The Defense, the Witness, and the Light: Kinds of Christian Apologetics

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Abstract

The church has been told to answer, but she has not been told that every answer is the same kind of answer. This paper maps the kinds of Christian apologetics. It takes the two classifications that have governed the recent English-speaking argument, Cowan's five views and Boa and Bowman's four approaches, and adds three kinds of my own that those two do not name. My thesis is that Christian apologetics is one duty, the duty of a ready answer, carried out in several kinds. Six of those kinds are methods of justification: the classical, the evidential, the cumulative, the presuppositional with its covenantal restatement, the Reformed epistemological, and the fideist. Moral argument, argument from the sciences, and the historical case for Jesus are lines of evidence inside those methods, not methods of their own. The three further kinds do a work the six methods do not measure. Testimonial and experiential apologetics reports what has been seen, heard, handled, and tasted. Life apologetics, set over against existence apologetics, asks whether a world that merely exists can be lived, for existence is not yet life. Life-as-light apologetics is the visibility the Sermon on the Mount requires, good works seen and the glory given to the Father. A full defense needs the methods. It is not finished without the three, and four things remain non-negotiable whatever the method: Scripture, prayerful reliance on the Holy Spirit, a life that matches what we claim, and a heart ordered around the task.

Contents

I. The charge is wider than a proof....1
II. The non-negotiables....3
III. Witness, life, and light are already in the charge....5
IV. What a kind is....8
V. Where the classical method begins....11
VI. The classical method among its writers....12
VII. The evidential method....12
VIII. The cumulative case....13
IX. Presuppositional and covenantal apologetics....14
X. Reformed epistemology....15
XI. The fideist approach....16
XII. Lines, and not schools....17
XIII. Modes of address....18
XIV. Three kinds of my own....18
XV. How the three sit with the six....19
XVI. Conclusion....20
Works cited....21

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The church has been told to answer. She has not been told that every answer is the same kind of answer. A man may be shown that God is, and still not be shown that God can be lived with. A woman may be given a historian's case for an empty tomb, and still not be given the word of someone who was there. A people may win the argument and hide the lamp. Those are not three failures of effort. They are three different works, and a defense that knows only one of them will call itself complete while leaving the others undone.

This paper maps the kinds of Christian apologetics. It takes the two classifications that have governed the recent English-speaking argument, says what they sort and what they do not, and then adds three kinds of my own that those two do not name. The first is testimonial and experiential apologetics, the answer that bears what has been seen, heard, handled, and tasted. The second is life apologetics set over against existence apologetics. Existence is not yet life.[1] The third is life-as-light apologetics, taken from the Sermon on the Mount, in which the disciple's visible life is itself a public argument, and the glory goes to the Father.

The thesis is this. Christian apologetics is one duty, the duty of a ready answer, carried out in several kinds. Six of those kinds are methods of justification: the classical, the evidential, the cumulative, the presuppositional, together with its covenantal restatement, the Reformed epistemological, and the fideist. Moral argument, argument from the sciences, and the historical case for Jesus of Nazareth are lines of evidence used inside those methods. They are not methods of their own. Appeal to imagination, to culture, and to the shape of a conversation are modes of address. Any method may use them. None of them is a rival account of why a belief is warranted. The three further kinds do a work the six methods do not measure. Testimony reports what has been given. Life apologetics asks whether a world that merely exists can be lived. Light apologetics lets the life so received be seen. A full defense needs the methods. It is not finished without the three.

I. The charge is wider than a proof

Peter's sentence is the text from which the word apologetics is ordinarily taken. "Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."[2] The defense is of a hope, not of a system floating free of

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[1] "The main claim of this book can be put in one sentence: existence is not yet life. Existence means that there is something rather than nothing. Life, as ordinary people mean the word, is existence plus purpose, meaning, love, joy, peace, hope, individual identity, significance, and wonder." Gerald Milton Smith, Jr., *Life Beyond Existence: Why I Believe* (manuscript, September 12, 2026), 10.

[2] "Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." 1 Pet. 3:15 (ESV).

anyone's life. It is owed to anyone who asks, so the answer has to be able to find the question that was actually put. It is to be made with gentleness and respect, so that a true argument delivered as a blow has already left the apostolic pattern. The next sentence ties the speech to a life: "having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."[3] The spoken answer and the visible life are one charge. A method that keeps the speech and drops the life has not yet heard the verse it quotes.

Jude's appeal is sterner and narrower. He had been eager to write about our common salvation, and instead found it necessary to write "appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."[4] Contending is not the same act as explaining. It is the refusal to let a delivered faith be revised. An apologetic that can only commend, and cannot contend, will be polite while the faith is altered. An apologetic that can only contend, and cannot give a reason to the one who asks, will be faithful inside the church and mute at the gate.

Paul at Thessalonica shows a third act. "On three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'"[5] Reasoning, explaining, proving, proclaiming: the defense here is an argument from a text to a person. The conclusion is not that a god exists. The conclusion is that this Jesus is the Christ, and that the Christ had to suffer and rise. A natural theology that never arrives at that sentence has stopped where Paul did not stop. An argument that begins there, with no account of the God who made the world, has a different starting point. The difference is real. It is not yet a reason to call either starting point the whole of apologetics.

At Athens the order runs the other way, and the difference should be kept rather than smoothed. Paul speaks of "the God who made the world and everything in it," who "gives to all mankind life and breath and everything," and who made the nations "that they should seek God." Only then does he come to the man appointed to judge the world, and to the assurance God has given "by raising him from the dead."[6] At Lystra the appeal is the same pattern in a smaller compass. The apostles urge the crowd to turn from vain things "to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them," and they point to rains, fruitful seasons, food, and gladness as a witness God "did not leave himself without."[7] Romans

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[3] "Having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." 1 Pet. 3:16 (ESV).

