

BOLD Course – Class 3 - Apologetic models

Chart 1

How we come to know

Reason Faith
 < ----- >

General revelation / natural theology Special revelation
 < ----- >

Evidence

External Internal
 < ----- >

The effects of Sin

Worldly wisdom Godly wisdom
 < ----- >

Able Unable
 < ----- >

To whom is apologetics directed at – or who benefits from apologetics?

Unbeliever Believer
 < ----- >

(Notes)

General revelation = Things revealed about God in and through creation

Special revelation = Bible

Natural theology = Knowledge acquired of God without the bible. Man is able to make the ascent reasonably that there is a God apart from special revelation.

The Classical Method

The **classical method** is an approach that begins by employing natural theology / General revelation to establish theism as the correct worldview. After God's existence has thus been shown, the classical method moves to a presentation of the historical evidences for the deity of Christ, the trustworthiness of the Scripture, et cetera, to show that Christianity is the best version of theism, as opposed to, say, Judaism or Islam. This school is called the "classical" method because it is assumed that this is the method used by the most prominent apologists of earlier centuries. Contemporary apologists who may be classified as classical apologists include R.C. Sproul, Norman Geisler, Stephen T. Davis, William Lane Craig, and Richard Swinburne.

It is usually argued that the order of the **two phases (two step)** in classical apologetics is essential. That is, before one can meaningfully discuss historical evidences, one has to have established God's existence because one's worldview is a framework through which miracles, historical facts, and other empirical data are interpreted. Without a theistic context, no historical event could ever be shown to be a divine miracle. The flipside of this claim is that one cannot appeal to alleged miracles in order to prove God's existence. As Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley argue, "miracles cannot prove God. God, as a matter of fact, alone can prove miracles. That is, only on the prior evidence that God exists is a miracle ever possible." However, not everyone who considers himself or herself a classical apologist will insist on this point, as William Lane Craig makes clear in this volume that the classical methodology need not insist on a theoretical necessity in the order of these two steps, but only, given the nature of probability arguments, that this order is the best *argumentative strategy*.

The evidential method

The **evidential method** has much in common with the classical method except in solving the issue concerning the value of miracles as evidence. Evidentialism as an apologetic method may be characterized as the **"one-step"** approach. Miracles do not presuppose God's existence (as most contemporary classical apologists assert) but can serve as one sort of evidence for God. This method is fairly eclectic in its use of various positive evidences and negative critiques, utilizing both philosophical and historical arguments. Yet it tends to focus chiefly on the legitimacy of accumulating various historical and other inductive arguments for the truth of Christianity.

Given this focus, evidentialists may and will argue both for theism and Christian theism at the same time without recourse to an elaborate natural theology. They might begin, for instance, by arguing for the historical factuality of Jesus' resurrection and then argue that such an unusual event is explicable only if a being very much like the Christian God exists. Having then established God's existence via Christ's miraculous resurrection, the evidentialist would then go on to contend that Jesus' resurrection also authenticates his claims to be God incarnate and his teaching on the divine authority of Scripture. Gary Habermas advocates Evidentialism. Others include John W. Montgomery, Josh McDowell, and Lee Strobel.

The Cumulative case method

The **third of the Big Four** is the **cumulative case method**. The term "cumulative case" is used by apologists in ways different than we are using it in this context, but Basil Mitchell, an early proponent of this view, gave this method that name. The careful reader will no doubt note that this method belongs to the same broad family of methods as does the evidential (and perhaps classical) method. However, it will also be apparent that as an argumentative strategy, the cumulative case method has something distinctive to offer. Indeed, this approach to apologetics arose because of the dissatisfaction that some philosophers had with these other evidential-type methods (i.e., the first two of the Big Four). According to advocates of cumulative case apologetics, the nature of the case for Christianity is not in any strict sense a formal argument like a proof or an argument from probability. In the words of Mitchell, the cumulative case method does "not conform to the ordinary pattern of deductive or inductive reasoning." The case is more like the brief that a lawyer makes in a court of law or that a literary critic makes for a particular interpretation of a book. It is an informed argument that pieces together several lines or types of data into a sort of hypothesis or theory that comprehensively explains that data and does so better than any alternative hypothesis. Paul Feinberg says that "Christian theists are urging that [Christianity] makes better sense of all the evidence available than does any other alternative worldview on offer, whether that alternative is some other theistic view or atheism." The data that the cumulative case seeks to explain include the existence and nature of the cosmos, the reality of religious experience, the objectivity of morality, and certain other historical facts, such as the resurrection of Jesus.

Beside Paul Feinberg and Mitchell, the cumulative case school would likely include C.S. Lewis

The Presuppositional method

Due to the noetic effects of sin (How sin negatively effects the mind & intellect), presuppositionalists usually hold that there is not enough common ground between believers and unbelievers that would allow followers of the prior three methods to accomplish their goals. The apologist must simply presuppose the truth of Christianity as the proper starting point in apologetics. Here the Christian revelation in the Scriptures is the framework through which all experience is interpreted and all truth is known. Various evidences and arguments can be advanced for the truth of Christianity, but these at least implicitly presuppose premises that can be true only if Christianity is true. Presuppositionalist attempt, then, to argue *transcendentally*. That is, they argue that all meaning and thought - indeed, every fact - logically presupposes the God of the Scriptures. John Frame a presuppositionalist puts the matter this way: "We should present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as the one who makes argument possible" By demonstrating that unbelievers cannot argue, think, or live without presupposing God, presuppositionalists try to show unbelievers that their own worldview is inadequate to explain their experience of the world and to get unbelievers to see that Christianity alone can make sense of their experience. Other presuppositionalists include Cornelius Van Til, Gordon Clark, Greg Bahsen and Francis Schaeffer

Books for further reading

About Apologetical methods

Classical Apologetic books

Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics Paperback – June 9, 2008 by Wm Lane Craig

Classical Apologetics Paperback – June 24, 1984 by John H. Gerstner (Author), Arthur W. Lindsley (Author), R.C. Sproul (Author)

RC's series Classical apologetics on YouTube (total of 25 - 24 minute teachings)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOKL-7P3g04&list=PL39rMtwOWL3bi5UNonZJR2-NHINZZUitv>

Evidential apologetic books

The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus Paperback – September 25, 2004 by Gary R. Habermas

The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict: - Nov 21 1999 by Josh McDowell

The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus – December 24, 2013 by Lee Strobel

Cumulative apologetic method book

Five Views on Apologetics Paperback – February 7, 2000 by Steven B. Cowan (Editor), Stanley N. Gundry (Series Editor), Gary Habermas (Contributor), William Lane Craig (Contributor), **Paul D. Feinberg (Contributor)**, Kelly James Clark (Contributor), John M. Frame (Contributor)

Presuppositional apologetic books

Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction Paperback – February 1, 1994 by John M. Frame

Van Til's Apologetic Hardcover – July 1, 1998 by Greg L. Bahnsen

The Defense of the Faith Paperback – July 14, 2008 by Cornelius Van Til (Author), K. Scott Oliphint (Editor)