The relevance of Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer to postmodern apologetics

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Dogmatics at the North-West University

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Graduation Ceremony: May 2019
Student number: 26790025
Acknowledgements

A project like this could never be accomplished without the support of a community. A number of people must be mentioned in this regard. First, I like to thank and acknowledge my students who challenge me to continually grow in the craft of teaching, especially the students of my first apologetics class, who gave me the ideas that are articulated in this study. An appreciation goes out to my supervisor of these past years, Irving Hexham, who has sharpened me intellectually and pushed me in the right directions. I am grateful for my colleagues at the library of Prairie College who have encouraged me throughout the process. I am especially grateful for the extensive resources available from the T.S. Rendall Library at Prairie College; without these this study would have been impossible to accomplish. I want to thank my family and especially my wife Connie who has patiently stood by me through all my academic endeavors. I am deeply appreciative to all who have encouraged me and pushed me along the way.
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to incorporate the thought and apologetic impulse of John Calvin, Blaise Pascal and Francis Schaeffer into a Christian apologetics suited for an audience steeped in postmodernity. In order to achieve this goal this study investigates the spirit of postmodernism, the theology of Calvin, and the apologetic methods of Pascal and Francis Schaeffer. First, this study traces postmodern intellectual thought through the twentieth century and the effects this has had on the culture at large and theology in particular. Secondly, this study focuses on Calvin's theology especially regarding reason, the state of humanity and the centrality of Scripture. The theology of Calvin has had great influence on worldview thinking as articulated by neo-Calvinists like Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd, who in turn influenced the thought of Francis Schaeffer, who incorporated this aspect of new-Calvinism into his apologetic system. Thirdly, this study examines Pascal's thought and apologetic approach and considers the remarkable connections to Calvin, which can be applied to a Christian apologetic in a postmodern culture. Lastly, Francis Schaeffer's apologetic method is explored to counter the relativism so prevalent in postmodernity. The striking similarities between Calvin, Pascal and Schaeffer's thought, especially regarding their mutual disdain for the autonomy of reason, can be used as a point of connection to postmodern thought. Their collective view on the state of man, the centrality of Scripture and their emphasis on the Christian life is a corrective to the postmodern insistence on experience, emotion and autonomous feeling, especially prevalent in postmodern spirituality. The commonalities in thought between Calvin, Pascal and Schaeffer can be effectively applied to a Christian apologetic to counter a postmodern culture where truth seems to be abandoned and where Christianity is pushed to the periphery of society.

Keywords
Postmodernity, reason, truth, incarnational apologetics, worldview, neo-Calvinism, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, Francis Schaeffer, common grace, Blaise Pascal, Pascal’s Wager, fundamentalism.
1.1 INTRODUCTION

Christian apologetics is a loaded and often a contentious and challenging issue, especially in a postmodern context (Dockery, 1995:324-342; Gschwandtner, 2013:1-16; Penner, 2013:1-19; Raschke, 2014:133). The term “apologetics” is recurrently equated with another term, “argumentation,” and therefore, it is said, should have no place in Christian vocabulary, let alone be practiced and embraced by Christians as a means of presenting the Christian faith to unbelievers. It must be emphasized that defending the Christian faith, or apologia as it is used in the Scriptures (cf. 1 Peter 3:15), is a biblical concept and can be regarded as a command to be taken seriously (Van Til, 2003:21-22; Carnell, 1950:7). One of the clearest examples of the more pointed imperatives regarding the defense of the faith that Christians have been given is the exhortation to give an answer or an apologia to everyone who asks, for the hope that they have (1 Peter 3:15, 16). As well, Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, gives the believers many examples of his approach to “defending” the faith in a variety of circumstances and contexts (e.g., Acts 17:2,3; 16-31).

Throughout church history, the defense of the faith, or apologetics, has always been a heterogeneous enterprise, where the Church Fathers incorporated pagan philosophy in one way or another. Disagreement arose regarding the use of pagan philosophy in theology, as Tertullian so aptly noted, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?” (Tertullian, 1885:loc. 296). Church Fathers, despite their extensive use of pagan philosophy, continued to defend the faith against the heresies of the day. They failed to see, however, that the philosophical elements were rooted in “a pagan ground motive” (Dooyeweerd, 2012:114).

We can deduce that, historically, philosophy and theology have had close affinities with apologetics. In contemporary thought, however, we can fall into the trap of thinking that the discipline of apologetics is a subset of philosophy, instead of a theological discipline. This assumption de-emphasizes apologetics as an intricate discipline within the overall task of the theologian, and delegates the task of apologetics only to those who are proficient in philosophy. The task of theology, as Klaus Bockmuehl (1983:13) defines it, is “the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and to everywhere and all times announce God to humanity, to each living generation.” Therefore, we would go so far as to suggest that apologetics is theology. We can agree with David Bentley Hart (2003:30) who asserts in his work The Beauty of the Infinite,

I do not like to separate these things [apologetics and dogmatics] too absolutely. I presume that a credible defense of Christian rhetoric can be undertaken only from within Christian doctrine: because the church makes its appeal to the world first by pursuing its own
dogmatics, by narrating and re-narrating itself with ever greater fullness, hoping all the while that the intrinsic delightfulness of this practice will draw others into its circle of discourse.

In the last decade or so, and against all odds, there appears to be a rejuvenation of interest in apologetics. Troy Anderson (2008:28) in a recent article in Christianity Today commented on the popularity of apologetics among young people. Anderson (2008:27) quotes Lee Strobel whom he had interviewed, stating, “There has been a resurgence in Christian apologetics as a direct result of the challenges Christianity has faced in the form of militant atheism in college classrooms, on the Internet, and in TV documentaries and best-selling books.” Anderson (2008:28) enthusiastically reports that the hotbeds of apologetics education – Biola and Talbot School of Theology – are overflowing with students who are eager to pursue graduate studies in philosophy and apologetics to counter the contemporary arguments that pertain to naturalism, scientism and materialism. They are taught to respond in turn by appealing to scientific “evidences” in hopes of persuading the unbeliever, in spite of a diminished confidence in human reason by postmoderns as far as religious truth is concerned. It is imperative, therefore, that we understand the postmodern Zeitgeist and point out its inconsistencies before we deal with issues such as the existence of God and other questions of faith. It is true, as Wolterstorff (1992:146) suggests, that we must bring to light the roots of the unbeliever’s resistance and relieve the unbeliever of his or her obstinate self-will.

A number of postmodern philosophers and theologians have taken a critical look at the apologetic approach and have rejected the task of apologetics altogether (Raschke, 2014:133-134). As well, many theologies (e.g., postconservative, postliberal, Radical Orthodoxy) have embraced postmodern aspects that have reduced the effectiveness of the apologetic endeavor, which leaves the question: where do Christians go from here in this (post)modern context in which secularism reigns and the orthodox Christian beliefs are attacked from all sides, even from within theology itself? It is true that some of the critique leveled against modern apologetics is justified, but this does not mean that apologetics should be abandoned altogether, rather it raises the question whether the time is now for a more urgent Christian apologetic. This study proposes a Christocentric apologetic approach, wherein we argue for the existence of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as articulated in Scripture, which has edification as its central element.

Some might argue that a robust Christian message that appeals to the postmodern mind seems like an impossible task in this (post)modern environment that is marked by hyper-tolerance and multiculturalism. They might also suggest that Christians will lose the ear of the seeker when employing the modern rationalistic approach of apologetics. Some theologians, pastors and biblical
scholars have come on the scene to propose a more palatable “Christianity” that appears, in many ways, unrecognizable when compared to orthodox Christianity (Vosper, 2012:306ff). They might question some of the core doctrines using rather weak arguments (Bell, 2011:63-93) or take a more therapeutic approach to faith that speaks to the masses (Osteen, 2009:72). Many of the doctrines articulated by the Church Fathers that have stood the test of time for centuries are now called into question, and it seems that, in the words of the title of Shelby Spong’s book (1999), Why Christianity Must Change or Die, we need to change the message of Christianity for it to be relevant in the twenty-first century, or so we are told.

Must Christians abandon the task of apologetics altogether and let people create their own spirituality relevant to their situation? We can contend that a robust Christian apologetics with the Bible as its foundation is imperative in a postmodern society. In addition, it is quite appropriate and beneficial to use examples of the past, as their theology can be appropriated in our context. We must unashamedly and unapologetically appeal to Scripture as the authoritative Word of God in our theology and, therefore, in our apologetics. As all good apologists have done throughout the centuries, it is critical to be culturally sensitive and aware of the issues of the day without abandoning the orthodox Christian faith. Thus we must scrutinize the postmodern era and the secular culture of North America, not only for the unbeliever or the skeptic but also for the postmodern “evangelical seeker” who has abandoned the orthodox Christian faith. In addition, we must critically assess today’s prevailing theology that has, at times, capitulated to the surrounding culture. We must pay close attention to the message that is proclaimed and we will come to realize that what is being communicated lacks biblical warrant and is empty of substance and theological acumen. We must come to the realization that when we want to engage apologetically in a postmodern context, although we want to remain culturally sensitive, we are called to confront the unbeliever with the Gospel rather than capitulate to the sentiments of our culture. At the same time, Christians must avoid the danger of being too culturally sensitive, which will inevitably result in escapism or elitism and thus a loss of influence in society.

Apolologists of all ages have remained relevant to the surrounding culture and, at the same time, have remained true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Cultures have gone through dramatic changes, and will continue to do so, but the essence of the message must remain applicable even in this postmodern culture. This study argues that three theologians/apologists and thinkers of the past are particularly important to the postmodern mind: John Calvin, the great Reformer, Blaise Pascal, the brilliant thinker of the seventeenth century, and the more recent apologist and evangelist Francis Schaeffer. All three men were deeply affected by their surroundings and approached their thinking according to their particular context (Miel,1969:61; Cailliet,1961:55-56; Kreeft,1993:9,15,16; Hankins, 2008:9-11). In addition to their cultural contexts, philosophical influences must be taken into
consideration. Especially, in the case of Francis Schaeffer, the philosophical influence of Herman Dooyeweerd and aesthetic influences on modern art as were articulated by the Dutch scholar H.R. Rookmaaker must be discussed to gain a proper understanding of Schaeffer’s apologetic method (Dooyeweerd, 1979:117-118; 2013:138-139; Rookmaaker, 1970:11ff).

The core of their thinking, however, transcends time and can be applied even in the twenty-first century: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. It is only in this realization that we can make sense of the world around us. The postmodern connection can be measured by the way Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer regarded reason as the measuring rod for apprehending truth. Postmodernity is correct in contending for an approach to apologetics that appeals to the existential element in grasping religious truths. Postmodernity, however, has over-emphasized this particular aspect and has disavowed the reasonable justification of Christianity. Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer are more balanced in their view and have appealed to an apologetic that is more well-rounded.

Although objecting to autonomous reason, they did not eradicate the reasonableness of the Christian faith. For Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer, apologetics was never just about convincing the unbeliever by presenting evidences, but more about showing their interlocutors their sinful state in order to bring them to the realization that Christianity is true and worthwhile. Their approach was holistic and appealed not only to the mind but to the heart as well. Christian apologetics in a postmodern context must be biblical, reasonable, relational, conversational and thoroughly incarnational, which means intensely practical.

1.2 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE STUDY

In light of the new resurgence of the more militant writings of the so-called New Atheists, and the spiritual ethos in the twenty-first century, it is imperative that a robust Christian apologetic is employed.

The postmodern responses by philosophers and theologians have in many ways capitulated to the current culture to remain relevant in the twenty-first century. At times, they have dismissed apologetics as irrelevant or even anti-Christian, or offer a scathing critique of the modern project (Raschke, 2004:133-134; Penner, 2013:47-49 respectively). What this research proposes is a robust Christian apologetic that “would make a case for the reasonableness of Christian belief not by referring to some putatively neutral datum of experience to which the Christian religion conforms but, rather, through the skillful demonstration of how our common and everyday world in its variety really conforms to the biblical world” (Werpehowski, 1986:284). By appealing to the notion of “common grace” as debated by thinkers in the Calvinist tradition (Dooyeweerd, 1979:36-39; Kuyper, 1981:121-126; Mouw, 2001:31-36), Calvin’s sensus divinitatis (Calvin, 1960:43-44),
Pascal’s evaluation and description of humanity as restless and apathetic (Pascal, 1995:59, 76, 80, 146), and Francis Schaeffer’s methodology of *Truth with Love* (Follis, 2006:135-139), this study will demonstrate that apologetics is able to reach the postmodern audience of the twenty-first century. In addition, this research will draw on Francis Schaeffer’s philosophical findings (1968:19-29; 1972:1-88; 1976:40-51) and his appeal to the Spirit-filled Christian life (Dennis, 1985:31, 47-49, 93-95; Parkhurst, 1985:197-200) that ultimately speaks to the relativistic and often nihilistic outlook of the postmodern secularist.

### 1.3 METHODOLOGY

The foundation of this study is Reformed evangelical, with Scripture, the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed as its guiding principles. The method of inquiry involves a critical analysis regarding the spiritual milieu and the current worldview system(s) that are prevalent in the postmodern context. In addition, a critical analysis is to be conducted concerning the apologetic method(s) adopted in the latter part of the twentieth and twenty-first century. This critical evaluation is helpful in understanding the postmodern mindset and the evangelical responses and will ultimately assist us in creating a proper rejoinder and so successfully adjust our apologetic method, all the while maintaining a robust evangelical emphasis.

In our disquisition of the postmodern worldview, negative aspects will be critiqued and positive facets will be commended and appropriated where possible in our apologetic response. As well, the more prevalent spiritual climate that pervades the Western world will be assessed. Included in the assessment is the (new) atheism that seems to stubbornly persist and has reared its head as a social movement (Cimino & Smith, 2014:21-30; 53-84) in the twenty-first century. Finally, the postmodern evangelical response with its own distinct apologetics mainly in theological movements such as Postliberalism, Radical Orthodoxy, and Neo-Evangelicalism, with Stanley Grenz as its foremost spokesperson (Mitchener, 2013:95-115; Smith & Olthuis, 2005:43-58 and Grenz, 2000:85-116, 321-351) will be evaluated.

To assist us in finding a proper response, this study will evaluate the writings of Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer. The method of study will use case study research methods based in part on Robert Stake’s research principles, as far as they are applicable to the research proposed here in this study (Stake, 1995). The method that is most applicable to the study proposed here is the collective instrumental case study. Robert Stake (1995:3-4) explains concerning the collective instrumental case study that the persons (in this study Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer) provide insight in a particular issue (in this study the apologetic method), and build a theory (the applicability to postmodern apologetic).
The data gathering is largely extrapolated from the primary sources. As part of the triangulation protocols a number of secondary sources will be used to strengthen the proposed argument, which Stark (1995:113) identifies as theory triangulation. Admittedly, only certain individual aspects of the argument can be deduced from the secondary sources (Cailliet, 1944:84-90, 91-95; Wells, 1965:75-137; Singer, 1975:52-56; Kuyper, 1981:110-171; Schnucker, 1988:77-92; Kreeft, 1993:9-42, 47-72, 147-164, 277-316; deGreef, 1994:195-203) because, to my knowledge, very little has been written involving the combination of all three individuals, Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer.

An important aspect of the case studies will be to discover theological patterns and commonalities between Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer (Calvin, 1960; Pascal 1995, 2008; Schaeffer, 1968, 1970, 1972). The theological patterns can be used to formulate an apologetic method that is suitable and applicable in a postmodern context. Besides the apparent commonalities and patterns the personal character and Christian life will be appraised and used as a possible pattern for an apologetic method in a postmodern context. Besides the collective instrumental case study method as described above, this study involves somewhat of an intrinsic study as well (Stark, 1995:3).

There is an intrinsic interest in the Christian life of Calvin, Pascal and Schaeffer that can be evaluated and appropriated to a postmodern apologetic (Stewart, 1915:72-96; Cailliet, 1961:315, 340-348; Singer, 1975; Leith, 1984:1-24, 107-108; Dennis, 1986:177-189; Leith, 1989; Follis, 2006; Hankins, 2008). The intrinsic study that guides this part is driven by the desire to know more about the uniqueness of the cases (Calvin, Pascal and Schaeffer), not to arrive at a certain theory. These particular cases can be used as examples to be imitated in our current context.

When we evaluate the writings of Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer, we must keep in mind the cultural and sociological context of all three cases. They lived in very different times and responded to a variety of issues that were culturally influenced. It is the intention of this study to discover the essence of the message of Calvin, Pascal and Schaeffer and apply it to the apologetic method suitable and relevant to the postmodern mind.
2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As Nancy Vyhmeister (2014:74) suggests, a review of literature “paints a backdrop against which the research will be done.” This backdrop must have as its focus the objective of this study, namely, the relevance of Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer to postmodern apologetic. We must begin this literature review, therefore, by gaining a proper understanding regarding the spiritual milieu in the twenty-first century that can be deemed as postmodern, to ultimately correlate Calvin’s theology, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer’s apologetic method to postmodern thinking. Firstly, relevant sources that define and describe postmodern thinking as it relates to religion will be looked at. Secondly, theological reactions to postmodernity will be assessed, and thirdly, the primary writings of Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer particular to the aim and objective of this study will be evaluated. In addition, a number of secondary sources that claim to give insight into the thoughts and methods of Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer will be given attention.

2.2 Relevant literature on postmodernity, postmodern spirituality and postmodern apologetic responses

Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1979:1-45, 165-198) in his book Postmodernism and Its Discontents describes the postmodern milieu and its view on religion. The emeritus professor of sociology at the Universities of Leeds and Warsaw begins by juxtaposing the essence of modernity with the essence of postmodernity. On the matter of religion, the author doubts that there exists a human urge to get answers to the fundamental questions of the purpose of life and he insists that we have come to believe that the church is providing a service necessitated by this non-existent human urge (Bauman, 1997:169). He scathingly insinuates that the “sense of the divine” has never been proven and was only implied “through the acceptance of the ecclesiastical self-legitimation formula as the explanation of religiosity” (Bauman, 1997:170). Religious experiences are coveted by the postmodern, according to the author, but have no religious content whatsoever. These experiences are invoked through appropriate techniques and are consumer-related. Whereas religious peak experiences focus on humanity’s weaknesses and insufficiencies, postmodern peak experiences presume and celebrate human infinite potency (Bauman, 1979:180-185).

