

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

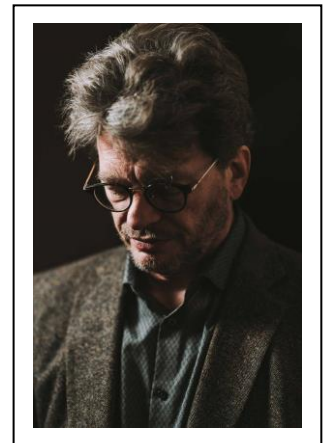
A Manifesto for Christian Apologetics: Nineteen Theses to Shake the World with the Truth¹

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*On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.
(Jesus Christ, Matt. 16:18)²*

This is a manifesto to ignite the holy fire of apologetic passion and action. As did Jeremiah, we should have “fire ... in [our] bones” to communicate and commend Christian truth today (Jer. 20:9). This manifesto is not a sustained argument or a detailed development of themes. Rather, as a manifesto it proclaims a short series of interrelated propositions crying out for both immediate and protracted reflection, prayer, and action. These challenges issue from convictions formed through my nearly thirty years of apologetic teaching, preaching, debating, writing, and Christian witness.



Because of (1) the waning influence of the Christian worldview in public and private life in America today, (2) the pandemic of anti-intellectualism in the contemporary church, and (3) the very command of God himself to declare, explain, and defend divine truth, I strongly advise that the following statements be wrestled with and responded to by all followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Christian apologetics involves the presentation and defense of Christianity as an integrated worldview that is objectively, universally, and absolutely true, reasonable, knowable, and existentially pertinent to both individuals and entire cultures.³ Apologetics involves rebutting unbelieving accusations against Christianity (2 Cor. 10:3–

¹ A shorter version of this manifesto, featuring sixteen theses, was published in *Areopagus Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (January/February 2005), 28–29.

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this Postscript are taken from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*.

³ For a defense of this view of biblical truth, see Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), especially Chaps. 3–4.

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5; Jude 3) as well as giving a constructive and persuasive case for Christian theism (Phil. 1:7; 1 Pet. 3:15).

2. Any intellectual discipline, church practice, or teaching that minimizes or denigrates the importance of apologetics is unbiblical and must be repented of (Matt. 4:17; Acts 17:16–34; 2 Cor. 10:3–5; 1 Pet. 3:15; Jude 3). The degradation of apologetics can only lead to the further vitiation of the life of the church. “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6).

3. The fundamental issue for apologetics is not how many apologists one has read or what apologetic method one embraces (although that must be worked out carefully).⁴ Rather, the essential issue is whether or not one has a passion for God’s transforming truth—reasonably pursued and courageously communicated—and a passion for the lost because of the love of God resident and active in one’s life (Rom. 9:1–3; 10:1). Like the apostle Paul at Athens, we should be “greatly distressed” because of the rampant unbelief in our day. We, like that great apologist, should also be intellectually equipped and spiritually prepared to enter the marketplace of ideas for the cause of Christ (Acts 17:16–34).

4. The apologist must be convinced of the truth, rationality, pertinence, and knowability of the Christian worldview, which is derived from Holy Scripture as it is logically systematized and rightly harmonized with general revelation (truth knowable outside of Scripture). This is an intellectual goal for a lifetime as the disciple of Christ seeks to love God with one’s mind and take more and more thoughts captive to obey Christ (Matt. 22:37–40; 2 Cor. 10:3–5). The apologist should never rest content with an ad hoc or piecemeal worldview, as is so typical of those afflicted with postmodernist pastiche sensibilities.

5. In light of (1), (2), (3), and (4), fideism—the claim that Christian faith finds no positive warrant from reason or evidence—should be rejected as unbiblical and harmful to the great cause of biblical truth (Isa. 1:18; Matt. 22:37–39; Rom. 12:1–2). Fideistic confessions such as “I just know that I know in my knower” do little to challenge unbelief or induce unbelievers to consider the saving truth of the gospel. Moreover, members of other religions can use the same technique to attempt to support their false beliefs. This is especially true for Mormons, who rely so heavily on subjective feelings to verify objective claims. Fideism strips Christianity of its rational witness to the reality of God’s holy revelation to humanity.

⁴ On apologetic method, see Gordon Lewis, *Testing Christianity’s Truth Claims* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), and Steven Cowan, ed., *Five Views of Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).

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6. Any theology, apologetics, ethics, evangelism, or church practice that minimizes or denigrates the concept of objective, absolute, universal, and knowable truth is both irrational and unbiblical. As such it must be rejected and repented of. Thus, the postmodernist view of truth as socially constructed, contingent, and relative must be rejected by Christian apologists. Anything that might be true in postmodernism can be found elsewhere in better philosophical systems. What is false in postmodernism (the vast majority of it) is fatal to Christian witness.⁵ Without a strong, biblical view of truth, apologetics is impossible.

