Before you start...

- Read through the relevant Unit Guide (under Moodle, Unit Guides)
- Order the set class texts – pdf’s for these are not online from week 3 onwards
- Download this learning guide, and have it open on your computer ready to edit if you are a class-based student.
- There are no pre-readings for this week. Note that Moodle readings within this module are to be read during this week (according to the lecture schedule, p6 unit guide) in preparation for next week’s lectures. For e.g., 1_BBText.pdf is pre-reading for module 2.

1. INTRODUCTION

This module introduces students to a narrative approach to apologetics. That is, as we clearly understand “the big story” God has revealed in Scripture, the questions and objections people have take on new meaning. At the close of this activity, we’ll use post-it-notes to register tough questions, using these at the start of each subsequent lesson for two students to give a one minute response to one of these questions. The second agenda for this lesson is to go over the unit guide (course outline), discuss assessment, and share the reason why we’re doing this subject. Who, in particular, has God laid on our heart? What are their questions, or objections? How can we pray for them? We’ll finish this module with a brief introduction to the field of Apologetics - What is it? Why do it? And how should we do it.

OBJECTIVES
The objectives of this module are to:
1. Frame our approach to apologetics around ‘the big story’ – a narrative apologetic.
2. Examine what apologetics actually is, and the basic contours of this field

OUTCOMES
On completion of this module, the student shall be expected to outline the five scenes of the big story as a frame for apologetic answers, and explain what apologetics is – it’s audience and function.

SESSION FLOW (lecture runs 6:15-9:00pm, breaks from 7:05-7:10pm, and 7:55-8:05pm)

6:15 Welcome, and “What story am I in?” – a narrative approach to apologetics (50 minutes)
7:10 Unit Introduction + Student Introduction + The Apologist’s Prayer (45 minutes)
8:05 What is Apologetics?
2. **WHAT STORY AM I IN?**

### Resource 1.1

Distance students can listen to a 1 hour mp3 equivalent to this module section online at [http://www.cbconline.org.au/downloads/20110918-DavidBenson-TheBigStory.mp3](http://www.cbconline.org.au/downloads/20110918-DavidBenson-TheBigStory.mp3), or download the mp3 on Moodle, Module 1, *Extra Resources for this Module: 1_Benson_The Big Story mp3 (58meg 1hr3min) file.*

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### 2.1 Why?!?

Perhaps you’re a “why” kinda’ person. I was. Everything needed an answer. *Apologetics* wasn’t about proving my faith, or even persuading others … it was about making sense of life. I figured good questions deserve good answers—that God gave us a mind to think. He wants us to love Him with everything we’ve got, and this *includes* our intellect, our mind *(Matthew 22:37-40).*

Besides which, we can’t embrace with our heart what our mind rejects as false. *(Tell that to a wife who doubts her husband’s fidelity.)*

If Jesus really is the “true light” and logic *(logos)* of the world *(John 1:9)*, who illuminates all that is—the source from which flows all that is true, good, and beautiful—then there was no need to be afraid of asking for His help while I searched in the dark. My head and my heart could align, bringing me life, and helping me point others towards what might make sense of their existence also.

### 2.2 Caught Out – Tough Questions take on new shape when in a STORY

Over the years I’ve done a lot of apologetics—helping both Christians and non-Christians alike discover the reason for the hope we have in Christ *(1 Peter 3:15).* Perhaps the most interesting experience was working with a team of apologists called “Logos”, surveying 600 yet-to-be-Christians about their major stumbling blocks in believing in and following Jesus. We put this together in a talk called “Caught Out: Quick Answers to Tough Questions”, available [here](http://www.cbconline.org.au/downloads/20110918-DavidBenson-TheBigStory.mp3).

During the process of “Caught Out”, I discovered that many of our team struggled to answer the barrage of questions and objections, as they seemed like individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to be memorised, one by one. “What about God and suffering?” “Why does God send people to Hell?” “What’s the point of the church, anyway?” … they were isolated facts. HOWEVER, when seen as of one part of a bigger story, the answers took form. It was less about memorising facts, then understanding the story we’re in. Once we got that right, most of the big questions were answered in simply telling our story right.

