortality is expressed in the following quote:

According to this view [Immortality], a human being is a composite -- a combination of soul (or mind) and body, incorporeal soul conjoined the physical body. A human being is not, however, equally a soul and a body; a human being is essentially a soul and only accidentally a body. The soul temporarily occupies or possesses the body in such a manner that at death, when the body ceases to function, the soul escapes unharmed.

Not only does the soul continue to exist apart from the body, it functions pretty much as before . . . . The soul is little affected by the loss of the body, since all along the soul had been the center of consciousness.<sup>147</sup>

The same author goes on to surface the difference between resurrection and immortality.

In contrast to immortality, resurrection regards human beings as unities, as psychophysical wholes. A person has both mental and physical characteristics essentially, but the mind is not a substance and cannot exist apart from the body. Death is not merely something which happens to the body and which the soul observes as a more or less disinterested

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<sup>147</sup> David A. Spieler. "Immortality and Resurrection: A Reappraisal". Religion in Life. 43:3 (Autumn, 1974), pp, 312-313.

spectator; it happens to the soul as well. . . . The resurrection thesis, however, is that though death marks the termination of a person's earthly existence, it is not the last word -- there is new life to come At some later time and (generally other) place, God by a special act resurrects (recreates or reconstitutes) the one who has died.<sup>148</sup>

However, the soul does not die when the body dies, but it is affected.

Ultimately the soul is rejoined to the body through a resurrection event, that is, resurrection is something which happens to the body, not the soul.

Concerning the Greeks, Robertson comments, "The Greeks believed that the souls of men lived on, but they had no conception of the resurrection of

the body."<sup>149</sup> Bruce observes, "Had he [Paul] replaced it [the resurrection]

by the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul, all but the Epicureans who listened to him would have agreed with him."<sup>150</sup> However, to compromise

on the issue of the resurrection would not only render the argument null

and void, it would deplete the Gospel message (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Paul

was serious about this matter of God and the resurrection event -- to omit

the resurrection would be to make the whole apologetic enterprise without a

base and turn the encounter into nothing other than a philosophical word game.

Nonetheless, despite the opposition, Paul's argument had been constructed so wisely and carefully, as well as meaningfully and logically, that even though he did not get the opportunity to build an argument for the historicity of the resurrection, "certain men believed" (17:34). The point is, if the first part of the argument is understood, the resurrection becomes a reasonable historical God-event which is logically consistent with the Christian world-life view and corresponds to the events of history revealing

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>149</sup> A. T. Robertson. Word Pictures in the New Testament. Volume 3, p. 292.

<sup>150</sup> Bruce. The Defense of the Gospel, p. 48.

the Judeo-Christian God as the only true God. Not only this, but also that the personal, Creator God works dynamically in history and beyond, a truth not accepted within either a pantheistic or naturalistic world view. This hints at a point to be made later, namely the importance of the Gospel being communicated within the context of a Judeo-Christian world view.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON

The speech at Athens evinces Paul's commitment to the use of reason in dealing with men concerning the truth-claims of Christianity. To deny man's ability to reason with the facts is to deny his "imageness" of God and, hence, to deny his "humanness". Without the ability to follow a logical argument, Paul's apology would be meaningless -- meaningless sounds spoken into a mental vacuum. However, Paul never tired of attempting to persuade men of the truth-claims of Christianity, in fact, he summarized his own ministry as one of persuasion (II Corinthians 5:11).

Stott cogently states,

Paul summed up his own evangelistic ministry in the simple words "we persuade men" (II Cor. 5:11). Now "persuade" is to marshall arguments in order to prevail on people to change their mind about something. . . . Now all the verbs Luke uses here of Paul's evangelistic ministry -- to argue, to explain, to prove, to proclaim and to persuade -- are to some extent "intellectual" words. They indicate that Paul was teaching a body of doctrine and arguing towards a conclusion. He was seeking to convince in order to convert.<sup>151</sup>

Although these phrases or "intellectual" words are not found in any of the immediate texts considered in Acts, the form of his speech, especially at Athens, undeniably reflects the spirit of such words. Paul's apologetic methodology depended on the ontological uniqueness of man (imageness), making reason a legitimate vehicle by which the truth-claims of Christianity

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<sup>151</sup> Stott, p. 47.

could be meaningfully communicated to the non-Christian. However, Paul's apologetic activity was not simply a human enterprise, he depended on the Holy Spirit to use his message to convince the hearers of their need of Christ (I Corinthians 2:13).

#### **A TEST FOR TRUTH**

As in the other passages considered, so also here, there is no explicit statement concerning Paul's use of a test for truth and yet his apologetic method implies such. Due to the fact that Paul uses evidences from man and his world in the development of his apology, it seems apparent that he uses a correspondence test for truth. Namely, that the truth-claims of Christianity correspond to the world as it really is, as well as explain the uniqueness of man. In Acts 13:14-30 Paul introduces the biblical record of God working in history and demonstrates how this record of God's working corresponds with the real historical events. In Acts 14:15-17, Paul sets forth God as the Creator who supplies the needs of men, a truth that corresponds to the testimony of their own hearts, ". . . filling our hearts with food and gladness." In other words, there is a correspondence between a Creator/Sustainer God and the real experience of man. Acts 17:24-29 reveals the correspondence between the Judeo-Christian world view and man's experience as observed even by the Greek poets (vv. 28 and 29). In each case, Paul points to what man knows to be true by observation and experience and shows how a Judeo-Christian theistic world view gives an explanation which corresponds to what really is in this world.

Likewise, the truth-claims of Christianity form a coherent system within itself without which the logical flow of Paul's apology would be impossible. While this may only be implicit in the Acts 14 passage, it is

clearly demonstrated in Acts 13:14-30, how the doctrine of divine deliverance (vv. 17-20), the covenant promises of God (vv. 22-23), the message of John the Baptizer (vv. 24-25), the principle of fulfilled prophecy (vv. 25-29) and the resurrection (v. 30) all form a coherent whole. Furthermore, Acts 17:30-31 confirms the same test of coherency. Paul, in summarizing (vv. 30-31), demonstrates that God's mercy, man's repentance, the coming righteous judgment of the world and the resurrection are harmonious parts of the Judeo-Christian theistic world view. The point is, Paul appeals to both correspondence and coherence as valid tests for his hearers to apply to his message. As true observers of the course of nature, they are able to judge whether or not Paul's message corresponds with their world, and as creatures of reason, they could judge the coherence of the successive claims of the argument.