7. The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to saving faith should not be artificially separated from faithful apologetic engagement. Many Christians wrongly think that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is exclusively nonrational or even irrational. The Spirit is free to win and woo unbelievers in a host of ways—including dreams, angelic visitations, healings, visions, meaningful coincidences, and so on—but we must remember that he is “the Spirit of truth,” as Jesus said (John 16:13). There is no reason to separate the work of the Holy Spirit from rigorous and skillful argumentation for Christian truth. The Holy Spirit can set the redeemed mind free to argue logically and winsomely; he also reaches into the unbeliever’s soul through the force of arguments. Apologists should earnestly pray that the Holy Spirit will make them as intelligent and knowledgeable as possible.

8. All apologetic endeavors should manifest the virtues of both humility and courage through the empowering of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Gal. 5:16–26). If we have been bestowed by Almighty God with truth to defend rationally, this is because of God’s grace, not our own goodness (Eph. 2:1–10; Titus 3:5–6). There is no room for pride, which goes before a fall. If Almighty God has bestowed us with saving truth to defend rationally, we should take it to the streets and not shrink back from appropriate encounters with unbelief. There is no room for cowardice. As Paul counseled Timothy, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7).

Humility should not be confused with uncertainty or timidity. One can be confident in one’s worldview and defend it publicly without being arrogant. The grand apologist G. K. Chesterton explains this perfectly and memorably:

⁵ See Groothuis, *Truth Decay*; Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); R. Scott Smith, *Truth and a New Kind of Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005). For a review of Brian McLaren’s influential defense of postmodernism in *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), see Douglas Groothuis, “A New Kind of Postmodernist,” *The Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2003). For an incisive review of McLaren’s book *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), see Jeremy Green’s review in *Denver Journal*.

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But what we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt—the Divine Reason.⁶

9. Apologetics must be carried out with the utmost intellectual integrity (Titus 2:7–8; Jas. 3:1–2). All propaganda, cheap answers, caricatures of non-Christian views, hectoring, and fallacious reasoning must be avoided. Sadly, some apologetic materials are too cavalier for serious use. One should develop competent answers to searching questions about the truth and rationality of Christian faith. This demands excellence in scholarship at all intellectual levels, even the most popular. This cognitive orientation takes time, money, and sustained effort. It will not happen by watching television or by otherwise wasting our limited time.⁷ Christians must thus cultivate the virtue of studiousness in order to grow deep in their knowledge of God, the Christian worldview, and how to bring the Christian message to bear on unbelief.⁸

10. The artificial separation of evangelism from apologetics must end.⁹ Many evangelistic methods die when those evangelized ask questions related to apologetics. Therefore, all evangelistic training should include basic apologetic training as well. The apostle Paul serves as a model for us in that he both proclaimed and defended the gospel in the book of Acts (Acts 17:16–34; 19:8–10). Jesus also rationally defended his views as well as propounding them.¹⁰

11. Apologetics is meant just as much for believers with doubts and questions as it is directed toward unbelievers. Therefore, Christians with doubts should not be shunned or shamed, but given good apologetic arguments (as well as pastoral care) in dealing with their intellectual struggles. When followers of John the Baptist came to Jesus with John's questions about Jesus' messianic identity, Jesus did not rebuke them but provided evidence for why John should believe that Jesus was the Messiah (Matt. 11:1–11). Jude

⁶ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Doubleday, 1959; orig. pub. 1908), 31.

⁷ See Douglas Groothuis, "Television: Agent of Truth Decay," in *Truth Decay*, 281–295.

⁸ On the intellectual virtue of studiousness, see Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); James W. Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990) and *Habits of the Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997).

⁹ See Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, 131–134.

¹⁰ On Jesus as an apologist and philosopher, see Douglas Groothuis, "Jesus: Philosopher and Apologist," *The Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2002); see also Douglas Groothuis, *On Jesus* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003).

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also counsels us to “be merciful to those who doubt” (Jude 22). One way to show mercy to the doubter is to build him or her up by giving reasons for Christian faith.¹¹ The apologetic witness of the church is strengthened tremendously when Christians gain rational assurance that their faith is indeed true and cogent.

12. Since all Christians are called and commanded to have a reason for the hope within them (1 Pet. 3:15), Christian teachers, pastors, mentors, and educators of all kinds are remiss if they avoid, denigrate, or minimize the importance of apologetics to biblical living and Christian witness. The commonly heard canard, “No one comes to Christ through arguments,” is patently false. Many people, such as the apologists C. S. Lewis and John Warwick Montgomery, were drawn to the gospel through apologetic arguments. By God’s grace I have been able to help unbelievers see the truth and rationality of Christianity through apologetic arguments. Well-respected Christian philosophers and apologists William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland concur.¹² Not all Christian teachers are equally gifted in apologetics, and some will emphasize this discipline more than others; but none should minimize the necessity of apologetics or preach around it when the biblical text requires otherwise.

13. Those outside of the leadership positions mentioned in (12) should humbly but boldly request that apologetics be made a constitutive part of their institutions if this is not already the case and pray to that end. We must stimulate each other to love and good deeds in this area (Heb. 10:24).