The Big Story is like a jigsaw box-top, helping us arrange all the pieces in their appropriate place.

Like Lord of the Rings, we sense we’re part of something bigger.
But have you ever seen that show, “Thank God You’re Here!”?

Life is like that ... we step through a door into literally God knows what, and we spend the rest of our time trying to work out what kind of story we’re in.

To know how to act in the present, you need to know the back story—where it’s been, and where it’s going ... Unless you know the shape of your story, you don’t know how to act.

But WHICH STORY?

There is no shortage of stories that try to tell us what life is about—that we’re a chemical accident, or that existence is illusory, or that we’re the experiment of a disinterested God. The problem, as humans, is that none of us has a bird’s eye view to objectively see the kind of story we’re in. Starting from ourselves and reasoning up, we can’t answer the big questions of how we got here, the meaning of life, the cause of the human problem, the solution to this dilemma, and where we’re headed.

But what if there was a story that just ‘fit’? ... a story that made sense of how we got here, of life’s meaning, the heart of our problem, and the solution to it all? What if there is a director who is not silent?

THIS is Christianity, and the story is found in the Bible. This story claims to offer the master perspective—a kind of bird’s eye view—which is a key to unlock all of life.

The invitation is to step through this door, into this particular story, and see if life doesn’t make more sense than any other story provides. For if we truly understand the story we’re in, then we can faithfully improvise in the present. For we all live according to the story we think we’re in.

And in the process, as Christians we’ll have the ‘box-top’. Understanding (and telling) the story right gives us the all-embracing narrative frame to answer all those jigsaw-sized apologetic questions as part of a coherent and compelling picture.
2.3 The BIG STORY

Resource 1.2

Distance students can follow the hyperlink below to watch a 7 minute video presentation of “The Big Story” (also known as “the five circles”): http://pathways.kbc.org.au/passing/passing-evangelism/the-big-story-video/.

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**Designed for good**
We were made to love God, love each other, and tend this garden planet . . .

**Damaged by evil**
Instead, we’ve despised God, abused others, and vandalized our world.
“Sin” pollutes, perverts and destroys life

**Restored for better**
We’re forgiven, freed, healed, and transformed by Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection

**Sent together to heal**
Jesus has empowered us with God’s Spirit to live the resurrection hope

**Set everything right**
We await the day Jesus returns to deal with all evil, rule fairly, and set everything right
—a transformed world, God with us, and real peace

“The big story is that God designed us all for good, but through our bad choices we’ve been damaged by evil. But, through Jesus’ life, death on the cross, and resurrection, we’ve been restored for better. If you’re humble enough to admit to God that you fall short, and ask Him to forgive you for the wrong you’ve done, putting God first, then you can connect with life to the full—what God always intended for you. Then you can join other Christ-followers, empowered by God’s Spirit, sent together to heal a hurting world, waiting for the day when God will set everything right by judging all the evil and restoring the whole universe.”

iado What are your questions? What objections have you faced? Stick post-it notes on whichever of the 5 circles is most relevant (or in the centre if it doesn’t quite fit). We’ll discuss 2 of these a week for the rest of the course, students choosing one and taking a minute to respond.
2.4 LOST and FOUND

At times we all get lost in the story. But when we doubt, it’s okay. Jesus has been there before us. He is the perfect guide. But unlike heroes of the big screen, he is no mythical saviour. As J. R. R. Tolkien (author of *Lord of the Rings*) explained,

“The Gospels contain a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of other stories. But this story has entered history and the primary world. This story is supreme. This story is true.”

Reflection Activities 1.1 & 1.2

In place of class discussion, online/distance students are required to complete a series of reflections – 4 per week (see p. 10 of the Unit Guide). For each reflection activity, journal at least 30 (meaningful!) words, and tick off the related box on p. 12 of the Unit Guide.

1.1 How might better understanding and telling ‘the big story’ have helped in a recent apologetic encounter you had?

1.2 What question(s) or objection(s) have you most frequently encountered, and to which of the 5 circles does it most relate?

