

# Truth, Christian Mission and Apologetics: A Response and A Proposal

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## **Introduction**

The issue of truth is one of the most fundamental questions in our contemporary pluralistic world. Most global, national and local contexts are characterized by competing religious and secular truth-claims. There is therefore a universal need to find appropriate ways of living together in pluralistic contexts, in order to combine key worldview convictions and commitments with attitudes of tolerance and respect.

Such sensitive approaches need to be cultivated and shared, including the need to develop appropriate models for public and private apologetic encounters between different worldview communities. The public dimension of such encounters has been expressed by Paul J. Griffiths as the obligation for religious communities to engage in interreligious apologetics:

If representative intellectuals belonging to some specific religious community come to judge at a particular time that some of their own doctrine-expressing sentences are incompatible with some alien religious claim(s), then they should feel obliged to engage in both positive and negative apologetics vis-à-vis these alien religious claim(s) and their promulgators.<sup>1</sup>

This public obligation should, of course, also include various secular communities and correspond to an equivalent private obligation to engage in mutual apologetics when encountering “the religious other”.

Whether public or private, Christian missional engagement should be in the forefront in developing appropriate arenas and attitudes for mutual dialogue, debate and critique. A key reason for this is the fact that the issue of truth is a fundamental concern for the Christian church, if it is to remain missional both in its key identity and its essential activities. A clear indication of this crucial theological concern for truth is found in a fundamental expression in *The Cape Commitment*: “Jesus Christ is the truth of the universe. Because Jesus is truth, truth in Christ is (i) personal as well as propositional; (ii) universal as well as contextual; (iii) ultimate as well as present.”<sup>2</sup> Such a strong commitment to the validity of the central truth claims of the Christian Gospel is characteristic of, but not limited to, classical evangelical contexts.

This dual concern for truth in general and for Gospel truth in particular characterizes Andrew Kirk’s significant essay on “The Religious Smorgasbord: What is Truth?”, where he proposes *inference to best explanation* (IBE) as a key tool both for dialogue in general and for Christian mission in particular.<sup>3</sup>

This article contains both my response to Kirk’s key contribution, with an emphasis on affirming, assessing and applying his material, and my own subsequent proposal, suggesting appropriate apologetic approaches and arguments.<sup>4</sup>

### **Truth and Christian mission: A response to Andrew Kirk**

#### *Affirming key concerns in the IBE-approach*

As a systematic theologian with a specialty in theoretical and practical apologetics, I find myself in fundamental agreement with Kirk in his stimulating article.

*First of all*, it is satisfying to observe the deep concern and respect for the truth question. This is not to be taken for granted, since the truth question tends to be ignored, suppressed or relativized in many contemporary cultural, academic and church contexts.

*Secondly*, the brief historical overview of views on truth and

the resulting assessment of the major theories about the meaning of truth both make sense as informed and balanced treatments of complex issues. I would propose, however, to reformulate the central theories about the meaning of truth as key, supplementary criteria of truth. If so, the criterion of coherence expresses the need for logical, linguistic, and systemic consistency for a single statement or a belief system to make sense on its own terms. Furthermore, the *correspondence* criterion expresses the need for factual, historical and everyday evidence to confirm that a statement or a belief system matches up to external reality, whenever possible and appropriate. Finally, the *pragmatic* criterion expresses the need to assess the implications or the fruitfulness of a statement or a belief system, if true.<sup>5</sup>

*Thirdly*, the overall discussion of the truth question found in Kirk's article constitutes a nuanced approach, which steers a constructive course between various influential positions. On the one hand, the implicit rejection of both fideism and scepticism as default positions is to be welcomed; on the other hand the explicit rejection of both positivistic and postmodern approaches to truth in general and Gospel truth in particular as inadequate positions is to be commended.<sup>6</sup>

Fourthly, the key proposal that inference to best explanation (i.e. the IBE-approach) constitutes a significant model for handling arguments about truth in pluralistic contexts is clearly attractive, not the least because this approach seems to be a natural way of connecting Christian mission and apologetics. This model will be explored in the following.

### **Assessing the IBE approach**

It is my intention in this section to briefly assess the value of the IBE-approach as a missiological tool, as set forth in Kirk's article. This is done in the shape of three essential qualifications.