14. In light of (12) and (13), Christian colleges, seminaries, and churches should incorporate apologetics into their institutional/educational life, mission, and vision. Specifically, every Christian high school, college, university, and seminary should require at least one class in apologetics for every degree in their curriculum. Sadly, this is not now the case for most institutions of Christian learning. Moreover, every discipline should be taught from a Christian worldview, since all truth is God’s truth. This has significant apologetic value in and of itself. Duane Litfin, president of Wheaton College, has written very insightfully on this practice with respect to the Christian college.¹³

Christian education within the church, especially the junior high level and above, should become more intellectually serious and thus more apologetically oriented. Classes should be taught by thoughtful teachers who engage students to outthink the world for Christ. These settings should become more like prayerful classrooms and less like chattering

¹¹ On this, see Os Guinness, *God in the Dark* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996).

¹² J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 4–5.

¹³ Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

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religious coffee and donut shops.¹⁴ Along these lines, churches should invest significantly in a church library that is well stocked with books on apologetics and other topics.¹⁵

15. Mission agencies should insure that their missionaries are adequately trained in the apologetic issues and strategies required for their place of service. The Great Commission requires that Christ's followers disciple the nations by teaching them *everything* Jesus taught his original disciples (Matt. 28:18–20). Since Jesus prized the life of the mind and defended this theology and ethics rationally, Christians should bring the best arguments for Christianity and against non-Christian religions to bear on the mission field. The nations cannot be discipled apart from the full-orbed teaching and defense of the Christian worldview as it relates to all of life.¹⁶

16. Because apologetics is meant to be the presentation and defense of Christianity as true, reasonable, pertinent, and knowable, competent apologists should attempt to offer their arguments in as many public venues as possible. Therefore, qualified Christian apologists should learn to become public intellectuals—thinkers who have mastered their material and are willing and able to enter public discourse and debate in a way that challenges and engages the non-Christian mind as well as galvanizes other Christians to hone their apologetic skills. Areas of apologetic engagement include the following:

1. Writing letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines.¹⁷
2. Writing op-ed pieces for newspapers.
3. Calling talk radio programs.
4. Engaging in public debates and dialogues on religious and ethical issues, particularly on university campuses, where young minds are being forged for a lifetime.
5. Making apologetic contributions to interactive web pages.
6. Writing books oriented to those outside the typical evangelical market, published by secular publishers if possible.

¹⁴ For specifics on developing these kinds of values in church education, see Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, 195–197.

¹⁵ For specific suggestions on this, see *ibid.*, 195–197.

¹⁶ See Darrow Miller with Stan Guthrie, *Discipling Nations*, second edition (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2001).

¹⁷ On how to write a clear and persuasive letter to the editor, see Douglas Groothuis, "How to Write a Letter to the Editor," *The Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2006).

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7. Creating apologetics tracts for specific events.¹⁸
8. Offering any other creative outreach—drama, poetry, cinema, and more.

17. Christians should also labor to present reasons for faith in as many private settings as possible. Many who are not gifted as public speakers or writers can shine in their interpersonal Christian witness. This can include apologetic encounters such as:

1. Inviting people into one's home for apologetic messages and discussions.
2. Giving apologetic literature to friends, family, and coworkers.
3. Writing letters to friends, family, and coworkers explaining and defending Christianity.

18. Young Christians with an aptitude in philosophy and academic pursuits in general should be encouraged that these disciplines are just as spiritual as anything directly church-related. For example, being a Christian philosopher at a secular college or university is just as godly and spiritual as being a pastor, missionary, or professor at a Christian institution (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17). As the Dutch statesman, theologian, and journalist, Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Christ does not cry out, 'This is mine!'" One may prudently apply one's apologetic skills in these settings and extend the Christian witness.¹⁹

19. All apologetics ventures—whether in writing, speaking, or dialogue—should be backed by personal prayer by the apologist and by the supporting prayer of the church (Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17). Certain apologetic ventures—especially those that deal with the occult and false religions—may require fasting in addition to prayer (Matt. 6:18–20; Acts 13:1–3).²⁰

May we who are redeemed through the blood of the Lamb and who yearn to proclaim, explain, and defend the gospel of Jesus Christ take as our charge the apostle Paul's rousing conclusion to his glorious exposition of the meaning of Jesus' resurrection:

¹⁸ On the philosophy of making and distributing evangelistic/apologetic tracts, see Douglas Groothuis, "Event Specific Evangelism," in *Confronting the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 217–222.

¹⁹ On the spurious separation of sacred and secular, see Arthur Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 1–30; Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004); and Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1981).

²⁰ On the meaning of fasting, see John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997).

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Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:58)²¹

²¹ Groothuis, D. (2007). "Postscript," in N. L. Geisler & C. V. Meister (Eds.), *Reasons for Faith: Making a Case for the Christian Faith* (pp. 401–408). Crossway Books.