This study will show the weakness and inconsistencies outlined by Bauman regarding his view on religion and his presumption that there does not exist the urge to find the answers to the questions of life and that the sensus divinitatis as articulated by Calvin, is but an empty theory. A theological corrective is needed that affirms the sense of the divine as put forth by both Calvin and Pascal as
well as the sense of need for meaning in mankind, as affirmed by Francis Schaeffer, that proved to be the essence of his apologetic method.

Richard Wolin (2004:xi-314), Distinguished Professor of History and Literature at the City University in New York, traces the embarrassing affinity between postmodernism and fascism in twentieth-century Europe in his work *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*. It is his estimation that the postmodern rhetoric in pre-war Europe was highly political and was embraced by both the left and the right. Nietzsche’s philosophy runs like a red thread through the political aspirations of German fascists, and the counter-revolutionaries in France (Wolin, 2004:89-104). Wolin describes the progenitors of postmodern thought in detail. Wolin’s overall conclusion is that postmodernism is untenable and because of its checkered past its influence and impact is on the decline (Wolin, 2004:312). The author’s conclusions may be correct as far as Europe is concerned, but postmodernism is still deeply entrenched in North America, especially in the area of theology.

David Tacey (2004:1-226), who is an associate professor in psychoanalytic studies at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, and a Jungian scholar, in his book *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* realizes that there exists a resurgence in spirituality in the West and explains that we have outgrown the modern suggestions, values and assumptions of “mechanistic science and humanism.” More importantly, Tacey would have us believe that it is impossible to return to organized religion or to the premodern categories of dogmatic theology for social and historical reasons. This spiritual revolution that Tacey (2004:4) speaks of is a revolution from below not from above; it is, in his words, “a counter-cultural revolution against the rise of materialism, inhumanity and economic rationalism.” The characteristics of this new spiritual revolution are based on personal autonomy and the “this-worldly,” the body, nature, femininity and the physical environment.

Modernity has killed God, but postmodernity has revived him again, according to the author. That does not mean, however, a return to the conventional image of God as articulated in Christianity. Only sentimentalists, fundamentalists and non-thinkers want to go back to that image, according to the author. Postmodernity is creating a new image of God. The author dismisses the conventional image of God and proposes a God as a process, force, or dynamism, an imaginative conception of our experience, reminiscent of the God of process theology (Tacey, 2004:154-171). The religious are moving freely in and out, across religious boundaries, combining elements from various religious traditions and creating a more personalized meaning system. As others have attested to as well, it can be summed up as “I am not religious, I am spiritual.” The lack of foundation is apparent
in the spiritual lives of the postmodern, thus a Schaefferian apologetic method is needed for this generation.

David Ray Griffin (1989:29-61), in his chapter “Postmodern theology and a/theology: a response to Mark C. Taylor” in Varieties of Postmodern Theologies, edited by David Ray Griffin, William A. Beardslee and Joe Holland, critiques Mark Taylor's deconstructive or eliminative postmodern view and suggests a revisionary postmodernism heavily influenced by Alfred North Whitehead, a proponent of process theology. Griffin explains that deconstructive postmodernism eliminates the One or central perspective that ultimately leads to Nietzschean nihilism. Deconstructive postmodernism denies any truth and leads to absolute relativism. Griffin, co-founder of the Center for Process Studies, shows the philosophical shortcomings of eliminative postmodernism and brings to light the inconsistencies. He concludes that eliminative postmodernism is as bad or worse than the disease that it wants to eliminate, that is, modernism. Griffin's answer is not to return to modernism but to overcome the problems of modernism by introducing a revisionary postmodernism. This revisionary postmodernism denies the God of the Bible and sees God in terms of naturalistic theism where “creative power inherently belongs to the realm of finite existence as well as to God” (Griffin, 1989:48). God is more the soul of the universe: “what exists necessarily is not God alone but God-and-a-world” (Griffin, 1989:48). The God of revisionary postmodernism is the God of process theology. Biblical theology, using the interpretive grid of Tradition as put forth by Calvin and an apologetic method with a biblical foundation such as those used by Pascal and Schaeffer, is needed to counter this groundless postmodern theology.

John Shelby Spong (1998:ix-228), bishop of the Episcopal Church of Newark, in his work Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile, asserts that Christianity, as articulated in the creeds, is hopelessly outdated and unworthy of any serious contention. No clear thinking intelligent person in these postmodern times can or should accept the premodern paradigm from which the Christian faith sprang (Spong, 1998:67-70). Having established a new way of thinking about God, Spong spends the remainder of his book deconstructing the major doctrines as articulated in the Scriptures, for example, the divinity and work of Christ, and the matter of heaven and hell. In his opinion, postmodernity has been left with a Christianity stripped of all content and is left with a religion of one's own making. More than ever, a Christian apologetic is needed to counter this empty religion void of any hope.

Greta Vosper (2012:1-315), a United Church minister in Ontario, Canada and a self-proclaimed atheist, in one of her most recent books, Amen: What Prayer Can Mean in a World Beyond Belief, voices many of the same concerns as did John Shelby Spong regarding the outdated beliefs of Christianity that are still adhered to by so many. Almost exasperatedly, Vosper calls us to get up
from our knees and leave the outdated beliefs behind, give back the lost dignity and find the crucial ways we need “to live love into the world” (Vosper, 2012:203). There is nothing new in what Vosper is trying to convey in her book. Her error is that she thinks that what she is suggesting is the new and evolved way to see religion in a postmodern context. Vosper has the notion that the postmodern mind must let go of archaic religious practices, but what Vosper fails to realize is that this is not postmodern thinking but a return to the post-Enlightenment optimism in humanity. We have no God, according to the author, but only ourselves; all we do, we do in our own strength, without the bothersome archaic ideas of a supernatural being. Ultimately, as Francis Schaeffer points out, this will lead to nihilism.

Linda A. Mercadante, professor of theology at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, addresses the issue of being “spiritual but not religious” in her 2014 book Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious. The author looks into the religious landscape of contemporary America and discovers that a large segment of the population call themselves “nones” meaning that they have no religious affiliation (Mercadante, 2014:46-50; 68-91). It is not that Americans are disinterested in spiritual matters, but more and more people are looking into individual spiritualities without religious attachments. Many of those mentioned by the author have become spiritual but not religious for a variety of reasons, such as a disdain of exclusivism, ethical objections to hypocrisy, or attraction to the personal choice from an eclectic spiritual smorgasbord (Mercadante, 2014:75-81). Many turn from religion and create their own belief system because of their frustration with traditional Christianity or religion in general. As it turns out, the frustrations continue even after “freeing” themselves from all external authority (Mercadante, 2014:75).

Postmodern spirituality is standing on shaky ground indeed, and, ironically, has retained the modern notion of the autonomous self. In this respect, Francis Schaeffer’s apologetic, very much aware of the epistemological foundation of postmodernism, is still very relevant more than thirty years after his passing.

David Lyon in his book Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times uses the metaphor of Jesus in Disneyland to describe the religious reality in a postmodern context. The author uses “postmodernity” as shorthand for a pluralistic, globalizing Information Age in which religion seeks to participate meaningfully. Disneyland seems to epitomize all the above description of the time, and religion has adopted many of these characteristics such as consumerism and entertainment; “Faith is in ferment; new beliefs are brewing” (Lyon, 2000:137). Although institutional religion is on the brink of extinction, according to the author, religion, spirituality and the search for the transcendent is not. Information technologies, consumer capitalism and consumer lifestyles offer new “challenges and new opportunities for contemporary religion, faith and spirituality” (Lyon, 2000:138). Lyon ends by confirming that it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict new modes of
religious expression within postmodern conditions. However, he is still hopeful that it is possible because of the available resources to which sociology can add nothing, such as “the sense of ‘eternity in the heart’ or the moral demands inscribed within creation itself, revelation, or the scandal of the crucified saviour” (Lyon, 2000:148). Again, a strong biblical foundation is lacking, and although Lyon mentions revelation he is ambiguous in his contentions where revelation would fit into postmodern religious sentiment.

The author Todd M. Brennemann in *Homespun Gospel: The Triumph of Sentimentality in Contemporary American Evangelicalism* (2013) argues that sentimentality and emotion are the driving forces of contemporary evangelicalism. It is no longer centred around doctrine or propositional beliefs but rather practice and Christian daily life coloured by sentimentalism and emotionalism that stands at the apex of contemporary evangelicalism. In order to understand contemporary evangelicals it is imperative to take note of the evolution of evangelicalism in North America. Special attention must be given to those who are the spokesmen of the contemporary emphasis. The author sees men like Max Lucado, Rick Warren and Joel Osteen as the most prominent and well-known examples of evangelicals who emphasize this sentimental and emotional evangelicalism.

The emotional emphasis has affected the apologetic posture of many pastors as well, according to Brennemann. Instead of addressing the intellect, evangelicals appeal to the emotions by making the implicit claim that the emotions provide a greater understanding of God and reality than the intellect does (Brennemann, 2013:65). Emphasizing the emotion as the core of people’s religious identity discourages the intellectual exploration of the faith. If people’s worldview is not well-defined intellectually, it becomes difficult for them to converse with others who have different ideological commitments, perhaps providing an explanation for why non-evangelicals find certain positions of conservative evangelicals incomprehensible. In addition, Brenneman (2013:50) makes the valuable point that “this culture of emotion downplays reasoned argument or defensible doctrine in favour of how the message of evangelicalism makes one feel.”

Brenneman calls for a redefinition of contemporary evangelicalism; evangelicalism has evolved, thus, so must the definition. However, I contend that scholars must be aware that emotion is a vital part of contemporary evangelicalism and scholars do well to pay attention to this aspect of the Christian faith in order to understand why people are drawn to evangelicalism and its diversity. Calvin’s theology, Pascal’s appeal to Scripture and Francis Schaeffer’s apologetic can bring a corrective and a balance between reason and emotion without creating a false dichotomy between the two.
Paul Lakeland (1997) in his short work *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* identifies three distinct ways postmodernity is viewed by contemporary theology and the subsequent responses to it. Lakeland mentions the postmodern “problem of God,” the role of the Christian community in the postmodern world, and, lastly, the implications of the traditional claims of Christian uniqueness in the face of postmodernity’s attention to otherness (Lakeland, 1997:8-12). In light of these issues, Lakeland investigates the responses of radical postmoderns, moderate postmoderns and nostalgic conservative postmoderns. The first group dismisses the traditional sense of God entirely, and in so doing has lost credibility with most theologians. The last group is alarmed by postmodern culture but remains conversant with postmodernism, albeit reservedly and cautiously, but ultimately emphasizes a premodern understanding of Christianity (Lakeland, 1997:68-76). In his apologetic, Lakeland suggests a method that “will seek ways of representing God, church and Christ that are amenable to the age without being unfaithful to the cherished religious vision of Christianity” (Lakeland, 1997:86). Unfortunately, Lakeland comes up short and, ultimately, suggests an apologetic that accommodates the postmodern culture and compromises on the exclusiveness of Christ’s sacrifice. He is correct in advocating an incarnational apologetic but in his overemphasis on the messenger he neglects the message.

Craig Gay (1998) in his book, *The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It’s Tempting to Live as if God Doesn’t Exist,* makes an attempt to look at the worldliness (secularization) within the postmodern churches and in the individual lives of Christians. The author affirms that the temptation of postmodern Christians is to embrace the worldliness and live as though God does not exist. This practical atheism, as he calls it, is rampant and the solution is to be found only in historic Trinitarian orthodoxy (Gay, 1998:2). An important feature of Gay’s book involves the view of the “self,” which has become skewed as the result of secularization. Gay suggests a rediscovery and a reassertion of a truly Christian theology of personhood (Gay, 1998:181-236). It is my understanding that Calvin points us in the right direction. The Church has employed the apologetic task by mimicking the falsely objective spirit of the age and by trying to demonstrate the “cash value” of the Christian faith and, finally, has surrendered to the therapeutic sensibilities of contemporary culture. Gay calls for meditation on the Christian virtue of patience. He notes that the secular postmodern culture is marked by anxious impatience that has led to a loss of hope in the Christian God, and has, in turn, put its hope in human abilities and agencies. Gay tells us to refuse to surrender to postmodernity’s godless impatience and live patiently and expectantly before the living God (Gay, 1998:313). In my research I will build on Gay’s premises by looking at the theology of Calvin, who calls us to a reassessment of ourselves by looking at the God of Christianity made known to us through His Son, Jesus Christ.
David Wells, a conservative evangelical, in his work, *Above All earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (2005), laments the fact that the church has lost its evangelical moorings and has capitulated to the postmodern ethos. It is imperative that the church returns to the solid foundation in Christ as articulated in Scripture, even if this means a confrontation with the postmodern culture (Wells, 2005:87-89; 314-317). There are continuities between modernity and postmodernity, especially in the fact that they both centre on the autonomous self as arbiter of truth. The author sounds the alarm because postmodernity is moving to a place where worldviews are denied, truth is rejected and purpose is forfeited (Wells, 2005:74-75; 84-88). Progress has been made by discarding rationalfoundationalism that was borne out of Enlightenment thought. The postmodernist has gone so far as to relinquish all ground for religious knowledge. Thus, this new “foundation-less” generation has adapted pragmatism in order to find some sense of truth amidst the chaos. Postmodernism denies the sure foundation of biblical revelation, thus denies the foundation for the interpretation of truth. Truth, therefore, is wholly dependent on the autonomous presuppositions of the interpreter, conditioned by culture, disregarding the individual biases coloured by sin. Ironically, the postmodern without truth, purpose and comprehensive worldview is reaching out for what is spiritual (Wells, 2005:84-90).

Wells’ work aptly covers the dilemma that the North American evangelical church faces in the postmodern context. The author points out the negative elements of postmodernism and the dangers of the extremes into which it can eventually lead. He is correct in pointing out that orthodox Christianity stands opposed to the spirituality of the postmodern seeker and thus confrontation is inevitable (Wells, 2005:310-316). My research will add some theological insight founded on Calvin and Pascal and, in addition, Francis Schaeffer’s reaction against the spirituality of the postmodern seeker.

The postmodern philosopher and Derrida scholar, John Caputo, who is of significant influence to many postmodern theologians, sets out in his book *Truth: Philosophy in Transit* to defend the postmodern notion of truth or truths. According to Caputo, truth in modernity became robotic and static; it has lost its sense of mystery. For Caputo, however, truth does not mean the same as it does for orthodox Christians. Truth, for Caputo, is an “event”, or a “deed”, always “on the go”, or as Derrida would confirm, truth is a “becoming.” Caputo (2013:93) borrows from his master Derrida and posits, “To be in the truth means to welcome what is coming, a truth 'to come', which is a sea of unforeseeable possibilities.” In other words, for Caputo and Derrida, the only truth that we know as true is that we will never know what is true because we are lost in the condition of a genuine movement, “of the venture and adventure which truth demands” (Caputo, 2013:94). Truth is not static, but de-centred, without an absolute centre, ground, or foundation. This, according to Caputo, does not mean that nothing at present is true, but only deprives the present of finality. Truth
happens, according to the postmodern philosopher, by way of repetition. By this Caputo (2013:95) means, “to produce a new work that draws from the energies and sources, the tendencies and possibilities of the past, the underlying event of truth harbour'd by the past.” This “repetition” can be detected by the manner in which postmoderns theologize; it becomes unhinged from the objective truth conveyed through Scripture.

Caputo recalls Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and their notions of truth and sees affinities to postmodernism in all three. He recalls Hegel’s notion of “truth on the go”, Kierkegaard's existential subjective notion of truth and Nietzsche’s truth of suspicion. These give rise to the postmodern turn, according to Caputo (2013:197), with a view of truth “modelled after neither God nor Reason, but the event.” The author continues, “to be in the truth is to be mindful of the contingency of what we take to be true at any given moment, and to cultivate an acute sensitivity to the unforeseen turns truth may take in the future” (Caputo, 2013:197).

The postmodern approach to truth hinges on interpretation (hermeneutics), according to Caputo. Caputo (2013:204) tends to move beyond the positions of absoluteness and relativism and poses that “hermeneutics says truth is not a matter of presuppositionlessness but of having the right presuppositions and avoiding the wrong ones.” These presuppositions depend solely on the right interpretations, either plausible or implausible, fetching or far-fetched. In his notion of truth, Caputo continues to abhor the idea of “relativism”, but unfortunately there is no getting around it. We can see this especially in his views regarding ethics, which he confirms as truth only once agreed on by consensus.

Nevertheless, we should maintain the love for truth, by which Caputo means an excitement for the future, or openness to what remains unknown. It is, according to the author, impossible to say something is true, because that would mean that the life interpretation is destroyed and the future is shut down. Where do we go from here? According to Caputo (2013:261-262), where we are going nobody knows, the truth has yet to be decided, if it ever will be. The author ends his book giving us little or no hope (not something he himself would admit to). After postmodernity comes posthumanism dictated by info-tech-no-science. Religion must be recontextualized accordingly. Faith now becomes a faith in the future. We have returned to Nietzsche’s famous dictum, “God is dead,” and that is compliant with Caputo. Against this prevailing postmodernism stands the theologian/apologist grounded in Christ, calling on Calvin, Pascal, and Francis Schaeffer, to proclaim the message of hope.