*The IBE-approach in missiology needs to be qualified through critical engagement with relevant biblical foundations and models, thus indicating the need to identify, explore and apply key biblical material on truth.*

As in many other contemporary treatments on truth and Christian apologetics, there is a lack of extensive engagement with

biblical perspectives, foundations and models. It is sufficient in this context to indicate three significant areas for such a biblical exploration, primarily with reference to the New Testament.

First, the biblical concepts of truth (*'emet, aletheia*) are very rich, like “a rope with several intertwined strands... [involving] factuality, faithfulness and completeness”.<sup>7</sup> Such a holistic view of truth needs to be explored further and applied appropriately.

Secondly, witnessing as a key concept is central to the truth question in the New Testament, not the least in the Gospel of John.<sup>8</sup> Correspondingly, when using and applying such central biblical language today, a key task in Christian mission may be described as “bearing witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching”<sup>9</sup>.

Thirdly, the *dialogomai* emphasis in the latter part of the Book of Acts, which is appropriately mentioned in Kirk's essay, should be related to “a wider, positive Lucan description in Acts of apologetic convictions, approaches and arguments, and ... this positive pattern can be related to a plausible dual Lucan apologetic intention with Acts (as written for Christians *both* in order to confirm the truth-value of their Christian faith *and* to provide them with apologetic tools and models for reaching outsiders)”.<sup>10</sup> The apologetic purpose of biblical books such as Luke-Acts should thus be properly identified and applied missiologically.

*The IBE-approach in missiology needs to be qualified as one of (at least) three parallel and relevant approaches in contemporary philosophy of science.*

As Alister E. McGrath points out, alongside the IBE-approach (which is *the quest for the best explanation*), there are (at least) two other available and relevant approaches in contemporary philosophy of science.

The first supplementary approach is *explanation as the identification of causes*. A well-known example of this causal explanation approach is found in the cosmological *kalam* argument, as expounded by William Lane Craig: “Whatever begins to exist has a cause. The universe began to exist. Therefore, the universe has a cause.”<sup>12</sup> This approach, strongly related to the widespread acceptance that the universe had a chronological

origin, points to the existence of a personal Creator of the universe. Such an argumentative approach, then, is a considerable challenge to both secular and pantheistic explanations.

*Explanation as the unification of our view of reality* is the second supplementary approach. A prominent example of this “explanatory unification” approach is found in Augustine’s emphasis on viewing God as having a function like a sun:

To explain something is to locate it within a wider context, allowing its interconnectedness to other aspects of reality to be understood... It is not difficult to see how this resonates strongly with a central theme of the Christian faith. For Augustine of Hippo, God was like an intellectual sun illuminating the landscape of reality, allowing us to see its deep structures and to figure out our own place within them.<sup>13</sup>

Such a biblical theism perspective provides a deeply satisfying worldview story, where the ultimate meaning both of the universe and the human destiny is found in the Triune God. Again, this is a challenge to other secular and religious worldviews.

*The IBE-approach in missiology needs to be qualified with arguments for why the Christian faith should be considered to be in the pool of live contemporary worldview options.*

The IBE-approach, as proposed by Kirk, seems to presuppose that Christian faith actually is considered in the contemporary world as being one of the live worldview options. However, this is clearly not the case in many contexts.

This is partly related to the increasing global influence of secular perspectives in such influential cultural institutions as the academy, the primary and secondary schools, and the news and entertainment media. This may lead to the adoption of naturalism, materialism or secular humanism as basic institutional or personal outlooks and to the corresponding rejection of supernatural explanations such as a biblical theism.

The fact that the Christian faith in many contexts seems to be excluded as a live option on beforehand seems also to be related to the influence either of postmodern relativistic attitudes or of alternative religious worldviews.<sup>14</sup>

It is crucial in all such pluralistic contexts to expose the myth of secular neutrality, as well as presenting a strong case for actually considering the claims for the credibility and the plausibility of the Christian faith over against secular and religious world-view alternatives.

