

Apologetics in 3D

This talk lays out an inspirational vision for Christian apologetics ‘in 3D’. The foundation of this vision is a three-part biblical, but nonetheless general, definition of ‘spirituality’. This definition of ‘spirituality’ is then conjoined with the three traditional transcendental values (truth, goodness, and beauty) and the three elements of classical rhetoric (logos, pathos, and ethos), to produce a biblical three-by-three conceptual grid for apologetics.

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I. Introduction

- A. *Kenneth D. Boa*: ‘Apologetics may be simply defined as the defence of the Christian faith. The simplicity of this definition, however, masks the complexity of the problem of defining apologetics. It turns out that a diversity of approaches has been taken in defining the meaning, scope, and purpose of apologetics.’¹
- B. *Francis A. Schaeffer*: ‘The purpose of “apologetics” is not just to win an argument or a discussion, but that the people with whom we are in contact may become Christians and then live under the Lordship of Christ in the whole spectrum of life’² (with all their mind and heart and strength).

I: Apologetics (cf. Mark 12:30; Acts 2:37; Acts 17; 1 Peter 3:15)

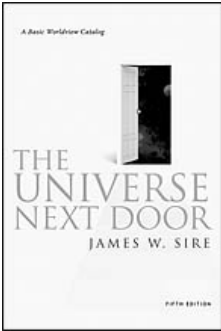
- A. Apologetics is:
 - 1. The art of persuasively advocating Christian spirituality across spiritualities,
 - 2. as objectively true, good and beautiful,
 - 3. through the responsible use of classical rhetoric.
- B. Each of these three elements is in turn composed of three aspects.

¹ Kenneth D. Boa, ‘What Is Apologetics?’, *The Apologetics Study Bible*

² Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview – Volume 1*, p. 153.

- C. The goal of Christian apologetics is: *a strong, central and therefore transformative self-conscious internalisation of a specifically Christian spirituality – and ultimately, of Christ himself.*

II: Worldview & Spirituality (cf. Mark 12:30; Acts 2:37; Acts 17; Colossians 3:15-17; 1 Peter 3:15)

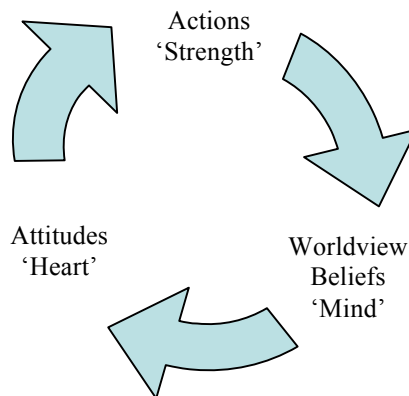
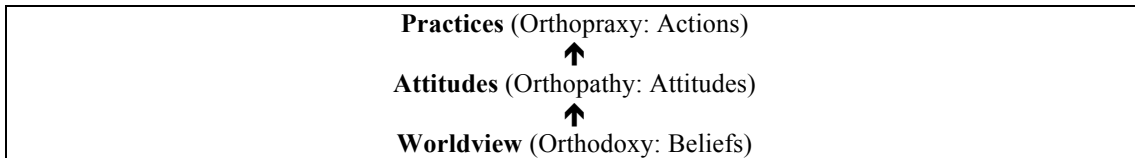


A. *James W. Sire* defines a worldview as:

‘a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.’³

B. Spirituality concerns how humans relate to reality - to themselves, to each other, to the world around them and (most importantly) to ultimate reality – via their worldview beliefs, concomitant attitudes and subsequent behaviour.

Spirituality



³ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, fourth edition (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), p. 17.

III: Transcendental Values (cf. Philippians 4:6-9)

- A. *John Cottingham*: ‘To everyone’s surprise, the increasing consensus among philosophers today is that some kind of objectivism of truth and of value is correct... truth, beauty and goodness... carry with them the sense of a requirement or a demand. The true is that which is worthy of belief ... the beautiful is that which is worthy of admiration; and the good is that which is worthy of choice.’⁴
- B. *John Cottingham*: ‘truth, goodness and beauty appear to be *objective* properties – they seem to hold independently of what you or I or anyone else may happen to think or to want or to prefer. They seem to presuppose an objective order or value that is logically independent of the beliefs and desires human beings may happen to have at any given time.’⁵

IV: Rhetoric (cf. Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 3:15)

- A. *Aristotle* defines rhetoric as ‘the power to observe the persuasiveness of which any particular matter admits.’⁶ In practice rhetoric encompasses the principles of how best to communicate such observations to an audience: ‘For a speech is composed of three factors – the speaker, the subject and the listener – and it is to the last of these that its purpose is related.’⁷

‘Of those proofs that are furnished through the speech there are three kinds. Some reside in the *character* of the speaker, some in a certain *disposition* of the audience and some in the *speech* itself, through its demonstrating or seeming to demonstrate.’⁸

1. ***Ethos*** - how the character and credibility of a speaker influences people to consider them to be believable (cf. Gal. 5:22)
2. ***Pathos*** - the use of emotional appeals to affect an audience’s judgment (e.g. through storytelling, or otherwise presenting the topic in a way that evokes strong affections in the audience)
3. ***Logos*** - the use of reasoning to construct arguments

- B. Apologists should use *good rhetoric* in all categories (cf. Acts 17).