A test for truth is not an incidental issue and its importance must not be overlooked. Paul cannot appeal to the authority of the spoken Word from the God of the Old Testament at this point, because they do not know either the God or His spoken Word. Yet, there must be some reasonable test, either stated or otherwise, whereby the truth claims of Christianity can be verified for their truthfulness and superiority over all other systems. However, this does not necessarily require a separate enterprise, only that the apologetic method weave into it an implicit test for truth. This seems to be the basic approach of Paul.

## **THE RESULTS**

According to verses 32 and 34, there were some who wanted to hear more (v. 32) and some who believed (v. 34) upon hearing Paul's apology. The fact that some believed indicates the apologetic approach and accompanying



apology had been used by the Holy Spirit of God to bring some to faith in Christ. There is no convincing evidence for the suggestion by Ramsay<sup>152</sup> that Paul was disappointed with the results and afterward no longer used any philosophical/historical apologetics and only preached Christ (I Corinthians 2:2). Such a conclusion is not only doubtful, but injurious to the verbal, plenary view of inspiration. Nowhere in Scripture is it stated that Paul felt he had failed at Athens because of an inappropriate or unscriptural method of evangelism. To suggest such is to open other teaching and/or ministerial methods of Paul to criticism which seems to jeopardize or compromise the ultimate authority of God's Word in all matters which it addresses. Also, it appears to be inconsistent to make such a judgment based on I Corinthians 2:2 when, in fact, Paul later builds an argument for the believers' resurrection based on evidences (I Corinthians 15:6-8) and philosophical/theological argumentation (I Corinthians 15:12-19).

Those who agree with Ramsay's conclusion reveal their incomplete view of the apologetic enterprise as well as raise suspicion regarding their view of Scripture. There is no conflict between the apologetic enterprise and preaching Christ -- they are one and the same endeavor. The former enterprise speaks of the over-all endeavor, while the latter refers to the objective of apologetics. They are most definitely not mutually exclusive endeavors, they go hand-in-hand, and one must not be set in contradistinction to the other.

Paul's apologetic methodology included, but was not limited to, God as the logical starting point which in this case was at a very elementary truth-level, namely God as Creator. Then by reasonable argumentation, using observable natural phenomena common to both hearer and speaker, Paul

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<sup>152</sup>Ramsay, p. 252.

identified and verified this God as the personal, sovereign, Creator God who works in history and beyond. The weight of his God-argument seems to be on the resurrection of Christ. It will be remembered that it was the resurrection which created the tension initially and that it was the resurrection which Paul was to defend. However, when he begins his defense of the resurrection, he begins with God and not the resurrection. The resurrection is a meaningless event when viewed outside a Judeo-Christian world view, and the only way to have a Judeo-Christian world view is to understand who God is. Therefore, Paul begins his apologetic enterprise with God, establishes by natural revelation God's existence and clarifies Him as Creator, and then he comes to the resurrection event. Now, it is more than a philosophical quirk of his teaching, it is the crucial point of his argument, the core of the Gospel (I Corinthians 15:12-17).

He calls upon his audience to accept his starting point and the truth-claims of Christianity because they are verifiable philosophically, historically, and experientially. He does not unnecessarily alienate his audience with caustic statements about them or their beliefs, nor does he soften his apology in order to make it more palatable to his hearers. The results are that the Spirit of God used both the apologetic method and the content of the apology to convince some of the hearers to a point of believing.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
TOWARD A VIABLE APOLOGETIC

The thrust of this final chapter is to crystalize the material surfaced in the previous chapters in order to focus attention on the apologetic methodology of the Apostle Paul. This endeavor will be augmented with references to the apologies of other spokesmen for Christianity as recorded in the Book of Acts. The results of this analytical operation will provide some necessary information relevant to the construction of a theological-philosophical framework within which a viable apologetic method will be formulated. The ultimate intention of this chapter is to logically and successfully present Paul's apologetic methodology as an apologetic paradigm from which a viable apologetic method can be developed for the desperately needy work of the Church in challenging modern man with the truth-claims of Christianity.

**NEW TESTAMENT APOLOGIES COMPARED**

In Acts 13:16, Paul begins this apology, as in other apologies, with God as his logical starting point. Carnell says,

The logical starting point is the highest principle which one introduces to give unity and order to his interpretation of reality. This is why it is the logical starting point -- it is what one logically conceives as the over-all synthesizing element which unites the particulars.<sup>153</sup>

Philosophically speaking, God was Paul's logical starting point, but theologically speaking, God was his necessary starting point. One should not be

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<sup>153</sup>Carnell, p. 124.

surprised that that which is logical should coincide with that which is theological.

Acts 14:15 and Acts 17:24 reflect the same starting point in his apology. However, the truth-level statement concerning God ontologically is not the same in each situation. In Acts 13:16, Paul commences his apology before a Jewish audience by referring to God as the God of Israel, a fact of special revelation. Stephen, in Acts 7:2, begins at a similar point. Peter, in Acts 3:13, immediately challenges his hearers with the truth statement concerning God as the God of Abraham, which was a fact of special revelation. In each case Jews were the main recipients, and they had no problems with starting at a truth-level concerning God which was founded solely in special revelation, because the nation of Israel was the recipient of and custodian of the Old Testament Scriptures. However, it was also possible to start one's apology with Gentiles at a truth-level about God known only by special revelation if, in fact, they were familiar with the Jewish religion. Such was the case with Agrippa (Acts 26:6). Therefore, by this analysis of Paul's apologetic methodology, it is evident that when speaking to Jews or those familiar with the Jewish religion, Paul's logical starting point was God, and in fact, it involved a truth statement about God which was founded solely in special revelation, namely the Old Testament Scriptures.