3. UNIT INTRODUCTION, STUDENT INTRO, & THE APOLOGIST’S PRAYER

During this time we will briefly discuss the Unit Guide, assessment requirements, and answer any particular questions students may have.

Students will each share their name, home church, and why they are doing this course.

For me as lecturer, I’m motivated by those who have genuine questions, and don’t yet know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. For me, one of these people is Fran. Who is it for you?

Take a minute to pray for this person by name, and keep them in mind across the course. Apologetics is not giving ‘abstract’ or ‘generic’ answers—impersonal ‘truth’—for your own amusement. Rather, apologetics is always PERSON-CENTRED: “What needs does this particular neighbour have, and how might I love them through this apologetic encounter?”

SO, as the course progresses, keep asking yourself PRACTICALLY, “What questions could I ask, and how might I share what I’m learning in a way that meets ______ where they’re at?”

Together, let’s pray “The Apologist’s Prayer” from C. S. Lewis, to keep our heart right:

“From all my lame defeats and oh! Much more
From all the victories that I seemed to score;
From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;
From all my proofs of Thy divinity,
Thou, who wouldst give me no sign, deliver me.

Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust, instead
Of Thee, their thin-worn image of Thy head.
From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,
O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.
Lord of the narrow gate and the needle’s eye,
Take from me all my trumpery lest I die.”
Reflection Activity 1.3

1.3 Who has God most put on your heart, to listen to, and point towards Jesus? Why do they matter to you so much? And what particular questions and objections do they have? Take a minute to pray for them now.

4. WHAT IS APOLOGETICS?

‘Apologetics’ is no new enterprise for Christians: Paul dialogued with the Areopagus on Mars Hill unveiling the ‘unknown God’; Justin Martyr defended the faith in the face of persecution; Thomas Aquinas integrated Aristotelian logic with Biblical revelation; C.S. Lewis patiently explained the reasonability of ‘Mere Christianity’ for war-torn Europe; and Josh McDowell compiled numerous ‘evidences that demand a verdict’ for rationalist sceptics. Wherever the ‘good news’ of Christ has gone out, apologetics has been associated.

What, then, is apologetics? Let’s begin with the Bible. Following is probably the most central verse associated with the apologetic endeavour.

> “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”
> (1 Peter 3:15b-16a)

In the verse above, defense comes from the Greek apologia. This word is used eight times in the New Testament, and in three very similar contexts:

- Open your Bible and look up the following verses ...

1) Providing a defense (Acts 22:1; Philippians 1:7, 17);

**Phi 1:7** It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

2) Giving an answer (Acts 25:16; 1 Corinthians 9:3; 2 Timothy 4:16; 1 Peter 3:15);

3) Clearing oneself (2 Corinthians 7:11).

> “Apologia” – Greek – used in a legal representation – to ‘speak away’ the accusation

In all contexts, it is fair to say that an ‘apologia’ comprises a reasoned statement of belief, whether to defend or commend one’s reputation, decisions, doctrines, or faith.

We see, particularly in the first and second categories, both the negative and positive elements of apologetics. In providing a defense, the apologist deals with objections, meeting the accuser point by point in a gracious manner. In giving an answer, the apologist seeks to commend a positive argument that connects with their reality, rationality, and experience. We similarly see Paul give commendations in Colossians 4:5-6 to “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”
Moving, now, to the more popular usage of ‘apologetics’ in the current context, it diversifies somewhat. In the broadest terms, *apologetics* properly includes “*anything* that helps people take Christianity more seriously than they did before, *anything* that helps defend and commend it . . . .”

Alister McGrath defined “apologetics as bearing witness to the glory of God.” Thus, apologetics is concerned not simply with truth and the intellect, but also goodness and beauty. For the narrower purposes of this subject, and following David Clark, “apologetics is best defined as the art of the reasoned defense of the Christian faith in the context of personal dialogue.”

These definitions retain the original intent. Apologetics always involves a negative (or defensive/reactive) mode in blocking objections, as we establish plausibility. This is accompanied by a positive (or offensive/proactive) mode, in which we commend the beauty and attraction of the faith, best seen in the person of Christ (Stackhouse, 115). McGrath points out (12) that ‘apologetics is not about winning arguments – it is about winning people.’