[4] "Appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." Jude 3 (ESV).

[5] "On three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'" Acts 17:2–3 (ESV).

[6] "The God who made the world and everything in it"; "he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything"; "that they should seek God"; "of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:24, 25, 27, 31 (ESV).

[7] "A living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them"; "he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful

says why such speech is possible. “What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”[8]

The classical method did not invent the movement from the world to God and on to Christ. It found that movement in these texts. Whether the movement must always take that order, and whether the first step must be finished as a proof before the second step may be heard, is a further question. The texts establish the movement. They do not, by themselves, establish a rule that history is inadmissible until theism has been demonstrated. Thessalonica is the standing warning against that rule.

II. The non-negotiables

Effective apologetics requires a number of non-negotiables that are, sadly, too often overlooked.

First, any presentation of the truth of the gospel needs to be steeped in the Scripture, with the goal of introducing, as soon as possible, the person who is being introduced to the truth of the gospel to that library of truth. Paul’s words, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ,” should be taken seriously, and relied on in faith.[9] More can be accomplished by well placed Scripture than any level of argumentation. Paul states this clearly: “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”[10] He had already said why the word, and not the debater’s wisdom, is where the power lies. “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”[11]

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seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Acts 14:15, 17 (ESV).

[8] “What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” Rom. 1:19–20 (ESV).

[9] “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Rom. 10:17 (ESV).

[10] “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” 1 Cor. 2:4 (ESV).

[11] “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the

Second, prayerful reliance upon the Holy Spirit, who is the agent of conversion in every case. Paul, again, asks for prayer in Ephesians 6:18–20 for this reason. There he writes, "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak."[12] The argument does not convert. The Spirit does. The apostle asks to be prayed for so that words will be given him, and so that he will speak the mystery boldly, as he ought. A defense that trusts the method and does not ask is trusting the wrong agent.

Third, a life that is in compliance with the relationship we are claiming and representing. People smell a hypocrite quickly. The Sermon on the Mount implies the same requirement when it says, "You are the light of the world," and, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."[13] A life out of compliance with the relationship it claims has put the lamp under the basket. The observer catches the contradiction before he ever weighs the argument. Life as light is a kind of apologetic in its own right, not this requirement under another name, though the two overlap. A life that matches what we claim is required of every type of apologetic. The requirement is that the life comply with the relationship it claims. The kind is a way of answering: good works made visible, so that the one who sees them glorifies the Father. A life can be consistent and still be hidden. A life can be visible and still be false. The non-negotiable forbids the false life. The kind puts the true life where it can be seen.

Fourth, a heart filled with the desire to orient all of life around this task. The task is not an hour set down beside a life that is otherwise aimed elsewhere. The desire is that work, speech, the household, and the way one suffers be ordered toward bringing persons to the gospel, and to the Scriptures in which the gospel is given. A life ordered that way is a city set on a hill. It cannot be hidden, because it was not arranged to hide. A life ordered around some other center will cover the lamp, however exact the method, and the third non-negotiable will already have told us what people smell when it does.

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debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." 1 Cor. 1:18–25 (ESV).

[12] "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." Eph. 6:18–20 (ESV).

[13] "You are the light of the world." "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Matt. 5:14, 16 (ESV).

III. Witness, life, and light are already in the charge

The same canon requires a work the recent maps rarely count as a method. The risen Lord tells the eleven that the Christ had to suffer and rise, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, and then he says, “You are witnesses of these things.”[14] Witness, in that sentence, is not a metaphor for holding an opinion. It is the office of those who can say what happened. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”[15] When the council orders them not to speak, Peter and John answer, “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”[16] Paul is appointed “a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.”[17] Ananias tells him he will be “a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.”[18]

John opens his first letter on the same ground. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”[19] The report is of a life made manifest. The aim is not that the hearer admire the reporter. The aim is fellowship with the Father and the Son.

The Samaritan woman is the pattern of how that report works, and of where it stops. She goes into town and says, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”[20] “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’” He stays two days. “And many more believed because of his word.” They

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[14] “You are witnesses of these things.” Luke 24:48 (ESV); see Luke 24:46–47.

[15] “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8 (ESV).

[16] “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:20 (ESV).

[17] “To appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.” Acts 26:16 (ESV).

[18] “You will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.” Acts 22:15 (ESV).

[19] “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:1–3 (ESV).

[20] “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” John 4:29 (ESV).

say to her, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”[21] Testimony is a real cause of faith. It is not the last cause. It brings people to the word, and the word does what the report could only begin. A testimonial apologetic that tries to replace the word has not understood the woman. A method that has no room for her, because she is not a historian and not a philosopher, has not understood the Gospel.

The man born blind shows the limit and the force of the same kind of answer. “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”[22] He does not pretend to settle the Pharisees’ question. He will not surrender the thing that was done to him. From that thing he does argue: “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”[23] Testimony is allowed to be incomplete. It is not allowed to be treated as nothing, and it is not forbidden to reason.

The experiential register belongs in this same kind, not in a school of its own. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.”[24] Peter takes up the psalm: “if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”[25] Tasting is not a second revelation set beside the word. It is the believer’s knowledge of the goodness the word announces. Testimonial and experiential apologetics, kept as one kind, is the answer that speaks from what has been seen, heard, handled, and tasted, within the limits of what the speaker was in fact given, and always so as to bring the hearer to the word itself.