In contradistinction to this approach, when Paul faced a Gentile audience unfamiliar with Jewish Scriptures, he began at a different truth-level although he still started with God. In such cases, Paul began at a very elementary truth-level, namely that God is Creator (Acts 14:15 and Acts 17:24). It is interesting that both the Old and New Testament begin at this very same place. More will be said about this at a later point.

In Acts 14:15, Paul prefaces his apology with a negative comment

aimed at criticizing the Lycaonians' world view and their subsequent conclusions, namely that Paul and Barnabas were gods. Peter, in Acts 2:15, does a similar thing when he says that the apostles were not drunk. The principle of antithesis is at work here, that God cannot be the kind of God he is and at the same time Paul and Barnabas be gods; nor can the apostles be drunk and filled with the Spirit at one and the same time. Paul appealed to the law of non-contradiction to make his point. Failure to correct the false conclusions of the respective audiences would have been counter-productive to the entire apology. There may be times when the false status granted the speaker by the hearer will need to be corrected in order to insure the maximum benefit from the apology.

Turning back to the main issue, the point of the discussion is that the apologetic methodology as portrayed in the ministry of Paul in particular, and other apostles in general, involves God as the logical starting point. The cultural, sociological, theological and philosophical status of the hearers determined at what level the truth statement would be formed concerning God. Another dimension of this -- which is closely related -- is the degree of intensity with which the hearers in particular have suppressed the truth about God which is in them (Romans 1:18, 19). Therefore, it can be concluded that Paul's starting point is normative for all apologetic activity while the truth-level about God is relative to each audience.

Regardless of the depths of paganism (a result of suppressing the truth [Romans 1:18-32]), the logical starting point is always God, but the truth statement about God is always at a level which is comprehensible to the hearers. By comprehensible, it is meant that the hearer understood the basic concept, though not necessarily all the philosophical or theological implications -- that is the task of apologetics. The truth statement

should be of such a nature that it can be verified by observable and cognizable facts from the created order. But this in and of itself will be insufficient without the ontological uniqueness of man, namely, his "image-ness". Therefore, whereas it has been previously demonstrated that all men have a sense of Deity, no matter how twisted and ugly it may be, it is both ontologically and epistemologically correct to begin with G-O-D as the logical point of beginning. Paul begins with the G-O-D word and then gives it a Judeo-Christian content or clarification. It is a logical starting point because it is common to all men, and it is the necessary starting point, because apart from God, all other discussable events/facts have no true reference point from which they can be properly interpreted. This is God's world and apart from Him it is impossible to interpret the events/facts which are His events/facts. As Mayers concurs, this is true "Because the dependent creation is defined by God, nothing exists that is not related to and interpreted by God. . . . that is a God-created world with a God-sanctioned history."<sup>154</sup>

All of this reveals that Paul's starting point involved the belief that all men had both innate knowledge that God is and the mental faculties capable of rational understanding of the work and person of God as revealed in creation (Romans 1:19-20; Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-30) and/or special revelation (Acts 13:17-29; 17:2-3). Paul postulated God and then appealed to reason to verify and clarify this God to be the Judeo-Christian God. He did not leave his hearers to accept his postulate without presenting evidence which verified that God is and clarified who God is. Reason was not appealed to in order to reason to God, but to demonstrate the validity of the Judeo-Christian God. By this Paul gives faith its proper relationship to reason

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<sup>154</sup>Mayers, p. 198.

without compromising faith or assigning reason an autonomous role. The evidence (internal and external) only verified and clarified the postulate and gave his hearers reason for exercising faith in God, i.e. faith that this God could save them, and this alone is an act of faith (Ephesians 2:8 and 9). Such faith must not be some fideistic leap to an "unknown god", but faith in the God who is really there -- the knowable God who died for men. In light of this, Paul employs considerations from both presuppositionalism and evidentialism for his apologetic methodology. In the following pages, this methodology will be referred to as verifiable postulationalism.

After postulating a truth statement concerning God to his audience Paul's apologetic methodology employs the use of common ground. It is not enough for people to believe God is Creator, they must know Him as Savior. So Paul begins with the known and builds a philosophical arch to the unknown. This arch is founded on information common to both speaker and hearer and will assist Paul in moving his audience from God the Creator, to God raising His Son from the dead, and ultimately to bring his audience to faith in this God for their salvation.

Common ground exists between believer and non-believer, because both live in the same world and both are made in the image of God. This is not to say that both agree as to the interpretation of all the facts, but again, that is the work of the apologist, namely to show the superiority of the Judeo-Christian world view. But because such facts are observable to all, it was possible for Paul (and any Christian) to build a case for the truthfulness of the truth-claims of Christianity. Even though Mayers denies the existence of epistemological common ground, he still affirms that Paul was able to engage in such an apologetic enterprise on the

. . . basis of a definitive interpretation of historical events (objects) and the possibility of relating these facts (objects) intelligibly to his readers (subjects) or hearers (subjects).<sup>155</sup>

Paul appealed to evidence which would be admissible and understandable to his hearers in order to build an argument for the truth-claims of Christianity as a whole. Meaningful conversation and argumentation transpired between the two because the evidence was common and understandable to both.

In Acts 13:17 ff, biblical history and fulfilled prophecy formed the common ground between Paul and his Jewish audience. The Old Testament Scriptures as a whole formed an epistemological point of contact and provided the framework from which Paul interpreted history. Both the saved Jew and the unsaved Jew agreed on the historicity of the time-space acts of God on their behalf. The facts were knowable to both, therefore, Paul could speak meaningfully about these commonly held facts and speak of them in light of the God who acts in history. From there he moved into contemporary events to show the logical implications of such events in light of the commonly held understanding of the God who works and speaks in history. Paul begins with the ministry and message of John the Baptizer as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (vv. 24, 25) and then moves to the birth, death and resurrection of Christ as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (vv. 22, 23, 27, 30, 33-36). The apostle argues from the accepted view of past history, appealing to scriptural authority to construct a consistent theistic interpretation of contemporary events (such as the resurrection).