**From Scripture: defensive: Proverbs 21:22; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; 10:3-5**

**Pro 21:22** A wise man scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust.

**2Co 10:3** For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.
**2Co 10:4** For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.
**2Co 10:5** We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

**2Co 4:3** And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.
**2Co 4:4** In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
**2Co 4:5** For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.
**2Co 4:6** For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

**What examples from Scripture come to mind of defensive apologetics?**

**From Scripture: offensive: Psalm 34:8; John 1:14; Colossians 1:15**

**Joh 1:9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
**Joh 1:10** He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.
**Joh 1:11** He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.
**Joh 1:12** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,
**Joh 1:13** who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
**Joh 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**Col 1:15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

*We don’t need to persuade someone that something is beautiful – they see this – we must make it clear.*

**What examples from Scripture come to mind of offensive apologetics?**

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4.1 Different Dimensions of Apologetics

Watch this youtube click:

Reflection Activity 1.4

1.4 After reading the notes below on the 'dimensions of apologetics', come up with your own brief definition you could share with a new believer that answers “What is apologetics?”

In simplest terms ...

**Apologetics** is about defending and commending the Christian faith: dealing with objections, barriers and misunderstandings to faith, and also highlighting what is true, good, and beautiful about Christianity as a whole, and Jesus the Christ, in particular.

It isn’t the preserve of some cloistered academic, the professional apologist. Rather, any time you speak with another about Christianity—especially those outside the faith—in some sense you’re engaged in apologetics. It’s not about whether to engage, or not engage in apologetics. Rather, it’s about encouraging or discouraging the other from seriously considering Christianity, based upon your engagement with them.

For that, however, we must recognise a number of key dimensions involved in the apologetic encounter.

4.1.1 The Apologist

**Joh 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We need both Word and Flesh, Message and Life; we must know the gospel, and also embody it. The best apologist is always ‘incarnational’. The actions and life of the apologist either make plausible (i.e., give warrant to -) or invalidate the message he or she shares. As Ravi Zacharias recognises in his book *Beyond Opinion*, one of the greatest apologetic challenges today is why, with the great promises of Christ and the Spirit, our lives hardly look different from those not connected to God (Romans 2:17-24; Titus 2:1-10).

**1Peter 3:13-16:**

“Now who is there to harm you if you are eager for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts sanctify Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”
Philosopher Linda Trinkhaus Zagzebski affirmed, “The experience of knowing holy people is still the most important evidence to me for the truth of Christianity.” However, Avery Dulles warns us at the beginning of his magisterial history of apologetics that

“Today the term apologetics carries unpleasant connotations. The apologist is regarded as an aggressive, opportunistic person who tries, by fair means or foul, to argue people into joining the Church. Numerous charges are laid at the door of apologetics: its neglect of grace, of prayer, and of the life-giving power of the word of God; its tendency to oversimplify and syllogize the approach to faith; its dilution of the scandal of the Christian message; and its implied presupposition that God’s word should be judged by the norm of fallible, not to say fallen, human reason.”

Thus, like the Christ, we must be people of both grace and truth (John 1:14). As John Stackhouse points out in his book *Humble Apologetics*,

“Offering one without the other is both relatively easy and actually harmful to the gospel: truth without grace (‘I tell the truth and let the chips fall where they may’) or grace without truth (‘I serve everyone and offend no one’). Instead, we are to live in the same way that the Apostle Paul tells us we are to speak: ‘Let no worthless word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is helpful for edification, according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those that hear [Ephesians 4:15, 29].’” (pp135-36)

Our apologetic must be a gift of grace to the other, a fulfilment of both the *Golden Rule* and the *Great Commandment* to LOVE:

“If you don’t communicate to me that you care about me, that your message is somehow going to benefit me rather than just you, then I’m going to resist it—whether you’re telling me life-changing gospel news or selling me a magazine subscription. So in terms of basic human communication, *Christians are foolish to try to speak without love.*” (Stackhouse, p. 137)

**Colossians 4:5-6:**

“Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”

As the apologist makes the most of every opportunity for the cause of loving their neighbour, she must know her strengths and weaknesses. You are merely a sign post to, rather than the fount of all, wisdom. And it’s a team effort with other believers. If you don’t know, say so! And connect your friend with other believers who will perhaps connect better with them—more on their wave length—than you do. It’s good to adapt your approach to your audience (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). However, you will always present better on some topics than others (e.g. the historicity of the resurrection), and your natural style of apologetics may or may not connect with the other (e.g. evidences, logic, or subjective appeal). Long story short, recognize your weaknesses, play to your strengths, and work as a team.

