

PREPARING OUR YOUTH TO DEFEND THEIR FAITH

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ABSTRACT

There has been a resurgence of the study of apologetics in Lutheran circles recently, in the Missouri Synod as well as the Wisconsin Synod. As our society continues to become more and more “post-Christian,” Christians and members in the WELS are asking for more information about how to defend their faith. This post-Christian society is one that our students are entering after high school, but in some cases even earlier. Some of our WELS elementary students go on to a public high school and do not receive additional biblical education. Neither do they receive much instruction on how to defend their faith against the questions that will be placed before them. It is primarily with these students in mind that this thesis will explore how to begin introducing apologetics in middle school.

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INTRODUCTION

We have all seen it – the promising young catechism students, who seemed so grounded in their faith, being skirted away by the arguments of our society. These arguments usually occur in two ways. The first is that they fully assault the concept of God’s Word as truth. The second is a slow erosion of faith which occurs from constant immersion in the cultural waters of postmodernism. Concern for the youth in congregations is the driving force behind this paper. It is a concern for the students who will continue in their Christian education at Lutheran high schools, but of particular interest are those who will not. It is concern for those who will face the slights, temptations, and challenges of experiencing life “outside the bubble” far earlier than some of their peers.

A Barna study from 2011 in the book *You Lost Me* found numerous reasons why young adults leave the church. These reasons include the perception of the church as overprotective, its appearance as antagonistic to science, the exclusivity of Christianity, and the unwelcoming feeling toward those who doubt.¹ These reasons may not be surprising to anyone. They are issues that many have fought against when teaching students in catechism, in an effort to retain some students after confirmation. How can we confront this challenge? This author suggests that introducing apologetics at the elementary-school level is one way in which we can help prepare our students for the assaults that they are sure to face when they enter the world. This is not a delusion of grandeur that sees apologetics as a panacea for the loss of our young adults. It is simply *one* approach that we can implement to try to stem the hemorrhage of young people leaving our churches. This thesis intends to encourage not only pastors teaching catechism class,

1. David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me – Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 92-93.

but also teachers, parents, and lay-members, to begin introducing apologetics at the grade school level, particularly 7th and 8th grade.

APOLOGETICS

Scripture Regarding Apologetics

Apologetics is a loaded word. Perhaps the debate between Ken Ham and Bill Nye comes to mind when “apologetics” is mentioned. This approach to apologetics relies on science to defend Scripture. This may have some benefits, but should not be seen as the definition of apologetics. This is perhaps the reason that some high school instructors² were outrightly opposed to introducing apologetics at such an early age. For a clear understanding of apologetics, let us go to the passage that is considered the *sedes doctrinae*, which many use to defend the use of apologetics.

Peter writes in his first epistle, in chapter three, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (NIV 84). The word ἀπολογία is where the apologetics hat generally is hung. It indicates a “defense” or “reply.” Professor David Kuske points out that ἀπολογία “can refer to a formal defense made in a court case...But the verses that follow in this context seem to indicate that here it has the sense of believers defending their way of life because others are asking why they live so differently from those around them.”³ So, Paul is not speaking here of giving scientific proofs to defend Christianity. He is simply stating that Christians ought to be able to verbalize what they believe and why they believe it. This would seem to indicate a more thorough answer than, “The Bible says so.” Therefore, the early Christians were encouraged to defend their faith, to give a reason for the

2. Interviews were sent out to each Lutheran High School to understand what is taught so that it could be determined what would be beneficial to teach at a lower grade level.

3. David P. Kuske, *A Commentary On 1 & 2 Peter, Jude* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015), 173.

hope that they had. This was not only meant to be a defense of the faith, but an outreach opportunity as well! Thus, apologetics as described in Scripture, in its most basic form, is a defense of the faith with the purpose witnessing to others the life-saving truth found in Christ.

Those who oppose introducing apologetics at an early age do so because of a concern that reason will sit in the driver's seat and the focus will be taken off of Christ. This is a valid concern. The biblical concept of apologetics can be, and has been, taken too far. It may seem as if people are *relying* on scientific apologetics or philosophical apologetics as a basis for faith.⁴ When apologetics is understood in the way that is described above, simply as a defense or having a response to critics, perhaps those who strongly oppose introducing apologetics at the grade-school level would be more open to the concept.

Lutheran Apologetics

Dr. John Warwick Montgomery writes, as a heading in one of his papers, that “Apologetics ≠ Dogmatics.” He explains,

By this we mean that, whereas Dogmatics begins with God's special revelation of himself in Holy Scripture and expounds its content, Apologetics begins where the unbeliever is: “becoming all things to all people, that we might save some” – “a Jew to the Jew and a Greek to the Greeks.” This does not mean, to be sure, that in Apologetics we alter the eternal message to fit the unbeliever's situation or needs.

Apologetics, in its correct biblical form, is not something to be feared. In fact, it is a branch of evangelism. In Dr. Montgomery's *Sensible Christianity* lectures, he states that the “fundamental thrust [of apologetics] is to push the unbeliever to the cross.”⁵ The cross is central to Lutheran

4. This paper will not delve into defining all the different subsets of apologetics. Briefly some of the major approaches of apologetics will be mentioned in passing and what a Lutheran apologetic looks like.

5. John W., Montgomery, “Sensible Christianity,” Audio recording, location N/A, MP3 file.

apologetics! Dr. Wade Johnston of Wisconsin Lutheran College echoes this when he says, “Get to Jesus!”⁶

Lutheran apologetics cannot be discussed without touching on Luther’s view of apologetics and, especially, his view on the use of reason. Many are likely familiar with Luther’s view on reason, which Dr. Siegbert Becker excellently expounds in *The Foolishness of God*. Luther’s view of reason was twofold. First, he despised it. He uttered phrases about it which we would dare not speak in front of our mothers. Second, he exalted it as a fantastic blessing from God, a gift which should be used to study the Scriptures.

Luther had little or no use for apologetics which attempted to “prove” the existence of or anything about God. He “resisted all attempts at making the Gospel reasonable. Not only did he consider such efforts a waste of time, but he looked upon them as dangerous and actually destructive of the Christian faith.”⁷ He saw it as destructive in the sense that, if used in a magisterial way, it could overpower faith, turn it toward false teaching, or even destroy it. The apologetics with which Luther was familiar were putting too much emphasis on reason. Scholasticism was leaning on reason and apologetics to prop up faith instead of using it as a way to support biblical evangelism to the unbeliever. Neither apologetics nor reason is to be used to buttress the faith of a Christian. Dr. Becker writes, “More than this, faith cannot be maintained even in a Christian by arguments of reason.”⁸

It is perhaps because of the first view listed that Lutherans have generally erred on the side of caution when teaching the relationship between reason and Scripture. This is with good

6. Wade Johnston (Assistant Professor of Theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College), interviewed by Jesse Knox, Milwaukee, WI, Aug. 31, 2018.

7. Siegbert W. Becker, “Luther’s Apologetics,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, (1958), 742-759.

8. Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1984), 163.

reason – they want to preserve the gospel! By doing this, however, they have sometimes failed to prepare students for the tough questions that they will face or have faced already.

The world in which Luther lived was different. This is, perhaps, an obvious statement, but it is something to be considered. The society in Luther’s day was not a pluralistic one as we have today. It was generally taken for granted that your neighbor was Christian. Therefore, evangelism looked different and apologetics would not have served as great a purpose in evangelism.

So, when we speak of Lutheran apologetics, we need to establish what apologetics can and cannot do. It cannot create faith. It cannot support faith. It cannot add to the power of the Word. What it can do, however, is take down objections which people have set up in opposition to Christianity. These may be objections which they hold but are actually inconsistent with other views they hold.⁹ As Lutheran apologists attempt to lovingly dismantle those objections for their neighbor, they are hoping for an opportunity to share the gospel.

It is important to note that even though apologetics falls under the discipline of evangelism, this is not the main purpose for introducing our students to apologetics. If they have the zeal and confidence to discuss with their friends and deconstruct the barriers which have been set up, this is a blessing. The main purpose of introducing apologetics to our students, however, is to enable them to have a response to the objections that will be dropped in front of them in biology class, world history class, etc. The goal is to help them to “break down false arguments,”¹⁰ so that crippling doubt does not incapacitate them.