It is of interest to note that they did not reject Paul's interpretation of the past events, instead it was his interpretation of Christ-events which created the hostility, and in particular, it was the resurrection which generated the most criticism. This implies at least two things: (1) the

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<sup>155</sup>Ronald Mayers. "Both/And: The Uncomfortable Apologetic", Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 23:2 (Sept. 1980), p. 235.



Jews did not disagree with a theistic interpretation of past events, which means they understood a theistic world view, and (2) the Jews followed the logic of Paul's argument and knew exactly where he was going and what the implication of the resurrection as a real God-event meant to them. Mayers concludes that in the proclamation of the Gospel, the unsaved individual must be able to comprehend something of the message,

. . . then there must be some rational comprehension of the significance of the gospel, if not the acceptance of its actual truthfulness, any accompanying spiritual insight and relevance, prior to regeneration.<sup>156</sup>

In order to have meaningful conversation there must be certain data that is common to both the believer and the non-believer, so that what the speaker says is what the hearer hears. Otherwise, it is meaningless chatter and no one would be moved to any alternate state of mind by such speech. However, regardless how meaningful the speech is, if the hearer resists the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11; Hebrews 3:7), he will remain in unbelief.

Peter, in Acts 2:22-36 and 3:13-26, is reported to have followed the same apologetic method as Paul (obviously Peter's speeches chronologically came before Paul's, so it might be more appropriate to say Paul followed Peter). Peter cites historic events as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies as evidence of the truthfulness of the Christian truth-claims. Such an approach not only formed the valid point of contact for meaningful discourse, it provided the evidence for a Judeo-Christian theistic world-view, which led to the scriptural and logical conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah and that the resurrection event was a God-act, confirming the truth-claims of Jesus. Acts 7:1-53 finds Stephen following the same apologetic tradition when addressing those who considered the Old Testament Scriptures as a word from God.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

However, when confronting Gentiles who had neither a Jewish world view nor a word of special revelation from God, Paul turned to natural revelation as the point of contact (Acts 14:15; 17:24). Paul used natural revelation as evidence in his apology to demonstrate that the Judeo-Christian God is the only God by which this world can be correctly interpreted and the only God who deserves worship. As Mayers writes,

Evidence is never open to just any interpretation if it is claiming to be true. Interpretation must correspond to reality, which is ultimately the mind of God. Man's must simply follow God's mind. This is exactly what Paul does on Mars Hill as recorded in Acts 17. The ontological common ground between his pagan hearers and himself is the fact and continuity of nature as well as the inherent religious -- and transcendent-seeking faculties of the human species.<sup>157</sup>

It is essential for a theistic world view to be developed in order for the Christian message of grace and salvation to make any sense. Logically, the place of beginning in an apology before the pagan crowd is God as Creator and from there the claim must be supported by appealing to natural revelation. This is epistemologically valid, because all men can know the truth that God is by the ontological make-up of creation including man himself. This is reflected in the fact that Paul can quote pagan poets who have touched this truth (Acts 17:28, 29). As one authority says,

The argument from the nature of the created world to the character of its Author is as old as the Psalter, Job and Isaiah: Pss. xix.1; xciv.9; cxlii.5; Is. xliii.5; xlv.18; Job xii.9; xxvi.14; xxxvi.24ff; Wisd. ii.23; xiii.1, 5 & c.<sup>158</sup>

Here natural revelation provides ontological and epistemological common ground, as well as providing the necessary evidence for the ontological truth statement about God which is the logical starting point for Paul's hearers. Therefore, Paul skillfully uses both the knowledge of God

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<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>158</sup>William Sanday and Arthur Headlam. The International Critical Commentary. The Epistle to the Romans. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901; reprint ed., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953 & 1957), p. 43.

and man's knowledge of himself and his world to build his apology. Paul was very much aware of the ontological uniqueness of man which provided certain epistemological realities for man, and he was thereby able to develop a meaningful apology for the true God by which the world must be interpreted.

This does not suggest a natural theology which starts with only the reality of nature and reasons to the reality of God. This is to say that theistic arguments -- as traditionally understood -- are invalid as sole proofs for God's existence. Nevertheless, they may have a place in apologetics for the purpose of verifying and/or clarifying a priori statements about God. Also, such arguments may serve to awaken innate knowledge of God which has been radically suppressed by some men (Romans 1:19-20). However, reason in and of itself is impotent to find God, but whereas God has chosen to reveal Himself both within man and in creation in general, reason can make sense of this revelation. As Mayers suggests, "From this theistic viewpoint, man is never autonomous but neither is he ever meaningless."<sup>159</sup>

Therefore, everything man will ever know about God is because God chose to reveal Himself to man either in creation or in special revelation.

John A. T. Robinson cogently states,

Man does not know some things by reason and some by revelation -- but all by revelation. Even the pagan world can know only "because God himself has disclosed it to them" [Romans 1:19].<sup>160</sup>

It is just this fact which makes Paul's argument valid. There are two indivisible factors at work which are founded squarely in the ontological Christian perspective of Creation. The first being that creation in general is so designed that it manifests the character of the Designer (Romans 1:20; 10:18;

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<sup>159</sup> Mayers. Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic, p. 199.

<sup>160</sup> John A. T. Robinson. Wrestling With Romans. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), p. 22.

Ps. 19:1-4). Murray, speaking to this matter writes,

Phenomena disclose the noumena of God's transcendent perfection and specific divinity. It is not a finite cause that the work of creation manifests but the eternal power and divinity of the Creator. This is but another way of saying that God has left the imprints of his glory upon his handiwork and this glory is manifest to all -- "God manifested it unto them" [Romans 1:19].<sup>161</sup>

The second factor is that man in particular is made in the image of God so that the truth of God's Being is in him (Romans 1:19). Mayers writes,

Paul used the natural revelation of God within as well as the natural revelation outside man in total compatibility with Romans 1:19-20. He has also shown us that we can legitimately argue from man to God on the basis of the ontological similarity between God and man through God's image in man.<sup>162</sup>

These two factors are indivisible philosophically as well as theologically. The ontological uniqueness of both man and his world as creations of God (natural revelation) make it possible to move the unbeliever from the truth of natural revelation to the much larger truth of special revelation -- salvific truth not revealed in creation, but not contradicted by natural revelation either. By God's design, the two factors of natural revelation fit together to form the necessary epistemological framework from which man can make sense of his world and know that there is a God. Not only can he know that there is a God, but by virtue of these two ontological factors, he can know that this God, of necessity, must be a certain kind of God (Romans 1:20).