⁴ John Cottingham, ‘Philosophers are finding fresh meanings in Truth, Goodness and Beauty’, *The Times* (June 17, 2006)

⁵ John Cottingham, *Why Believe?* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 26-27.

⁶ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, p. 70.

⁷ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, p. 80.

⁸ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, p. 74.

V. Conclusion

- A. *Francis A. Schaeffer*: ‘I am only interested in an apologetic that leads in two directions, and the one is to lead people to Christ, as Saviour, and the other is that after they are Christians, for them to realize the lordship of Christ in the whole of life... if Christianity is truth, it ought to touch on the whole of life... Christianity must never be reduced merely to an intellectual system... After all, if God is there, it isn’t just an answer to an intellectual question [Mind]... we’re called upon to adore him [Heart], to be in relationship to him, and, incidentally, to obey him [Strength].’⁹
- B. *Alister McGrath*: ‘We cannot allow Christ to reign in our hearts if he does not also guide our thinking. The discipleship of the mind is just as important as any other part of the process by which we grow in our faith... We must see ourselves as standard bearers for the spiritual, ethical, imaginative and intellectual vitality of the Christian faith, working out why we believe that certain things are true and what difference they make to the way we live our lives... Above all we must expand our vision of the Christian gospel... apologetics involves enabling people to glimpse something of the glory and beauty of God... True apologetics engages not only the mind but also the heart... and we impoverish the gospel if we neglect the impact it has on all of our God-given faculties... We are thus called upon to demonstrate and embody... the truth, beauty and goodness of faith.’¹⁰
- C. Five Practical Steps:
1. Study and pray into relevant scriptures (esp. Mark 12:30; Acts 17; 1 Peter 3:15; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Colossians 3:15-17 & 4:5-6; Philippians 4:6-9)
 2. Encourage appropriate dialogue within the church about doubts & questions concerning the truth, goodness and beauty of Christianity
 3. Always seek ‘honest answers to honest questions’
 4. Learn ‘without ceasing’ (at an appropriate level) in both theory - from those with gifts in this area (books, websites & podcasts) – and in practice!
 5. Wisely put yourself in a position to gently give an apology for the hope that is in you to those who ask

⁹ Francis A. Schaeffer, ‘The Undivided Schaeffer: A Retrospective Interview with Francis Schaeffer, September 30, 1980’ in Colin Duriez, *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), p. 218 & 220.

¹⁰ Alister McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind* (IVP, 2010), p. 21, 88 & 93.

Spirituality	Judged by	Transcendental Values	Communicated Through	Classical Rhetoric
Actions	Judged by	Goodness	Communicated Through	<i>Ethos</i>
↑ Attitudes	Judged by	Beauty	Communicated Through	<i>Pathos</i>
↑ Beliefs	Judged by	Truth	Communicated Through	<i>Logos</i>

Peter S. Williams Podcasts:

‘Apologetics315.com Interview with Peter S. Williams (8th March 2010)’ @ <http://apologetics315.blogspot.com/2010/03/apologist-interview-peter-s-williams-of.html>
Christian Persuaders Podcast: ‘Peter S. Williams & the Servant Apologist’ @ www.uccf.org.uk/download/cp-podcast-peter-s-williams
‘How Paul in Athens Provides a Biblical Basis for Engaging with Popular Culture Through Classical Rhetoric’ @ www.damaris.org/cm/podcasts/241
‘Apologetics in 3D’ @ www.damaris.org/cm/podcasts/248
‘1 Peter 3:15: Apologetics – What, When, Who, How & Why?’ @ www.damaris.org/cm/podcasts/261
‘Apologizing for a Reasonable Faith?’ @ www.damaris.org/cm/podcasts/281
‘Introduction to Apologetics’ @ www.damaris.org/cm/podcasts/360
‘A Vision for Spiritual Education’ @ www.damaris.org/cm/podcasts/418

Papers

J. Daryl Charles, ‘Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind: Paul’s Encounter with Athenian Culture as a Model for Cultural Apologetics (Acts 17:16–34),’ *Trinity Journal*, 16:1 (Spring 1995), p. 47-62 @ www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/athenian_charles.pdf
Lars Dahle, ‘Acts 17 and the Biblical Basis for Apologetics’ @ www.euroleadershipresources.org/resource.php?ID=367
Peter May, ‘The Centrality of Persuasion in Authentic Evangelism’ @ www.euroleadershipresources.org/resource.php?ID=280
Bruce W. Winter, ‘On Introducing Gods To Athens: An Alternative Reading Of Acts 17:18-20’, *Tyndale Bulletin* 47:1 (May, 1996), p. 71-90 @ http://98.131.162.170/tynbul/library/TynBull_1996_47_1_04_Winter_Acts17GodsOfAthens.pdf
Bruce W. Winter, ‘Introducing the Athenians to God: Paul’s failed apologetic in Acts 17?’ @ www.euroleadershipresources.org/resource.php?ID=120

Books

Joe Carter & John Coleman, *How To Argue Like Jesus* (Crossway, 2008)
Charles Colson & Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Marshall Pickering, 1999)
Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game-Plan for Discussing your Christian Convictions* (Zondervan, 2009)
Sean McDowell (ed.), *Apologetics For A New Generation* (Harvest House, 2009)
Alistair McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind* (IVP, 2010)
J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Navpress, 1997)
Nick Pollard, *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult* (IVP, 1997)
Peter S. Williams, *I Wish I Could Believe In Meaning: A Response to Nihilism* (Damaris, 2004)