Carl Raschke in his book *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicalism Must Embrace Postmodernity*, proposes a new look at postmodernity, and asserts that the *zeitgeist* of the twenty-first century has often been misinterpreted and caricatured by those who hold fast to modernism.
Contrary to David Wells, Raschke affirms the positive aspects of postmodernity as opposed to the dangers of modernism (Raschke, 2004:11-34). He supposes that postmodernity comes far closer to upholding orthodox Christianity than modernism, because of modernity’s emphasis on the autonomous self. Raschke (2004:9) calls for a New Reformation that embraces the credos of the Protestant Reformation, which has cloaked itself in a postmodern mindset and has done away with modernity’s emphasis on the natural intellect.

Raschke (2004:100-108) takes to task Schaefferian presuppositionalism and Calvinist “dominionism” as theologies of glory and even sees them as anti-Christian. Ironically, he proposes a postmodern theology and describes it in Calvinistic and Augustinian terms. Raschke has a gross misunderstanding of the Reformed presuppositionalism adhered to by Van Til and, in some way, by Schaeffer as well. He proposes that faith in the postmodern context is presuppositionless, as if the presuppositions of Van Til and Schaeffer precede faith. The author has a triumphalist view of postmodernism as the savior of Orthodox faith and in one fell swoop disregards all views that preceded it. It is his opinion that only postmodern theology adheres to the Reformation dictum sola fide.

Raschke (2004:179-205) describes his charismatic experiences that are, in his opinion, expressions of postmodern Christianity. His descriptions involve experiences prompted by the Spirit with little discernment or biblical backing. When postmodernism is taken seriously and with such vigor, as articulated by Raschke, it stands to reason that the Bible as God’s Word does not take a prominent role. Raschke takes seriously the writings of Derrida and Foucault, thereby depreciating the value of God’s Word in postmodern Christianity. Raschke is correct in identifying that the Enlightenment project has failed, but it must be said that postmodernism with its suspicion of language and its incredulity toward metanarratives is untenable. My research will indicate that orthodox Christianity must stand on a solid biblical foundation as God’s Word, and, in addition, will show that we are given faith, and therefore presuppose that the Bible is God’s Word, contrary to Raschke’s reading of Van Til and Francis Schaeffer.

Myron Penner, philosopher and Kierkegaard scholar, in his book The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context, contends that the apologetic method and the language we employ are remnants of an era gone by and are unintelligible to the postmodern ears. Penner (2013:7) argues that the rational defense of Christianity that supposedly makes it intelligible is often misunderstood and overestimates rational warrant for belief. This approach can be counterproductive and downright unchristian (Penner, 2013:9). The author follows a Kierkegaardian paradigm and claims that apologetics itself might be the single biggest threat to genuine Christianity that we face today (Penner, 2013:12). It becomes quite clear in the following
pages that what Penner means is not apologetics *per se* that is a threat to Christianity, but the threat is a certain apologetic method that ignores the postmodern *zeitgeist* of today and continues in its modern rational arrogance to defend the Christian faith. In what follows, the author makes an attempt to redefine an apologetic that takes into consideration the postmodern culture of the twenty-first century.

The alternative Penner (2014:69) suggests claims that Christianity is more a way or an invitation to live in the truth than it is a doctrine or a set of beliefs whose truth we can grasp and cognitively master; Christian truth-telling involves our overall patterns of action and behaviour. Penner (2013:74) proposes a hermeneutical approach to Christian faith that “carefully negotiates faith in reference to the text and traditions out of which we hear the apostles and prophets speak.” It also acknowledges that hearing God speak is an event in the context of a faithful community that requires careful interpretation.

Penner (2013:165) proposes an incarnational apologetic, which means that our apologetic is not focusing on objective truths as such but on the person to whom we witness. We must be ardent in our critique regarding Penner’s negation of objective truths and his minimal use of Scripture in his apologetic endeavour. Penner significantly deviates from Calvin, Pascal and Schaeffer in these matters.

Brian McLaren, who is currently recognized as a leading spokesperson of postmodern evangelicalism, in his book *More Ready Than You Realize: The Power of Everyday Conversations*, suggests a manner of evangelism that is honest, open and conversational (McLaren, 2001:16-17). He recalls negative aspects that evangelism has been associated with and proposes that instead we must adopt the kind of conversational evangelism employed by Jesus himself. He promotes a postmodern apologetic/evangelism that markedly differs from the modern apologetic method based on rational argumentation and logic. McLaren rightly points out that evangelism/apologetics is more than giving “proofs” and clever syllogisms, as these can appear “lame” to the postmodern seeker. McLaren (2001:28-30) suggests that Christianity must become real, regardless of the evidences that can be proffered. He is correct in pointing out that apologetics involves far more than offering the “right knowledge” and the proper “proofs” for Christianity (McLaren, 2001:41-45). Logic and rhetoric had their place but the time has come to adjust our apologetic task to the postmodern culture in which we find ourselves. This means, according to McLaren, that postmodern style apologetics must involve relationship, community, dialogue, mission and Christian service (McLaren, 2001:139-148). As we will discover, many of these (postmodern) aspects that McLaren promotes are present in Calvin’s, Pascal’s and Schaeffer’s apologetic/evangelistic approaches, but it can also be shown that Christianity is a reasonable and
historic faith. As with Myron Penner, McLaren’s opposition to objective truths, especially applied to Scripture, must be lamented, and additionally, it can be asserted that McLaren in many ways proposes an apologetic method that is accommodating to the postmodern notion of hyper-tolerance and pluralism.

James K.A. Smith, as the associate professor of philosophy at Calvin College and Senior Fellow of Cardus (a think tank dedicated to the renewal of North American social architecture), engages philosophical issues head-on, not unlike Francis Schaeffer at L’Abri (Smith’s own admission, c.f. Smith, 2006:20-21). In his work Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism (2006) as part of his series Church and Postmodern Culture, James K.A. Smith describes the cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity that the church now experiences. In order to do this, Smith looks at three postmodern philosophers, Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault, and claims that the postmodern church can learn from these three Parisians and, in many ways, should embrace certain postmodern thoughts (Smith, 2006:23). The entire book is a protest against the modernist notion of autonomous reason and the autonomous self. Smith uses three slogans from the aforementioned postmodernists: “there is nothing outside the text” (Derrida), “the incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard), and “power/knowledge/discipline” (Foucault). He does this to show that, when “Christianized”, these axioms can point us toward a true postmodern expression of Christianity. The protest against modernist thinking as expressed by Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault echoes the objections against autonomous reason voiced by Francis Schaeffer and Dooyeweerd, according to Smith.

To conclude, Smith advocates for a postmodern theology largely modelled by Radical Orthodoxy that avoids what he calls the correlational method employed by so many postmodern movements and apologetics (Smith, 2006:109-146). By the correlational method Smith means that the wider culture dictates the manner in which the gospel is articulated and proclaimed in order to gain the hearing and appeasement of a wider audience. Smith (2006:126) rightly states, “Theology is most persistently postmodern when it rejects a lingering correlational false humility and instead speaks unapologetically from the primacy of Christian revelation and the church’s confessional language.” According to Smith, we can indeed find some points of contact with Calvin, Pascal, and Schaeffer, whose thoughts can be applicable to postmodern apologetics. The author suggests that it is possible that without accommodation we can carefully utilize postmodern thinkers and “make off with postmodern loot for the sake of the kingdom” (Smith, 2006:23). We must be cautious again, for, like Myron Penner and Brain McLaren, James K.A. Smith is critical of objective, universal truths.

Ronald T. Michener has a unique cultural perspective as an American who is a member of the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Belgium. He uses this perspective to engage with postmodern thinkers, much like James K.A. Smith, and to glean insights from postmodern
theologians/philosophers in order to sustain or modify Christian apologetic work. Michener in his book *Engaging Deconstructive Theology*, looks at a wide variety of deconstructionist or postmodern thinkers from an array of different cultures: Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida from France, Rorty and Mark C. Taylor from the United States, and Don Cupitt from Britain. In light of the aforementioned deconstructionists, Michener (2006:159-168; 241-242) proposes an apologetic that focuses on community and is evangelically pluralistic. Contrary to many postmodern thinkers, Michener readily accepts the metanarrative that is laid out in the book of Acts with its focus on the suffering community, which he uses to identify with the suffering of this world (Michener, 2006:182-185). Grand narratives, according to Michener (2006:177), “give us an interpretive scheme by which to live out our hopes, dreams and convictions.” It is imperative, according to the author, to listen to postmodern deconstructionists and to understand their atheistic suspicions lest the possibility of apologetic dialogue is lost.

Like James K.A. Smith, Michener calls for a non-violent “plundering” of non-Christian thought that can be applied through a critical appropriation of deconstructionism, and a careful recontextualization which gleans the good and rejects the bad. To make his point Michener uses thinkers such as Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and Taylor to make his point (Michener, 2006:51-155). In addition, Michener calls for an apologetic of imagination as proposed by C.S. Lewis in his novels grounded in promise and hope. The author concludes suggesting a “soft foundationalism” that assumes the possibility of human dialogue and understanding (Michener, 2006:229-230). Much can be said of Michener’s approach to apologetics, and we can appreciate his prudent openness to postmodern thought. He is cautious in his assessment and appropriation of postmodern thought and is careful not to thoughtlessly “Christianize” radical postmodernism. The same critique, however, can be levelled against Michener as against Smith, Raschke and Myron Penner regarding their epistemology and disdain for objective truths.

Douglas Groothuis, associate professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary, and a conservative evangelical heavily influenced by Pascal and Francis Schaeffer, penned *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (2000) in order to take to task the postmodern rejection of propositional objective truth claims. He vehemently defends the fact that objective truth is knowable and attainable. Groothuis, a staunch defender of the correspondence theory of truth, dismantles the postmodern view of truth and believes that the correspondence theory is the only option for Christians.

Contrary to James K.A. Smith and Ronald Michener, Groothuis does not see any point of contact between the Christian faith and postmodernism, and he opposes the idea, as put forth by James K.A.
Smith and Ronald Michener et al., to appropriate postmodern thinkers in Christian thought, and declares that those who do so are hopelessly inconsistent (Groothuis, 2000:116-121).

In many regards, especially in the realm of morality, postmodernists such as Richard Rorty and Michel Foucault are inconsistent. Groothuis asserts that only Christianity can account for a universal moral ethic; it is only when we accept the fact that objective truth exists that we can rightly address the issue of morality. Groothuis points out that postmodern philosophers, although denying objective moral standards in theory, act as if they exist in practice; thus affirming Rorty's charge of being a “free-loading atheist” (Groothuis, 2000:190).

Groothuis (2000:248-256) contends that the decay of truth has affected the area of aesthetics as well. In agreement with Francis Schaeffer, the author asserts that postmodern art is unhinged from representing and capturing any objective truth; and when unhinged, postmodern art “becomes mute with respect to truth” (Groothuis, 2000:245). Groothuis (2000:263-280) concludes his book with the call to return to the truth that is anchored in Scripture. Truth Decay is a call of caution to all who attempt to appropriate postmodern thought with Christian theology. To Groothuis, postmodernism is the great enemy of the Church and the Christian faith, and therefore nothing good can come from any endeavour to apply postmodern thought to Christian principles. Groothuis can be applauded for his views on Scripture and objective truths, issues sorely lacking in postmodern theology.

Nancy Pearcey (2005:17-378), in her standard work, Total Truth, begins by explaining the importance of the Christian worldview. The author, who is educated in Schaefferian fashion, explains that our (post)modern culture has dichotomized the way in which we see reality, that is, as secular/sacred, fact/value and public/private. The “doctrine of worldview,” as espoused by Francis Schaeffer under the influence of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd, is significant for the life of the Christian and imperative for a robust Christian apologetic, according to the author.

Pearcey (2005:42-45), much like Schaeffer, dismantles the postmodern intellectual’s “leap of blind faith” and renders it hopelessly inconsistent. She sets out the Christian paradigm as “Creation,” “Fall,” and “Redemption”, and shows that all worldviews work within a similar but distorted paradigm.

According to Pearcey (2005:41; 229-230), Darwinism is the main culprit in the rise of secularism and the solidification of the fact/value dichotomy. The author spends a large segment of her work explaining the effects of naturalism and Darwinism on our culture and the Christian faith that has often capitulated to the aforementioned dichotomy, thus playing into the hands of the philosophical naturalist. Pearcey (2005:214) notes that, “once you accept the Darwinian premise, there is a logical
pressure to be consistent, applying it to every aspect of culture.” The author shows the irrationality and inconsistency of a Darwinian worldview. Evangelicalism, according to Pearcey, has been guilty of creating a false epistemological dichotomy that has created difficulties in maintaining a consistent Christian worldview. Pearcey (2005:311) calls us “to liberate Christianity from the twostory division that has reduced it to an upper-story private experience, and learn how to restore it to the status of objective truth.”

Common sense philosophy has resulted in two strands of apologetic methods; on the one hand there is the evidentialist method that assumes truths knowable by believers and unbelievers alike, and on the other hand the presuppositionalist method as proposed by Abraham Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, emphasizing the overall Christian worldview. Pearcey (2000:327-378) concludes by pointing out that defending the Christian worldview should not be a mere academic exercise but should involve all aspects of our lives. Postmoderns look for authentic Christian lives, and will not take Christianity seriously unless we demonstrate an authentic way of life. Thus some of what postmodern apologetics proposes can be appropriated to the Schaefferian apologetic method.

Roger Olson, a self-labeled postconservative, sets out in his book, Reformed and Always Reforming, to make a case for postconservatism and to attempt to do away with the more rigid foundationalism of conservative evangelicals. He begins by defining what he means by “evangelical”, and he comes to the conclusion that the evangelical movement is characterized by tension between pietism, which emphasizes experience and synergism, and Protestant orthodoxy with its emphasis on sound doctrine. Olson (2007:51) contests that postconservative evangelicalism has close affinities to the pietistic form of evangelicalism, blaming conservative evangelicalism for its resistance to change. Both conservative and postconservative theologians presuppose revelation but the former sees it as informative and the latter as transformative. In addition, postconservatives regard theology as a pilgrimage to reconsider old formulations and create new ones in light of new discoveries and different contexts, as opposed to conservatives, for whom theology is a discovery or a conquest, according to the author. Another characteristic of conservatives deals with the importance of tradition in their theology.

Additionally, postconservatives tend to shy away from propositional truths contained in Scripture and adopt the postmodern narrative approach. In many ways, they make an attempt to appropriate some postmodern values into their theology. Olson (2007:122) claims that postconservative theologians have the courage to reconstruct doctrines that are, in his opinion, “more biblical and real, even if that means less traditional.” Some of the doctrinal issues that postconservative theology looks at for (re)interpretation range from the traditional atonement theory to the inclusiveness of the gospel in regard to the unevangelized.
In summation, postconservative theology, according to Olson (2007:148) is “progressive in that it is an ongoing discipline that repeatedly gives rise to new ways of looking at old questions, bringing into view previously undervalued aspects of the Christian belief-mosaic, and occasionally even advances the church’s knowledge of theological truth.” It is wary of conservative theology, which, according to the author, affirms that true beliefs are connected back to more basic beliefs and ultimately to verbally inspired inerrant Scripture.

On the upside, postconservative theology is robustly trinitarian and emphasizes the relationality of the triune God. We can commend Olson for making us aware of some aspects that might have been neglected in the past but which are beneficial for theology. However, postconservative theology has a number of pitfalls and must be critically discerned. Although Olson says little about the task of apologetics, we can see that postconservative theology is averse to an apologetic method that appeals to objective truths, and only endorses an incarnational apologetic, as is the case of postliberal theology. The apologetic method proposed in this study is more holistic in that it appeals to tradition and objective truth while remaining incarnational.

Ronald T. Michener (2013:96-120) in his work Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed, deals with the criticisms levelled against postliberal theology, one of which is the absence of a robust apologetic. This critique is not surprising because postliberal theology is heavily influenced by the theology of Karl Barth. Michener acknowledges the criticism and agrees that a “systematic” apologetic method is lacking in postliberal theology. By this Michener means that a system of apologetics which implies that justification is a necessary condition “in order to claim the value of Christian faith in 'respectable fashion' before one's culture or society” is repudiated by postliberal theology (Michener, 2013:103). Postliberal theology embraces a so-called *ad hoc* approach that does not appeal to some presupposed universal reason but “demonstrates the coherence between Christian beliefs and practices and encourage[s] non-Christians to become absorbed and rooted into the practices, grammar and faith of Christian community” (Michener, 2013:105). Although postliberal theology becomes somewhat muddled when asked how to approach those who have been hurt by the community or stand opposed to the community, it is right in pointing out that the apologist should not take a one-size-fits-all approach. This theology acknowledges the variety of ways in which the Holy Spirit works—ways which are as diverse as the people and backgrounds to which it ministers. Although an *ad hoc* approach has some value, the postliberal approach is found wanting, as postliberal theology does not adhere to Scripture being objectively true. This becomes evident in postliberal theology's approach to interreligious dialogue (Michener, 2013:108-109).

According to postliberal theology, the aim of interreligious dialogue, as in *ad hoc* apologetics, is not to convince those outside the faith of the truthfulness of the Christian faith but to learn from other
faith perspectives and to discover aspects of the mystery of God that we may have neglected to see (Michener, 2013:106).

James K.A. Smith (2004:179-182) in his work Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Postmodern-Secular Theology expounds on another postmodern viewpoint that has close affinities to Reformed theology but also to postliberal theology. It is also critical of the classical method of apologetics that Smith dubs as an “illegitimate project.” Smith understands Radical Orthodoxy to offer a new apologetic that he calls “narrative persuasion” (Smith, 2004:180). This new apologetic begins by “pointing to the mythical status of competing ontologies and narratives and offers a counter-narrative from the Christian story that is embodied in practice” (Smith, 2004:181). This particular method, by his own admission, has close affinities with the Reformed tradition, especially as espoused by Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer.