Depending on the degree of intensity with which man suppresses this truth, each man has a certain degree of true understanding of his world and God. Natural revelation is limited and can never show man that Christ died for him, for this is the work of special revelation.

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<sup>161</sup>Ned Stonehouse. gen. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), vol. 1: The Epistle to the Romans, by John Murray, p. 40.

<sup>162</sup>Mayers. Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic, p. 167.

Consequently, this is the point of Paul's apologetic methodology. He begins with what the non-believer can understand, regardless how elementary it may be, and builds a case for the Judeo-Christian God who raised His Son, Jesus, from the dead. Once he establishes the kind of God (i.e. a scriptural ontological content for God which is supported by evidence in the created order) he can build a case for God speaking and acting in history (i.e. the resurrection).

Paul's hearers do not need to know the propositional truth statements about God on which Paul predicates his argument. Special revelation and natural revelation are not contrary to each other. For example, Genesis 1:1 says the same thing propositionally as creation says ontologically. Paul does not need to quote verses, though they are implied (or at least the truth of them is implied). He simply needs to be guided by them until the argument comes to the point borne only by special revelation. But until then, Paul can point to natural revelation and give a theistic interpretation of those facts without fear that it will contradict the way the world really is. On the other hand, he can speak of the world as it really is, without fear of contradicting the scriptural position on such.

In dealing with an analysis of Paul's apologetic methodology, his position regarding a logical starting point and common ground has been dealt with, as well as Paul's understanding of the relationship between faith and reason and his use of a correspondence/coherence test for truth. Still, there is another factor which needs to be addressed, and that has to do with the theological/historical subjects common to Paul's apology. At least one of these subjects is essential to his methodology, namely the resurrection. However, implicit in this is another subject, namely fulfilled prophecy, because where the resurrection is mentioned there will be either an explicit

or an implicit use of fulfilled prophecy (I Corinthians 15:4). Marshall agreeingly writes,

Theologically, we have established the important place of the resurrection in the early Church as the decisive act whereby in accordance with prophecy God exalted his Son to be the Lord and revealed him to chosen witnesses in order that they might preach the good news of forgiveness in his name.<sup>163</sup>

In each of Paul's apologies, his message includes the subject of the resurrection.<sup>164</sup> This, as mentioned above, indicates that each of Paul's apologies included the gospel. Acts 17:2 speaks of Paul "reasoning" with the Jews in the synagogue and verse 3 declares that this involved preaching the gospel. Acts 18:4, 19 and Acts 19:8 employ similar terminology referring to Paul's activity in the synagogue. Therefore, the gospel is explicit in Acts 17:2 and implicit in Acts 18:4, 19; 19:8, and if the gospel is preached, then of necessity the resurrection is preached (Romans 4:24, 25; 10:9).

Likewise, Peter's apologies include the resurrection (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:26; 10:40). The matter is so obvious in Paul's preaching (and Peter's) that the resurrection stands out as the keystone in Paul's apologetic methodology. Paul begins with God, moves to the resurrection, and then calls for faith in this resurrected Christ. The resurrection loses its meaning without a theistic world view, so he begins with God. If God is the kind of God a Creator God must be, then He can raise the dead. If, according to His predictions, Jesus was raised from the dead, then this verifies the truth-claims

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<sup>163</sup> I. Howard Marshall. "The Resurrection in the Acts of the Apostles". Apostolic History and the Gospel. eds. W. W. Gasque and Ralph Martin. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 107.

<sup>164</sup> The resurrection factor is not found in the Acts 14:15-18 apology. However, whereas it is a very brief account, it is possible, for editorial purposes, that Luke does not include the entire substance of the speech. It seems likely that Paul did include the resurrection, because he claims he always preached Christ (Romans 1:15-16), and Christ cannot be preached without mentioning the resurrection (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

of Christ. If this is so, then the hearer can be logically and intelligently enjoined to believe on this One.

It was stated earlier that the resurrection is the keystone to the apologetic methodology of Paul, and in the sense that the work of apologetics is to defend the truth-claims of Christianity and to declare the Gospel message, this observation is valid. That is, the resurrection is the historically verifiable (Acts 13:30-37; I Corinthians 15:1-8) God-act which verifies who God is, and it is the resurrection which is the core of the Gospel (Romans 10:9; Acts 17:20-31; I Corinthians 15:12-20). Also it is explicitly stated that the purpose of the Twelve was to be witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:22). In this way it is the keystone.

Some other issues in Paul's apology include: man (Acts 13:23; 14:15; 17:28, 29), repentance (Acts 13:24; 14:15; 17:30), and judgment (Acts 13:39-41 [implied]; Acts 17:31). If the flow of his apology were to be diagrammed, it would show the flow looking something like this:

Acts 14 (Gentiles):

God Creator --> Man --> Common Grace

Acts 17 (Gentiles):

God Creator --> Man --> Repentance --> Judgment --> Jesus --> Resurrection  
--> Belief

Acts 13 (Jews and Gentile Proselytes):

God of Israel --> History --> David --> Jesus --> Resurrection --> Belief

Peter's Apology would look like this:

Acts 2 (Jews):

God of History/Prophecy --> Jesus --> Resurrection --> Belief

Acts 3 (Jews):