### **Applying the IBE approach**

With the qualifications presented above, the IBE-approach seems to be an attractive and relevant missiological tool. Along the same lines as Kirk, Harold A. Netland summarizes the case for the IBE-approach as follows:

[What] seems to be the most promising approach involves what is often called a cumulative case argument, or a comprehensive argument based upon inference from the best explanation. This approach maintains that a strong case for the truth of Christian theism can be established through the careful accumulation and analysis of a wide variety of data from various dimensions of our experience and the world. While none of these phenomena, either individually or collectively, entail the truth of Christian theism, the argument claims that Christian theism provides a more plausible explanation for the data than other alternatives.<sup>15</sup>

Following on from this, it is my intention in the following to apply Kirk's approach to three key issues or areas.

#### *Offering the best explanation for the surprisingly fine-tuned universe*

Most professional observers seem to agree that a design may be perceived in the physical universe, especially connected with the so called fine-tuning phenomena. Depending on the world-view commitment of the observer, this design is seen as being either apparent or actual. Robin Collis defines the fine-tuning of the universe as

the conjunction of the following two claims: (i) the claim that the laws and values of the constants of physics, and the initial conditions of any universe with the same laws as our

universe, must be set in a seemingly very precise way for the universe to support life; and (ii) the claim that such a universe exists, or when the background information includes the information that there is only one universe, the claim that *this* universe is life-permitting, where *this* is an indexical that picks out the one universe that actually exists.<sup>16</sup>

Usually, a version of the IBE-approach is used when arguing for the actual fine-tuning of the universe. Thus, design is offered as the best explanation for the (apparent) fine-tuning phenomena. This teleological argument may be expressed (in deductive form) as follows: “1) The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design. 2) It is not due to physical necessity or chance. 3) Therefore, it is due to design.”<sup>17</sup>

The significance of this discussion is whether a religious (i.e. theistic) perspective<sup>18</sup> or a secular outlook provides the best explanation for these key phenomena of (at least apparent) design. The answer to that question is significant in a pluralistic context for determining a plausible worldview framework for other issues (such as the following).

*Offering the best explanation for what happened to Jesus at the intriguing first Easter*

Jesus from Nazareth remains the most central figure in human history. In any serious attempt to try to make sense of his identity, mission and fate, a probable explanation must be offered for the events of the first Easter. Again, this is where the IBE-approach is highly recommendable in terms of making it possible to identify the best explanation for these events.

Gary Habermas suggests a “minimal facts approach”, where one utilizes data which have “two characteristics: they are well-evidenced, usually for multiple reasons, and they are generally admitted by critical scholars who research this particular area”<sup>19</sup>. In a parallel argument, Craig summarizes the IBE-approach as follows:

In my estimation the hypothesis ‘God raised Jesus from the dead’ furnishes the best explanation of the historical data relevant to Jesus’ final fate (das Geschick Jesu).The inducti-

ve grounds for the inference of the explanation consists primarily in the evidence supporting three independently established facts: (1) the tomb of Jesus was found empty by a group of his women followers on the first day of the week following his crucifixion, (2) various individuals and groups thereafter experienced on different occasions and under varying circumstances appearances of Jesus alive, and (3) the first disciples came to believe in Jesus' resurrection in the absence of sufficient antecedent historical influences from either Judaism or pagan religions.<sup>20</sup>

It should be emphasized in this context that alternative natural historical explanations do not seem to explain these data sufficiently, when faced with a historian's key criteria<sup>21</sup> for judging between various explanatory options. Thus, a theistic explanatory perspective on events of the first Easter may be considered to be more adequate than secular (or religious) rival theories. The higher plausibility of a theistic worldview explanation of the events of the first Easter is of obvious relevance to the communication of the Christian Gospel in contemporary contexts.

#### *Offering the best explanation for ambivalent human nature*

The quest for human identity, meaning and purpose is an on-going search, evident in the arts, in the news and entertainment media, and in basic longings in our own life stories. When exploring this on-going human quest, many observers would claim that there is ambivalence in human nature. On the one hand, humanity is often capable of great beauty, wisdom and love. On the other hand, humankind is also constantly showing evidence of brutality, folly and selfishness. Thus, humans are both uniquely gifted with an inalienable dignity and deeply flawed with a propensity towards evil.

A number of prominent Christian apologists<sup>22</sup> have emphasized the Christian view of humanity as both created and fallen as the best explanation for this ambivalent human nature. A classical expression of this biblical view of humanity is found in C. S. Lewis' story in the Narnia Chronicles:

'You come from the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve,' said Aslan.