What is the best and worst example of an apologist you have seen?


Remember, *apologetics* is not telling someone why you’re sorry you are a Christian. Nor is *apologetics* making someone sorry he asked why you are a Christian!

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4.1.2 The Audience (and their spectrum of openness)

- Who are the audience for apologetics?
- What role does it play externally? What role does it play internally?
- What doubts have you struggled with? What help did church give in facing it?

There is both an external and an internal audience for apologetics. Externally, those outside the church—the unsaved, or not-yet-Christians—have many questions and barriers to faith. They often see Christianity as irrelevant, and need someone to paint with beauty who Christ is and how he relates to their reality. Again, the positive and negative aspect of apologetics comes into play. Apologetics may be, in this context, pre-evangelism: clearing away objections, tilling the soil of their mind and heart, in preparation for the sowing of the gospel seed.

Internally, those inside the church have many questions that can effectively block their faith if not brought into the open and dealt with. Apologetics has the purpose, in this context, of answering questions, grounding their faith, and helping equip and motivate them to go out and reach others.

Apologetics serves to both strengthen your own faith when God seems distant (2 Chronicles 32:31; Habakkuk 3:17-18), and provides a tool to commend Christ in sharing with another (1 Peter 3:15) helping prepare a heart responsive to the Father’s drawing (John 6:44).

Thinking particularly of a non-Christian audience, how should their “openness” (along a spectrum) affect your apologetic approach? Consider examples from Jesus’ own ministry, for instance the Rich Young Ruler, the woman by the well, or the woman caught in adultery.

Apologetics reaches its limits when either a person does not want to engage, or simply does not want (or desire) what Christ offers. We may commend Christ all we want to Playboy founder Hugh Hefner, but if his ultimate pursuit is sensual pleasure, then like the rich young ruler, we are likely casting pearls before swine. We can maintain he is making a bad choice—trading carnal gratification for spiritual delight—but “if they don’t want what we offer, than that is it. Only the Spirit of God can penetrate to the heart where such decisions are made” (Stackhouse, *Humble Apologetics*, p. 147f). We must know the limits of argumentation with our particular conversation partner. We ultimately can’t argue or persuade people to trust Jesus. We may simply need to offer them our best, prayerfully present the hard choice, and then let them walk away.

4.1.3 The Subject Matter

“Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.”—G. K. Chesterton

- What is the subject matter for apologetics?

A. Christianity as a whole
- Bible
- doctrine
- community/church
- traditions and history
- God’s existence

In this subject we’ll consider the case for faith, specifically for Christian Theism. That is, the belief that There is an infinite, all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving God who has revealed Himself by means natural and supernatural in creation, in the nature of man, in the history of Israel and the Church, in the pages of Holy Scripture, in the incarnation of God in Christ, and in the heart of the believer by the gospel.
Augustine is commonly attributed with the following ecumenical advice:

“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

Christians argue with outsiders and each other about all manner of subject matter. What, then, are our essentials?

As per the 5 circles activity, apologetics may defend and commend any of the core tenets of the big story:

- designed for good (creation);
- damaged by evil (fall);
- restored for better (Israel/Jesus);
- sent together to heal (church/mission);
- God sets everything right (new creation/judgment)

That said—irrespective of what we consider to be most important theologically—we often need to begin with the most pressing issue for them. Perhaps the inerrancy of the Bible, or the literality of 6 day creation, or the masculine identifier of God, is a key sticking point for the other. It is gracious to start at this point, even as we should encourage them onto more central issues. Jesus models this powerfully in John 4 with the woman at the well, acknowledging her question of ethnic and geographic controversy concerning on which mountain believers should worship God—“salvation comes from the Jews.” But His main strategy is to direct attention back to the inbreaking Kingdom of God, the heart and worship of spirit and truth that God accepts, and His own identity as the Messiah. That is, we must balance what our neighbours are asking AND what the gospel asks of them (Stackhouse, Humble Apologetics, pp. 187-88).