9. Craig A. Parton, *Religion on Trial* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 36.

10. Michael Berg, “No Apologies, Apologetics,” *Let The Bird Fly*, Podcast audio, Oct. 3, 2017, <https://www.letthebirdfly.com/2017/10/03/episode-27-no-apologies-apologetics>

The use of reason in such situations, placed under faith in the ministerial role, is a blessing from God. Luther says, “Just as all gifts and instruments of nature are evil in godless men, so they are good in believers...Enlightened reason, taken captive by faith, receives life from faith, for it is slain and given life again.”¹¹ Reason in and of itself is not bad. People use it all the time in their daily lives and students ought to be taught how to use it correctly. Examples of the ministerial use of reason are found in Scripture, such as Paul in Corinth speaking the Word of God in the Areopagus as he was reaching out to the lost.¹² It is also seen as he stood before Festus making his case.¹³

Lutheran apologetics is not something to be feared; it is a Christ-centered tool for reaching out to those who do not know their Savior. For our students, the purpose of introducing apologetics is to enable them to think clearly and dismantle arguments that are being placed in front of them. The goal is to provide them with an intelligent response to objections which are placed before them.

11. Martin Luther, “The Place of Reason in Christian Life, 1533,” in *Table Talk* (ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert; vol. 54 of *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 183.

12. Acts 16.

13. Acts 25.

INSTRUCTION AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

You Want To Teach What? At What Age?

Some advocate that students be focused strictly on learning the basic stories of Scripture and memorizing Bible passages instead of being introduced to apologetics. This is most certainly the main goal of Christian instruction but perhaps there is a part of their religious instruction which has been neglected. When a gardener begins growing plants indoors in March, then immediately places them outside at the end of April, they die! The plants are exposed to the elements too quickly and become droopy. The gardener then has to revive them. Therefore, what gardeners often do, is place the seedlings outside for an hour a day, and slowly increase the time that they are outside. With this approach, the seedling slowly is strengthened to the point when it can be transplanted outside. It can now endure the elements and survive—even flourish! Perhaps this is what we should be doing with our students: expose them to some of the harsh weather they are going to face in the world slowly, a little bit at a time, and instruct them on it.

So, why such a young age? Why not wait until high school? One reason is obvious, because the continued Christian education that is offered in our Lutheran High Schools will not be received by all. What about youth group? The reality is that many of our churches lack a youth group and even thriving ones do not see *every* student returning. For the sake of students who go to public schools, it is imperative to begin apologetical instruction at an early age.

Our students who continue on to public school¹⁴ already face some of these daunting questions at the grade-school level. They are being constantly inundated by Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram – the list could go on. Media has expanded the world of our students

14. This is not meant to cut down public schools. They are great institutions and a blessing to our society. Also, they can provide a fantastic learning environment regarding different cultures if our students are properly prepared to deal with the challenges that come along with it.

beyond anything we would have known. They face difficult questions and concepts as early as middle school. They are being bombarded by multiple points of view in an ever-growing pluralistic and postmodern society.¹⁵

A majority of the time it seems that our students are ill-prepared to cope with the world outside of “the bubble.” The “bubble” would be the church culture in which they are raised, where most people they know have the same perspective on the world. Then, once they get to public high school or a public college, they are ostracized, because of the faith they hold. Two challenges, specifically, are the culture of post-modernism as well as the adherence to a strictly scientific perspective on life. James Sire puts it nicely when describing the challenges of living in a post-modern world. He writes, “Those who hang on to their metanarrative as if it really were the master story, encompassing or explaining all other stories, are under an illusion.”¹⁶ Postmodern thought bucks at and rejects any ideas or metanarratives that claim to have figured out all the important parts of life.¹⁷ This would include a rejection of Christianity as well as a rejection of science.¹⁸ This is what students are up against, this is what they grow up in, and this is what is subtly ingrained in them (as well as us), perhaps even without our awareness of it.

15. The current culture we live in and in which students grow up in is postmodern. Most scholars who have studied postmodernism likely could not agree on a definition of it. One way of defining it is to say what James Sire says in his book *The Universe Next Door*, “No longer is there a single story, a metanarrative...that holds Western culture together.” There is no longer one correct way to account for our world and the society in which we live. This is the swirling sea of ideas in which our students are suspended, learning to view the world in a plethora of different ways that are inconsistent with biblical teaching. It may not be evident and maybe it is not an issue yet. It may look as if students are sheltered and safe from the sea of postmodernism but perhaps that is part of the problem.

16. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, Fifth Ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 223.

17. Bruce Hilman “Postmodernism,” *The Thinking Fellows*, Podcast audio, Aug. 31, 2018. <https://www.thinkingfellows.com/blog/2018/postmodernism>.

18. Sire, 222.

How can postmodernism reject the scientific/naturalist worldview, along with Christianity? To clarify, the worldviews themselves are not rejected as being valueless. Postmodernism would say, “If Christianity works for you, great! If Naturalism works for you, great!” What is being rejected is when one makes the claim that there is only one truth. Therefore, it is possible for the scientific worldview to be very much alive and influential in our society, while still being “rejected” by postmodernism as a metanarrative.

The issue that stems from Naturalism and a scientific worldview is that, “World views religion and facts on opposite ends of the spectrum.”¹⁹ They are portrayed as being incompatible. Brad Gregory writes about the secularization of knowledge at the university level:

In research universities, the beliefs, practices, sacred texts, and worship of any and all religious traditions can be and are the objects of study according to the secular assumptions of the social sciences of humanities. But religion is not and cannot be considered a potential source of knowledge, just as theology—as opposed to religious studies—cannot be an academic discipline on par with other academic disciplines if it includes claims of divine revelation.²⁰

This is how our society views the relationship between knowledge and religion. This is not only at the university level, but in high school and in elementary school. This perspective, combined with the culture of postmodernism (which denies anyone can claim to have knowledge of a universal Truth) makes it imperative that we educate our students *in a specific way, on specific material*.

In addition to these environmental challenges which students (as well as adults) face, there is information which is more relevant to our synod. “A study was requested by a 2003

19. Michael Berg (Assistant Professor of Theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College), interviewed by Jesse Knox, Milwaukee, WI, Aug. 31, 2018.

20. Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 299-300.

Synod convention resolution and was commissioned by the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD).²¹ At the time the study was completed in 2005, Dr. Joel Nelson, the head of the CYD at the time, was interviewed by David Sellnow. This is a brief summary of what that study and the subsequent interview revealed. In the survey, 163 pastors responded to the interview. They made observations as to why young people leave the church. They highlighted family influence, increased freedom for youth, sub-standard youth programs/no sense of ownership, confirmation syndrome, and the influence of peers/culture. This study also asked the opinions of the “leavers.” When asked why they left WELS, 91 responded. When asked how the responses of pastors and the “leavers” compared, Dr. Nelson replied, “I would say there is quite a bit of similarity. The youth, however, seemed to express the different view that WELS adults in leadership as not really understanding them, and are being too critical, close-minded, and negative toward non-WELS people. They also felt that in the WELS adult’s mind, youth don’t count.”²²

Now, all of these issues mentioned cannot be addressed by introducing apologetics at an earlier age, but that is not the goal. The goal is to introduce apologetics as *a* way to help address the issue of youth leaving our churches; as was mentioned in the introduction, this is not a panacea. We have seen again and again how the cultural weather of our time causes the faith of our students to wilt. Therefore, it is necessary to begin to acclimate them prior to high school to the challenges they will face, especially for the sake of our public-school students. This can be done by introducing apologetics at the catechism level.