2.3 Relevant Literature on Calvin’s Doctrinal Foundation

Much of this research is derived from the primary sources of John Calvin. In order to come to a good understanding of his theology a thorough reading of Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion is pertinent. The Reformer’s magnum opus gives us a good theological foundation for our theological method. Especially in Book I, we find Calvin’s exposition on the issue of natural theology and the natural endowment of mankind and the awareness of divinity or the sensus divinitatis which are so important in our establishment of a proper apologetic method in the twenty-first century (Calvin, 1960:43). The Institutes help us understand the theological groundwork for the issue of natural theology. To have a clearer understanding of how Calvin used this theological aspect, we must resort to his commentaries on John (2005j:25-37), Acts (2005k:19-20; 148-178) and Romans (2005k:39-82). Other appropriate sources that explain Calvin’s theology in regard to apologetics are Calvin’s commentary on John (2005j:421-422), and his commentary on the Psalms (2005b:189-191, 308). As part of the triangulation protocols secondary sources will be consulted in order to come to a more thorough understanding of Calvin’s theological thrust.

Christopher B. Kaiser (1988:77-92), in his essay “Calvin’s understanding of Aristotelian natural philosophy,” points out that Calvin’s concern was mainly the reform of the church and not an exposition of a particular natural philosophy. The Reformer, however, wished to establish the credibility of his reform program in a culture where natural philosophy was of much concern. Aristotelian science posed as much of a challenge to a personal God as does Darwinian evolutionary theory today, according to the author. Calvin was fully aware of Aristotelian cosmology, but more important for Calvin was the proper understanding of God in the midst of these conversations. Calvin challenged the strict naturalism of the natural philosophers and
reminded them of God's special providence when dealing with his creation. It was the Reformer's intent to give comfort to his hearers and assure them that God's providence extended beyond the social and ecclesiastical disorder and that the whole world rested in God's hands. The author (1988:92) makes clear that, although Calvin was no specialist in natural philosophy, he did make an attempt “to do justice to the subject in his biblical expositions and occasionally went into more detail than was absolutely necessary.” The arguments that we receive from those questioning the Christian faith often revolve around science and faith. What we see from Calvin here is his interest in natural philosophy and the integration of science in his understanding of Scripture. This is something we do well to emulate.

Professor of history and ordained Presbyterian minister C. Gregg Singer, in his short work, *John Calvin: His Roots and Fruits* (1967), makes clear that Calvin's theology was thoroughly influenced by early Church Fathers and especially Augustine. Singer stresses the fact that the supremacy and infallibility of Scripture is central to the doctrinal content of Calvinism. For Calvin, Scripture is self-authenticated and should not be subject to demonstration and argument from reason. Proper appropriation of Scripture is the work of the Spirit, according to Calvin. This union of the objective Word and the subjective work of the Spirit restores to fallen humanity the necessary knowledge of God. It is for this reason that the Scriptures are the final authority in all areas of human life (Singer, 1967:10). Calvin's theology is consistent in all aspects but was by no means novel. In many ways it is an elaboration of Augustine’s theology while remaining truly biblical. Throughout history Calvinism has suffered attacks from all angles, such as Arminianism, liberalism, neo-orthodoxy and the Social Gospel, mainly in attempts to repudiate the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Calvinism, according to Singer, has significant influence on all aspects of life. For instance, the decrees of creation and providence have inspired Calvinists to use this doctrine as the formative principle in cultural life and endeavours; all aspects of life, whether economic, social, educational, cultural or aesthetic have not been immune to the influences of Calvinism (Singer, 1967:33). Singer (1967:31) asserts that “It [Calvinism] provides a weltanschaung, a world and life view by which the Reformed faith could be translated into every phase of human life.” All aspects of life, however, must come under the judgement of Scripture (Singer, 1967:68). This theme has especially been appropriated by Dooyeweerd and Kuyper and, in turn, by Francis Schaeffer.

Abraham Kuyper, in his *Lectures on Calvinism* delivered at Princeton in 1898, asserted that a unity of life-conception can only be found in Calvinism. The principle that the whole of one’s life is to be lived in the *Divine Presence* is fundamental to Calvin. Thus the first condition of the unity of life-condition is our relationship to God. The second condition is our relationship to other people, which emphasizes the equality of all before God. Finally, the third fundamental relation which decides the
interpretation of life is the relation we bear to the world. Calvinism recognizes the world as divine creation maintained by God’s common grace, allowing us to serve God in the world in every position in life (Kuyper, 1931:19). Kuyper decries the lack of receptivity of the Gospel in modernity that sets it apart from the Greco-Roman world and the culture of the Reformation.

We cannot expect modernism’s interpretation of Christianity, which destroyed the authority of Scripture, to bring us out of the state of indifference. Although Rome can be regarded as one of our allies, and practical and mystical tendencies must be commended, the main and most effective weapon in the assault against modernism is the return to Calvinism, which, with its life and worldview, sets its stamp on social and public life and which “created for the whole life of a man a world of thought entirely its own” (Kuyper, 1981:190). Ultimately, however, Kuyper (1931:197) declares that the quickening of life is the prerogative of God and is due to his sovereign will alone. The principles put forth by Abraham Kuyper are very much appropriated by Francis Schaeffer in his apologetic endeavor. This study will elaborate more on the worldview propagated by Calvinism and articulated by Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, as a central point of apologetics.

2.4 Relevant Literature on Pascal’s Apologetic Method

The body of literature composed by Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) is certainly not extensive, but is nevertheless rich in content. His apologetic work and his theological fervency is laid out in his Pensées (1966:9-359) and some of his theological groundings, mainly his sympathy with Jansenism and his sentiments regarding divine grace, can be extrapolated from his Provincial Letters (2015:83-136; 303-319). To understand Pascal’s apologetic approach, this research will use the Pensées as its primary source. We discover that, in essence, Pascal uses a similar approach in his Pensées as Calvin did in his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Both men were Augustinian, but the former remained a devout Catholic and the latter was a Protestant. Pascal begins his apologetic method with the assertion that we are wretched, and that in order to truly know ourselves as wretched we must know God, which is similar to Calvin’s position in Book I of his Institutes. Other similarities will be discussed in the body of this study. In addition, Pascal’s “Wager” is very much applicable to postmodern apologetics, for it points to the feebleness of reason, a central issue in postmodern thought.

Besides the primary sources, some of the commentaries on the Pensées will be used, such as Peter Gilbert’s Pascal’s God-Shaped Vacuum (2011) and Peter Kreeft’s Christianity for Modern Pagans (1993). A number of secondary sources indicate the theological backgrounds and cultural contexts in which Pascal worked. Pascal’s theological influences included Augustine and Jansenism, and the
philosophical and cultural context includes Descartes, a contemporary of Pascal, who was the philosophical polar opposite of Pascal.

James R. Peters in his work *The Logic of the Heart* encourages an Augustinian and Pascalian take on reason and faith, reason operating in concert with our passions. Their position on faith and reason is well suited for a postmodern age “disillusioned with the idols of hard facts, passionless reason, absolute foundations, and the amoral rhetoric of consumerism and materialism” (Peters, 2009:22). Peters makes the distinction between the radical postmodernist and the more modest postmodernist, and while he rejects the former, he considers Augustine and Pascal to have affinities with the latter because for both all human truth is approximate and flawed compared to the only Truth (Peters, 2009:230-235). What we need, according to the author, is not more autonomy of the radical postmodernist (hyper-modernist) kind, but Socratic self-knowledge that “embraces both our dependence on the divine and our need to engage in honest, critical, reflective thought” (Peters, 2009:239). Peters points out the logical inconsistencies of postmodern anti-realism, especially regarding morality and philosophy. He shows the Pascalian justification for objective moral value and that our philosophical inquiries are reasonable when we affirm objective human worth. For Pascal, in typical Augustinian fashion, faith makes sense when we see our own wretchedness, or as Augustine puts it, affliction (Peters, 2009:284-285). For both Augustine and Pascal the heart is necessary for faith, because it is through the heart that we acknowledge our plight and our need for healing. The point for Peters is that for both Augustine and Pascal, rational understanding of God cannot precede the assent of faith: “they envision a kind of understanding in which reason is not unmoved and love is not blind” (Peters, 2009:88). We turn to God not through rational proof, according to both Augustine and Pascal, but through an awareness of our own wretchedness and through our heart's desire for a resolution to our predicament. In the words of Peters (2009:179), “knowledge of God is a starting point, a fundamental first principle that we grasp intuitively as response to our own desperate, dual state of greatness and wretchedness.”

For Pascal, the Christian faith appears rationally compelling only for those who feel the reality of the power of God's amazing grace. Pascal’s desire for wholeness, as instilled by his father and witnessed in his scientific and mathematical discoveries, is especially evident in his attraction to Augustinian Jansenism, which made the attempt to rid theology of rationalistic philosophy so prevalent in seventeenth-century France. Albert Wells, in his work *Pascal’s Recovery of Man’s Wholeness*, asserts that the Augustinian Christian intellectuality enables one to find wholeness in all intellectual aspects of life, as expressed in Pascal's *Pensées* 792 (Wells, 1965:15).

Wells posits that Pascal derives from mathematical equations, such as the mystic hexagon theorem, the assertion that God is the simple unity in whom all contradictions are resolved and in whom true
oneness is realized. In other words, Pascal’s mathematical background helps him see that the spiritual reality is related to the natural reality (Wells, 1967:36-37). Pascal’s conception of order supplied the structural basis that was needed to make the Christian doctrine of reality relevant to science and culture, according to Wells. It is only Christian revelation that “can render human reality and the reality in which it is set comprehensible in the wholeness of meaning and destiny” (Wells, 1965:90). Pascal’s simple affirmation is profound in that he who has understood God’s love in Jesus Christ recognizes love’s hand in everything. Wells (1965:123) sums up Pascal’s view as follows:

That reality ‘belongs’ to Jesus Christ, that he is the clue to the meaning of life and creation, that faith in him enables us to unravel the mystery of existence, that commitment to him brings that wholeness that our very existence implies—this is the heart and the apex of the Pascalian understanding of life and the world.

For Pascal this had significant meaning regarding his approach to science, religion and philosophy. All disciplines must be approached under the authority of the Christian faith. Wells (1965:145) posits what can be thought of as Pascal’s affinities to presuppositionalism, for “Pascal began with the biblical assertion of the reality of God, after the inspiration of Hebrews 11:6.”

Donald Adamson, in his work Blaise Pascal: Mathematician, Physicist and Thinker of God, traces the remarkable life of Blaise Pascal and identifies much of his writings and influences. One of the influences that many see as a blemish on Pascal’s theological thought, and that has been affirmed by a number of Pascal scholars, is Jansenism. Adamson, however, downplays this influence and notes that, although Pascal’s sister Jaqueline was a Jansenist nun, Pascal himself was not a Jansenist (Adamson, 1995:61). The reasons for his hesitancy to fully embrace Jansenism, according to the author, was Pascal’s ignorance regarding the Fathers of the Church and that “he was, in fact, practically unversed in theology” (Adamson, 1995:61). Adamson only declares that Pascal showed sympathies with the devout Jansenist, but theologically he may have never subscribed to Jansenism, as becomes clear in Letter XVII of his Provincial Letters (Adamson, 1995:77-78).

Regarding Pascal’s apologia, Adamson rightly concludes that for Pascal the traditional theistic arguments are not enough for, at most, all they will prove is the First Cause or Prime Mover but not the incarnate God, Jesus Christ (Adamson, 1995:144). The apologia of Pascal centres on humanity and the truth about human nature itself; we must become beware of ourselves and our true nature; “and man being taught to think of himself as the object of God’s love and redemption” (Adamson, 1995:146). In other words, Pascal’s entire apologia rests on the paradoxical dictum of humanity’s wretchedness and grandeur, and at the very apex stands the personality of Jesus. Miracles and fulfilled prophecies are the greatest attestations of the truthfulness of Christianity, as articulated in
the Scriptures. Pascal, as with Calvin and Francis Schaeffer, in line with Reformed apologetics, hold the Scriptures in high regard and sees them as vital in their apologetic task.

2.5 Relevant Literature on Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetic Method and Philosophical Thought

To fully appreciate Francis Schaeffer’s apologetics and philosophical outlook, we must look at and analyze his essential books in one volume, *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (1990) and his further writings compiled in five volumes, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (1984). To understand Francis Schaeffer’s views on culture and philosophy we must consider Hans R. Rookmaaker and Herman Dooyeweerd as Schaeffer’s leading influences.

It is imperative for the apologist and for the Christian in general to interpret faulty presuppositions; thus begins Francis Schaeffer in the first book of his trilogy, *The God Who is There* (Schaeffer, 1990:6). Schaeffer states that prior to 1890 in Europe, and 1913 in the States, people worked with similar presuppositions: the notion of absolutes. The unbeliever accepted these notions while having no logical basis for them. The shift in truth and epistemology changed gradually and affected different disciplines at different times. The first discipline to be affected was philosophy, and finally theology fell victim to this shift. It is the task of the Christian to become familiar with the unity and diversity within the unbeliever’s thinking. The unity is the unbeliever’s rationalism and the diversity is in the standards upon which that rationalism is built. A titanic shift occurred with the unity of rationalism and so the rationalist departed from the classical methodology of antithesis and shifted the concept of truth.

The important advice Schaeffer gives to all apologetics, modern or postmodern, is that the Christian must resist the spirit of the world and the form in which it manifests itself in this generation. The world has changed and has become post-Christian and is following a methodology and a basic monolithic thought form: the lack of absolutes and antithesis leading to pragmatic relativism (Schaeffer, 1990:6-7). To be apologists we are called to come to grips with the uniformity of our (post)modern culture in order to defend and communicate the gospel well.

Francis Schaeffer (1990:209-270), in the second book of his trilogy, *Escape From Reason*, clarifies the shift in thinking that affects nearly all aspects of life and displays significant ramifications especially in regard to philosophy and theology. The basis for Schaeffer’s apologetic is the fact that we have true and unified knowledge on the foundation of Scripture. It is the task of the Christian evangelist to stress upon (post)modern people that there is unity of thought and to have the Scriptures speaking “true truth” both about God and about the world (Schaeffer, 1990:263). The term “true truth” was coined by Schaeffer to emphasize the biblical concept of truth as absolute and
not relativistic. When we communicate the Christian faith, we must remember two things. Firstly, we need to know facts that are true, and secondly, we need to know the ebb and flow of thought forms in the rapidly changing historical situations. It is crucial that we understand the thought forms of the next generation and are able to speak a language that is understandable.

In the last book of his trilogy, *He is There and He is Not Silent*, Francis Schaeffer deals with the philosophic necessity of God being present and not silent in the areas of metaphysics, morals and epistemology (Schaeffer, 1990:277). Schaeffer suggests that philosophy and religion deal with the same basic questions and it is the duty of the Christian not only to know the answers but also to know the questions; they must know how to relate Christianity to those who hold to an apostate worldview. In the case of the metaphysical problem, the moral problem and in the matter of epistemology the answer, according to Schaeffer, is the triune God who is there and is not silent. In other words, it is the Christian presupposition of the God who is there and is not silent that gives order to both our external and internal aspects, and to our surrounding world.

Francis Schaeffer addresses in his book *True Spirituality* (1972) what the Christian life means essentially. This work precedes Schaeffer’s apologetic work and is the result of his spiritual crisis in 1951 and 1952. *True Spirituality* can be regarded as a rebuttal against critics such as Clark Pinnock, who accuses Schaeffer of being too rationalistic (*in* Ruegsegger, 1986:191).

For Schaeffer, true spirituality means more than just being born again or desiring to get rid of taboos, for the true Christian life is as outward as it is inward: positive inward reality, and then outward positive results (Schaeffer, 1972:5-16). True spirituality has two aspects: one negative, to be dead to sin, and a positive aspect, to be alive to God through Jesus Christ; it is the power of the crucified Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The outward and inward motif is also apparent in Schaeffer’s emphasis on our internal thought world which produces outward action.

Schaeffer continues to stress the work of the Holy Spirit, but never negates the work of the intellect either. The glory of the experiential reality of the Christian is “that we can do it with all the intellectual doors and windows open” (Schaeffer, 1971:70). Reason and the Christian life are never divorced.

In Schaeffer’s small pamphlet *2 Contents, 2 Realities*, he stresses four things that are absolutely necessary to meet the needs of our age (Schaeffer, 1974:7-32). The first thing Schaeffer emphasizes is the content of a clear doctrinal position. We should be concerned not only about the content itself but also that we should practice the truths of the content, that is, to give honest answers to honest questions.
The two realities that Schaeffer emphasizes are true spirituality and the beauty of human relationships. Concerning the former, Schaeffer abhors dead orthodoxy, and regarding the latter, he calls the Christian to treat others with dignity as creatures created in the image of God. In sum, there are two orthodoxies, according to Schaeffer: the orthodoxy of doctrine and the orthodoxy of community. Both orthodoxies must be practiced “down into the warp and woof of life where the lordship of the Lord Jesus touches every area of our life” (Schaeffer, 1974:29). In other words, for Francis Schaeffer apologetics does not solely consist of the right answers to tough questions using the right doctrine but apologetics is not complete without the right actions (doctrine and community).

In Francis Schaeffer’s trilogy, the evangelist explains his view regarding the method of apologetics in one of the essays, “The Question of Apologetics.” Schaeffer explains that there is no set formula that should be applied mechanically as far as apologetic method is concerned (Schaeffer, 1990:176). He believes that when we talk to the non-Christian our dominant consideration should be love. This sentiment agrees with the postmodern position that emphasizes an incarnational apologetic. Schaeffer, however, does reiterate that we meet the person where he or she is and continue the conversation, taking seriously what they are preoccupied with. Although love is the motivating factor, our primary calling is to truth as it is rooted in God, His acts and revelation, a calling that is lacking in postmodern apologetics.