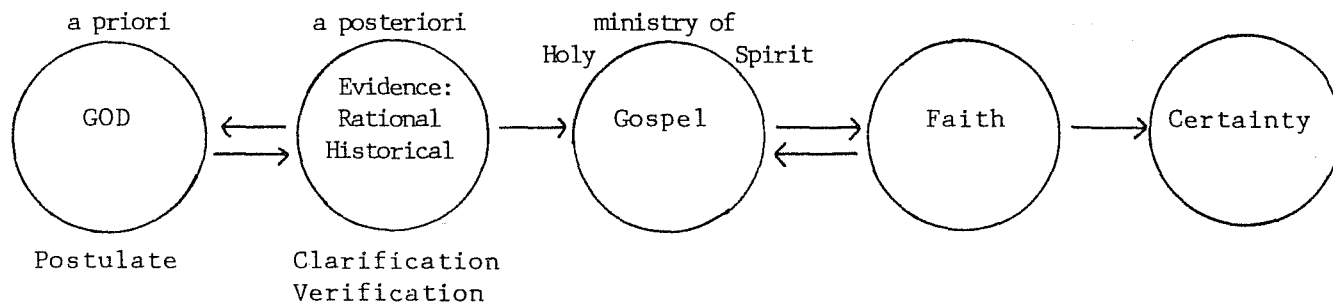
God of Abraham --> Jesus --> Resurrection --> Revelation --> Repentance --> Belief

Acts 10 (Gentile influenced by Judaism):

God Savior for all Men --> Jesus --> Resurrection --> Judgment --> Belief  
Belief in all cases is either stated or implied because that is the point  
of doing apologetics (Romans 1:15-16 cf Acts 2:41; 4:4, 32; 13:48; 17:4;  
34; 18:8).

In each apology examined, Paul's methodology begins by postulating God (Acts 13:16; 14:15; 17:24). The word "postulate" is used in the sense of a fundamental truth assumed to be true for the purpose of establishing a world view which adequately explains man's world and is confirmed from the evidence in man's world. It is in this sense that it is suggested Paul postulates that God is. He then verifies that God is and clarifies who God is by appealing to a rational argument based on evidence. For the Jew the evidence came from history (Acts 13:17-29) in light of biblical history and prophecy. Before the Gentiles, he introduced evidence from natural revelation (Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-29). Earlier this method has been referred to as verifiable postulation-alism. Paul did not simply state that God is and then go directly to the gos-pel. Instead he built a case for God's Being so that the gospel message is proclaimed within a Judeo-Christian theistic context, which is the only way the gospel makes sense. Paul's apologetic methodology looks like this:

VERIFIABLE POSTULATIONALISM



(Figure 1)



Paul speaks with certainty that God is, because he has believed. However, he does not expect the unbeliever to accept such statements about God merely because he says so. Nonetheless, Paul speaks with certainty and then demonstrates the reasonableness of God and consequently, the reasonableness of faith in God. He postulates God for the unbeliever and then introduces evidence to verify that God is and clarify who God is. Before the Gentile audience he uses evidence from natural revelation (cosmological premise - Acts 17:24-29; teleological premise - Acts 14:17) as well as the resurrection (Acts 17:31), and before the Jewish audience he uses special revelation (fulfilled prophecy - Acts 13:17-29) as well as the resurrection (Acts 13:30, 33). From there he moves to the gospel and when one believes, the Holy Spirit gives that individual certainty that his faith is well-founded, based upon the authority of God's Word.

Paul understood man as one made in the image of God and the need to start with God, while at the same time appealing to the events/facts to verify his postulate. Since it is God's world, the events/facts can in reality have only one interpretation which in fact will point to God. This has been developed elsewhere in the thesis, and it is sufficient to say that Paul's apologetic methodology by today's categories was an eclectic system.

Paul's apologetic methodology epitomized his ministerial confession in I Corinthians 9:21-22 which is summarized by the words, "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some" (I Corinthians 9:22b). His apologetic agenda was always the same, but the selection of the events/facts with which to make his apology was always judiciously relevant to each particular audience. He argued philosophically, historically, theologically and experientially for the truth-claims of Christianity. Paul respected the dignity and uniqueness (imageness) of men while recognizing that all men are

sinners and in need of a Savior. His apologetic methodology was committed to more than showing Christianity to be true, it was equally committed to showing men their need of Christ (I Corinthians 1:23, 24). Consequently, his apologetic methodology included both a defense for the truth-claims of Christianity and a declaration of the Gospel with the resurrection forming the keystone. It was never an end in itself, but rather a viable means under the direction of the Holy Spirit whereby some men might be brought to Christ (I Corinthians 2:4, 5).

With these observations made, the final task is to formulate a viable apologetic method for today using Paul's methodology as an apologetic paradigm.

#### **TOWARD A VIABLE APOLOGETIC**

From what has been said, it becomes apparent that a viable apologetic is neither methodologically wholly presuppositional nor evidential, but rather it is an eclectic methodology. As Mayers concludes,

Presuppositionalists want to begin with God, evidentialists with ourselves; the balanced apologist says start with both God and ourselves simultaneously, as these cannot be broken apart.<sup>165</sup>

Mayers refers to the balanced apologetic as a "both/and" apologetic which seems to identify handily Paul's apologetic methodology and hence serve as a model for present day Christians. However, in this thesis, the methodology has been designated as verifiable postulationalism, because although it starts with God, there is an appeal to the evidence in man's world to verify and clarify the starting point which is God. This apologetic framework is not seen as one internally inconsistent, but rather, as Mayers correctly suggests,

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<sup>165</sup> Mayers, Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic, p. 198.

. . . the debate between evidentialists and presuppositionalists over self-interpreting facts or God-interpreting facts is artificial, since both sides accept and believe that this is a God-created world with a God-sanctioned history.<sup>166</sup>

Therefore, both a priori and a posteriori considerations have their place in a viable apologetic methodology.

#### LOGICAL STARTING POINT

The Christian's logical starting point must be God, based on at least three facts: (1) a theistic world view is needed before the Christian truth-claims have meaning, (2) because of the ontological uniqueness of man (imageness) each man has within him the innate knowledge that there is a God, and (3) the ontological nature of creation reveals that there is a God and indicates something about what that God is like.