21. Joel Nelson, “Responding to Why Youth Leave WELS,” Interviewed by David Sellnow, *The Lutheran Educator*, Nov. 2006.

22. Nelson, “Why Youth Leave WELS.”

Cognitive Development of 7th and 8th Graders

From this assertion arises the question whether middle school students are even able to comprehend the abstract concepts that would be involved in apologetics. Jean Piaget (1896-1980), Swiss psychologist and a key influencer in educational psychology, had a theory which proposed that children develop in cognitive stages. Piaget said abilities increase as maturation occurs.²³ The four stages which Piaget lays out are: sensorimotor (birth to age 2), preoperational (2-6/7), concrete operations (6/7-11/12), and formal operations (11/12-adulthood). The stages which we are interested in are the concrete and formal stages. By the time students enter 7th and 8th grade they are likely entering the formal stage.

According to Piaget's theory, "Children in the concrete operations stage can reason only about concrete objects and events, and especially about things they can actually see."²⁴ This stage occurs around ages 6 or 7 to ages 11 or 12. Then begins the formal operations stage in which the ability to think abstractly emerges – right around age 11 or 12. 7th and 8th graders are generally 12 and 13 years old. This means they are entering the formal stage according to Piaget's approach. So, what does this mean for the purposes of this thesis? If we introduce students to apologetics in middle school, it is likely that they will be able to understand and grasp the basic concepts being taught. There may be some students who develop at a slower pace, but that does not mean we should not begin introduction apologetics in 7th and 8th grade. Rather, we should seize the opportunity to teach students how to think abstractly, specifically in regard to apologetics, from the earliest time they are able.

23. Robert J. Sternberg, Wendy M. Williams, *Educational Psychology* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education Inc., 2010), 51.

24. Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Essentials of Educational Psychology – Big Ideas to Guide Effective Teaching* (Boston: Pearson Education Inc., 2012), 150.

Piaget was a giant in the field of psychology but he was by no means perfect. According to Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, “Abstract and hypothetical reasoning seem to emerge earlier and more gradually than Piaget proposed.”²⁵ The cognitive development which is needed to understand certain concepts involved with apologetics may begin to develop earlier than age 11 or 12. This, in itself, is not very significant; however, there is more information that is promising and encouraging.

“The ability to think logically about a situation or topic depends to some degree on learners’ background knowledge and educational experiences.”²⁶ Students at the middle school level who attend a Lutheran Elementary School generally possess an immense amount of Scriptural background knowledge. Some may disagree, insisting they do not have enough to begin learning apologetics. We indeed want our students to have as much biblical knowledge as possible before they head off to high school or college. However, when we compare our grade-school students to the average joe in our culture today, our students would likely blow them out of the water in a game of Bible trivia. Our students have the background knowledge that will enable them to more easily grasp some of the abstract concepts and ideas that will be introduced to them. We need to foster and guide students in the correct way to *use* their background knowledge and apply it to practical situations.

Another important reason to begin introducing apologetics to our students is that the abilities they will need to understand and use some of these apologetical concepts “are more likely to develop when they’re actively nurtured rather than left to chance.”²⁷ Some of these

25. Ormrod, *Essentials of Educational Psychology – Big Ideas to Guide Effective Teaching*, 151.

26. Ormrod, *Essentials of Educational Psychology – Big Ideas to Guide Effective Teaching*, 152.

27. Ormrod, *Essentials of Educational Psychology – Big Ideas to Guide Effective Teaching*, 172.

cognitive abilities²⁸ are more useful to the field of science, but are still used in other areas of study and for general reasoning.

Thus far, in regard to the cognitive development of students, this paper has defended introducing apologetics at the grade-school level. Now, positive information will be supplied in this same area of study.

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) is another colossal name in the field of educational psychology. His theory was different than that of Piaget. Whereas Piaget saw cognitive development as occurring in stages, “Vygotsky’s major premise was that a person’s internal processes have their roots in interactions with others... This theory is sometimes referred to as sociocultural theory.”²⁹

Sociocultural theory is significant for our purposes, not because of where students are in 7th and 8th grade, but rather where they *will* be and the people who *will* be influencing them. It is around the high school age, grades 9-12, when the “search for the ‘real me’”³⁰ begins. This is when a person’s “sense of self” begins to take on shape and when influences from peers, society, and culture increase.

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) proposed a stage theory of personal development. The stage for the adolescent age is called “Identity versus Role Confusion.” “During this stage, adolescents are figuring out who they are. They struggle with questions such as what is and is not important to them, what their values are, and who they will become as they grow up.”³¹ As

28. Such abilities are: “sophisticated mathematical and scientific reasoning processes—proportional reasoning, formulating and testing hypotheses, separating and controlling variables, and so on...”

29. Sternberg, *Educational Psychology*, 51.

30. Ormrod, *Essentials of Educational Psychology – Big Ideas to Guide Effective Teaching*, 245.

31. Sternberg, *Educational Psychology*, 78.

students enter high school and social experiences increase, the behaviors of others affect learners' sense of self.³² Common throughout educational psychology is the awareness that the behaviors of others affect and influence a person.

This is especially true in the adolescent years. Many adults worry about what others think of them and perhaps adjust their behavior accordingly. How much more so as an adolescent with hormones buzzing and self-esteem skyrocketing and crumbling on a day to day basis! For our students going into public high schools, what others think of them poses a significant temptation—that is, the temptation to shy away from their Christian beliefs in order to be accepted into the group. “Young adults also look to their peers to be their moral and spiritual compass. They tend to base their views of morality on what seems fair-minded, loyal, and acceptable to their friends.”³³

The urge to be accepted into a group is a strong one. C.S. Lewis, in *The Weight of Glory*, speaks of the desire people have to be in the “Inner Ring.” He writes, “I believe that in all men’s lives at all periods between infancy and extreme old age, one of the most dominant elements is the desire to be inside the local Ring and the terror of being left outside.”³⁴ He describes the “Ring” as being part of the “in crowd,” being able to have an opinion that matters to others in the “Ring.” He points out that there are many different “Rings.” These “Rings” are not all bad, though some of them can be. Some of these “Rings” are “most skillful in making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things.”³⁵ This is not saying that students who go to public schools are going to end up in bad “Rings” doing drugs or dropping out of school. However,

32. Ormrod, *Essentials of Educational Psychology – Big Ideas to Guide Effective Teaching*, 242.

33. David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me – Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith*, 172.

34. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 58.

35. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 63.

there may be more “Inner Rings” that have the potential to plant significant doubts in the minds of students, potentially enticing them away from the truth.

Lewis writes in regard to the ambition to be in the “Inner Ring”, “Unless you take measures to prevent it, this desire is going to be one of the chief motives of your life.”³⁶

Therefore, how do we prevent that ambition from controlling the minds of students and leading them to be willing to sacrifice their faith for the sake of what others think of them? We teach them the living Word of God, which is sharper than any double-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). That comes first and foremost; that is the foundation, the rock on which we build. Then, as a secondary defense, apologetics is one more way that we can equip students to be more prepared for the world that they will face – the world they already face.

36. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 62.

LOOKING FORWARD

The Goals of *Introducing Apologetics*

This phrase “Introducing apologetics” has been used frequently in this paper. What is meant exactly by that phrase? This section will begin to shed some light on that question and some of the specifics of what is intended by introducing apologetics. It is not the author’s opinion that “introducing apologetics” is the correct way of speaking about what should be implemented at the middle school level, due to all the baggage that comes with the term “apologetics.” This phrase is used, however, due to the lack of a more concise, clearer phrase. What is meant by introducing apologetics is *not* to drill specific arguments into the brains of our students. There will be a place for some of that. It is instead focused on getting our students to actually *think*. It would teach students the correct use of reason, introducing them to the ways other people think, assumptions they make, and why they think that way. These apologetics would also focus on talking to people with gentleness and respect, as the apostle Peter encourages us to do (1 Peter 3:15). It includes an attempt to help students make their faith “their own” and help them to live for their Savior. There is a lot wrapped up in the phrase “introducing apologetics.” What follows is a breakdown of what is included in that concept.

In an effort to best understand what concepts could be taught to students, interviews were sent out to each of the WELS area Lutheran high schools. Of the fifteen responses, a majority showed a general interest in the concept of introducing apologetics at such an early age. Others simply thought it was a bad idea. This concern is well-noted, as it is not intended that apologetics be elevated above Scripture. Those who reject the idea were concerned about the use

of reason taking on a magisterial role in the faith of our young adults.³⁷ This is something which, of course, we do not want and has been covered previously in this paper.