There is a further act in the same canon, and it is not an argument until someone watches it. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”[26] The identity is stated before the command. You are the light; therefore let it shine. The light is not a technique added to a faith that could otherwise stay

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[21] “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ … And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’” John 4:39, 41–42 (ESV).

[22] “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” John 9:25 (ESV).

[23] “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” John 9:32–33 (ESV); see John 9:30–31.

[24] “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.” Ps. 34:8 (ESV).

[25] “If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” 1 Pet. 2:3 (ESV).

[26] “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:14–16 (ESV).

hidden. It is what the disciples are, and the only question is whether they cover it. The observers are to see good works. The conclusion they are to draw is not that the disciples are impressive. It is glory to the Father. Peter says the same thing from the other side of slander. "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."[27]

This light is derivative, or it is false. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."[28] "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."[29] The life and the light are not two decorations. The life is the light. Paul tells the Philippians to be "children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life."[30] Light without the word of life is a glow the church can counterfeit. The word of life without a visible people is a message the nations can file and forget. The servant in Isaiah is given "as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."[31] Paul and Barnabas hear that sentence as a command laid on their own mission: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."[32] The church does not own the light. She holds it because she holds the word, and because "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."[33]

Life-as-light apologetics is my name for that public visibility. It is not moralism, because the light is Christ's and the glory is the Father's. It is not a substitute for the spoken defense. The same apostle who says "shine as lights" says "holding fast to the word of life," and the same Peter who joins good behavior to the shaming of a slander also demands a reason for the hope. It is the kind of answer a life makes when it is seen.

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[27] "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." 1 Pet. 2:12 (ESV).

[28] "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 (ESV).

[29] "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4 (ESV).

[30] "Children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life." Phil. 2:15–16 (ESV).

[31] "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Isa. 49:6 (ESV).

[32] "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." Acts 13:47 (ESV).

[33] "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. 4:6 (ESV).

IV. What a kind is

Once those texts are allowed to stand together, the modern argument about schools can be put in its place. The argument is real. It is not the whole map.

Two books have done much to fix the names now in use. Steven B. Cowan edited *Five Views on Apologetics*. The five presentations are classical apologetics, by William Lane Craig; evidential apologetics, by Gary R. Habermas; cumulative case apologetics, by Paul D. Feinberg; presuppositional apologetics, by John M. Frame; and Reformed epistemology, by Kelly James Clark.[34] Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., in *Faith Has Its Reasons*, sort the field into four approaches, classical, evidential, Reformed, and fideist, and they close with integrative approaches that draw on more than one.[35] The two schemes overlap, and they do not match. Cowan separates presuppositional apologetics from Reformed epistemology, and he includes a cumulative case. Boa and Bowman include fideism, and they do not give the cumulative case a part of its own. Their fideist part is titled "By Faith Alone," and its chapters take up reasons of the heart, calling people to encounter God in Jesus Christ, and the subjectivity of faith.[36] A paper that treats either scheme as the only map will miscount. A paper that ignores both will spend its strength renaming what has already been named.

I use *kind* for any distinct work a defense can do. Inside that word, three things have to be distinguished, and then the three works the surveys do not name.

A method of justification is an account of where the argument may begin and of what sort of support it claims to give. As this paper uses the names, the classical method begins from what may be known of God from the world and moves to the acts of God in Christ. The evidential method holds that the historical case, above all the case concerning the resurrection, can carry both the existence of God and the identity of Christ without a prior demonstration that must be granted first. The cumulative method refuses to rest on one decisive proof and gathers many lines, none of them sufficient alone, into a case that Christian theism accounts for the whole more adequately than its rivals do. The presuppositional method, and the covenantal restatement of it, denies that believer and unbeliever share a neutral ground on which the faith may first be judged, and it argues from the conditions that make reason, meaning, and morality intelligible. Reformed epistemology is less a procedure for showing than a claim about knowing: belief in God can be rational, and can be knowledge, without being inferred from

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[34] Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000). The five names and the five presenters are as given in the book's table of contents.

[35] Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). The four approaches and the integrative close are the book's own division of its parts, as its table of contents shows.

[36] InterVarsity Press contents for Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*: "Part Five: Fideist Apologetics: By Faith Alone"; "Fideist Apologetics: Reasons of the Heart"; "Calling People to Encounter God In Jesus Christ"; "Apologetics and the Subjectivity of Faith." InterVarsity Press, "Faith Has Its Reasons," accessed October 8, 2026, https://www.ivpress.com/faith-has-its-reasons.

other beliefs. Fideism is the approach the one survey isolates and the other does not, an approach that sets faith, the reasons of the heart, and encounter with God in Christ at the center of the defense. These six are the methods. I keep them at six, not at four and not at five, because the differences Cowan preserves and the difference Boa and Bowman add are both real. Whether Reformed epistemology is better called a thesis about knowledge than a method of address is a fair question, and the label alone does not settle it.

A line of argument is a particular evidence or inference that a method may use. The moral argument, the arguments drawn from the sciences, including the arguments that go under the name of intelligent design, and the historical case for Jesus of Nazareth are lines. They often become almost the whole of a book, and then they are mistaken for schools. They are not schools. A moral argument can be the first movement of a classical case, one strand in a cumulative case, or part of an internal critique in a presuppositional case. A resurrection argument can be the second movement of the classical method or the single movement of the evidential method. The line does not tell you the method. To set *moral apologetics*, *scientific apologetics*, and *historical Jesus apologetics* beside the classical and the evidential as if they were the same sort of thing is to count the tools as if they were the crafts.