**B. Jesus in particular**

**John 5:39:**

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

Again, from Stackhouse (p189f.), the central subject matter of apologetics must be to focus on Jesus:

“Since the heart of God’s revelation of himself is the figure of Jesus Christ, and since the heart of the Christian story of salvation is the career of Jesus Christ, Christian apologetics . . . rightly focuses on Jesus Christ. The heart of the Christian religion is personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and it is this to which apologists hope to point their neighbours. Whenever we can, therefore, we aim to focus on Jesus Christ: not on Christian metaphysics, or Christian morals, or Christian membership. . . . We don’t talk about the Christian religion, furthermore, as a means to something else: social cohesion, perhaps, or moral uplift, or personal satisfaction. People should become Christians primarily because they want to follow Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

. . . So we leave aside secondary matters if we can. To put this another way, and perhaps too simply, we should avoid the popular apologetic zones located at the beginning and end of the Bible—‘creation versus evolution’ at the one end, and apocalyptic themes of judgment and rescue, heaven and hell, at the other—if our neighbour is willing to look with us at the heart of the Bible: the gospel testimony to general.”

Remember Nathanael, who asked his brother of Jesus, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” The heart of Philip’s message was not a geography or history lesson. Rather, it was an invitation: “Come and see.” In essence, Philip invited Nathanael to experience this person for himself: “what do you think of Jesus?” And in turn, Jesus’ apologetic was “Come, follow me.” We would do well to imitate.

**4.1.4 The Strength of One’s Claim**

The Protective Claim: “We are rationally warranted to hold our views.”

The Comparative Claim: “I believe my views are more warranted than another’s.”

The Imperative Claim: “My views alone are warranted.”

**Which strength of claim do you believe we can or should assert in commending Christianity?**
4.1.5  Limitations and Dangers of Apologetics

Reasoning, argument, and our actions alone cannot persuade anyone into faith. Only the combination of God’s drawing (John 6:44) and their choosing (cf. Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Mark 1:15) will bring conversion. As such, it is a partnership with God. Spiritual truth cannot be apprehended apart from the Holy Spirit’s illumination (1 Corinthians 2:16). Our attempts to open ears, establish trust, and arouse interest, are only effective inasmuch as God draws a person and that person willingly responds, ultimately in repentance (Acts 3:19; 2 Timothy 2:25).

Besides pride and arrogance (a major pitfall of apologists), two other dangers plague the apologetic enterprise:

A. CULTURAL CAPITULATION (changing our message)
Apologetics has always been a contentious enterprise. “Numerous charges are laid at the door of apologetics,” writes Avery Dulles in *A History of Apologetics*, “ . . . its neglect of grace, of prayer, and of the life-giving power of the word of God; its tendency to oversimplify and syllogize the approach to faith; its dilution of the scandal of the Christian message; and its implied presupposition that God’s word should be judged by the norm of fallible, not to say fallen, human reason.” Such charges caricature the master practitioners; yet in seeking to become “all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22, TNIV), apologists can easily distort their message according to the Zeitgeist of their age.

B. MISINFORMED CONTEXTUALIZATION (misunderstanding our audience)
Apologetics must always be done in culturally appropriate ways. Tony Jones, in *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, suggests we adopt a missional stance: “Much as a missionary might wear the native dress of the land in which she is living out of respect for the people, we may take on some of the apparel of our students and their culture. This is not selling out or backsliding. It is a wise, missionary tactic.” Questions, however, are raised. For instance, what precisely is the culture of those with whom we engage? Failure to answer this question may prove devastating to the apologetic enterprise. We may rightly seek to contextualize our witness, yet falsely read our audience, and thus further undermine Christian belief.

What example comes to mind when speaking of the limitations and dangers of apologetics?