In addition to the interviews sent out to high schools, a short questionnaire was given to 7th and 8th graders. The questions asked about the experiences students had which raised doubts in their minds about God's Word and what topics they wished were taught in catechism class. Overall, the responses were very insightful and deep. Middle school students have questions about many of the same things we, as adults, have questions about and struggle with. Specifically, some of their concerns revolved around evolution, the problem of evil, and the exclusivism of Christianity.³⁸ In addition to simply knowing the struggles of students and what to teach them, this information will also be used to establish the goals of introducing apologetics.

The interviews which were sent to our WELS high schools were sent to religion teachers. Of the fifteen schools which replied, four were in favor of introducing apologetics at the grade-school level. Four were opposed to it and seven were unsure, but seemed open to the idea. *All* those interviewed showed great concern for the teaching of God's Word and do not want reason to take a magisterial role. What a blessing to see this concern and care from our religion teachers in our Lutheran high schools!

Of the fifteen schools interviewed, five seem to have a fairly heavy inclusion of apologetics especially during Junior and Senior year. Five schools have a fair amount of incidental inclusion, with two schools planning on adding courses specifically geared toward

37. Note that this was not only a concern of those who objected to introducing apologetics at this early age. Those who were interested and had positive feelings about this concept also expressed concern for laying a solid foundation of biblical knowledge.

38. This information goes to show that 7th and 8th graders are thinking about some tough questions, the very same that we struggle with. Now, this is not *all* of the students and some of the questions are not explicitly "If God is all-powerful, and loving why is there evil?" That question is really *behind* some of the more "elementary" questions that the students ask.

apologetics. There are also five schools who have little integration of apologetics, addressing it incidentally when it comes up.

In determining the goals for introducing apologetics at the grade-school level, the ideas and suggestions of the five high schools which have a heavier emphasis on apologetics were taken into consideration more than the others.³⁹ This is appropriate since those schools have the most experience teaching apologetics and can best speak to what would be beneficial for students to know prior to entering high school. The following goals are listed in order of importance, or in the order that they ought to be introduced in the classroom. This order is the author's opinion, based on the research done. After the goals are listed, the subsequent section will deal with each goal in more detail and suggest some thoughts as to how to reach these goals.⁴⁰

Goal 1: Model the proper use of reason and proper Lutheran apologetics.

If we don't want our students to fall into the snare of elevating reason above Scripture, we ought to model for them how to properly use reason. Teaching Bible history and doctrine is essential and important, but if that is all we do, we are failing to adequately prepare our students. Remember, we are keeping in mind those students who will go on to public high schools and face this temptation much sooner than perhaps we did.

Goal 2: Model a loving attitude toward those who disagree with us.

39. Note that the five schools which emphasize apologetics the most do not directly correlate to the top five that are in favor of introducing apologetics at the grade-school level.

40. To prevent any disappointment, it should be noted that the suggestions on how to reach the goals listed will not be extremely specific on methods or approaches. That is not within the scope of this paper. The suggestions will be more along the lines of listing what information is important for students to learn in order to achieve that specific goal. To get those specifics, the reader will have to do some research and, most importantly, talk to others who are doing these things.

One of the major reasons our young adults leave the church is because they perceive those in the church as intolerant, and oftentimes, they are right. Once they meet others outside their church and see how open and tolerant they are, students compare that to what they have known in the church their whole life. Oftentimes, they are appalled. They wonder how these people who claim to love their neighbors can say such terrible things about others who are perfectly pleasant to be around.⁴¹ A pastor or teacher needs to model the love that Christ showed to the depraved, rotten sinners of this world.

Goal 3: Teach our students how to think.

That may sound like a ridiculous goal. Aren't our students learning how to think all the time in school? We hope so, but this may not always be the case. In general, the education system in the United States has failed to equip students to slow down and think logically. Now, this is not to elevate reason to a magisterial use. Oftentimes, however, because of the lack of *actual* thinking, students may jump the ship of Christianity before they even realize that the opposing argument, which they are beginning to adhere to, is a false one. Therefore, it should be modeled for students how to think, how to be discerning, and how to be alert for false arguments and traps.⁴²

Goal 4: Address the tough questions of Christianity with our students.

41. This is an issue that can be addressed only to a certain extent by modeling by the pastor or teacher. To be truly effective, this must start in the home.

42. This ought to be done while explaining to students that those who present certain arguments often don't even know they are false.

The interviews completed by the 7th and 8th graders, as many would expect, reveal that middle school students wrestle with the tough questions of Christianity—questions about how we know the Bible is God’s Word, questions about the problem of evil, and questions regarding the theology of the cross. These questions need to be discussed and digested with the help of pastors or teachers, in order to prepare our students for the attacks and temptations Satan will throw their way.

Goal 5: Enable students to recognize some holes in the theory of evolution.

This was an intersection point between the surveys sent out to the high schools and to those done by the 7th and 8th graders. As was mentioned earlier, a good Lutheran apologetic does not enter the world of science and try to debate. It should rather be specifically recommended that students do not try to cite science to prove creation. Once we enter the realm of science to defend the faith, even those well-versed in the Scriptures will be outmaneuvered by those versed in the world of science.

Goal 6: Provide students with resources.

Providing our students with resources which they can go to when they have questions is important. After laying a foundation for the proper use of reason and modeling apologetics, we can provide them with resources from others who teach apologetics. This would include people such as Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, Craig Parton, C.S. Lewis, and others. Perhaps some of these names will stick in their mind, and when they have a question about something specific, they can do some reading and sifting of material on their own.

This concludes the goals of introducing apologetics. Perhaps a more concise definition for “introducing apologetics” would go something like this: It is a practical, reasonable way of thinking which addresses challenges to faith and is based on the foundation of the Holy Scriptures and infused with the love of Christ.

How to Achieve the Goals

Next, we will explore some general strategies for achieving these goals. It is important to remember a few things. First, this paper is mainly seeking to advocate for the introduction of apologetics at the grade-school level. The specifics of how that will be done would hopefully be developed at a later date. There are, however, some basic concepts which will be suggested that would be helpful in achieving the goals. The suggestions will not be exhaustive, but are simply intended to give some direction to those interested in introducing apologetics to their students.

Secondly, it should be noted that this author is not under the delusion that teaching apologetics to our students will be a cure-all for issues they face in school and life. These are meant to be supplementary concepts integrated into the 7th and 8th grade catechism curriculum. This is not a substitute for teaching Scripture. These concepts would be taught alongside Scripture and Luther’s catechism. Furthermore, this is not a substitute for parents who teach and model Christianity for their children. That, in the author’s opinion, goes much farther than any teaching of apologetics ever could and should be cultivated in congregations.

Goal 1: Model the Proper Use of Reason and Proper Lutheran Apologetics

Lutheran apologetics has not had a significant presence in the WELS. Perhaps this is due to our aversion and fear of elevating reason above Scripture – which is a worthy concern. However, when students enter our pluralistic world after being sheltered, they are overwhelmed! They

have perhaps heard how unreasonable Christianity is, from TV and social media, but once they enter the real world, it is more personal. Instead of the big, bad atheist on the internet, it is their teacher, whom they rather enjoy listening to, pointing out to them that their faith is unreasonable. All of a sudden, they have friends who point arguments out to them and they feel as if the church has been keeping them in the dark all their lives.

One way for teaching and modeling the proper use of reason in the classroom is to use Siegbert Becker's book, *The Foolishness of God*. We must let our students know first that, "Even if all the reason in the world were to be concentrated in one spot, it could not understand nor tolerate the Word, and the holier and sharper, the higher and more intelligent, reason is, the less it understands."⁴³ Teaching this requires a firm grasp of original sin, how utterly corrupt we are, and that our reason is clouded by sin. This part of reason is taught very well in our grade schools, but it must be followed up with more. Teachers should include the fact that reason is a tool God has given us to understand his Word. Students must be taught this balance.