A mode of address is a way of making the claim perceptible: by story and image, by an appeal to beauty and to the longings of a culture, by the conduct of a conversation. C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton are constantly brought in at this point, and they do not sit cleanly inside one method. That fact about them is a reason to notice the mode. It is not a seventh method. Imagination can serve a classical sequence, a cumulative appeal to the fit of the faith with the whole of experience, or the exposure of a worldview that cannot be lived. The mode does not decide the warrant. A map that measures only warrant will find Lewis and Chesterton everywhere and nowhere. A map that promotes imagination into a rival school will have lost the question the warrant-maps were right to care about, which is why anyone should believe.

The three kinds I add are not lines and not modes. Each does a work of its own.

Testimonial and experiential apologetics is the work Peter and John refuse to abandon, the work the risen Lord assigns, and the work the Samaritan woman and the man born blind actually perform. It resembles evidence in this, that it offers something that happened. It differs from the historian's case in this, that the speaker is not only assembling a record from outside the event. He is the one to whom it happened, or one of those who saw and heard and touched. The force of the answer depends on that position, and so do its limits. The man born blind will not say what he does not know. The town that believed the woman comes to believe because of Jesus' word. John proclaims what was manifested so that the hearer may have fellowship with the apostles, and the fellowship he means is with the Father and the Son. Testimony that ends in the witness is a dead end. Testimony that ends in the Son is apologetics.

This kind has to be distinguished from two neighbors, or it will be absorbed and lost. It is not fideism. Fideism, as I read the part Boa and Bowman give it, is a stance toward the defense itself: faith stands in the title of that part, and the heart and encounter stand in the titles of its chapters. The witnesses in John and in Acts are not offering a theory of method. The blind man argues from the opening of his eyes. Paul reasons from the Scriptures. Testimony can be examined, contradicted, and corroborated. Nor is this kind the claim that belief in God can be rational, and can be knowledge, without being inferred from other beliefs. That claim belongs

to Reformed epistemology, as this paper uses the name. It is a claim about the believer's knowledge. Testimony is a claim about what the believer then says to someone else. A man may hold a belief without inferring it and still owe his neighbor a report. The report is a different act from the way the belief is held.

Life apologetics, set over against existence apologetics, is the second kind. "Existence, in the thin sense, is the fact that there is a world. Stones exist. Storms exist." A world that runs down is still a world, for as long as it lasts. "None of that is yet life in the sense that Camus treated as the only serious philosophical problem." "The question is not whether we are here. The question is whether being here is livable." "Life, as this book uses the word, is existence plus a set of goods that only persons can have: purpose, meaning, love, joy, peace, hope, individual identity, significance, and wonder." "These are not decorations added on top of biology. They are what we mean when we say that a person has a life rather than a series of chemical events."[37] Existence apologetics asks whether God is, whether the world has a cause, whether the word "God" names one more object among objects. Those questions are lawful. The classical method lives by them, and I will not discard them. They are not the only questions persons ask.

The intuitive force of this second kind is that persons already seek those goods and already treat them as claims. They keep promises, they grieve, they demand justice, and they offer arguments they want received as true. A view on which nature is all there is can describe existence. It cannot, without borrowing what it has denied, support life in that full sense. If the goods are illusions produced by processes that have no final purpose, then every practice that treats them as real is deceived in its seriousness, and seeking the truth is one of those practices. An account that makes its own claim to truth a deception cannot be offered as a serious account of the world. If the goods are real, they require a living personal Source. "Existence without that Source is mere persistence; life is existence received as gift and calling." What remains, where the Source is refused and the goods are kept in speech only, is "a philosophy of bare existence pretending to be a philosophy of life."[38]

I have set this out in my book, *Life Beyond Existence: Why I Believe*. "Existence means that there is something rather than nothing. Life, as ordinary people mean the word, is existence plus purpose, meaning, love, joy, peace, hope, individual identity, significance, and wonder."[39] Here it marks a kind of my own that those two surveys do not name. They can file it under the moral argument, or under desire, or under an appeal to meaning. Those are lines the kind may use.

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[37] "Existence, in the thin sense, is the fact that there is a world. Stones exist. Storms exist." "None of that is yet life in the sense that Camus treated as the only serious philosophical problem." "The question is not whether we are here. The question is whether being here is livable." "Life, as this book uses the word, is existence plus a set of goods that only persons can have: purpose, meaning, love, joy, peace, hope, individual identity, significance, and wonder. These are not decorations added on top of biology. They are what we mean when we say that a person has a life rather than a series of chemical events." Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 20.

[38] "Existence without that Source is mere persistence; life is existence received as gift and calling." "It is a philosophy of bare existence pretending to be a philosophy of life." Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 21.

[39] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 10.

The kind is prior to the lines. It is the refusal to let the question of God be reduced to the question whether one more object exists. Scripture does not use my sentence. It presses the thing the sentence names. The God Paul preached at Athens "gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."[40] The life that was in the Word "was the light of men."[41] The signs in John's Gospel are written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."[42] A defense that stops when it has established existence has stopped short of the life the Gospel announces.

Life-as-light apologetics is the third kind, and it is the kind a church can neglect while mastering the other two. Argument can be sound, and testimony can be honest, and the lamp can still sit under the basket. The Sermon on the Mount does not say that good works replace the gospel. It implies that a light which does not shine has ceased to do what a light is for, and it says that the shining is the visibility of good works whose end is the Father's glory. A city on a hill is a public fact. A lamp on a stand gives light to all in the house. The defense is owed both to the household and to the town. Philippians joins the shining to the word of life, so that this kind cannot be played against doctrine. First Peter joins honorable conduct to the day when God is glorified, so that this kind cannot be played against the hope. Where that life is absent, the most exact method will look like a brief for a kingdom no one has seen.