However, not all men are at the same philosophical place, nor have all men suppressed to the same degree the truth within them. Therefore, while the starting point is always God, the truth statement concerning God may not be the same. The two extremes would be similar to the Jewish audience on the one hand and the Gentile pagans on the other. The former, who have been confronted with special revelation, may already have a theistic world view as far as it can go apart from regeneration. With that group it may be sufficient to begin at a truth-level known only by special revelation, eg. "God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world." As Schaeffer points out, "If we find the man ready to receive Christ as Savior, then by all means let us not talk about presuppositions, but tell him the glorious good news."<sup>167</sup> The latter audience illustrates those who have either never been confronted

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Francis Schaeffer. The God Who Is There. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 127.

with special revelation, or the confrontation resulted in extreme negativism, and/or those who radically suppressed the truth within them. For those in that extreme category, it is necessary to begin at a very elementary truth-level, such as God as the Creator of the universe, and from there build a case for the truth-claims of Christianity within a theistic world view.

Carnell writes,

He [the Christian] shows that granting the hypothesis of the existence of God Who has revealed Himself in Scripture, he can produce a system of philosophy which is horizontally self-consistent, i.e. which makes peace with the laws of contradiction, and which vertically fits the facts of life. Having fulfilled these two standards, the Christian is assured that there is enough rational evidence for him to believe in a super-naturalistically ordered universe.<sup>168</sup>

The Christian (remember it has been proposed that every Christian is to do the work of apologetics) must be sensitive to the philosophical and theological mindset of the unbeliever being addressed and begin conversation at the highest truth-level comprehensible to the hearer. This insight comes through an understanding of man and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Philosophical questions must be dealt with honestly and responsibly, but it must not be assumed that each man is of the same philosophical orientation nor at the same philosophical level, for no man lives in a sterile philosophical environment, nor does he mature in a cultural vacuum. Therefore, each man must be approached in light of existential realities, philosophical possibilities, and theological absolutes. The proposed apologetic methodology allows for this very thing.

#### COMMON GROUND

Common ground exists between the believer and the non-believer by virtue of the ontological qualities of creation in general and man in

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<sup>168</sup> Carnell, p. 355.

particular. Mayers (although he denies epistemological common ground) addresses the matter of ontological common ground when he writes,

This ontological nature of man made in God's image and living in God's universe, then not only necessitates a natural revelation outside of man by which the visible things point to the invisible God, but also a natural revelation within man through his intuitive God-consciousness. The ontological nature of man provides him not only with the moral law written on his heart and his artistic and mental creativities, but also with the sub-structure of logic to differentiate this from that empirically. Man is also provided with the possibility of meaningful linguistic communication between God and himself and among men. Man could not comprehend God's special and propositional revelation without God's endowment of logic. Both natural and special revelation come only to the creature who has the prerequisite abilities to logically differentiate this from that by being made in God's image.<sup>169</sup>

However, it seems that in light of man's ontological uniqueness there is also epistemological common ground, and the unbeliever, depending upon the intensity of his suppression of truth, can be confronted at some truth level in meaningful communication. The Jewish audience (Acts 13) possibly is an example of a low degree of suppression, while the Gentile pagan audience (Acts 14) reflects the other extreme among unbelievers. The former could be appealed to on the basis of special revelation, the latter on the ontological realities of creation.

Wisdom and the leading of the Holy Spirit are essential in determining valid points of contact with each hearer. It must not be assumed that just because man is a sinful creature he is meaningless and lives a meaningless existence in this world. He is a creature made in the image of God and must live in God's world, which necessitates knowing truth about his world which is knowing truth about God.

#### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON**

Reason understands revelation, but does not ultimately sit in judgment over revelation, but neither is revelation -- natural or special - non-reason. The faculty of reason is the God-given ability which enables man to understand

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<sup>169</sup>Mayers, Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic, pp. 109, 200.

God's world and His Word. Nash writes, "The laws of reason are the same for both God and humans."<sup>170</sup> Consequently, reason and faith are neither mutually exclusive nor contradictory operations. It will be remembered that Acts 17:2; 18:4; 19:8, revealed that Paul first "reasoned" with men which the Holy Spirit used to lead many to belief who listened to his "reasoning" (Acts 17:4; 18:8; 19:18). This indicates that reason leads to faith (Romans 10:17). As Schaeffer points out,

Knowledge precedes faith. This is crucial in understanding the Bible. To say, as a Christian should, that only the faith which believes God on the basis of knowledge is true faith, is to say something which causes an explosion in the twentieth-century world.<sup>171</sup>

Nash adds that "God's Word is true and what God teaches will always be consistent with whatever humans discover. The truth of faith and the truth of reason can never conflict logically."<sup>172</sup>

#### **A TEST FOR TRUTH**

This is a necessary part of apologetics although not always expressed explicitly within an apology. The Christian's authority is the Word of the eternal Creator God. However, the non-believer, being a rational being, needs to see the superiority of the truth-claims of Christianity over other religious truth-claims. The test for truth which is reflected in the Apostle Paul's apologetic methodology and which best serves the apologetic enterprise is two-fold, i.e. one of correspondence and coherence. Carnell refers to this test as "systematic consistency",<sup>173</sup> namely, that the system corresponds to reality and it has internal coherence.

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<sup>170</sup> Nash, p. 90.

<sup>171</sup> Schaeffer, The God Who Is There, p. 142.

<sup>172</sup> Nash, p. 90.

<sup>173</sup> Carnell, pp. 56-62.

This two-fold test for truth provides both an external test as well as an internal test for the truth-claim. That is, each truth-claim must correspond to what is known to be true by observation and the sum of the Christian truth-claims must form a coherent harmonious whole.

It is conceivable that a truth-claim could give a possible explanation of the world as it is known to be without being in harmony with other truth-claims of the same system. Likewise, it is possible to construct a coherent system of truth-claims which would not reflect reality. Systematic consistency protects against each potential problem and provides an objective test for the truthfulness of the truth-claim of Christianity, because such claims satisfy both requirements -- external correspondence and internal coherence. Carnell refers to the two-fold test as "horizontal" and "vertical" corresponding to what has been referred to here as "internal" and "external" respectively.