Becker writes,

Luther did value reason highly as the instrument by which a person intellectually understands and apprehends the Word of God. Yet we have also heard him say that it is one thing to understand the Word of God and quite another thing to believe it and to accept it. And one of the greatest obstacles to the acceptance of the truth of the Word of God is this same reason by which it is apprehended mentally and understood. Luther was convinced that the better a person understands the Word of God the harder it is for him to believe it.

Our students need to be aware that reason is used to understand God's Word but can also get in the way of our belief. They need to know that there *will be* times when they doubt God's Word as they continue to grow in their faith.

43. Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, 156.

We want to do more than simply *tell* our students this. It is important to be transparent and acknowledge that there are things we struggle with. This is not easy. It seems counterintuitive. We may think, “If I tell them that *I* struggle with portions of God’s Word they are definitely going to bolt from the church once they are confirmed.” That is probably not true. If instructors themselves reveal that they struggle with certain teachings it will probably not increase the odds that once a student enters high school, they will stray from the faith. Likely, there will be two different outcomes. 1) They will appreciate the fact that the instructor is being honest with them and will therefore be more likely to return when they face doubts.⁴⁴ 2) They will see that the instructor, an educated adult, has thought through some of the tougher doctrines or questions related to Christianity.⁴⁵ They will perceive that reason was used and despite the fact that the answer to the question is *beyond* reason, the instructor still believed it. They will see that reason was taken captive, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

The second point above is commented on by Becker: “We Christians are not such fools that we do not know what it is that we believe. We will believe God and give him the glory against all sense and reason. If others do not want to believe it, that is their concern. And even if it does not harmonize, we still know that it is true, and we cheerfully take a risk on it in God’s name.”⁴⁶ Our students need to know that Christians have thought about the “unreasonableness”

44. This touches on the importance of the relationships that we cultivate with students in and out of the classroom. Time needs to be taken in class and, if possible, outside of class, to connect with our students and get to know them. They will be more likely to return when they face problems and difficulties in their lives. This is something that is often done with congregation members, but is sometimes neglected among our students.

45. More will be said on specific questions in goal number four.

46. Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, 166.

of Christianity and still hold to their faith. As Becker says, “It is not Christianity that needs to be made reasonable. It is reason that needs to be made Christian.”⁴⁷

Along with modeling the ministerial use of reason is modeling proper Lutheran apologetics. This first involves giving a general definition of what apologetics is: a defense of the faith. The Lutheran apologetic uses a ministerial use of reason to defend Christianity and to support scriptural evangelism. Some may not want to use the phrase “defend Christianity,” because we do not truly need to defend Scripture against reason. However, when evangelizing to unbelievers, there will be times of *some* defense of the faith with the ministerial use of reason; it can be difficult to separate the two.

Modeling proper Lutheran apologetics is necessary for the same reason that it is necessary to model the proper use of reason. We do not want our students to be exposed to all the arguments and challenges to Christianity at once, thereby creating a bigger temptation to drop the faith. In the same way, we do not want students to discover this thing called apologetics and rely heavily on it to the detriment of their faith. We do not want them to make the error of using apologetics ineffectively. So, what is the best apologetical approach for Lutherans to use?

First, a brief look must be taken at the broad approaches of apologetics. There are a few different ways to classify the different approaches. The following classifications come from Dr. Travis Campbell. The Classical method is a two-step method. The first step in the classical approach is to prove that God exists. Once the apologist has proven that God exists, they then move on to prove that the Christian God is the true God. Next is the Historical/Evidential method. This consists mainly of defending the historicity of Jesus’ existence. Included in this would be resurrection apologetics. The Presuppositional method offers an internal biblical

47. Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, 166.

critique of other schools of thought. The first goal is for the apologist to convince the skeptic that the Bible is God's Word. This form of apologetics tends to be circular in its reasoning and therefore is perhaps not the best method to use when evangelizing. The last approach is the Existential method. This provides a rationale for the faith based on the fact that the only way to escape the evil of this world is to embrace a life that is devoted to God.⁴⁸

The goal of Lutheran apologetics is to be Christ centered. When evangelizing, the goal is, "To get to Christ as efficiently as possible. You're not trying to win an argument; you're trying to win a soul."⁴⁹ In everything we do, we preach Christ crucified. That leads to the question: which apologetical approach gets us to Christ the quickest?

In their podcast, "Let The Bird Fly," Dr. Michael Berg and Dr. Wade Johnston speak about this topic. Dr. Johnston, when advocating for more apologetics in Lutheranism, points out that, "God was very careful to make sure that those who wrote Scripture, wrote about things that could be corroborated by events or by witnesses, that the gospels are not written as myth, they're not written in any way like you should just take a giant leap of faith. They're actually written very matter-of-factly, of 'This is what Jesus did for you.'"⁵⁰

Which approach gets to Christ the quickest? The quickest approach seems to be the historical approach, also known as the evidential approach.⁵¹ This approach deals with Christianity as being a verifiable religion based on historical facts. It also deals with the

48. Reasons to Believe, "Apologetics Methods: An Overview," Filmed [N/A], Youtube video, 02:26, Posted November, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CsUhQO4NUM>.

49. Michael Berg, "Apologetics", *Let The Bird Fly*, Podcast audio, June 23, 2018, <https://www.letthebirdfly.com/2018/06/23/episode-64-apologetics/>

50. Wade Johnston, "Apologetics", *Let The Bird Fly*, Podcast audio, June 23, 2018, <https://www.letthebirdfly.com/2018/06/23/episode-64-apologetics/>

51. For an overview on this method read Craig Parton's book, *Religion on Trial*.

resurrection of Jesus Christ as being a historical event. This is not to say that the other apologetical approaches are useless. However, the historical approach may be best for beginners since it is historical, concrete, and focuses on Christ.

Students would not be taught all of the ins and outs of historical apologetics. However, historical apologetics does seem to be a good jumping-off point so they can be introduced to apologetics. They can be told that creation apologetics may have a time and a place, but more importantly we want to get to Christ as quickly as possible when talking to skeptics. Another benefit of speaking to students about the historical approach is that it pushes them to view the Bible as a real historical document that was recorded in history.⁵²

Modeling the proper use of reason and the proper use of Lutheran apologetics is essential and foundational in preparing our students to defend their faith. When they see that someone has thought about the relationship between reason and faith, they will be more likely to return to their pastors, teachers, or others when they have their own questions. An immensely important and essential part of modeling—not only the use of reason and apologetics, but also Christian character as a whole—is doing all these things in a loving way.

Goal 2: Model a Loving Attitude Toward Those Who Disagree with Us.

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. *But do this with gentleness and respect.*”⁵³ There is a reason Peter writes this little phrase: he knows the human condition. How easy it is for us to become frustrated with someone when they do not agree with us! This

52. This is something that the author and likely many others did not experience in catechism class.

53. 1 Peter 3:15

weakness is not confined to the realm of religion – it permeates our culture on the news and the internet. Debates on TV between Republicans and Democrats contain so much tension it could be cut with a knife. The collateral from these debates and viewpoints spills over into heated, visceral exchanges online and in person. People often have no qualms about bad-mouthing those who think differently than themselves when they are in the company of those sympathetic to their view. Often people enjoy making those who hold the opposing view look like imbeciles.

Of course, our students notice this. Perhaps they even crack some jokes they have heard from their parents and, without thinking, the instructor laughs along or smiles. This affirms to them that the instructor is part of their “inner Ring” as C.S. Lewis would say. These students get older, their horizons are expanded by meeting people who do not share their viewpoints, and they see that they are merely different people! They’re just as nice as people in the church. Then they notice that many of the people in church speak in harsh, demeaning ways toward others. They think, “If this is the church, do I really want to be a part of it? They condemn my friends with vicious words!”