V. Where the classical method begins

The classical method is the first of the six because it follows the order Athens, Lystra, and Romans already use. It speaks of the God who made the world before it speaks of the man by whom the world will be judged. It treats the knowledge of God from the things that have been made as a real knowledge, enough to leave the nations without excuse, and not enough to name the Christ or to announce the forgiveness of sins. The second movement is historical. It concerns what God has said and done, and in particular the resurrection as the assurance he has given.

Two errors follow if that order is hardened into a law the texts do not enact. The first is to treat the opening movement as a demonstration that must be finished, and granted, before a hearer is permitted to hear of Christ. Paul does not wait on any such statute. In Thessalonica he begins from the Scriptures and from the necessity that the Christ suffer and rise. In Athens he begins from the altar and the poets and comes to the resurrection, which is where his hearers balk. The order is wisdom about where a particular people stand. It is not a law binding every conversation. The second error is to treat the opening movement as optional for everyone, on the ground that some hearers may begin at the tomb. Some may. A church that can no longer say why there is a world, or why the world is intelligible, or why persons are without excuse, has lost a speech the apostles used. The classical method is the discipline of keeping that speech.

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[40] "He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." Acts 17:25 (ESV).

[41] "The life was the light of men." John 1:4 (ESV).

[42] "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:31 (ESV).

What the recent classical writers have added, and where they disagree with the evidential writers about a required first step, cannot be settled by the biblical texts alone. The biblical pattern is enough to show why the method exists, and enough to forbid turning it into the only kind of answer. A man who has been shown that God is, and has not been shown that life is more than existence, has been given the first movement and not the second kind. A man who has been given both, and has never met a witness, has been argued toward a Christ he has not heard anyone say that he saw. A city that has the arguments and hides the lamp has forgotten the sentence that stands in the Sermon on the Mount before any of those arguments is offered. "You are the light of the world."[43]

VI. The classical method among its writers

The biblical pattern is the method. The modern writers have given it a name and a literature. William Lane Craig's *Reasonable Faith* and *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, Norman Geisler's *Christian Apologetics*, the *Classical Apologetics* of R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, Edward Feser's *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, and *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by Craig and J. P. Moreland, are the books in which that literature is to be read.[44] A required first step, whatever those writers hold about it, is not enacted by the texts as a law binding every conversation.

What this paper means by the method has been taken from Romans, from Lystra, and from Athens. What can be known about God is plain in the things that have been made, and the nations are without excuse. That knowledge does not name the Christ, and it does not announce the forgiveness of sins. The second movement is what God has said and done. The resurrection is the assurance he has given that he will judge the world by the man he has appointed. A church that can no longer speak of the God who made the world has lost an apostolic speech. A church that will not speak of Christ until a demonstration has been finished and granted has added a statute. Paul did not keep it at Thessalonica. He did not keep it as a statute at Athens either. He began from the altar and the poets, and he came to the resurrection, which is where his hearers balked.

VII. The evidential method

The evidential method refuses the statute. It holds that the historical case, and above all the case concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus, can carry both the existence of God and his action in Christ, without a prior demonstration that must be granted first. Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona's *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Licona's *The Resurrection of*

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[43] "You are the light of the world." Matt. 5:14 (ESV).

[44] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994); Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1979); Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976); R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984); Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017); William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

Jesus, and John Warwick Montgomery's *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus* are among the books associated with the method. N. T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God* is a work of New Testament history on which that method has drawn, not a handbook of the method.[45] The shape is this. The argument begins where a hearer can be asked to look at what is claimed to have happened: a death, a reported rising, a company that said they had seen him, a proclamation that spread. It treats that history as able to show that God has acted, and therefore that God is.

The evidential method is close to testimony, and it is not testimony. The historian assembles a record. The witness says what he saw and heard. The method may receive the witness as evidence. It does not become the witness. John does not offer a case assembled from outside the event. He says what was heard, seen, looked upon, and touched. A church that has only the historian has not yet obeyed the risen Lord. "You are witnesses of these things."[46] A church that has only the witness, and will not let the report be examined, has forgotten the town that believed the woman. They came to believe because of his word, and they said it was no longer because of what she had said. Testimony is a real cause of faith. It is a cause that exists to be surpassed by the word. The evidential method is one way the report is examined. It is not a substitute for the person who says, "though I was blind, now I see."[47]

VIII. The cumulative case

The cumulative method will not rest on one proof. It gathers many lines, none of them sufficient alone, and it concludes that Christian theism accounts for the whole more adequately than its rivals do. Paul Feinberg presented the method in Cowan's symposium. Basil Mitchell's *The Justification of Religious Belief* and Richard Swinburne's *The Existence of God* are the philosophical books set beside it.[48] How near the method stands to the evidential method is plain from what each asks the evidence to do. Both care about what is the case. The cumulative case refuses to let one line, even the resurrection, carry the whole. The evidential case is willing to let the historical argument carry it. A survey can place one writer in either column. The placement does not change the lines. It records what the lines are being asked to do. That record is the method.

This method is the one most easily confused with life apologetics, which is a kind of my own. A cumulative case may include moral experience, desire, and the need for meaning. Those are

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[45] Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004); Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic; Nottingham: Apollos, 2010); John Warwick Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2002); N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

[46] Luke 24:48 (ESV).

[47] John 9:25 (ESV).