Hans Rookmaaker, professor of history and art at the Free University of Amsterdam, was connected to L’Abri and had considerable influence on Francis Schaeffer. He will be discussed in the body of the research. In his work Modern Art and the Death of a Culture Rookmaaker (1970:32) explains the religious influence on art throughout history, but also the decline of Christian involvement in art after the Reformation that caused art to become the “avant-garde” in the sense that it was ahead in the quest for a non-Christian way of spirituality.

Rookmaaker traces the roots of contemporary culture and the aspects of epistemology and truth as they were depicted in modern art. Schaeffer follows a similar trajectory in his book Escape from Reason and uses similar examples from the arts to strengthen his argument regarding the problem of truth in contemporary culture (Schaeffer, 1990:245-248). In modern art, Rookmaaker (1970:136) discovers human despair and our need to listen, “as man cries out from their prison, the prison of a universe which is aimless, meaningless and absurd.” Rookmaaker bemoans the fact that modern art was dominated by the surrealists, such as Picasso, with their nihilistic style. True Protestant Christian art made no headway; it was either sorely lacking or, if it were Christian art, its style was more humanistic and sentimental. Rookmaaker (1970:163) declares, “they [Christians] only too frequently have not understood that art and literature, philosophy and even popular music were the
agents of the new spirit of the age, and have left these alone or optimistically assumed they were too remote to be of influence.’ Rookmaaker (1970:243-252) calls the Christian to act in relation to the given structures of reality, realizing one’s possibilities and acting in love and freedom within these given structures. Artistic creativity is only one of the many possibilities.

Herman Dooyeweerd in *Roots of Western Culture* (2012) articulates his outline of the unfolding of Western culture. Many of his thoughts, taken from his earlier lectures (1960) that are compiled in this book, can be found in Francis Schaeffer’s thought as well. Dooyeweerd, much like Francis Schaeffer, agreed that one cannot answer today’s questions unless one comes to grips with the religious and secular forces that are at work in contemporary culture (Dooyeweerd, 2012:7-15). Dooyeweerd’s emphasis on the ground-motive (*grondmotief*) of the Christian religion—creation, fall, and redemption through Jesus Christ—as well as the long-lasting effects of the Roman Catholic synthesis of the Greek view of nature with the Christian religion (Aquinas’ nature-grace ground-motive) can be found in the writings of Francis Schaeffer (Dooyeweerd, 2012:28-31). The ground-motive of the nature and grace dichotomy which Schaeffer was so adamantly against is still very much alive in our contemporary (post)modern culture.

### 2.6 Conclusion

The main objective of this literature review is to touch upon the most helpful resources in order to strengthen the argument of this study regarding the relevance of Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer in contemporary apologetics and, in addition, to clarify the postmodern *Zeitgeist* in which we find ourselves in the twenty-first century. It must be emphasized that the literature referred to in this review, especially in regard to postmodernity and the theological responses, is in no way exhaustive, but the samples reviewed give a fair indication regarding the sources that are consulted to indicate the state of our culture and theological climate of contemporary thought.

Concerning Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer, it is most beneficial to principally use the primary sources for this research. Without a doubt, plenty has been written on each of these individuals but mainly in isolation and never in consolidation. This study, therefore, takes aim at finding the theological relationship between Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer and uses the theological similarities drawn from the primary sources to bring about a biblical apologetic suitable for contemporary postmodern culture.
3.0 POSTMODERN SPIRITUALITY AND THE RELIGIOUS MILIEU

3.1 Introduction

There seems to be a love-hate relationship with apologetics in contemporary theology. There are those who still fully embrace the theological discipline, but there are also those who outright reject the task of apologetics and consider it detrimental to our Christian witness (cf. Myron Penner, 2013:9; Robin Parry, 2013:§5). It needs to be emphasized, however, that Christians throughout the centuries have defended the Christian faith with much vigor. Apologetics is a biblical mandate (cf. 1 Peter 3:15) and the Scriptures give us plenty of examples of apologetic rhetoric. For example, Anthony Guerra (1995:13) in his work Romans and the Apologetic Tradition identifies the Apostle Paul’s book of Romans as protreptic discourse and recognizes its apologetic value. Guerra perceives the importance of the Apostle Paul’s command to defend the Christian faith whenever the opportunity arises, whether the audience be Gentile or Jew.

Opportunities continued to arise as time went on as the fledgling church grew in a more hostile environment. The second century A.D. is the period specially known as the “age of apologists” (Bruce, 1959:9). For example, apologists like Justin Martyr (2012:163) impressed upon the Emperor Titus and his son Verissimus that Christianity is the superior philosophy. Similarly, Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) defended the faith against the Valentinian heresy (Cox, 2012:309).

The hallmark of the early apologists was twofold. Firstly, they had a clear doctrinal position, and secondly, the apologists were well acquainted with the culture in which they lived. In their attempt to defend the Christian faith, they were not averse to making use of the philosophies of the day. This in no way meant that they deliberately adjusted the message of the gospel so as to make it more palatable to their audiences. On the contrary, they made sure that the message remained true to the essence of the gospel as articulated in the Scriptures.

It was imperative for the early apologists to be in tune with the thought forms of the cultures in which they lived in order to communicate the gospel well. Knowing the thought form of the culture was not only important for the early apologists, but it is important for contemporary apologists as well. Francis Schaeffer (1990:269) is correct in pointing out that unless we discover the present “ebb and flow” of the contemporary thought forms “the unchangeable principles of Christianity will fall on deaf ears.” We cannot deny that we live in an ever-changing world where the thought forms are different from those of a generation ago. Apologists need to stay in tune with contemporary culture in order to remain effective in communicating the gospel. Our day, which can be identified as postmodern, presents us with new challenges. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that we understand the postmodern thought patterns in order to meet the challenges facing the Christian
faith head-on and that we, all the while, continue to remain true to the gospel. F.F. Bruce (1959:11) gives us a reminder when he posits that “while Jesus remains the same, and the gospel is unchanging, the means adopted to defend the faith may vary widely according to the situation in which the apologist finds himself in the public which he is confronting.”

Besides becoming familiar with the cultural postmodern ethos to assure effectiveness in our Christian apologetic, we must be informed of the spiritual climate of the contemporary culture. We cannot deny that the religious landscape has often been one of change, especially in the last century. In the 1960s it seemed as if the West had written off religion altogether. The twenty-first century, however, is experiencing a wave of renewed, albeit confused, spirituality. Additionally it is encountering a lingering indifference and apathy for religion, especially for organized Christianity.

Theology has countered this culture of confused spirituality and has, at times, capitulated to the postmodern spirit of the age. Apologetics must uncompromisingly stand on sound doctrine that is grounded in the truth of Scripture and must discerningly embrace the voices of Christian tradition.

3.2 The Postmodern Turn

Pierre Klossowski (1997:xiv), who in his work *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* wondered how much can still be said about Nietzsche, mused, “Will we not run the risk of following paths that have already been travelled more than once, blazing trails that have been marked out many times, imprudently asking questions that have long been left behind?” We can feel very much like Klossowski when tackling the issue of postmodernism. Much time has been devoted to the topic of postmodernism, so being novel is an arduous, if not impossible, task. Nevertheless, it is imperative to understand the current ethos to remain relevant to the contemporary culture in which we live. To do this we must look back into recent history. In many ways, postmodernism and its historical roots have often been explained solely through a philosophical lens, at times forgetting the theological undercurrent. As we shall see, rationalism, irrationalism and postmodernism are all attempts to come to grips with reality in one way or another, but have more often than not deliberately excluded God from the process, resulting in a fragmented, hopeless and nihilistic generation that is now clamoring for a solid foundation upon which to build their shattered lives.

Today there is a common consensus that modernity has died a slow death and that we now live in the time after modernity or what has been termed “postmodernity.” Postmodernity has affected popular aspects of society such as architecture, the arts, filmmaking and the theatre and was followed by the intelligentsia across the various disciplines, such as literature, psychology, sociology, philosophy and eventually theology (cf. Grenz, 1996:24-38; John Macionis, 2004:429; Cardwell, 2003:188). There are, however, some who deny that we live in a postmodern culture and
they perceive the very idea of a postmodern culture as myth (Craig, 2008:18). It is easy to agree with William Lane Craig, who vehemently denies that modernity is dead and gone, for many of the New Atheists (Richard Dawkins, Daniel Bennett and Sam Harris) still hold to extreme modernist principles; however, regarding postmodernism as myth, Craig might be overstating his position. Craig is not alone in his assessment. Richard Wolin (2004:313), Distinguished Professor of History and Literature, agrees that the influence of postmodernism is highly overestimated by conservatives and concludes that the “impact and influence has largely been confined to the isolated and bloodless corridors of the academe.” In partial agreement with Craig and Wolin, we can accept that many aspects of modernity are very much present in postmodernity, so the term “hyper-modernity” would be more applicable to the current ethos of our culture. But we must also be aware that postmodernity is a reaction to the pitfalls of modernity, so we continue to use the term “postmodernity” for clarity.

Even many postmoderns do not like to label themselves as such. For example, Derrida sees himself as a man of the Enlightenment, albeit a new Enlightenment; he considers himself one who is enlightened about the Enlightenment (in Caputo and Scanlon, 1999:2). Alan Kirby (2006:34) goes one step further and exclaims that postmodernism is dead and buried in the rubble of post-9/11. It is his opinion that what arrived in its place is a new paradigm of authority and knowledge, which he calls “pseudo-modernism.” He says that this new paradigm was “formed under the pressure of new technologies and contemporary social forms” and is characterized by its consumerism and conformism and driven by new technologies (Kirby, 2006:34-37).

Alan Kirby’s assessment of contemporary culture obsessed with technology and virtual reality can be agreed upon, but are these not a direct result of postmodernism and essentially attached to its core principle? Rein Staal (2008:35) is doubtful of Craig, Wolin and Kirby’s estimation and remains adamant that the postmodern influence is pervasive in all aspects of culture; postmodernism has surpassed modernity and, in his own overstatement of thought, concludes, “Modern thought has run its course, leaving behind only a thoroughgoing skepticism about all meaningful accounts of human nature and destiny.” It is easy to be in agreement with Stephen Hicks (2010:loc. 603), who correctly states, “Postmodernism is a comprehensive philosophical and cultural movement. It identifies its target—modernism and its realization in the Enlightenment and its legacy—and it mounts powerful arguments against all of the essential elements of modernism.” Whereas in European society postmodernism might be on the wane, North American culture remains steeped in postmodernity.

Peter Drucker in his work Landmarks of Tomorrow recognized the drastic change of worldview in the latter part of the twentieth century and in the process coined the term “post-modern,” correctly
noting that “there is a new spiritual center to human existence” (Drucker, 1965:xi). Written in the 1960s on the cusp of the drastic changes postmodernism would bring, he sees the inevitability of the shift in thinking and paints a rather Orwellian picture of the state of mankind, positing that “we have not learned much, if anything, to enable man to control himself. But we have learned how to make man worse” (Drucker, 1965:258). He sees the negative effects but also detects that we live in a time of exciting challenges and opportunities. He is correct in his assessment that there is a need for mankind, society, and the individual to return to spiritual values but also a way of dealing with the threat of knowledge in this world of rapid change (Drucker, 1965:266). The role mankind has to play, according to Drucker (1965:270), is far more mundane than heroic and is centered on “one’s work, one’s citizenship, in one’s compassion and courage to stick to an unpopular principle in an age of cruelty and moral numbness.” This can only be done if we recognize our responsibility to God and to each other.

It must be stressed that the rumblings of postmodern philosophy were audible well before the term “postmodern” became fashionable; in other words, the essence of postmodernism is not new but is a continuation and an out-working of philosophical ideals in reaction to post-Enlightenment and Reformation (as has often been claimed) rationalism. We especially see this working itself out epistemologically in the past century. We can conclude that the pervasive (post)modern principles have, in more ways than one, negatively affected a broad spectrum of society, and its characteristics have had far-reaching consequences on all aspects of our culture, especially in the realm of Christian theology.

We must avoid the tendency to romanticize the modernist movement, for it had plenty of pitfalls of its own and a corrective is certainly needed. The question then arises, must we uphold the modern epistemology, or forge ahead and embrace the progress to postmodernism? The present research suggests that we must avoid a return to radical modernism or a move to a radical postmodern epistemology; instead we must consider a revisitation of a premodern epistemology as upheld by Calvin, Pascal and in many ways by Francis Schaeffer. In this regard, we must tread carefully, as Gregory Bruce Smith (1996:13) suggests: “Modern thought has so successfully transformed the world that no appeal to tradition or authority, to ancient or medieval philosophy, can be immediately compelling.” However difficult it may be, and although we live in a world far different, we can suggest that we can still hold to a premodern epistemology that is dependent upon revelation and yet continue to live in the contemporary world.

Concerning the contemporary world a few questions must be answered in order to gain an adequate understanding of the culture that we live in. These are questions such as: when and why did this epistemological shift occur, and what are the characteristics of postmodernity as opposed to
modernity, and how has that affected the contemporary theological ethos? When those questions are adequately answered we will discover that a premodern epistemology, which relies on the supernatural, is superior to either a modern or postmodern epistemology, the former relying on autonomous reason and the latter on autonomous experience to grasp reality. We do well to investigate the historical trajectory of postmodern thought in order to be able to adequately and honestly critique the context in which we must present and defend the Christian faith.

3.2.1. Postmodernity in the Twentieth Century and Its Runners-Up

It is impossible to pinpoint exactly when the shift from modernism to postmodernism occurred, if there actually was a shift. A number of scholars have made an attempt to identify a particular event as the impetus for postmodernism. For instance, David Harvey (1989:40) suggests that, in regard to architecture, the passage from modernism to postmodernism can be placed at 3:32 pm on July 15, 1972 with the destruction of a housing project in St. Louis to make way for a new style of architecture that had its inspiration from the popular and the vernacular landscape rather than the “abstract, theoretical, and doctrinaire ideals” of the past. In other words, in architecture, postmodernism meant a departure from the functional and a return to a mixture of past styles.

The advent of postmodernism in philosophy seems more difficult to identify. Stanley Grenz (1995:39) seems to agree with Harvey regarding the postmodern beginnings in architecture, but adds that postmodernism was put on the intellectual map seven years later, in 1979, by French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard from the Institute Polytechnique de Philosophie of the Université de Paris in Vincennes with his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, written by request from the Conseil des Universités of the government of Quebec (Grenz, 1996:39). This work describes the philosophical underpinnings that lie behind postmodernism as it revolutionized the Western world. In it, Lyotard used the term “postmodernism” to express the drive towards the post-modern world (Lyotard, 1992:41,79-82). As already suggested, Peter Drucker was ahead of Lyotard by more than two decades and made the observation in the late 1950s that we moved out of the Modern age into a Post-modern age (Drucker, 1965:xiff). Others have suggested that the watershed moment that contributed to the cultural shift to postmodernism happened in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall (Toth, 2011:106).

Postmodern political and philosophical rhetoric has a much longer history, with its roots found in France and Germany in the pre-war decades of the twentieth century. In other words, the sentiments of postmodern thought began long before any of the postmodern philosophers such as Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida came on the scene. It can be said that these French philosophers took the prevailing thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and championed
their ideas as truths to live by, resulting in a confused and spiritually chaotic generation. Continental postmodernism, which Richard Wolin (2004:4, 13-14) expanded on in his book *The Seduction of Unreason*, was highly politically charged and is on the decline, according to the author. North American postmodern thought, however, which has firmly taken root in theology, is still very much in vogue. Many of the contemporary theologians have integrated postmodern ideas, championed by French philosophers such as Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida, into their discipline but, unfortunately, postmodern theology does not, in many ways, promote orthodox Christianity; therefore, it is inadvertently contributing to the spiritual confusion. We can identify many of the postmodern elements in varieties of theological systems such as postliberalism and more radical expressions in feminist theology and queer theology (c.f. Mohler, 1995:76-77). In order to identify the sources of confusion, we must go back into history and look at the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the philosophical influence of German philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche, and, in turn, identify what brought on Nietzsche’s irrationalist philosophy. This will enable us to determine two important points that are relevant to this study. Firstly, we can pinpoint the sources of confusion, and secondly, we are able to adjust our Christian apologetic “method” in order to reach the twenty-first century seeker.

3.2.1.1 The role of reason and faith in modernism

The worldview since the Reformation gradually veered off into a direction that began to elevate humanity above God and an air of unbelief began to spread across Europe, which would eventually reach North America. Whereas the Reformers set limits on the use of reason by affirming that faith is the basis for reason (*fides quaerens intellectum*), humanistic philosophy began to deny this view of faith, elevating reason over faith and claiming that reason is sovereign and is not to be limited (Van Riessen, 1960:31). As faith was denied its proper place to give certainty of values, philosophy determined that autonomous human reason is, ultimately, the arbiter of truth; rationalism became dominant. Jürgen Habermas (1981:9) explains, “The project of modernity formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art, according to their inner logic.”

A string of events in the past five hundred years brought about the philosophies that are so popular today. As is true in all movements, we can expect reactions and over-reactions. Kantian philosophy, continuing the Enlightenment’s ideals, gave way to Hegelian philosophy. Subsequently, irrationalism reacted to the Enlightenment ideal of humanism, and the elevation of reason began to rear its head in the eighteenth century. It is only in the soil of unbelief that these movements could flourish well into the twentieth century and beyond. This soil was already cultivated by the likes of Paul Henry Thiry, Baron d’Holbach, who in 1795 published his two-volume anti-religious work
System of Nature, or the Laws of the Moral and Physical World, in which he described the universe in terms of materialistic principles, utterly denying any divine involvement (D’Holbach, 1889:iii; 47; 86).