Susan Harding is a cultural anthropologist and a professor at the University of California-Santa Cruz. She wrote an article titled, “Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other.” In this article she studies the perception of the modernist’s view toward fundamentalists.⁵⁴ In her article, she coins the term “Repugnant Cultural Other” (RCO). An RCO is person A who is looked down on because they have an opposing view to person B. Person A’s perspective is looked at with disdain by person B.⁵⁵ The idea of the RCO is not

54. The Modernist-Fundamentalist Conflict was a conflict that had been brewing for some time. Broadly defined, it was a clash in worldviews and ideologies between those who adhered to evolution and those who adhered to a strict biblicism. This conflict came to a head in the Scopes Trial in 1925.

55. Susan Harding, “Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other,” *Social Research*, 58:2 (1991), 373-393.

exclusive to the Fundamentalist – Modernist conflict. This idea of an RCO is everywhere in our society, especially in regard to politics. Contrary to what many may think, politics has always been heated and divisive. Things have not necessarily gotten worse in the 21st century. However, this does not mean it is a good thing, or something that should be accepted.

Alan Jacobs writes, “Everyone today seems to have an RCO, and everyone’s RCO is on social media somewhere.”⁵⁶ It is all around us. Even if we ourselves do not participate in verbally tearing others down because of their political or moral views, we may still do it in our hearts. Goal number two has a far larger scope than simply the catechism teacher modeling love and respect for others. An attitude of love and respect must be modeled *and specifically taught*, not only to our students, but to the adults in the congregation as well.

Consider the words of a former Christian in response to a question about events or ideas which led them to question the truth of Scripture.

In middle school, 9/11 happened. This emboldened people to persecute and shame all Muslims because of one extremist cult that misconstrued the teachings of the Quran. I saw and heard some people (even within the congregation) spout vitriol and hatred towards people of the Islamic faith. I questioned whether or not they truly believed what the Bible was teaching about forgiveness and love.⁵⁷

If more adults in the congregation act and speak in a manner of love and respect, students will notice. The prayer is that students will remember the love that was exhibited as they enter high school and meet people who have different perspectives or worldviews than theirs. Perhaps they will think back on their congregation and realize that members truly wanted their neighbor to be saved, even if their neighbor was an extreme left-wing Democrat or an extreme right-wing Republican.

56. Alan, Jacobs. *How To Think*. (New York: Currency, 2017), 27.

57. Anonymous 1, interviewed by Jesse Knox via e-mail, Nov. 11, 2018.

The focus of this paper, however, is not about fostering understanding in a congregation (though that should definitely be done and it would go a long way if students saw that). It is about modeling respect and fostering understanding *in the classroom*. So, how do we do that? The first step is to teach students about the motivations of others. Teach them that people with different viewpoints are not stupid. They are not a Repugnant Cultural Other, but rather, they probably have honest, not wicked, motivations for their views. One way to do this is to point out that different denominations of Christians, most of the time, have very honest and logically sound reasons for emphasizing the false doctrines that hold. They have real, valid concerns behind the things they teach. In the same way, we need to teach our students that even those who hate the church probably do so for what our world sees as good reasons. They think the church is spreading lies, or perhaps someone in the church truly hurt them in some way and they do not want that to happen to anyone else. We want to teach our students this, so they see how to care about their neighbor and listen to their perspective. The point in looking at the motivation of others is to *understand* them instead of labeling them as being wrong. If we do not do this, students may get to high school and realize they were never given any reasons for why these other groups were wrong. Instead of remembering how understanding their teacher was, they may remember that their teacher did not care enough to listen to the other point of view.⁵⁸

In order to teach students how to be understanding, we have to become understanding of others and their points of view. This means getting out of our comfort zone, reading authors we do not agree with, watching news programs we do not agree with, and interacting with those who think differently than we do. This is a battle that we need to fight and model for students. It is a

58. This is not meant to be a wide-sweeping condemnation of pastors, teachers, or others who teach catechism. I think many of our pastors and teachers do this very well. The point that is being made rather is that this gentleness and respect needs to be taught and modeled very intentionally.

form of what Paul writes in Romans 7, as he struggles against his sinful nature to do the things his new self wants to do. When Christians struggle between wanting to understand others and getting angry or frustrated with them, they are battling their sinful nature. It is recognized that in this life, we will not overcome our sinful nature; however, Christ calls us to fight. By being intentional about this fight, in regard to understanding others' worldviews and perceptions for the spread of the gospel, we can glorify our Savior and build up students.

In addition to teaching and modeling for students how to understand another person's motivation, it is also essential to teach students the mission of the church. The church's mission is to spread the good news of Christ to as many souls as possible. One way this can be communicated to students is to repeat over and over that evangelism and apologetics are not about being right. "You're not trying to win an argument, you're trying to win a soul."⁵⁹ Remind them that when they meet someone who is perhaps hostile to Christianity or does not believe it, the goal is not to use apologetics to make them look stupid. The goal is to share Christ. The goal is to share the love of a God who gave up his life for that person.

"But do this with gentleness and respect."⁶⁰ This is extremely significant to introducing apologetics. It is key to model and teach gentleness and respect, not only when defending the faith, but in everyday interactions with others. It takes a lot of self-control and practice on the part of the instructor and congregation members, but the potential benefits are well worth it. It is not simply something we do to see results. It is a command from our God: "Love your neighbor as yourself."⁶¹ This love flows out of the love that our Savior has shown us by giving his life for

59. Michael Berg, "Apologetics," *Let The Bird Fly*, Podcast audio, June 23, 2018, <https://www.letthebirdfly.com/2018/06/23/episode-64-apologetics/>

60. 1 Peter 3:15.

61. Mark 12:31.

those who were completely opposite, different, and hateful toward him. This is a necessary attitude to model and foster among students.

Goal 3: Teach Our Students How to Think.

Ideally, the point of school is to teach students how to think. However, it can be argued that the current educational system in the United States does not foster critical thinking. In his book *How To Think*, Alan Jacobs speaks from a Christian perspective and describes the problem this way,

For me, the fundamental problem we have may best be described as an orientation of the *will*: we suffer from a settled determination to avoid thinking. Relatively few people *want* to think. Thinking troubles us; thinking tires us. Thinking can force us out of familiar, comforting habits; thinking can complicate our lives; thinking can set us at odds, or at least complicate our relationships, with those we admire or love or follow. Who needs thinking?⁶²

We see the fruits of this all around us in our society. An example is the spiteful words politicians fire back and forth, falling back on ad hominem attacks rather than addressing the core issue. Our society does not slow down and take time to think about what is going to come out of their mouth next, or if their position is tenable or accurate. This is the example students are bombarded with.

Tied to the aversion of thinking, and perhaps the root cause of it, is the sin of *acedia*. Daniel Deutchlander speaks of it in his book *The Theology of the Cross*. He is mainly writing in regard to Christianity, but it is an epidemic across our culture. “It means sloth or laziness of such a kind that the one afflicted knows what is right and true and good but does not pursue it as it deserves to be pursued. He pursues it only halfheartedly, casually, in a bored and uninterested

⁶². Jacobs, *How To Think*, 17.

manner.”⁶³ There are many distractions in the world today: video games, social media, childhood sports, and the list could go on. This *acidia* is one of the reasons that not only students but adults have an aversion to thinking. It permeates our culture and few people truly know enough about a subject to speak correctly on it. T.S. Eliot has insight here: “when we do not know, or when we do not know enough, we tend always to substitute emotions for thoughts.”⁶⁴

Oftentimes, emotions get the better of a person. Everyone can think of a time when they were speaking or arguing because they were emotionally charged, instead of the fact that they had a clear argument laid out. When emotions control us, we enter, as Jacobs calls it, “Refutation Mode.” “In Refutation Mode there is no listening. Moreover, when there is no listening there is no *thinking*. To enter Refutation Mode is to say, in effect, that you’ve already done all the thinking you need to do, that no further information or reflection is required.”⁶⁵

A close connection has probably been noticed between this section and the previous. If time is not being taken to think, then we may easily become frustrated and attack others. Then they become our Repugnant Cultural Other. We cannot hope to model the gentleness and respect of goal two, if we do not *listen* to what others have to say.