‘And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth.  
Be content.’<sup>23</sup>

The explanatory power of this central biblical paradigm for the understanding of the ambivalent nature of humanity represents a fundamental challenge to the anthropology of other religious and secular worldviews.

### **Truth and Christian mission: A proposal for apologetics**

It seems legitimate to conclude from the above discussion that apologetics should be an integrated part of contemporary Christian dialogue and witness in a pluralistic world. One may even claim that apologetics today has an increasingly important role to play globally in Christian missional encounters with secular and pluralistic contexts. My proposal in the following – which suggests a way forward in terms of a threefold apologetic approach and a threefold apologetic argument – is intended as a contribution towards this missional task.

#### *A threefold apologetic approach: pre-evangelism, evangelism and post-evangelism*

When a Christian argues for the Christian worldview as the best explanation of any given evidence or phenomenon, this takes place in a pluralistic context of competing truth claims and contending apologies. As we have seen above, every religious and secular worldview has its own apologists and its own apologetic contributions. This sociological reality needs to be taken into account when formulating and developing an adequate Christian apologetic approach.

In previous contributions, I have defined Christian apologetics in the more technical sense as “the rational justification of Christian truth claims over against relevant questions, objections and alternatives”<sup>24</sup>. The following proposal is an attempt to develop apologetics further conceptually, through the use of *pre-evangelism, evangelism and post-evangelism* as key categories. Thus, it seems both legitimate and fruitful to imagine Christian apologetics as having a distinctive contribution both in pre-evangelistic, evangelistic and post-evangelistic contexts.

Support for such a proposal is partly found in various apologetic strands of material in the New Testament, not the least in the overall purpose and pattern of e.g. Luke-Acts (see above). The proposal also corresponds to an influential and plausible recent description, which claims that “apologetics specifically serves to show to unbelievers the truth of the Christian faith, to confirm that faith to believers, and to reveal and explore the connections between Christian doctrine and other truths”<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, this proposal makes sense missiologically, since it explores the passion for the truth of the Gospel across pre-evangelistic, evangelistic and post-evangelistic contexts.

*Christian apologetics as pre-evangelism: Answering and agenda-setting*

Apologetics has traditionally been assigned the roles of answering honest questions about the Christian faith, dealing with serious objections to biblical truth claims, exposing influential myths about the Gospel, and “positively deconstructing”<sup>26</sup> current secular and religious worldview alternatives. These functions of apologetics have often been described as the removal of intellectual stumbling blocks on the way to (potential) personal faith in the God of the Bible. Thus, “apologetic argument may not create belief, but it creates the atmosphere in which belief can come to life”.<sup>27</sup>

This pre-evangelistic function also relates to the agenda-setting role of Christian apologetics, which is crucial in pluralistic contexts of competing truth claims where the Christian story often is forgotten, neglected, or marginalized. It is therefore “the broader task of Christian apologetics to help create and sustain a cultural milieu in which the gospel can be heard as an intellectually viable option for thinking men and women”<sup>28</sup>. This is clearly a key task when confronted with political correctness, influential secular thought and alternative religious beliefs, not the least in the contemporary Western media and academic worlds.<sup>29</sup>

*Christian apologetics as persuasive evangelism: Commending and clarifying*

Evangelism and apologetics are distinct but related entities or

activities. Whereas evangelism is the actual proclamation of the Gospel, inviting people to believe in Christ and offering forgiveness and new life in Christ,<sup>30</sup> apologetics is commending this Gospel of Jesus Christ as rationally compelling, historically credible and existentially attractive. Along the same lines, *The Manila Manifesto* “affirms that apologetics and evangelism belong together”.<sup>31</sup>

Apologetics also has a key clarifying role in relation to evangelism and related religious decisions. Accordingly, John Warwick Montgomery points out perceptively that

in the absence of an apology that will make sense to the uncommitted, it is impossible, *even in principle*, to decide between [various world]views...