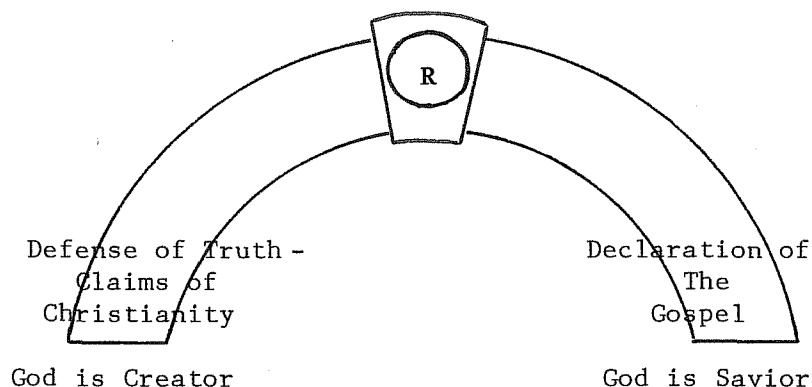
#### **THE RESURRECTION**

The last matter to be discussed is the place in the apologetic methodology for the resurrection. It was stated earlier that the resurrection formed the keystone of Paul's apology, and evidence was given to support that conclusion. Now it is suggested that for the same reasons, the resurrection forms the keystone to the apologetic methodology proposed in this thesis.

Chapter one made a case for the fact that every apologetic method should include the defense of the truth-claims of Christianity and a declaration of the Gospel. Keeping the idea of the "keystone", the apologetic methodological arch involves starting with God and arguing to the resurrection. The resurrection is the climactic historically verifiable God-act

which verifies who God is (according to the truth-claims of Jesus), and it is the resurrection which forms the core of the Gospel. In diagram form it looks like this:

THE APOLOGETICAL METHODOLOGICAL ARCH



(Figure 2)

In summary, the suggested apologetic methodology involves both a priori and a posteriori considerations. The logical starting point is God,<sup>174</sup> epistemological and ontological common ground is granted, reason is

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<sup>174</sup> Some may object that this is a viable apologetic methodology, because it does not take into account the atheist. However, the point is made by Carnell that there is in reality no such philosophical specimen among the human race (Carnell, An Introduction to Christian Apologetics, p. 186). However, for any who still claim to be an atheist, they should be approached in the same fashion as outlined in this thesis which includes the presentation of the gospel, trusting the Spirit of God to work in the unbelieving heart (John 16:7-11). Yet, as indicated above, Paul would not simply give the gospel and then walk away from the atheist. Instead, he would demonstrate the reasonableness of the Christian message as well as attempt to dismantle the atheist's faulty world-view by using evidence such as was used at Lystra, in order to show the inadequacy of a non-God world view. At the same time this line of argumentation would be directed to awaken the sense of creatureliness within the individual (Romans 1:18-25). Paul would use any and all epistemological and/or ontological common ground possible in order to engage the atheist in meaningful argumentation in order to establish the validity of his starting point. From there he would move to the gospel, the keystone being the resurrection.



utilized (but not exalted over revelation), the test for truth is systematic consistency and the resurrection-event is the keystone.

While this forms the apologetic methodological skeleton, the "fleshing-out" of the apology is determined by the nature of the audience. There are different truth-levels, different points of contact, different types of evidences, and different degrees of the development of logic for different audiences, but all are supported on and limited by the philosophical/theological strength of the apologetic methodological skeleton. Furthermore, it is the Holy Spirit alone Who gives the total apologetic creation dynamic breath whereby it accomplishes the purposes of God in the souls of men.

Admittedly, a full-blown apologetic methodology has not been presented, but such was not the burden of this thesis. Instead, an apologetic methodological agenda has been proposed, suggesting a combination of both presuppositionalism and evidentialism. This methodology has been referred to as verifiable postulationalism and has been developed from the example of the Apostle Paul. Its contribution lies in the fact that it provides the base for a balanced apologetic methodology, one which offers potential for every Christian engaged in the enterprise of apologetics.

## CONCLUSION

As the Twentieth Century draws to a close, the Christian community, and evangelicals in particular, are confronted with a pressing challenge. The essence of this challenge is the effective defense of the Christian truth-claims and a meaningful communication of the Gospel before a radically changing culture in the midst of a cybernetic revolution. Concurrently, theological erosion, philosophical inroads of humanism, naturalism, and secularism, as well as a kaleidoscope of Eastern religions and their cognates have all contributed to the destruction of a Judeo-Christian world view in the present society. Consequently, no longer does the Christian community have the luxury of speaking to its culture with the same degree of assurance it once did, where a Judeo-Christian world-view was generally accepted.

In light of this, there is a growing need in Christian conversation to establish the basis for a true theistic world view without which the Christian message of grace and salvation will be subject to the interpretive influence of the variant world views of the hearers. As the differences in world views between the Christian and his culture increase, and the gap widens, the Christian must do more than speak his religious words louder. For this reason there needs to be a renewed commitment to the work of apologetics on the part of each concerned Christian who seeks to be obedient to his risen Lord.

God has not left the Church without pertinent instruction for this enterprise. Appropriately, Scripture records the ministry of the Apostle Paul, providing the Christian with a quintessential apologetic methodology from which those who wish may be instructed. Paul's theistic starting point, his versatile defense techniques, his emphasis on the resurrection, his

uncompromising allegiance to the Truth, his dependence on the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, his skillful argumentation couched in meaningful language and concepts of his hearers, his sensitivity to his hearers, and his genuine concern for people as persons made in the image of God all contribute to the development of a biblically balanced apologetic as an instrument by which an alienated community can be reached with the claims of Christianity.

In the interest of Truth and the advancement of the Kingdom of God, the Christianity community needs to re-examine what it is doing methodologically in the field of apologetics, as well as who should do the work of apologetics, in order that the claims of Christianity might be more effectively communicated to this generation. Admittedly, this thesis has not addressed all the issues, or answered all the questions, but its content is respectfully submitted as a contribution toward a viable apologetic methodology for every Christian whereby he might fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission.

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