[48] Paul D. Feinberg's presentation is in Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*. See also Basil Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief*, US ed. (New York: Seabury Press, 1974); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

lines the kind may use. They are not the kind. Life apologetics is the refusal to let the question of God be reduced to the question whether one more object exists. A cumulative case can be conducted entirely inside existence: causes, constants, probabilities, and a tomb. It becomes the kind only when it asks whether being here is livable, and whether the goods persons already treat as claims can be housed by a world that is only a world. "Existence, in the thin sense, is the fact that there is a world."[49] A case that explains that fact, and stops, has done classical or cumulative work. It has not yet asked the question I have argued in *Life Beyond Existence: Why I Believe*. "The question is not whether we are here. The question is whether being here is livable."[50]

IX. Presuppositional and covenantal apologetics

The presuppositional method denies that believer and unbeliever share a neutral ground on which the faith may first be judged. It argues from the conditions that make reason, meaning, and morality intelligible. It begins from God's revelation in Scripture, not from a pile of facts treated as silent until a god is added to them. Cornelius Van Til's *The Defense of the Faith* is the founding book. Greg L. Bahnsen's *Van Til's Apologetic*, John M. Frame's *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, and K. Scott Oliphint's *Covenantal Apologetics* have restated the method, the last of them under the covenantal name. As I read it, the new name does not make a new method; it states what the method was already claiming. Human beings understand themselves and the world rightly as covenant creatures, or they do not understand themselves rightly. The denial of neutrality, and the form of an argument that moves from the conditions of intelligibility rather than from a silent fact to an extra object, are the method.

Gordon Clark belongs in this section, and not in a seventh kind. As he is commonly described, he begins from Scripture and tests a system by its logical consistency; on that description he stays here as a different system inside the same method. A separation into another kind would have to be shown from his own books, and it is not shown by the mere fact that his system is not Van Til's. The beginning, for both, is revelation rather than a neutral court. Edward John Carnell's *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* and Francis A. Schaeffer's *The God Who Is There* are often read as using presuppositional themes in a looser register.[51] Where a presuppositional argument presses an unbeliever's account of the world by whether it can be lived, that pressure is kin to life apologetics. It is not the same kind. To ask whether an account can be inhabited without contradiction is one question. To ask whether existence, even a consistent existence, is yet life is another. A man may live consistently inside a philosophy of

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[49] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 20.

[50] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 20.

[51] Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955); Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1998); John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1994); K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics: A Philosophic Defense of the Trinitarian-Theistic Faith* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1948); Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 30th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

bare existence. “It is a philosophy of bare existence pretending to be a philosophy of life.”[52] The consistency does not rescue the pretense.

This method is the one that most clearly requires the first non-negotiable. If there is no neutral ground, the presentation has to be steeped in the Scripture, and the person has to be brought to that library as soon as possible. An argument that borrows the unbeliever’s ultimate standard, and never opens the Scriptures, has already granted the neutrality the method denies. Paul at Thessalonica reasoned from the Scriptures. That reasoning is not a decoration laid on a case built somewhere else. For this method, it is the case. More can be accomplished by well placed Scripture than any level of argumentation. The presuppositional writer who believes that sentence, and then argues for an hour without a text, has deserted his own method.

X. Reformed epistemology

Reformed epistemology, as this paper uses the name, is less a procedure of address than a claim about knowing. Belief in God can be rational, and can be knowledge, without being inferred from other beliefs. Alvin Plantinga’s *God and Other Minds* and *Warranted Christian Belief*, the volume *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, edited by Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, William P. Alston’s *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, and Kelly James Clark’s *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* are among the books in which the claim has been set out.[53] Whether the claim is better called a thesis about knowledge than a method of address is a fair question, and the label alone does not settle it. Cowan gave it a place of its own among five views. Boa and Bowman give it no part of its own; their contents have a single Reformed part. Both arrangements can be seen from the way those books are divided. The claim itself is not a procedure for showing the faith to a neighbor.

This is why the claim must not be collapsed into testimonial and experiential apologetics. That kind is mine. Basicality is about the believer’s warrant. Testimony is about what he then says to someone else. A man may hold belief in God without inferring it, and still owe his neighbor a report of what he has seen and heard. Alston’s book concerns the epistemology of religious experience. The experiential register in this paper is narrower, and it is biblical. It is tasting that the Lord is good. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.”[54] “If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”[55] Tasting is not a theory of perception set beside the apostolic report. It is the

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[52] Smith, *Life Beyond Existence*, 21.

[53] Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967); Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

[54] Ps. 34:8 (ESV).

[55] 1 Pet. 2:3 (ESV).

knowledge, in the one who has believed, of the goodness the word announces. The two registers stay one kind because both answer from what has been given to a person. They do not answer by a thesis about whether belief needs an inference.

Nor does the claim cancel the duty to show. A belief can be rational without an argument and still be a belief for which a reason is owed when a neighbor asks. Peter did not say that the hope needs no defense because the believer is already rational. He said to be ready to make the defense, with gentleness and respect, and he joined that readiness to a good conscience and a visible life. Reformed epistemology, if the claim is true, tells the believer he need not wait on a proof before his belief is rational. It does not tell him he may be silent. The silence would be a failure of the charge, not a consequence of the epistemology.

XI. The fideist approach

Fideism is the approach Boa and Bowman isolate and Cowan does not. Their part is titled "By Faith Alone," and its chapters take up reasons of the heart, calling people to encounter God in Jesus Christ, and the subjectivity of faith.[56] As I read that part, it is a stance toward the defense itself. Faith stands in the title of the part. The heart and the encounter stand in the titles of the chapters. Myron Bradley Penner's *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* is a recent book whose subtitle names witness as its subject.[57] The stance, as this paper uses the name, is that God is received in his self-revelation by faith, and that a proof constructed apart from faith is not the apologist's proper work.