Only a genuine apologetic based on external, objective fact as presented in general and special revelation preserves religious decision from arbitrariness, keeps the gospel truly *gospel* and ... ‘lets God be God’.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Christian apologetics as post-evangelism: Affirming and equipping*

Whereas the pre-evangelism and the evangelism contexts describe the external missional task of Christian apologetics, the post-evangelistic context describes the internal missional task of affirming the believer in his or her decision to start (or to continue) to believe in Jesus Christ. This may be illustrated in relation to the multifaceted purpose of the Book of Acts (see above), which according to Ben Witherington seems to have been to provide “early Christianity with a sense of definition, identity and legitimization”<sup>33</sup>. This is clearly transferrable to our own pluralistic contexts, where Christian apologetics should offer such affirmation and legitimization to Christian believers.

However, the apologetic task also includes equipping believers to “bear witness to Christ and all his teaching, in every part of the world – not only geographically, but in every sphere of society and in the realm of ideas”<sup>34</sup>. This programmatic statement about three key missional arenas or frontiers has a definite apologetic character (“bear witness to”), and thus indicates the centrality of apologetics for mission.

This may be illustrated in relation to a missional approach to children, tweens and teenagers. A number of contemporary researchers and commentators observe that many Western churches currently are losing their younger members at an alarming rate, e.g. according to figures from The Barna Group.<sup>35</sup> Their leading researcher David Kinnaman comments on these figures, that “we are learning that one of the primary reasons that ministry to teenagers fails to produce a lasting faith, is because they are not being taught to think.”<sup>36</sup> This certainly indicates why apologetics must be properly integrated into “the making of disciples” of any and every Christian youth ministry.

### **A threefold apologetic argument: Natural theology, ultimate authority and the Resurrection**

In order to carry out the threefold apologetic task outlined above, we need an appropriate biblical paradigm. I have already indicated above, that one of the prominent paradigms is found in the Book of Acts, with its overall purpose as an essential framework and with Acts 17:16-35 as a key model.

The context Paul encountered in first-century Athens was characterized both by critique and curiosity, expressed in objections and questions and coloured by various alternative worldviews. Paul was invited to present his case in the marketplace before the Areopagus Council, which (among other duties) had the task of licensing heralds of foreign gods. Thus, the apostle was invited to make the case for “Jesus and the Resurrection” to this distinguished audience within the wider context of the marketplace.

As written elsewhere, my understanding of this key New Testament passage is that Paul’s argumentative approach in Athens was a move from natural theology *through* ultimate authority *to* the Resurrection.<sup>37</sup>

#### *First apologetic argument: The natural theology argument*

Paul argues (in this more extensive argument) that natural theologies such as Stoic pantheism and Epicurean deism contain elements of truth. However, Paul argues that a Judeo-Christian *natural theology* provides the most adequate view of God, the universe and humanity. The exploration and application of

“God’s self-disclosure in the external universe and in the personality of human beings ... [leads to the challenge that the people in Athens] ... were not fulfillable on the basis of their own views of themselves”<sup>38</sup>.

Theologically, such an argumentative approach affirms general revelation as a God-given communicative and apologetic context for his special revelation. It also opens up for critical reflections on the validity and relevance of the cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments for God’s existence over against argument for atheism.<sup>39</sup>

*Second apologetic argument: The ultimate authority argument*

Paul argues (in this more compressed argument) that the Judeo-Christian God has *ultimate authority*, as expressed in the claims about his final judgment. This is plausible, since he is the Creator and Sustainer, and it constitutes an appropriate basis for subsequent claims about the absolute truth claims of the Christian faith. The key argument is that the Author of life has absolute and legitimate authority over life.

Theologically, such an argumentative approach affirms the holiness and justice of God and opens up for critical and existential reflections on the moral argument for God’s existence<sup>40</sup> as well as on the fundamental questions of sin and salvation. This argument may also be linked to the biblical claim that the Cross of Christ demonstrates God’s power in weakness (cf. 1 Cor. 1-2), thus indicating a non-manipulative divine authority.

*Third apologetic argument: The Resurrection argument*

Paul argues (in this highly condensed argument) that the historical *Resurrection* of Jesus has a threefold function. It resonates with ultimate human concerns, it indicates the uniqueness and authority of Jesus, and it is based on sufficient, available evidence.

Theologically, such an argumentative approach affirms that the New Testament picture of “Jesus and the Resurrection” is historically plausible, intellectually credible and existentially relevant.<sup>41</sup> This opens up for critical and existential reflections on the unique character and the implications of “Jesus and his Resurrection”.