4.1.6  Apologetics, Theology, Evangelism and Mission – Some Metaphors

In groups of 4, read Acts 17:16-34, to answer the following questions:

- How are *theology*, *study of religion*, *mission*, *apologetics*, and *evangelism* different?
- How do *theology*, *study of religion*, *mission*, *apologetics*, and *evangelism* work together?

You’ll need to put it in your own words, but here is my attempt:

With a clear understanding of our own foundational beliefs (*theology*), and a clear understanding of the beliefs of our interlocutor (*study of religion*), we go to them with the intent of making disciples of Christ (*mission*). As we dialogue, we build bridges from points of common contact, that we may defend and commend the plausibility, credibility and relevance of Christianity in a understandable way in that particular context (*apologetics*—always audience-specific). We seek not merely that God would through our words and His Spirit persuade them of the goodness, truth, and beauty of Christ. Our ultimate aim is to proclaim the good news of Christ, calling them to turn from their agenda to align with the Kingdom of God, trusting Jesus for their forgiveness of sins (*evangelism*).

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5 Ibid., xx.
6 Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 79. It is a wise tactic, provided we do not compromise our mission and message.
In closing, we can bring this together in two analogies:

1) Opening the Blinds:
Picture a dark house with windows covered by wooden blinds. The sun shines brilliantly outside, but no light enters for the blinds are shut. Apologetics gently opens the blinds so the light can shine in. Apologetics doesn’t make the light shine; it just opens one up to perceive it. Similarly, apologetics helps open one’s heart to the love of God found in the gospel, presented in evangelism. At this point, with the light clearly shining, one must decide whether they will embrace the light, or hide from it (John 3:19-21). It has been said that the same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay. Their response is between them and God – we are simply responsible for sharing the message. Apologetics makes that evangelistic message more understandable and relevant.

2) The Feast:
Picture a great feast, a banquet, prepared for those on the street. Apologetics helps explain to those not having seen the feast that it really exists. It deals with their objections, and helps commend how lovely, how satisfying it would be to eat and drink that lovely meal. It explains that they are invited, laying it all out for them to wisely choose. Evangelism brings it back to basics. “There’s a feast for you; are you coming?”

Is there another analogy connecting apologetics and evangelism that works better for you?

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Forum Activity Week 1

Take 200-300 words (including interaction with other students’ forum posts) to answer this question:

In your own praxis, what is the role of apologetics in relation to theology, evangelism, and mission?

[n.b. There are some additional hints on Moodle for this forum task which may help.]

Put your response on the Moodle Forum (200-300 words)

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Preparation for Next Week …

To help me (Dave – the lecturer!) get to know you, could you please bring a one page (preferably typed) PERSONAL PROFILE with a photo, answering the following questions in brief:
1) ORIGIN: Where (geographically) have you come from?
2) EDUCATION: What educational background do you have?
3) RELIGION: What is your religious background?
4) INTEREST: Why have you chosen this subject?
5) QUESTIONS: What burning issues or questions would you like addressed during this subject?
6) MEMORABLE: Share a brief but memorable story to help me remember you easily!

ADDITIONALLY, you’ll need to do all of the PRE-READINGS listed under MOODLE MODULE 1 – these are in preparation for week 2. Come prepared to share …
- a question—something you don’t get, or want to clarify
- a challenge—something you disagree with, or want to nuance
- an implication—“so what” for our apologetic practice
- an application—something useful right now in your context
Significance for Christian theology, life and thought...

What in this session is most significant to you personally, in forming your own theology, life and thought?

For me, I’m amazed at how subtle the Creator of the Universe can be. He spoke supernovas into existence, and yet He approaches His image bearers *in cognito*. God is sovereign, but He makes space for a genuine response to His grace. Ultimately He invites us to join the loving community that birthed all things in joy. This cannot be compelled. It speaks to the mind, but is incomplete until it captures our heart. As an apologist wishing to commend Christ to outsiders, I must first ask if God truly has my heart? Have I responded to His advances, and entered this loving Trinitarian community? In turn, does my approach to others reflect—even imitate—God’s humble advance? This remains a challenge, but is a continual source of praise as I remember who God is and how He chooses to use us—finite and fallible humans—to extend His offer of love to all creation.