The stance is not testimonial apologetics. The witnesses in John and in Acts are not offering a theory of method. The blind man argues from the opening of his eyes. Paul reasons from the Scriptures. Testimony can be examined, contradicted, and corroborated. A refusal of proof is a stance toward the defense. A report of what was seen is a kind of answer. They can travel together in one person. They are not the same act. A church that calls every witness a fideist, because the witness did not first build a natural theology, has confused a report with a theory. A church that calls every refusal of argument a testimony has confused a silence with a seeing. John writes so that the hearer may have fellowship with the Father and with his Son. The fellowship is the aim. The seeing and the hearing are the ground. Neither is a ban on argument.

The second non-negotiable sits over this approach as it sits over the others. The Spirit is the agent of conversion in every case. What Paul writes in Ephesians 6 is a request. He asks the church to pray at all times in the Spirit, and to pray for him, that words and boldness may be given for the mystery of the gospel, and that he may speak as he ought. The request shows where he looks for the power to speak. It does not let any method treat prayer as needless because the Spirit is sovereign. It does not let any method treat the Spirit as needless because the argument is sound. The argument does not convert. The Spirit does. The apostle still asks for words, and he still intends to speak.

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[56] InterVarsity Press, "Faith Has Its Reasons," contents.

[57] Myron Bradley Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

XII. Lines, and not schools

Three bodies of work are often set beside the methods as if they were methods of their own. They are lines. A line is a particular evidence or inference. It can serve more than one method. It does not tell you where the argument is allowed to begin, and it does not tell you what sort of support is being claimed. To count the line as a school is to count the tool as the craft.

The moral argument takes moral obligation, or moral knowledge, as a ground for theism. C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* is a well-known statement of the line in English, and David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls's *Good God* is a later philosophical restatement of a moral case for theism.[58] The line can be the opening movement of a classical case. It can be one strand in a cumulative case. It can stand inside a presuppositional argument, if the claim is that obligation cannot be made intelligible unless God is already presupposed. The same line, three methods. A writer who spends his book on the line has not thereby founded a fourth.

The arguments drawn from the sciences, including the arguments that go under the name of intelligent design, are the same sort of thing. Michael J. Behe's *Darwin's Black Box* and Stephen Meyer's *Signature in the Cell* are among the books, and the fine-tuning of the physical constants has been argued in the same region, including by Robin Collins in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*.[59] A line of argument about the natural world is, at most, a contribution to the first movement of a classical case, or one line among others in a cumulative case. If it shows anything, it shows something about the world that was made. It does not identify the Christ. It does not turn existence into life. A universe finely ordered is still a universe. Stones exist in it. Storms exist in it. The goods that only persons can have are not supplied by the constants. They are not purpose, meaning, love, joy, peace, hope, individual identity, significance, and wonder. A defense that stops when the constants have been admired has stopped inside existence.

The historical case for Jesus of Nazareth is the shared line of the classical second movement, of the evidential method, and of many cumulative cases. The names have already been given. The line becomes a method only when a writer says what the line is being asked to carry, and whether anything must be granted before it may be heard. Until that is said, a book about the resurrection is a book about the resurrection. It is not yet an account of apologetics. John's Gospel states the aim of its own signs without becoming a theory of method. "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."[60] The life in his name is more than the establishment of an event. The event is written toward the life. A historical line that never arrives at that sentence has stopped where the Gospel did not stop.

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[58] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952); David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[59] Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Stephen Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2009); Robin Collins, "The Teleological Argument: An Exploration of the Fine-Tuning of the Universe," in Craig and Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, 202–81.

[60] John 20:31 (ESV).

XIII. Modes of address

A mode is a way of making a claim perceptible. It is not an account of why the claim should be believed. Story, image, beauty, the longings of a culture, and the conduct of a conversation are modes. C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton are writers often brought in when the mode is under discussion, and they do not sit cleanly inside one method. The books are Lewis's *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles* and Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* and *The Everlasting Man*.[61] Later books have made the mode explicit: Andrew Davison's collection *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition*, Alister E. McGrath's *Mere Apologetics* and *Narrative Apologetics*, Timothy Keller's *The Reason for God*, and Gregory Koukl's *Tactics*.[62]

The fact that Lewis and Chesterton fit every school a little, and none of them fully, is a fact about the mode. Imagination can serve a classical order of argument, a cumulative appeal to the fit of the faith with experience, or the exposure of a worldview that cannot be lived. The mode does not decide the warrant. A map that measures only warrant will find these two writers everywhere and nowhere. A map that promotes imagination into a rival school will have lost the question the other maps were right to care about, which is why anyone should believe. Meaning can be made vivid and still be false. A story can be wanted and still be untrue. The truth of the claim remains the test. Imagination is not a second test that outranks it.

The mode is also not life-as-light apologetics. That name is mine, and it names another work. A story makes a meaning perceptible to a reader who is not in the room. A life makes a people visible to a neighbor who is. The Sermon does not say to compose a better tale. It says, "You are the light of the world,"[63] and it says to let that light shine so that others may see good works and give glory to the Father. A chronicle may send a reader toward that life. It is not that life. To confuse the mode with the kind is to think that a depicted obedience can stand in for an obeyed life. People smell the difference quickly. The third non-negotiable is the compliance. The kind is the visibility. The mode is neither.

XIV. Three kinds of my own

The two surveys do not name these three. I do. They are not lines with a new label, and they are not modes, and they are not a seventh method.

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[61] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947); G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane Company; London: John Lane, 1909); Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1925).

[62] Andrew Davison, ed., *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012); Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011); McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics: Sharing the Relevance, Joy, and Wonder of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019); Timothy J. Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Dutton, 2008); Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009).