The Enlightenment, as is the case in postmodernity, had many varieties that sprang up in different cultures and had geographical boundaries. Besides French Enlightenment thinkers (Voltaire, Montesquieu), there were the Scots (Adam Smith and Thomas Reid) and the Germans, of whom Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) has become the most famous. Kant agreed with the Enlightenment on many levels, thought of the Aufklärung as “man come of age”, and had great confidence in human intellectual power (Green, 2003:85). Immanuel Kant (1965:146-150, 573-593) in his second edition of Critique of Pure Reason describes elegantly and sometimes grandiloquently the role of reason and knowledge. Kant, not deviating from the essential Enlightenment doctrines, suggests, however, a revision that declares that it is not the object that imposes reality on the subject but that representation makes the object possible. Reality then is a creation of the mind, or subject. Our minds’ structures are not there to register or respond to structures in reality but they exist to impose themselves on reality (Hicks, 2004:Loc.967). Our mind is a mechanism that has the power to establish existence. Kant (1965:146) alleges that “a pure imagination which conditions all a priori knowledge is thus one of the fundamental faculties of the human soul.” Kant (1965:22) likened the revolution of subject/object relationship to the Copernican revolution in his preface to his second edition of his Critique of Pure Reason: the object must conform to the constitution of our faculty of intuition. The creativity of the mind only involves the world of phenomenal reality; noumenal reality is forever closed, for it is fraught with seeming contradictions. Kant (1965:396-421) describes the dilemma of contradiction in his four antinomies, pointing out that reason falls short when dealing with noumenal truths about reality, and as Cornelius Van Til (1925:12) points out, according to Kant, “the noumena may or may not exist. At any rate we have no valid knowledge of them.” Kant suggests that by trying to prove four different metaphysical truths using reason leads to contradictory conclusions.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), although having affinities with the philosophy of Kant, deviated on the important matter of contradiction. Hegel reacted strongly against Kant’s conundrum concerning the contradictions spelled out in Kant’s four antinomies. Stephen Hicks (2004:Loc.1172) points out, “What Kant’s antinomies show is not that reason is limited but rather that we need a new and better kind of reason, one that embraces contradictions and sees the whole of reality as evolving out of contradictory forces.” Hegel made an attempt to solve the riddle of contradictions that prevent us from knowing all of reality through reason. Hegel is clear in his Science of Logic where he explains how he arrives at his conclusion to know all of reality. There he suggests that when we affirm that “something is” we must also assume that “something is not”. In
other words, “being” implies “non-being” and must be understood as both opposite and identical. Hegel resolves this confusing contradiction by categorizing it as “becoming” (Hegel, 1816:Loc. 785).

Both Kant and Hegel, although trying to make an attempt to modify the meaning of reason, remained strongly attached to the Enlightenment ideal by claiming the subject as the starting point. German philosophers such as Kant and Hegel were far too attached to reason, which they considered artificial and limiting, but continued to rely on the essential autonomy of reason as proclaimed by the Enlightenment. The main characteristic of philosophy is, of course, the grasping after truth and reality. This is most apparent in both Hegel and Kant, but frustration grew, in that truth and reality remained elusive and reason in and of itself as proposed by Hegel and Kant was unable to solve the human pursuit of truth. Thus, irrationalism sprang up in reaction to rationalism and as a repudiation of reason.

The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1995:391) sums up irrationalism well, and states:

> In general, irrationalism implies either that the world is devoid of rational structure, meaning and purpose; or that reason is inherently defective and incapable of knowing the universe without distortion; or that recourse to objective standards is futile; or that in human nature itself the dominant dimensions are irrational.

Where rationalism was a reaction to a “pre-modern superstition,” irrationalism was a reaction to rationalism as espoused by Kant and Hegel. Irrationalism repudiated reason, which only lies within the scope of the human mind, and philosophers began to embrace irrationalism that dared to delve into the realms of feeling and intuition and the non-physical. Here we begin to see the affinities to postmodern thinking of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The most (in)famous and influential irrationalist is the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900).

Georg Lukács (1980:129) describes the historical trajectory of irrationalism in his book *The Destruction of Reason* where he claims in Marxist fashion that irrationalism sprang up from a socio-economic and philosophical crisis ultimately sparked by the French Revolution. Lukács lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of nineteenth and early twentieth century bourgeois imperialistic thinkers such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Oswald Spengler, who had socialism as their main detractor (Lukács, 1980:129, 192, 309-395). Irrationalism as a philosophy was embraced by many philosophers in Germany who would use its irrational essence for fascist ideology, a sentiment that Richard Wolin (2004:184) suggests as “conjectural and superficial.” Lukács might be correct in his assessment because irrationalism is an essential aspect of the philosophies of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Georg Spengler, and was used to engender ideologies.
such as fascism. However, he fails to stress a more deeply underlying inclination, that of a blatant rejection of and a departure from the Christian principles, not only in Germany but in Western Europe as a whole.

Nietzschian philosophy has been embraced by irrationalist philosophers in post-war Germany and its rhetoric continues in postmodern philosophy. Irrationalist philosophy began to take solid root in Germany in the early twentieth century and its essential principles were embraced in Fascist ideology (Lukács, 1980:95). Fascism from the far right has often been considered a movement of thugs and anti-intellectuals but that is a gross misconception. Mussolini, who was heavily influenced by Nietzsche (Ratner-Rosenhagen, 2012:219) and who coined the term “Fascism”, affirmed this as well and considered it necessary to deny “the silly tale that Fascism is all made up of violent men. In point of fact, among Fascists there are many men who belong to the restless but meditative class” (Mussolini, 1935:loc:291). It must also be noted that “a large share of the SS leadership was rooted in the educated bourgeoisie” (Ziegler, 1989:114-115). Many intellectuals and philosophers like Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, who were well-versed in Nietzschean philosophy, embraced fascism or its National Socialist variant, while many more flirted with fascism. The same intellectuals have been courted by postmodern thinkers (c.f. Derrida, 1991:158; Caputo, 2013:94-95). Thus the connection between irrationalism, fascism and postmodern philosophy must be taken seriously, and must be examined for its truthfulness.

Both National Socialism and contemporary postmodern philosophy were born in a time of social discontent with the idea to give a corrective to the prevailing thought of the time and also to give hope in a time of change. The Fascist movement and National Socialism are more than political movements, as Mussolini (1935:loc.10) states: “Fascism is action and it is thought; action in which doctrine is immanent, and doctrine arising from a given system of historical forces in which it is inserted, and working on them from within.” National Socialism and Fascism as ideologies began in the latter part of the nineteenth century and grew into political movements protesting many of the same issues that postmodernism is challenging today. The movements constituted an intellectual revolution against the world of matter and reason, against materialism and positivism, not unlike postmodernism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Sternhell, 1991:321). Mussolini (1935:loc.38) fully agrees and states in his Doctrine of Fascism, “Fascism is opposed to all individualistic abstractions based on eighteenth century materialism.” Zeev Sternhell (1991:322) continues and posits regarding National Socialism, “The ‘new’ intellectuals inveighed violently against the rationalistic individualism ... and to the claims of the individual’s power of reason.” Even the Fascist revolt against the prevailing religious milieu has connections to contemporary postmodern philosophy, as Mussolini (1935:loc.335) states: “Revealed truths we have torn to
shreds, dogmas we have spat upon, we have rejected all theories of paradise.” It would be a gross overstatement to equate Fascism with postmodernism, but the connections in thought are abundantly clear.

### 3.2.2 Nietzsche and His Lasting Legacy

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the philosopher and cultural critic, was an enigmatic figure and remains so to this day. His philosophy has been interpreted and re-interpreted by many people, from proto-Nazis to postmoderns, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His death preceded his fame and his stature has grown into legendary proportions, mainly through his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, who survived him by thirty-five years (Hollingdale, 1999:86).

Walter Kaufmann (1965:60) in his interpretation of Nietzsche admits that Nietzsche’s books are easier to read but harder to understand than any other thinker. He is correct. When one lays claim to any of Nietzsche’s ideas, a counter-claim is made that denies the previous assertion. Georg Lukács (1980:309ff) sees Nietzsche as a proto-fascist and a preeminent irrationalist in the Imperialist period. Walter Kaufmann, on the other hand, takes pains to present a de-Nazified and sanitized Nietzsche who is a fiercely independent thinker misunderstood and misrepresented by many, and whose affiliations with National Socialism are largely exaggerated and promoted only by Nietzsche’s sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, who, alongside her husband, had close affinities with Nazism (Kaufmann, 1965:17-19). Kaufmann might have been a little too optimistic where Nietzsche was concerned, for at closer examination the German philosopher’s views on slavery and Jews were dubious at best and it is impossible to avoid the term “racist” regarding his views on schwarzen Sklaven (black slaves) and Jews (cf. Losurdo, 2012:386-389; Nietzsche, 2015:loc. 40947).

Elisabeth Förster does not come away innocent as far as the misinterpretations of Nietzsche are concerned. She contributed a great deal in promoting the “Nietzsche legend” that has confused many as to where Nietzsche stood, especially where National Socialism was concerned (Kaufmann, 1965:19). We do know, however, that many National Socialists had latched on to Nietzsche’s philosophy and that some of his central ideas were used by the Nazi propagandist machine to stoke the fires of enthusiasm in the impressionable minds of Nazi youths (Aschheim, 1992:239, 324; Wolin, 2004:31-32). It is true that many, on the left and on the right, have tried to interpret him, and in so doing have bastardized Nietzsche’s philosophy to further their cause. As early as 1896 the German theologians Hans Gallwitz and Albert Kalthoff went so far as to provide a “Nietzschean Christianity” (Aschheim, 1992:204). Some see the German philosopher as a proto-postmodernist, a position denied by others (Pippin, 1999:252-273). The connection between Nietzsche and National
Socialism has been a hotly debated issue. There are many contradictions between Nazism and Nietzschean philosophy that cast doubt on the connection. However, Nietzsche was one of Hitler’s favorite philosophers and some of his principles were applied by the Nazis to further their cause (Weikart, 2016:15-37). Can we accuse Nietzsche of Nazism? Probably not, but we can positively affirm that his ideas were appropriated by Nazi propagandists. The same can be said about Nietzsche being a proto-postmodernist. Many of Nietzsche’s ideas resonate with postmodern philosophers and are thus appropriated to further the postmodern cause. There is also much of Nietzschean philosophy that is still very modern, so we must be careful not to overstate the case.

These differences of opinion and interpretations are largely due to the style of writing Nietzsche presents in most of his works; he was not a systematizer and wrote many of his books in aphorisms, which easily lend themselves to a variety of interpretations. Nietzsche himself voiced his suspicion concerning systems: “I distrust all systematizers and I avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity” (Nietzsche, 2015:Loc.39381). For that reason we must read Nietzsche as he presents himself and interpret his works on its own terms. Taking Nietzsche’s writings at face value we immediately detect his disdain for Christianity, which he (2015:Loc.12470-12473) describes as follows:

It [Christianity] wants to annihilate, debase, stupefy, amaze, bedazzle. There is but one thing that it does not want: measure, standard and, therefore, it is in the worst sense barbarous, asiatic, vulgar, un-Greek … I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity, the one great instinct of revenge, for which no means are venomous enough, or secret, subterranean and small enough. I call it the one immortal blemish upon the human race (Nietzsche, 2015:loc. 42431-42433).

His anti-Christian attitude was in no small way influenced by the theological upheaval in nineteenth century Europe. For all intents and purposes, Nietzsche (2015:loc.23796) was quite right in affirming that Europe had “killed God.” Allan Bloom (1987:195) asserts that Nietzsche did not say this in a most triumphant spirit, but “rather said it in the anguished tones of the most powerful and delicate piety deprived of its proper object.” In assessing Bloom, we can assert that he might be misinterpreting Nietzsche’s sentiment surrounding this statement. Nietzsche (2015:Loc.25041) in his Joyful Science expresses himself rather exuberantly: “What our Cheerfulness Signifies. The most important of more recent events—that ‘God is dead,’ that the belief in the Christian God has become unworthy of belief—already begins to cast its first shadows over Europe.”

Martin Heidegger views the phrase “God is dead” as much more than a theological statement, and considers it a rising up against the prevailing Geist of the time: “The suprasensory world is without effective power. It bestows no life. Metaphysics is at its end” (Heidegger, 1977:61). When building
on the aforementioned German theologians Hans Gallwitz and Albert Kalthoff, one only needs to look at Ludwig Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* (1881), the French scholar Ernest Renan’s *The Life of Jesus* (1863) and David Friedrich Strauss’ *The Life of Jesus* (1860) and others who questioned the divinity of Jesus, to realize that it was not so much a denial of the existence and historicity of the man Jesus but rather the central Christian tenets promoted by Christian tradition and the Church that were being rejected; it was the Christian ecclesiastical and theological interpretation of the world that had lost its influence (Heidegger 1977:63-65).

Nietzsche is an important figure for this study because of his influence on contemporary postmodern culture. Hans Küng gives us a warning not to put too much stock in the various Nietzschean movements and their influences in contemporary thought (Küng, 1981:400). It is his opinion that the early twentieth-century philosophies such as irrationalism and vitalism (*Lebensphilosophie*) are irrelevant today. Nothing could be further from the truth. The very essence of irrationalism and the very essence of the *Lebensphilosophie* are found in contemporary postmodern thought. Both irrationalism and vitalism (*Lebensphilosophie*) are heavily influenced by some of the main themes of Nietzsche’s philosophy and are still being appropriated today. Circumstances such as the founding of the German Reich with its hopes and disappointments in the late nineteenth century helped Europe to be more than ready for the influence of Nietzsche and for irrationalism to take flight; however, this influence is in no small part due to Nietzsche’s considerable talents (Lukács, 1980:309-310). One of these talents was his ability to read the philosophical and political milieu of the time and to react fiercely against it (Lukács, 1980:314-316). Philosophically the themes of Nietzsche such as the eternal recurrence, aestheticism, his disdain for rationalism and objective truths, all important in irrationalism and postmodernism, became magnified in the branch of irrationalism called vitalism or *Lebensphilosophie* in the early twentieth century.

Both Nietzsche and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) became extremely important and influential in the progress of vitalism or *Lebensphilosophie* in the early twentieth century. Although the ideas brought forward by these two German philosophers were vital, it was men like Ludwig Klages (1872-1956) and the “Cosmic Circle” in the 1890s that made *Lebensphilosophie* a household name and carried it all the way to official Nazi philosophy (Aschheim, 1992:80-84). Because of its checkered past with Nazism in the early to mid-twentieth century, *Lebensphilosophie* fell out of favor after the war. However, the essential ideas of Ludwig Klages and his companions can still be detected in postmodern thinking in the twenty-first century.

It was Dilthey who suggested that experiencing the world is the ultimate basis of knowledge (Lukács, 1980:418). This epistemological rationale, shared largely by Nietzsche, was further
promoted by vitalists such as Ludwig Klages (1872-1956) and Stefan George (1868-1933) in the early twentieth century. Lukács (1980:412) exclaimed:

Experience with intuition as its organon and the irrational as its ‘natural’ object, could conjure up all the necessary elements of Weltanschauung without renouncing, de facto and publicly, the agnosticism of subjective idealist philosophy and without revoking that denial of a reality independent of consciousness which had become crucial to anti-materialism.

In short, the Lebensphilosophie is a life philosophy or even a Weltanschauung guided strictly by emotion and experience (Erlebnis) with an aversion to all intellectuality and void of any moral standard. This Lebensphilosophie when politicized became an active tool for Nazi propaganda and its race policies. Nazism, especially by men such as Rosenberg and Alfred Baemler, took the Lebensphilosophie elements that Ludwig Klages appropriated to his psychology and philosophy (characterology and graphology) and used them to further their policies of National Socialism (Lebovic, 2013:80).

The Lebensphilosophie of Ludwig Klages was fraught with essential elements of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Although some of the philosophical aspects of Nietzsche were discarded and even detested by Klages, such as the will to power (Lebovic, 2013:37), other ideas were indeed enthusiastically embraced. One of these aspects was Nietzsche’s idea of eternal recurrence. Although interpreted many different ways, according to Klages, Baemler, Bachofen and other vitalists, Lebensphilosophie perceives time on the basis of repetition of symbols and mythical narratives (Lebovic, 2013:82); history is regarded as circular and not linear as in the Western Christian tradition. Ludwig Klages, as a psychologist, applied the idea of eternal recurrence to the discipline of characterology. After all, did Nietzsche not say in his Beyond Good and Evil, “If a man has character, he has also his typical experience, which always recurs”? (Lebovic, 2013:143).

Another aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophical musings that vitalism took to heart is the aspect of “ecstasy” or Rausch, a feature also embraced by Romanticism. For Nietzsche, Rausch or ecstasy is closely associated with the ancient mythological elements of the Greek tragedies. Nietzsche (2015:Loc.4064) proclaimed in his The Birth of Tragedy,

We are pierced by the maddening stings of these pains just when we have become, as it were, one with the infinite primordial joy in existence, and when we anticipate, in Dionysian ecstasy, the indestructibility and eternity of this joy. In spite of fear and pity, we are the happy living beings, not as individuals, but as the one living being, with whose creative joy we are united.

He regarded ecstasy as an all-encompassing aspect of life:
… also the frenzy (*Rausch*) that follows all great cravings, all strong affects; the frenzy (*Rausch*) of feasts, contests, feats of daring, victory, all extreme movement; the frenzy (*Rausch*) of cruelty; the frenzy (*Rausch*) in destruction, the frenzy (*Rausch*) under certain meteorological influences, as for example the frenzy (*Rausch*) of spring; or under the influence of narcotics (Nietzsche, 2015:loc. 40084).