This is why we need to teach students to think, and proper thinking begins with listening. It also needs to be specified that the listening that is mentioned is not a listening that intends to respond with the better argument, exposing a weakness in the other’s argument. It needs to be taught that listening *to understand* is key. This is not easy. Most of the time, our automatic

63. Daniel, Deutchlander, *The Theology of the Cross*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 81.

64. T.S. Eliot, “The Perfect Critic,” *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, (Frome and London: Butler and Tanner Ltd, 1964), 10.

65. Jacobs, *How To Think*, 18.

listening mode is listening to respond, which is basically the same as “Refutation Mode.” It takes a conscious effort to listen to someone we disagree with and try to understand their perspective. When this is done, we grasp their thoughts and concerns better. Therefore, we can better share the gospel with them.

How will teaching students to think prepare them for high school and college in a way that will help them to remain a Christian? In theory, teaching students to think will help them see the big picture. When they enter high school and challenges to their faith are placed in front of them, they can think through the false arguments on their own. Even if they cannot think through them on their own, the hope would be that they recognize that many times there are flaws in the arguments against Christianity. This would perhaps then lead them to come back to their pastor or teacher for guidance.

Another benefit of teaching students to listen and to think would be their perception of Christianity. Students would grow up viewing and experiencing educated people in a church, thinking through problems and questions. Then, when the challenge is dropped before them that Christianity is just for a bunch of uneducated, bigoted people who hate change—perhaps they will think of the effort and love that their catechism teacher put into thinking about the perspectives of others.

To effectively teach this to students takes time on the instructor’s part—time to perhaps learn to listen, understand, and think *themselves* more effectively before they can teach it to students.⁶⁶ Again, the benefits not only to students, but to the ministry of the gospel, are well worth it.

66. This is in no way meant to insult any pastors, teachers, or others or even to imply that any do not do these things. However, who of us could not benefit from intentionally practicing these skills in our own lives?

Goal 4: Address the Tough Questions of Christianity with Our Students.⁶⁷

This may seem like a strange and unnecessary goal. The truth is that a lot of catechism teachers *do* talk about the tough questions of Christianity. This often arises as a result of questions being posed by the students whose minds are inquisitive and penetrating. The problem is, perhaps, not that students are not being taught about these tough questions and the biblical answers to them. Rather, generally speaking, they are not being taught any of the *other* worldly answers, which they are going to hear about and are going to be challenged with.

There may be readers who think that this is too early to introduce students to the tough questions of Christianity. It may be thought that they should not have to think about the problem of evil or the exclusivity of Christianity.⁶⁸ This may have been the situation in the past, but our students today are plugged into the internet and have access to unlimited amounts of information. They *will* experience these tough questions at a vulnerable time in their life. It is the job of pastors, teachers, and laypeople to walk them through these questions in order that, when

67. This section will not address all the tough questions of Christianity. There are books written on that. There are, however, a few suggestions that will be made here about which questions to address and walk through with students. Here are some topics which both reflect questions asked by the 7th and 8th graders as well as questions I think would be beneficial to help lay a foundation for students to respond to skeptics. 1) The problem of evil. If God is all-powerful and good how can all of these bad things happen in the world? This is clearly a question that needs to be addressed over and over again. In connection to the problem of evil, two things ought to be covered: both theology of the cross and the hiddenness of God. These two can help students respond to this question in a biblical manner. 2) The exclusivity of Christianity. The fact that Christianity is *the* only way to eternal salvation is a concept that is hard to accept in the inclusive culture today. 3) The reliability of the New Testament writings. As students enter high school, Christianity will likely be portrayed as a myth to them at some point. Educating our students on the NT manuscripts, and why they are reliable, is key to helping them respond to this argument. 4) Finally, the sinful things that have been done in the name of Christianity need to be addressed. Questions about the Crusades are some of the low hanging fruit that are often picked by those who want to antagonize or challenge Christianity. All of these issues need to be addressed in an objective, loving way.

68. By “exclusivity” is meant that Christianity is the only true way to salvation and all others lead to eternal damnation. This is not referring to the attitude of Christians, whether they are welcoming or not to non-Christians. On a side note, if there was a time when students did not have to think critically about their faith, that perhaps was not good. Thinking critically about something, especially one’s faith (in the author’s opinion), allows one to be better prepared to evangelize and respond to criticism.

someone sets these arguments before them, they will not be caught off guard. With the proper teaching, they will begin to understand the seriousness and the weightiness of these questions.

In the interview handed out to the 7th and 8th graders, it was clear that the tough questions need to be addressed in a more systematic way than perhaps is currently done. Here are a few questions from a student: “How do we know the Bible wasn’t just created by some guy? How do we know God really exists? I don’t see him doing things! (I do actually.) Wouldn’t it be easier just to forget about God?”⁶⁹ This is an example of answers from a 7th or 8th grader in response to a question about what doubts they have about Scripture. Now, this student is clearly fighting against their sinful nature. It can be seen in their parenthetical remark, that even though sometimes they do not see God working, they actually do believe he does. Here are a few other answers from students: “If God lets bad things happen, does he have total control?” “If God is all-powerful, why didn’t he defeat the devil right away?” “The movie *Evan Almighty* made me wonder if God would really do that.” It is evident that students have a plethora of questions that touch directly or indirectly on deep, tough concepts. The questions are raised from what they see in culture, such as the movie *Evan Almighty*.

Therefore, what are some ways we can improve how we teach the answers to these questions? Perhaps a very basic piece of advice spoken by a teacher can help: “Treat them like people.”⁷⁰ What did he mean by this? He meant, do not treat students like they are little kids or of inferior intelligence. In short, do not underestimate them. How will this help to teach them about the tough questions? It shows them that the instructor takes them seriously and thinks they can handle these questions. An instructor can be open and honest, maybe even sharing some of

69. Anonymous 2, interviewed by Jesse Knox at a school, Nov. 12, 2018.

70. This was my 5th grade teacher, Mr. Strieter, whom I shadowed when I was in college to be a teacher.

their own struggles and doubts. If the tough questions are approached this way, perhaps their attention will be gained, as well as their respect.

Another way to make sure these questions are addressed is to schedule these questions directly into the curriculum. Instead of simply waiting for the students to bring up these questions or saying, “We usually cover that when we cover the Fall,” an instructor should be intentional and plan on discussing them. Plan on spending an entire class period on one or two of the tough questions. Dig into them and into the ways in which the world tries to answer them. By doing this, while modeling gentleness and respect, students will at least have heard the biblical answers, as well as the secular ones. Then, when these questions are shoved in front of them, they have already heard the arguments and maybe thought about them a little bit. Again, even if they cannot remember the specific responses to the some of the questions, they will at least know that there *is* an answer, and God-willing, return to their pastor, teacher, or another mentor and receive clarification.

In a footnote at the beginning of this section, there were a few topics that were suggested to be taught to students. There is one more, in addition to this list, so prominent that it has its own goal. That is the topic of evolution.

Goal 5: Enable Students to Recognize Holes in the Theory of Evolution.

The reason this topic has goal of its own is because it is perhaps the most relevant to students who are entering high school.⁷¹ It is almost guaranteed that the theory of evolution will be a challenge placed before freshmen in the first couple months of classes. Another reason this

71. This is keeping in mind students who will not continue on to a Lutheran High School.

topic receives more discussion is due to the amount of doubts it raises among students. In the survey given to the 7th and 8th graders, questions about evolution were the most common. Evolution led the pack in topics that students were most concerned about responding to. It also raises doubts in their minds about the Scriptures.⁷² A third reason this topic has received more focus is because of the fundamental thought and attitude of our society. As was quoted earlier, Dr. Berg said, “Our world views religion and facts on opposite ends of the spectrum.”⁷³ This chasm between empiricism and religion is one that needs to be bridged in order for students to understand that they do not have to choose between religion and science.⁷⁴

The topic of evolution was an intersection point between the surveys sent out to the high schools and to those done by the 7th and 8th graders. A number of high schools compare and contrast evolution and creationism. Very seldom, however, are students (in WELS grade-schools) exposed to or taught the theory of evolution like their peers in public schools. For those who go on to public high schools, they are exposed to evolution for the first time, in an environment that will not present the true biblical view of creation. This can lead to doubts and questions being raised by the unprepared student.