### **Concluding reflections**

It seems thus legitimate to propose the apologetic paradigm identified in Acts 17:16-34<sup>42</sup> as an attractive and flexible model for missional encounters with contemporary secular and pluralistic contexts.

Within the overall apologetic framework identified above as the purpose of the Book of Acts, this “Acts 17 model” has considerable relevance both in pre-evangelistic, evangelistic and post-evangelistic contexts. This seems to be the case whether focusing on each of the three individual arguments (i.e. the natural theology argument, the ultimate authority argument, and the Resurrection argument) or on the plausible moves back and forth between the three arguments.

Each of the three Acts 17 arguments explored above may be framed in the shape of *inference to best explanation*.<sup>43</sup> Thus, my proposal may be seen as an affirmation and further development of Andrew Kirk’s significant contribution.

## Noter

- <sup>1</sup> Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), 3.
- <sup>2</sup> *The Cape Town Commitment* (CTC), (<http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html#p2-1>), see section II.A.1
- <sup>3</sup> See Kirk's article in this issue of NOTM and his *Christian Mission as Dialogue. Engaging the current epistemological predicament of the West* (Nijmegen: Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies, 2011) [Doctoral thesis; available at <http://dare.ubn.kun.nl/bitstream/2066/90917/1/90917.pdf>.]
- <sup>4</sup> The origin of this article is as a formal response to Kirk's stimulating paper at *Missiologisk Forum* on 25th April 2012 at MF Norwegian School of Theology, but my article has since then been developed into an independent contribution.
- <sup>5</sup> See e.g. <http://larsdahle.no/acts-17/truth/>.
- <sup>6</sup> See e.g. Lars Dahle, «Encountering and Engaging a Post-modern Context: Applying the Apologetic Model in Acts 17», [<http://klice.co.uk/uploads/whitfield/Vol%207.6%20Dahle.pdf>] *Whitefield Briefing*, Vol. 7 No. 6 Dec 2002.
- <sup>7</sup> Roger Nicole, "The Biblical Concept of Truth", in D. A. Carson & J. D. Woodbridge (eds.) *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 296.
- <sup>8</sup> See esp. A. A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- <sup>9</sup> CTC, Foreword [<http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html#foreword>]
- <sup>10</sup> Dahle, Lars, "Acts 17:16–34. An Apologetic Model Then and Now?" (Diss), *TynBul* 53.2 (2002), 313.
- <sup>11</sup> See Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers & Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 82-86.
- <sup>12</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2008; 3rd ed.) 111-156.
- <sup>13</sup> McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 86. The same analogy is used by C. S. Lewis: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else." ("Is Theology Poetry?" in L. Walmsley (ed.), *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection* (London: Collins, 2000), 21.)
- <sup>14</sup> It should also be added that strong aversion towards classical Christian truth claims (as well as aversion towards the public expression of such claims) exists in a number of influential contemporary communities, e.g. communities associated with new atheism, radical islam and the secular gay lobby.
- <sup>15</sup> Harold E. Netland, "Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth", in D. W. Baker (ed.) *Biblical Faith and Other Religions: An Evangelical Assessment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004), 39.
- <sup>16</sup> Robin Collins, "The Teleological Argument: An Exploration of the Fine-Tuning of the Universe", in W. L. Craig & J. P. Moreland (eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 204.
- <sup>17</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 161.