For a number of vitalists, one of which was Stefan George, the senior member of the Cosmic Circle, *Rausch* became an important expression of rebellion against social norms. Ludwig Klages, however, separated himself from this application to sexuality and social norms and saw *Rausch* more as a “state of utterly unmediated experience” (*Erlebnis*), or a state that resisted systems and structures (Lebovic, 2013:94). Michel Foucault, the postmodern philosopher, has taken up the aspect of *Erlebnis* and applied it to the topic of sexuality. In his preface to the *History of Sexuality* he sets out to “analyze sexuality as a historically singular form of experience,” avoiding a sterile inquiry that involves religious, moral or medical implications (Foucault, 1984:333). Foucault’s investigation is thus very much in line with Stefan George’s interpretation of ecstasy and sexuality. The concept of *Erlebnis* would further rear its head in theological circles, especially in North American evangelicalism, where, at times, evangelicalism is motivated, not by doctrine, but by emotivism and spiritual experientialism. Worship is now seen as the catalyst for a religious experience.

The influence of Nietzsche on German and French philosophy was widespread and the interpretations of the German irrationalist were numerous throughout Europe. Politicalizing elements of his philosophy inadvertently brought about National Socialism in Germany and fascism in Italy. Nietzsche’s influence on religion in Germany was tangible, especially because the orthodox Christian faith was brought into question through German higher criticism, which provoked the subsequent questioning of the historical Jesus and the very existence of God as articulated in Scripture. One example is Max Maurenbrecher (1874-1929), the German politician and pastor, who combined his religious views with his political socialism using Nietzschean philosophical elements. Aschheim (1992:219) declares, “In Germany, the closest equivalent to a fully developed Nietzschean socialist religious alternative came from Max Maurenbrecher, who created what amounted to a revisionist socialist Nietzschean religion, and who sought to spread the word to working-class, free-thinking congregations.”

Maurenbrecher, who was identified by his peers as “*eine zweispältige Erscheinung*” because of his own religious uncertainties (Pfeiffer, 1977:131), saw Nietzsche as a religious ally. Maurenbrecher, along with others such as the German Protestant theologian Albert Kalthoff (1850-1906), were heavily influenced by the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. They denied the historical Jesus and
viewed the resurrection as a myth (Weaver, 1999:80). Nietzsche was not so much the catalyst for the distortion of Christianity, but the shaky theological foundation upon which Maurenbrecher and the Deutscher Monistenbund built their theology, created on the fertile grounds of Nietzschean philosophy. It was particularly the elements of Nietzscheism such as the will to power and Zarathustra’s Übermensch that were used by Maurenbrecher to advance his religio-political agenda. The German higher criticism and the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule also made its way across the Atlantic and had ready hearers that were all too eager to advance their “new Gospel”; it was in this context that the legacy of Nietzsche advanced to North America.

The move of Nietzscheism from continental Europe across the Atlantic proved to be a challenge, although it did not happen until well after the death of the German philosopher. Paul Carus (1914:6), a Nietzsche interpreter fascinated with Nietzsche’s psychological state, in quoting Professor R.M. Wenly, quipped, “‘German professors when they die go to Oxford,’ and we may add that from Oxford they travel west to settle for a while in Concord, Boston, Washington, or other American cities.” Once Nietzscheism caught on in North America, however, its effects on American culture, especially where religion was concerned, were long lasting, and, as it turns out, American postmodernism still remains tainted by Nietzschean philosophy. Steven Aschheim’s analysis of Nietzsche’s influence in Europe can also be directed towards North America. Aschheim (1992:16) rightly states, “Nietzsche was foundational to this specific consciousness of creation as radical and experimental secular freedom; in later discourse he became the central symbol of the post-Christian, post-rationalist, nihilist predicament and its correlated, profoundly destructive, and liberating possibilities.”

Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen superbly describes Nietzsche’s ascent into the American psyche in her work, American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas. Ratner-Rosenhagen (2012:26) admits that the ascent to prominence was a slow one in North America, mostly because America’s overall thinking was vastly different from that in Europe. In Europe, Nietzsche’s philosophical elements were faithfully applied to the political discourse of the day, whereas America deliberately avoided using Nietzsche to spiritualize politics. The first impression of the American public was one of apprehension at best, and one of thorough disgust at worst. Even those interpreters who looked favorably upon Nietzsche’s philosophy were not inclined to accept that theoretical Nietzscheanism would take hold in American thinking. Victor Yarros, American anarchist, lawyer and prolific contributor to the anarchist newspaper Liberty, assessed the spread of Nietzsche’s philosophy with definite apprehension, noting that “probably no sound thinker entertains the faintest fear of the spread of Friedrich Nietzsche’s amazing gospel” (Yarros, 1901:682).
This so-called “gospel” he described as “ultra-egotistical” had little chance of acceptance because, in the opinion of Yarros, it was “too extreme, too paradoxical, too violent” (Yarros, 1901:682-683).

The prevailing thought among American thinkers was that the negative aspect within American culture, such as uncompromising egotism, gloom and moral decline, could be laid at the feet of practical Nietzscheanism (Yarros, 1901:686). Other American interpreters did not mince any words when assessing Nietzsche’s philosophy. For instance, H.L. Mencken (1908:Loc.357) describes Nietzsche as follows:

Thus there arose in him a fiery loathing for all authority, and a firm belief that his own opinion regarding any matter to which he had given thought was as sound, at the least, as any other man’s. Thenceforth the assertive ‘ich’ began to besprinkle his discourse and his pages. ‘I condemn Christianity. I have given to mankind … I was never yet modest … I think … I say … I do …’ Thus he hurled his javelin at authority until the end.

Max Simon Nordau (1898:Loc.8256), Zionist leader and social critic, did not hold back his fiery judgment and remarked,

From the first to the last page of Nietzsche’s writings the careful reader seems to hear a madman, with flashing eyes, wild gestures, and foaming mouth, spouting forth deafening bombast; and through it all, now breaking out into frenzied laughter, now sputtering expressions of filthy abuse and invective, now skipping about in a giddily agile dance, and now bursting upon the auditors with threatening mien and clenched fists.

And yet, ironically, Nietzsche’s popularity rose, especially among the ranks of early twentieth-century Protestantism.

Early twentieth-century theological sentiments were not so different from those in the twenty-first century. Georg Burman Foster (1858-1919), a controversial liberal Baptist theologian from the University of Chicago, describes the state of the early twentieth century in such a way that it would be difficult to miss the glaring similarities between then and now. He describes American culture as one that has lost faith in itself: “a weltschmerz has come over us” (Foster, 1914:14). Christianity had lost its relevance and it would be of no use to look backwards to a primitive Christianity for the healing of the modern culture of America. Whatever was held to so strongly had been thrown into doubt—doubt in faith, doubt in Church and state, doubt in science and doubt in truth. Foster saw this doubt epitomized in Nietzsche. This “doubt finds its most radical, most conscious, and most eloquent expression in Friedrich Nietzsche” (Foster, 1914:16). Nietzsche, he said, dared to tread where few men dared to go; Nietzsche questioned the status quo and demolished the moral stronghold of his time.
In his most daring and theologically liberal work *The Finality of the Christian Religion*, Foster (1906:260) professes his admiration of Nietzsche and states, “We have cause to thank Nietzsche. He broke down ramparts against which we were too weak. He would give back the deep again to man and awaken a great yearning.” Supernatural religion, or authority-religion, with its affirmation of the inerrancy of Scripture and miracles, must be done away with; historical Christianity is passé. Foster (1906:137) declares, “Faith in the divine truth of Christianity is not founded on the bodily resurrection of Jesus, as is the case in authority-religion, but on its new content, the world of love and grace.” He agreed with Nietzsche that “God is dead,” but he dies to live; a theme that would be repeated by theologians in the 1960s and postmoderns in the twenty-first century. Foster found in Nietzsche a voice that shook the religious from their slumber, and forced them to re-evaluate their Christian faith. He (1931:195) declared in his work *Friedrich Nietzsche*, “The world needs him [Nietzsche] as never before. His religion is the religion of life, of beauty, of strength and must not perish from the earth.”

On the one hand there is a profound difference between Foster and Nietzsche. Foster, despite his erroneous theological views regarding God and Christ, still tenaciously hung on to Christianity. In contrast, Nietzsche disregarded Christianity and vehemently opposed any form of organized religious adherence whatsoever. In many ways, Foster made the attempt to read religion into Nietzsche and to “Christianize” the German philosopher so as to make him applicable to a re-interpretation of liberal Christianity. On the other hand, similarities exist for both Nietzsche and Foster (and Maurenbrecher); both took note of German higher criticism or the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* that changed the face of Christianity in a most profound way. Nietzsche was heavily influenced by the liberal theologian David Strauss, who shocked European Christianity by professing a historical Jesus whose divinity Strauss denied (Strauss, 1846:246). Foster, himself influenced by liberal theology, affirmed similar ideas; likewise did Maurenbrecher. The similarities between these men are striking; all they needed was a voice to give to their ideas, and for both Maurenbrecher and Foster, Nietzsche was that voice.

Along with Foster, many young American philosophers and theologians questioned the values and the relevancy of Christianity but had little courage to voice the doubts that were on their minds. In Nietzsche they found a kindred spirit who became the voice of young America. Nietzsche was regarded as the “prophet of a new culture,” who courageously dismantled the existing value system of early twentieth century America. On both sides of the Atlantic, the opposition to Enlightenment rationalism through irrationalism and vitalism (*Lebensphilosophie*), with Nietzsche as its central figure, and the corrosion of the central doctrines of the Christian faith brought about a milieu in which a worldview that opposed Christianity could flourish. The irrationalist philosophy with Nietzsche as its spokesperson can be regarded as “foundational to the specific consciousness of
creation as radical and experimental secular freedom; in later discourse it became the central symbol of the post-Christian, post-traditionalist,” and we can add, postmodern, “nihilist predicament and its correlated, profoundly destructive, and liberating possibilities” (Ashheim, 1992:16).

3.2.3 Irrationalism and Nietzschean Influences on Postmodernism

Hendrik Kraemer, the Dutch missiologist, warned of the impending crisis he saw looming over the West. In 1938 he wrote, “The outstanding characteristic of our time is the complete disappearance of all absolutes, and the victorious dreadful dominion of the spirit and attitude of relativism” (Kraemer, 1956:6). Roughly thirty years later, in the United States, a Jewish atheist from the Mid-West lamented the decline of post-secondary education in most of the Ivy League schools in America for the same reason. Allan Bloom (1987:25) starts his best-selling book *The Closing of the American Mind* with the following statement: “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.” Without using the term “postmodernism” Bloom inadvertently describes the postmodern ethos in the academia. Although Bloom saw Nietzsche as an excellent diagnostician regarding the state of society, he puts the blame on him and those philosophers most influenced by him, such as Heidegger, Freud and especially Max Weber, for the way that American university life was revolutionized by German thought. Bloom sees a direct connection to mid-twentieth-century Germany, and he recalls, “As in Germany, the value crisis in philosophy made the university prey to whatever intense passion moved the masses” (Bloom, 1987:314).

In Europe, the matter of values or meanings was addressed through Nietzsche’s philosophical deliberations on the issue of nihilism and his essential philosophical doctrine of the “will to power.” Martin Heidegger, as interpreter and popularizer of Nietzsche, elucidates Nietzsche’s philosophy on the issue of value and value positing in his *The Question Concerning Technology*. Heidegger (1977:53) claims that value positing can only be fully understood through the understanding of Nietzsche’s fundamental position within the history of Western metaphysics. Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche is a re-interpretation of selected statements of Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*, in connection with values and value positing in relation to Nietzsche’s parable of the madman, in which he declares the “death of God.” According to Heidegger (1977:67), we must interpret Nietzsche’s value positing in light of the will and nihilism as the inner logic of Western history. Values are seen in connection to nihilism. Nietzsche asks the question: “What does Nihilism mean? — that the highest values are losing their value. There is no answer to the question: ‘to what purpose?'” (Nietzsche, 2015:Loc.43183-43184). Heidegger (1977:67) explains that “the world
becomes value-less, presses inevitably on toward a new positing of values. After the former values become untenable, the new positing of values changes, in respect to those former values, into a ‘revaluing of all values.’” By “revaluing” Heidegger means the overturning of the way we value; new principles of valuing must be set in place. The suprasensory world (God as the highest value) has become untenable and “lifeless”, thus it is now imperative to move to what is most alive (Heidegger, 1977:67-70). The criteria of values are conditions of preservation and enhancement, or “preservation-enhancement conditions” that are regarded as the essence of life, tendencies that belong intrinsically together.

Heidegger explains that value positing must be seen in connection to Nietzsche’s will to power. In his words, “The will to power is, in its essence, the value positing will” (Heidegger, 1977:80-81). In sum then, for Nietzsche and for Heidegger, value positing, or apportioning meaning, is solely based on the will. Once the suprasensory world has been destroyed, the standard of meaning or value has been abolished as well. As Nietzsche (1990:50-51) put it,

The ‘true’ world—an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating—an idea which has become useless and superfluous—consequently, a refuted idea: let us abolish it! The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.

Value positing has now been left to the will to power, which Nietzsche conceives as the innermost essence of existence or Being (Nietzsche, 2015:Loc.5047). It is safe to assume that Nietzsche follows the pragmatic line in the matter of value posting, a reasoning that postmoderns have readily adopted.

It was not until the sixties, however, that the value insights of Nietzsche, which, in some way Max Weber made popular, caught on in the universities of the United States, as we shall see. American emphasis on freedom, personal choice, individualism and responsibility made a fertile ground for Weberianism. Philosophically, positivism, existentialism and Weberianism undoubtedly played a role in American relativism that was, according to Stephen Turner (1983:200-201) a “peculiar belief in ‘rights.’”

Max Weber (1864-1920), the German sociologist, vehemently rejected the label “relativism” (in Turner, 1983:40), but considering his stance on value judgments, one has difficulties avoiding the term. Stephen Turner (1983:40-41) explains that Weber was not a relativist in the sense that his choices were ambivalently based on his own choosing; in fact, Weber would rather be called a “decisionist.” Weber did not make ultimate decisions arbitrarily and irrationally and the decisions made required responsibility to carry them through. The decision-making of Weber, however, seems highly subjective and based on choosing one’s own fate. The question then arises: is Weber
not making decisions relative to his own, or his community’s own welfare? Is he not in line with Nietzsche’s dictum that we must make decisions and value judgments that contribute to the health of the group or individual? (Turner, 2002:588). Thus, it would seem fair to assume that Weber was most pragmatic in his decision-making, not unlike Nietzsche. Although Weber would call his decision-making rational, he relegated the religious decisions to the irrational, for “there was no rational justification for their [the believers’] confidence in the truth of their conviction” (Turner, 2002:602). Georg Lukács (1980:605) correctly states, “Weber was opposed to irrationalism in his conscious aims but if we examine Weber’s genesis of capitalism, we find a particular significance in his wedding of modern rationalism to the idea that with it, religion was shifted into the domain of the irrational,” or what Francis Schaeffer calls in his *Escape from Reason* the “upper-story” of the non-logical or the non-rational (Schaeffer, 1990:237ff).

Weber identified the problems of modernity and its emphasis on autonomous rationalism and science as the new god, as he so soberly explained in his *Science as a Vocation* (Weber, 1946:129-156). Much of postmodern thought is making the attempt to rectify the problems but is hopelessly groping in the dark and is without foundation, because the foundations have been destroyed by early twentieth-century liberalism. Ironically, in many ways, postmodernism is returning to a new liberalism not much different from what we witnessed a century ago. The issue of irrationality and relativism regarding religious values and morality is something that both Weber and Nietzsche addressed. At bottom, what it comes down to is the matter of truth and absolutes, as mentioned by Hendrik Kraemer in the above quotation; irrational philosophy by its very definition denies truth as foundational. Thus, as soon as the denial of absolutes and truth values enters into the realm of theology and religious commitment, the very foundation upon which we build our religious commitments is eroded and a postmodern religiosity is born.

The matter of value judgments stands in close proximity to the matter of truth, which is so much called into question in our contemporary culture. It is clear that the difficulty with “truth” has a long and arduous history but has through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries been scrutinized and its objectivity has been denied by those who adhered to irrationalist philosophy under the influence of Nietzsche. Although the overall essence of Nietzsche’s thought is hard to determine at times, one thing can be accurately determined, and that is that fundamentally, Nietzsche’s irrationalism does not allow for absolutes or universal truths. The basic premise of this philosophy is subjectivism. Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 2015:Loc.4855) wonders, “Could it not be this, that the hypothesis which gives the intellect the greatest feeling of power and security, is preferred, valued, and marked as true? — The intellect sets its freest and strongest faculty and ability as the criterion of what is most valuable, consequently of what is true.” Thus the criterion of what is true and meaningful is solely based on the subjective act of the will and intellect. Especially when it comes
to religious truth, Nietzsche considers its acceptance a psychological capitulation to wishful thinking. In his *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche (2015:Loc.39773) states,

To derive something unknown from something familiar relieves, comforts, and satisfies, besides giving a feeling of power. With the unknown, one is confronted with danger, discomfort, and care; the first instinct is to abolish these painful states. First principle: any explanation is better than none. Since at bottom it is merely a matter of wishing to be rid of oppressive representations, one is not too particular about the means of getting rid of them: the first representation that explains the unknown as familiar feels so good that one “considers it true.” The proof of pleasure (“of strength”) as a criterion of truth.