This goal is tied into the first goal: *model the proper use of reason and proper Lutheran apologetics*. When dealing with science, it is imperative that our students understand the magisterial and ministerial use of reason. Teaching students how to recognize holes in the theory

72. One student mentioned a field trip to the planetarium and how the presentation of evolution raised some doubts in their mind. Another mentioned they have had the doubt that, “The world is too big to have been made in six, twenty-four hour days.”

73. Michael Berg (Assistant Professor of Theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College), interviewed by Jesse Knox, Milwaukee, WI, Aug. 31, 2018.

74. Tackling this problem will not be addressed in this paper. The proper use of reason, however, does have some use in bridging that gap.

of evolution is also an excellent opportunity to model Lutheran apologetics, without trying to rely on science to prove Scripture.

As was mentioned earlier, a good Lutheran apologetic does not enter the world of science and attempt to debate. It should be specifically recommended that students do not pick an argument and try to cite science to prove creation. Most of the time, even those well-versed in the Scriptures will be out-manuevered by those moderately versed in the world of science.

The goal here is to simply *recognize* holes in the theory of evolution. This does not mean we teach students the ins and outs of scientific apologetics or encourage them by any means to try and show that science proves Scripture. *Recognizing* the goal does not even mean that we are going to push them to evangelize to the teacher or their friends. This, of course, is always a goal and it is a fantastic blessing if students do this. However, it is not the *main* goal. The main goal is that students *recognize for themselves* that the arguments and “facts” being presented before them are not rock solid by any means. This, again, is not something they base their faith on, but allows them to disassemble the “roadblocks” that are placed before them.

What practical approach ought to be taken to address this goal? The first step is to teach the limits and use of reason and science. At elementary schools affiliated with a congregation, this can be taught both by the pastor during catechism and by teachers during science class. The next step is to teach students the theory of evolution. It needs to be taught more specifically and more thoroughly than a one-day overview of it. Often times in catechism class, when teaching about evolution, a straw man is built and bowled over. There are several reasons for this. One is likely the desire to focus on the main topic, the word of God, which is the main drive of catechism. The second is that many pastors and catechism teachers themselves are not acquainted with the theory of evolution or the history behind it. These thoughts are not meant to

be condescending toward our pastors, teachers, and laypeople. They are very busy and it is impossible to be educated on everything. However, if we want to teach our students to recognize holes in evolution, they have to know a bit about the theory itself, not simply what creationists say about it. It requires catechism instructors to be educated, to a certain extent, about evolution.

Teaching students about evolution will have several outcomes. First, it will allow them, when they are older, to see that the church was not simply trying to keep them in the dark and manipulate them. Second, it will acquaint them to evolutionary theory, so that all this information is not dumped on them as freshmen, overwhelming them and creating more doubts. Finally, it will allow them to *recognize* the holes in evolution and allow them to dismantle those obstacles placed before them.

It is with this goal that perhaps the basics of some true apologetical arguments could be introduced. For example, the cosmological argument would be a good one to introduce. This is partially done already in catechism, when the natural knowledge of God is taught. We know there is a God from creation. So, teaching the basics of the cosmological argument, for instance, would mean taking more time and educating students about some specifics of the cosmological argument. For example, when it comes down to naturalism vs. creationism, students can be led to see that if the path of naturalism is taken and thought through logically, *something* had to come out of *nothing* by chance. It can be pointed out that this itself requires much faith for those who believe it. That is a strong argument that most grade-school students can likely grasp. This paper will not go into any more detail regarding the specific arguments or holes in the theory of evolution. There are plenty of resources which address those questions. The goal is to educate our students about evolution and teach some basic rebuttals in an attempt to lift the fog that often surrounds the theory of evolution.

One of the benefits of this goal, if it is carried out at a congregation which includes an elementary school, is that the instructors can collaborate. Evolution can be incorporated into the curriculum on a regular basis, and in catechism the students can build off of what they have learned. The foundational information will be laid, and the pastor can spend more time on what Scripture says, what the proper use of reason is, and enabling students to recognize holes in evolution.

Goal 6: Provide Students with Resources.

This brings us to the last goal, that of providing students with resources. In theory, this goal would be occurring continuously throughout students' final two years in elementary school. The pastor or teacher would regularly be using quotes of Christian apologists, as well as providing pictures of them. This way, when students enter high school, if they have doubts or questions but they do not feel comfortable approaching their instructor, then, on their own, they can look up what these apologists say.

Obviously, this is not to say to our students, "All right, that's all we've got to offer! Good luck!" That is not what is being suggested by any means. It would be preferable if students were all comfortable enough to return to their spiritual mentor and talk to them about doubts and struggles. Unfortunately, that is not the reality. In most cases, it is less embarrassing, easier, and quicker to type a few words in Google and see what comes up, instead of sitting down with someone and discussing the issue. The prayer and hope is that with the proper education, the students will be able to navigate through some of the apologist's answers. Hopefully, the answers would lead them to find comfort and rest from their doubts in the assurance of Scripture and in Christ their Savior.

APOLOGETICS IN HIGH SCHOOL

Throughout this paper, the catechism student who will not go on to a Lutheran high school has been in mind. Everything that was said to prepare public school students for their faith is true for those that are continuing on to a Lutheran high school as well. The hope would be that introducing apologetics at the grade-school level would lay a foundation for continued apologetical instruction at the Lutheran high school. This is another reason to introduce apologetics in elementary school, to prepare students for more efficient learning in high school. This would hopefully increase their ability and desire to defend the faith and reach out with the gospel to others once they enter college.

Pastor Brian Doebler is a teacher at Wisconsin Lutheran High School and started a course on apologetics this last year. According to remarks from Doebler, the course seems to be a success. When asked about what would be beneficial for students to know prior to high school and this class in particular, he said, “It seems like a class where repetition would be a good thing—not only biblical teachings about God, but giving them one or two basic arguments [for the] skeptic or naturalist—there were some comments where kids asked, ‘how come I have never heard of this before?’”⁷⁵ If we begin introducing apologetics at the grade school level, it would make teaching apologetics in high school that much easier and more beneficial. Perhaps in an ideal situation there would be collaboration between Lutheran elementary schools and Lutheran high schools to determine how best to serve students.

75. Brian Doebler, (Theology teacher at Wisconsin Lutheran High School), interviewed by Jesse Knox via telephone, Dec. 6, 2018.

CONCLUSION

That brings us full circle. This paper has provided part of the answer to how we can best serve our students. We want to serve our students in a way that prepares them to better answer challenges to their faith and think through issues in a God-pleasing way.

This is not a cure-all for keeping our young adults in the church. This is not an attempt to try to understand faith or raise reason above Scripture. This is just one attempt, among many, that ought to be considered for instruction. The strategies mentioned in this paper are also not only for middle school students. These are things that many adults, leaders, and called workers in our congregations would benefit from growing in.

Teaching these concepts is no easy feat. It will take education, thinking, preparation, and effort on the part of both pastors and teachers. However, as it has been said throughout this paper, the possible benefits are well worth it.

The goal of implementing these strategies is to increase the number of students who remain connected to the church. Not only that, but it will better prepare our students for life in this sinful world. However, the results will never be what we want them to be—namely, that all remain in the church and never stray. We are the church militant and we fight the battles of this world. There will be heart-breaking losses, but we never forget our chief cornerstone, the one on whom the church is built. We rest our faith in him and pray that he enables us to teach our students the best we can, that they might remain faithful to him.

Introducing apologetics is much more than simply teaching our students a few apologetical arguments. It is also an attempt to show them the practical side of their faith in the world today. It encourages a way of thinking about real issues in the world while keeping them grounded and anchored to the Word. It cultivates an attitude of love and understanding on

biblical principles that will serve them for years down the road. Furthermore, apologetics exposes students to unfamiliar and uncomfortable views, which strengthen them for the challenges they will face outside their church life. It strives to shape our students into well-rounded men and women whose faith is securely cemented in Christ.

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