[63] Matt. 5:14 (ESV).

Testimonial and experiential apologetics is the office the risen Lord assigns and the church in Acts refuses to abandon. The report is of what was seen, heard, and handled. It is allowed to be incomplete, as the man born blind is incomplete when he will not settle the Pharisees' question, and it is not allowed to end in the witness. The town that believed the woman believed at last because of Jesus' word. The experiential register is the same kind. It is tasting that the Lord is good, not a second canon and not a theory of religious perception. Geisler's *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* has an entry titled "Experiential Apologetics."[64] The kind, as I mean it, is the biblical office, not a heading borrowed from a reference book.

Life apologetics is the second, and the terms are fixed in *Life Beyond Existence: Why I Believe*. Existence is not yet life. The goods that make the difference are purpose, meaning, love, joy, peace, hope, individual identity, significance, and wonder. A method that asks only whether God is, or only whether theism best explains a body of evidence, may be a true method and still not be this kind. Those two surveys have no heading for the question whether being here is livable. I have given it one.

Life-as-light apologetics is the third, and the name is mine. It is the visibility the Sermon requires, derivative of Christ, aimed at the Father's glory, and held together with the word of life. It is not the third non-negotiable. Compliance is the life matching the relationship it claims. Visibility is that life set out where the house and the town can see it. A compliant life can be hidden. A visible life can be false. Life as light is the form of an apologetic by itself. A life that matches what we claim, though it does overlap with that, is a non-negotiable that applies to every type of apologetic.

XV. How the three sit with the six

Testimony can be offered inside an evidential case and remain more than a document in the file. The historian may cite the woman, the blind man, Peter, and John. The citation does not exhaust them, because they are not only sources. They are answering, and the answer is part of the church's duty whether or not a historian ever takes it up. Life apologetics can use a moral line, a transcendental line, or a cumulative line, and it is not identical with the method that uses the line. A presuppositional argument that stops when it has secured the conditions of reason has defended the possibility of argument. It has not yet asked whether the world so defended can be lived as a life rather than as a consistent emptiness. Light apologetics does not compete with a method of justification. It asks whether the method has a people whose works can be seen, and whether the seeing ends in the Father's glory. A full defense needs the six methods. It is not finished without the three.

The old disputes are not dissolved by the addition. They remain exactly where they were. Where may the argument begin? Must theism be granted before the historical evidence is heard? Is the support aimed at a demonstration, a probability, the best account of the whole, or a belief that need not be inferred from other beliefs? Those questions divide the six, and they should be allowed to divide them. What the three kinds add is not a truce. It is the recognition that a true answer to those questions can still leave the duty unfinished. A man may know where the argument should begin, and not be a witness. He may weigh the whole evidence, and

[64] Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), s.v. "Experiential Apologetics."

never ask whether existence is yet life. He may have the epistemology in order, and hide the lamp.

The place of the Spirit is not one more item on that list of disputes, as if only some of the methods had heard of him. The second non-negotiable binds them all. The Spirit is the agent of conversion in every case. Paul's words in Ephesians are the pattern of reliance, and they are a request for prayer, not a theory that exempts the church from speaking. Words are asked for. Boldness is asked for. The mystery is to be proclaimed. Every method stands under that request. None of them is the agent. A classical demonstration, an evidential history, a cumulative brief, a transcendental argument, a claim about proper basicality, and a call to encounter all fail in the same way if they are trusted to do the converting. They also fail, differently, if the church will not use them because it has remembered that the Spirit converts. The apostle who asked for prayer intended to speak.

XVI. Conclusion

Christian apologetics is one duty, the duty of a ready answer, carried out in several kinds. Cowan's five views and Boa and Bowman's four approaches are the maps that have done much to fix the names of the methods, and the maps do not match. The methods in this paper are six, because the cumulative case Cowan keeps, the separation he keeps between presuppositional apologetics and Reformed epistemology, and the fideism Boa and Bowman keep, are all real differences. Moral argument, argument from the sciences, and the historical case for Jesus are lines inside those methods. Appeal to imagination, to culture, and to the shape of a conversation are modes of address. Any method may use them. None of them is a rival account of warrant.

Three further kinds are mine, and those two surveys do not name them. Testimonial and experiential apologetics reports what has been seen, heard, handled, and tasted, and it does so in order to bring the hearer to the word. Life apologetics, set over against existence apologetics, asks whether a world that merely exists can be lived, on the claim that existence is not yet life. Life-as-light apologetics is my name for the visibility the Sermon requires: good works seen, and the glory given to the Father. A full defense needs the methods. It is not finished without the three.

Four things remain non-negotiable, whichever method is in hand and whichever kind is doing the work. Any presentation of the truth of the gospel needs to be steeped in the Scripture, with the goal of introducing, as soon as possible, the person who is being introduced to the truth of the gospel to that library of truth. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."[65] More can be accomplished by well placed Scripture than any level of argumentation. There must be prayerful reliance upon the Holy Spirit, who is the agent of conversion in every case. The pattern is Paul's request, not a slogan: prayer at all times in the Spirit, and prayer that words will be given and the mystery declared boldly, as he ought to speak. There must be a life in compliance with the relationship we are claiming and representing. People smell a hypocrite quickly. And there must be a heart filled with the desire to orient all of life around this task, so that work, speech, the household, and suffering are not arranged to hide the light. The methods are ways of answering. The four are what an answer has to be in order to be an answer a neighbor can trust. A defense that is not steeped in

[65] Rom. 10:17 (ESV).

Scripture, not prayed, not lived, and not wanted with the whole of life is not repaired by being filed under the right school.

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