- <sup>18</sup> Cf. Alister E. McGrath's claim that "the rich Trinitarian ontology of classical Christian thought has a deep intellectual capaciousness, which proves able to accommodate our observations and experience of reality". ("The Natural Sciences and Apologetics" in A. Davison (ed.) *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 153)
- <sup>19</sup> Gary Habermas. "Evidential Apologetics", in S. Cowan (ed.) *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 100.
- <sup>20</sup> William Lane Craig, "Classical Apologetics", in S. Cowan (ed.) *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 52.
- <sup>21</sup> A classical treatment is found in C. B. McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), where he points to six key criteria: "consistent with observable data, greater explanatory scope, greater explanatory power, more plausible, less ad hoc, disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs, [and] exceed its rivals in fulfilling the above conditions" (p. 19).
- <sup>22</sup> This includes such well-known apologists as Blaise Pascal, G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer and Ravi Zacharias.
- <sup>23</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian in The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: Harper Collins, 1998; reprint), 416.
- <sup>24</sup> See e.g. Lars Dahle, "Acts 17 as an apologetic model", *Whitefield Briefing*, Vol. 7, No. 6, March 2002. [Available at <http://klice.co.uk/uploads/whitefield/Vol%207.1%20Dahle.pdf>]
- <sup>25</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 15. Cf. also the following succinct definition: "In the Christian context the word apologetics means defending and commending the faith." (William Edgar & K. Scott Eliphant, "Introduction to the Two-Volume Work", *Christian Apologetics Past & Present: A Primary Source Reader. Volume I: To 1500* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2009), 1.
- <sup>26</sup> This expression was coined by Nick Pollard in *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult* (Leicester: IVP, 1997), 48–56.
- <sup>27</sup> Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 23.
- <sup>28</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 17.
- <sup>29</sup> See e.g. Lars Dahle, "Media Messages Matter: Christ, Truth and the Media", *Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper* [available at <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/resources/detail/10514>] and <http://larsdahle.no/cape-town-2010/>.
- <sup>30</sup> David Bosch offers an insightful definition: "Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sins, and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit." (*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 11)
- <sup>31</sup> John R. W. Stott, "An Historical Introduction" in J. R. W. Stott (ed.) *Making Christ Known: Historical Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974-1989* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press / LCWE, 1996), xxi.
- <sup>32</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, "Lutheran Theology and the Defence of Bib-



- lical Faith”, in *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: NY: 1978), 152.
- <sup>33</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostle: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 76.
- <sup>34</sup> Doug Birdsall and Lindsay Brown, Foreword, *CTC* [Available at <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html#foreword>.]
- <sup>35</sup> See esp. David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me. Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011)
- <sup>36</sup> David Kinnaman og Gabe Lyons, *unChristian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), s. 81.
- <sup>37</sup> For references to my previous contributions on Acts 17 and apologetics, see <http://larsdahle.no/acts-17/>.
- <sup>38</sup> Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death: The Sixties Counterculture and How It Changed America Forever* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1994), 342, 358.
- <sup>39</sup> For an exploration of theistic arguments over against atheistic claims, see Peter S. Williams, *A Sceptic's Guide to Atheism: God is Not Dead* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2009).
- <sup>40</sup> See Williams, *A Sceptic's Guide*.
- <sup>41</sup> For a recent exploration of these issues, see Peter S. Williams, *Understanding Jesus: Five Ways to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2012).
- <sup>42</sup> A fundamental theological and argumentative consistency may be demonstrated between ‘the Lucan Paul’ in Acts 17:16-34 and the relevant Pauline passages in 1 Thess. 1:9-10, Rom 1:18ff, and 1 Cor 9:19-23.
- <sup>43</sup> It should be emphasized that none of these apologetic arguments from Acts 17:16-34 are to be considered as conclusive, compelling or coercive. However, as indicative of an IBE-approach, they should be seen as claiming (1) higher plausibility than alternative explanatory options, (2) overall coherence and consistency and (3) theological significance and existential relevance.

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### **Sannhet, kristen misjon og apologetikk**

Denne artikkelen har en todelt hensikt, dels å respondere på Andrew Kirks vesentlige artikkel om «The Religious Smorgasbord: What Is Truth?» og dels å presentere mitt eget bidrag om hvordan sentrale apologetiske anliggender kan og bør integreres i missiologisk tenkning og praksis. I den første delen av artikkelen bekrefter jeg Kirks hovedtese om at «slutning til beste forklaring» er en fruktbar missiologisk tilnæringsmåte i en pluralistisk kontekst, før jeg introduserer noen viktige nyanseringer og tre aktuelle eksempler. Den andre delen av artikkelen inneholder så mitt eget bidrag, der jeg presenterer to sentrale teser. For det første argumenterer jeg for at apologetikkens rolle bør forståes både i forhold til pre-evangelisering, evangelisering og post-evangelisering. For det andre løfter jeg frem tre argumenter fra Apgj. 17,16-34 som en aktuell apologetisk modell, nemlig 'naturlig teologi', 'absolutt autoritet' og 'Jesus og oppstandelsen'. Disse tre kan alle uttrykkes i argumentativ form som «slutning til beste forklaring».