Even though Nietzsche abhorred the systemization of his philosophy, we can glean from his writings how he viewed the issue of truth. Albert Cinelli (2012:35-45) in his article “Nietzsche, Relativism and Truth”, makes an attempt to dispute that Nietzsche can be charged with relativism and that imposing a unitary theory of truth upon Nietzsche is rather un-Nietzschean. When reading Nietzsche’s writings, his *The Will to Power* in particular, we get a good idea of his theory of truth and his standard upon which he builds this theory. It becomes clear that Nietzsche does not hold to an absolute truth that is outside of himself. Nietzsche (2015:Loc.49346) admits that “The absolute is even an absurd concept: an ‘absolute mode of existence’ is nonsense, the concept ‘being,’ ‘thing,’ is always relative to us.” Truth, according to Nietzsche, is regarded as perspectival, and at the same time he denies the possibility of a correct perception. He admits that the world is knowable but can only be interpreted, and these interpretations can vary; it has not one sense behind it, but hundreds of senses; according to Nietzsche it is “perspectivity” (cf. Nietzsche, 2015:Loc. 49878). He gives what seems to be a theory of truth that is based on the needs and the will of the individual.

“Every instinct is a sort of thirst for power; each has its point of view, which it would fain impose upon all the other instincts as their norm” (Nietzsche, 2015:Loc.48371-48374). Truth, therefore, is a convention, what Cinelli (2012:39) dubs, “a product of uncertain beings.” For Nietzsche, then, truth is not transcendent but perspectival and multiplex, and in the end, becomes therefore non-existent; “there are many kinds of eyes. Even the Sphinx has eyes—therefore there must be many kinds of ‘truths,’ and consequently there can be no truth” (Nietzsche, 2015:Loc.48887-48888). Nietzsche’s theory of truth is based on human passions, reason and experience (Wilcox, 1974:170). According to Nietzsche, life is not dictated by the truth but rather truth is dictated by life; life puts truth to work in the service of life (Caputo, 2013:181). The truth of Christianity, and religion in general, is merely an interpretation of a metaphysical reality; the doctrines are presented as “hypothetical”, albeit a gross misinterpretation of reality (cf. Wilcox, 1974:157). Nietzsche (2015:Loc.12369) claims that “all religions grew out of dread or necessity, and came into existence through an error of
the reason.” Here, it seems, we detect Nietzsche, seemingly despairingly but ultimately triumphantly, acclaiming the death of God in the parable of the madman, for “the sense of truth, highly developed through Christianity, ultimately revolts against the falsehood and fictitiousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and its history” (Nietzsche, 2015:Loc.43210). Christianity has based its truth on a fictitious world and, according to Karl Jaspers (1997:243), “when the fiction is recognized for what it is, it must vanish into such nothingness as no man has ever experienced.”

Christianity for Nietzsche has become untenable and, he reasons, the sooner we eradicate the world of this fictitious lie, the better off we all are, for, at bottom, nihilism is rooted in Christianity (Jaspers, 1997:243). Nietzsche (2015:Loc.43443) adds, “The time is coming when we shall have to pay for having been Christians for two thousand years: we are losing the firm footing which enabled us to live. Now, everything is false from the root, words and nothing but words, confused, feeble, or overstrained.” According to Karl Jaspers (1997:243) nihilism arose out of “erroneous thinking that categories such as meaning and wholeness have absolute validity when applied to the world.”

This meaning and wholeness, according to Nietzsche, is ultimately not verifiable or discoverable, hence the disillusionment that meaning cannot be grasped; the longing for certainty will eventually lead to the exasperation of nihilism. Nietzsche’s foundation for truth is his will to power. It is not made clear through his writings exactly what the “will to power” entails, other than that it is man-centred; Nietzsche has discarded Christianity as fictitious and has put in its place human passions and experience. Ironically, in protest of the Enlightenment rationalist ideal, the postmodern aesthetic ideal has taken its place under the careful auspices of Nietzsche and irrationalist philosophy.

John Caputo (2013:188) calls Nietzsche the “turning point, or doorway, to the postmodern, and even in some sense the post-philosophical, in which a rather different idea of truth is emerging.” He gives an approving nod to Nietzsche’s perspectivalism and his view of Christianity as destructive fiction. Nietzsche’s suspicion of truth gives rise to the postmodern turn, according to Caputo (2013:197), with a view of truth modelled after neither God nor Reason, but the ‘event’, always conscious of the “unforeseen turn truth may take in the future.” Nietzsche’s particular brand of philosophy is not unique to Caputo. Postmodern thinkers like Foucault, Lyotard and Richard Rorty share similar thoughts. They might despise the distinctive labels put on them, but they seem to have one important thing in common: the way they see truth.

One of these is the American philosopher, Richard Rorty, who sees himself in the post-Nietzschean tradition as well, but adds that besides his post-Nietzschean affiliation, he stands in the American post-Darwinian tradition, the tradition of pragmatism (Rorty, 1999:xx). He can be counted among
other postmodern and post-Nietzschean thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Michel Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre, John Dewey and Thomas Kühn. Not unlike Caputo, all these thinkers took a page from Nietzsche’s book regarding the issue of truth. To be called a ‘relativist’ or a ‘subjectivist’ does not sit well with pragmatists such as Richard Rorty. To avoid the dilemma of being labeled a relativist and subjectivist, Rorty suggests a change of vocabulary. It is his opinion that the terms ‘relativist’ and ‘subjectivist’ point to Platonic distinctions that he is working hard to overcome. We must turn to a language that denies the Greek influences in which the West has been steeped for centuries. Rorty (1999:xix) proposes that “the efforts of persuasion must take the form of gradual inculcation of new ways of speaking, rather than of straightforward argument within the old ways of speaking.” We must do away with the Cartesian ways of thinking that sought to get in touch with reality outside of itself (Rorty, 1999:xxii).

For the pragmatist, truth statements are not just statements about reality as it is; rather, reality can only be applicable to those who utter the statements. Language is simply a tool for coordinating our behavior. We should never seek the truth as a goal of inquiry; truth is, and must be, inextricably linked to action to make life better (Rorty:148-149). We can commend the American pragmatist and the post-Nietzschean philosophers for protesting against the quasi-divine faculty called ‘reason’ in the Cartesian sense. Unfortunately, as the Enlightenment rid itself of the supernatural light as a guide to the Truth, the postmodern pragmatist has thrown the proverbial baby out with the bathwater and has not replaced the discarded light of the Enlightenment with something else to guide them to the Truth. American pragmatists like Rorty are not interested in thinking about knowledge and truth for its own sake; the quest for certainty “is an attempt to escape from the world” (Rorty, 1999:33).

Douglas Groothuis (2000:200) detects the correlation between Nietzsche and Richard Rorty as well and argues that “both Nietzsche’s thundering pronouncements and Rorty’s relaxed but radical ruminations share the same essential philosophical defect”—an atheistic world is void of meaning or value or certainty. In Nietzschean fashion, certainty has been done away with, and “pleasure can no longer be found in certainty, but in uncertainty; no longer ‘cause and effect,’ but continual creativeness; no longer the will to self-preservation, but to power; no longer the modest expression ‘it is all only subjective,’ but ‘it is all our work! Let us be proud of it’” (Nietzsche, 2015:Loc. 53711).

3.3 A New Atheism or a Spiritual Revival?

Peter Drucker (1993:1) exclaimed:
Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. We cross a divide. Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself—its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born.

I believe we live in such a world today. Postmodernism with its affiliation to irrationalism and vitalism has forced itself upon contemporary North American society; the relative has replaced the absolute. Huston Smith (1995:210) is correct in his assessment that, predominantly, social considerations have put their focus on “the dark side of absolutism (fanaticism) and the bright side of relativism (tolerance),” ignoring all the while that the dark side of relativism is nihilism, which is very much a possibility in postmodernism. One of the characteristics of postmodernity is the valuation of meaning in a relative sense. There is a symbiotic relationship between anti-foundationalism and postmodernity that inevitably leads to postmodern nihilism. The philosopher Ashley Woodward, however, strongly disagrees with this position and posits that it is premodernity, and modernity with its foundationalism, that are associated with nihilism. The postmodern, on the other hand, “looks for new possibilities of existence, and criticizes those aspects of contemporary life which tend towards meaninglessness” (Woodward, 2009:248). Woodward imagines a certain freedom from the constrictions that either premodernity or modernity has placed upon him; the shackles of foundationalism have been thrown off, giving postmodernity the freedom to explore different ways that most suit the current cultural context. The conundrum lies in the fact that postmodernism has destroyed the foundations upon which it built its view of reality and has failed to construct a basis and a standard which they can rely on and truthfully see reality. This is just the point for postmodernists like Jean-François Lyotard (1993:29) when he pointedly affirms that “the grand narratives have become scarcely credible.” The grand narrative he was referring to was not solely the metanarrative of science, so prevalent in modernity, but also the grand narrative of Christianity: God working through and sustaining history.

This new-found freedom, which denies objective truth values and certainty, should make us all the more happy, one would imagine. Paradoxically, it has made us more afraid and apprehensive about the future. This fear manifests itself in our forming new sets of beliefs and retreating into old sets of beliefs resembling the pagan religiosity, a mixture of Eastern and Western religion, or a Christianity that barely resembles the true faith as articulated in Scripture. Surprising as it may seem, atheism is not the standard fare of the postmodernist. As appealing as atheism was a century ago, it lost its fervor in the twenty-first century. No doubt, atheism will always have its attraction among some intellectuals such as Sam Harris or a Richard Dawkins, but as Alister McGrath (2004:273) points out, it is simplistic, “fails to engage with the complexities of human experience, and is seriously out
of tune with our postmodern culture.” Humanistic atheism relies heavily upon the modern principles of reason, and its goal remains the progress of human perfection, still very much connected to Renaissance humanism. For that reason McGrath considers atheism passé, and suggests that because of the cultural shifts of the twenty-first century towards a postmodern ethos, it has “left atheism beached for the time on the sands of modernity, while Westerners explore a new postmodern interest in the forbidden fruit of spirituality” (McGrath, 2014:279).

Whether we admit it or not, people need unifying truth values and a standard upon which to build their lives; we are homo religiosus. Postmodernity is marked by a people that seek a new certainty. Václav Havel (1999:237) describes postmodern spirituality as an “awareness of our being anchored in the Earth and the universe, the awareness that we are not here alone nor for ourselves alone, but that we are an integral part of higher, mysterious entities against whom it is not advisable to blaspheme.” He continues to assure his readers that “the only real hope of people today is probably a renewal of our certainty that we are rooted in the Earth, and at the same time, the cosmos” (Havel, 1999:237). Postmoderns have taken the principles of postmodernity and created a spirituality that suits their immediate needs, which must fuel their situational and personal happiness. The characteristics of this new spiritual revolution are based on personal autonomy and the “worldly”—the body, nature, femininity and the physical environment (Tacey, 2004:4-5). The religious are moving freely in and out, across religious boundaries, combining elements from various religious traditions and creating more personalized meaning systems, as others have attested to as well (cf. Tacey, 2004). It can be summed up as “I am not religious, I am spiritual.”

For many years, to remain relevant, Christian leaders have linked truth-claims to physical science and its significance to the social sciences (Turner, 1989:25), or have wedded Christianity solely to rationalism or to mere emotionalism, creating a false dichotomy between the heart and the mind as if these could be separated. As a matter of fact, both rationalism and emotionalism became the false gods of the post-Reformation era. The new spirituality found new objects of worship, bowing to either rationalism or emotionalism. James Turner (1985:249) notes, “Superficially, agnostics may appear only to have switched God for secular ideals in a kind of theological shell game, merely to have transferred allegiance to new gods.” As already indicated above, the god of rationalism with science as its representative proved to be an empty hope for most postmoderns, for it lacked the transcendent aspect that mankind longed for. Experience-ism, emotionalism and existentialism turn out to be far more appealing, and their sense of mysticism and transcendence speaks to a contemporary culture seeking to create a new spirituality unfettered from the ecclesiastical constrains. Faith detached from reason was reduced to a kind of Kierkegaardian leap into the mystical abyss; religion had become an ambiguous enterprise. A de-centred Christianity had an enormous appeal to those inside and outside of the church.
Wayne Baker, a sociologist from the University of Michigan, has done some extensive research regarding the cultural and religious viewpoints of Americans in the last decades. Baker relies heavily on data from the World Values Survey and has discovered that America’s values have not changed drastically in the last three decades compared to other industrialized Protestant English-speaking societies. Canada is more closely following its secular European counterpart than her neighbour to the south. It is likely that the reason for this is that many of Canada’s immigrants are from secular Britain, Europe and Asia, whereas America’s immigrants are largely from traditional Roman Catholic South American countries, thus retaining its traditionalist values. Canada, for that reason, holds more to secular/rational values (Baker, 2005:209-211, 249).

As far as the religious milieu of America is concerned, Wayne Baker also discovered that, although Americans have retained their traditional values, self-expression or self-realization values have made their way into the American psyche. Baker (2005:63) determines that “existential conditions at the end of the twentieth century and turn of the millennium were the fertile soil in which self-realization could flourish.” In typical American fashion, religion is being marketed and there is “vigorous competition among religious organizations for members” (Baker, 2005:57). From his research, Wayne Baker (2005:57) makes the observation that the new competitors who offer new spiritual avenues and resources seem to be winning, and “the decline of organized religion is accompanied by a rise of spiritual concerns and the pursuit of self-realization through personal quests for spiritual insight and fulfilment.” Baker holds a similar opinion as Thomas Luckmann (1990:134), the American-Austrian sociologist, who writes that “the ‘autonomous’ consumer selects certain religious themes from the available assortment and builds them into a somewhat precarious private system of ‘ultimate’ significance.” To be sure, the American religious landscape is changing.

Both Wayne Baker and Thomas Luckmann agree that the new religious institutions have not totally abandoned traditional Christian rhetoric but only slightly resemble orthodox Christianity. He affirms with Baker that religion is not disappearing but is drastically changing. Luckmann (1990:127) suggests a shrinking of transcendence. He identifies three levels of transcendences: the “little” special transcendence, which he describes as the experience of the physical entities other than ourselves, the “intermediate” transcendences, or the inner life of other human beings that cannot be experienced, and, finally, the “great” transcendences, which he characterizes as the experiences that cannot be empirically verified (i.e., the topics of universal religions of salvation). Luckmann (1990:135) believes that the span of transcendences is shrinking, meaning that the religious foci are on the “intermediate” and even the “little” transcendences. These orientations are geared towards nations (nationalism), social class, family (“familism”), other people (“togetherness”), and the “sacralized” self (“self-fulfillment”). Luckmann (1990:138) sums up his
findings with the statement that “modern religious themes such as ‘self-realization,’ personal autonomy, and self-expression have become dominant.”

Robert Wuthnow, professor of sociology at Princeton, agrees that the idea of religious decline is a myth. On the contrary, he discovers that Americans are fascinated with spirituality; however, he also determines that the spiritual character, although difficult to gauge because of its private element, is changing. Wuthnow (1998:3) argues that traditional spirituality has slowly been replaced by a new spirituality of seeking. Americans “have been losing faith in a metaphysic that can make them feel at home in the universe and that they increasingly negotiate among competing glimpses of the sacred, seeking partial knowledge and practical wisdom” (Wuthnow, 1998:3).

Besides the theological distinctive and European philosophical input in mid to late twentieth-century American religiosity, Wuthnow determines that spirituality in America was intrinsically linked to the social milieu of the time. The sacralized social element, Wuthnow identifies, caused the spirituality and religiosity of America to be superficial and formulaic—“a simple affirmation in the existence of God, a belief that all would be well if one worked hard” (Wuthnow, 1998:40).

American spirituality could be described as highly pragmatic and one of “spiritual exploration.” The deterioration of the home as the sacred fortress, coupled with the lack of certainty and objective truths, causes Americans to re-think their religious fervor and abandon the already shaky foundations upon which they build their spirituality. A new freedom marked American spirituality; freedom became the new religion. Wuthnow (1998:83) admits that freedom needed to be redefined and explains, “The freedom that living in a secure community of like-minded individuals offered was gradually replaced by a freedom to exercise choice in a marketplace of ideas and life-styles.” Freedom came to be highly subjective and contingent on one’s personal feeling of right and wrong and happiness—“to feel one’s own feelings and to experience one’s own sensibilities” (Wuthnow, 1998:78). This freedom is expressed most radically in the subjective eclectic spirituality, family dynamics, and sexual expression. The relied-upon grand narratives of religious tradition, upon which morality and religion were based, have been replaced by personalized narratives of exploration and expression (Wuthnow, 1998:83).

Besides the freedom of expression as a characteristic of postmodern spirituality, a redefined view of the self has become an important aspect of the contemporary spiritual quest. The buzzwords of our culture are all connected with our unique self: self-esteem, self-expression, self-fulfillment, and self-awareness. It stands to reason that, with the loss of objective truths found outside of ourselves, a dictum promoted by postmodern philosophers, the locus of meaning and truth must be found within us. Paradoxically, while postmodernism vehemently opposes Enlightenment individualism and stresses the importance of community, the individual self has become the centre and the locus
of meaning, whereas the community only serves to affirm the truths we have discovered ourselves. Wuthnow (1998:151) affirms this sentiment and observes, “One can disclaim any certainty about absolute truth but feel comforted in one’s personal convictions by the affirmation received in one’s group.”

David Wells (2005:249) perceives as well that “the autonomous self is autonomous because it has liberated itself from an outside world of meaning, of obligation, of rules, rites, customs and practices.” Ironically, whereas the modern rational Cartesian self of the Enlightenment was driven by autonomous reason, the postmodern person is driven by the autonomous experience or Erlebnis. We can thus safely assume that spirituality is contingent on autonomous experience and, lacking a transcendent authority, is a de-centered spirituality and eventual cause for spiritual confusion for the postmodern seeker. Many would call themselves spiritual but not religious, or what Linda Mercadante (2014:2), professor of theology at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, would identify as “nones.” Mercadante discovers as well that it is not that Americans are not interested in spiritual matters, but more and more people are looking into individual spiritualties without religious attachments. Many of those mentioned by the author became spiritual but not religious for a variety of reasons, such as a disdain for exclusivism, ethical objections (hypocrisy), or the attraction to the personal choice of an eclectic spiritual smorgasbord. Many turn from religion and create their own belief system because of their frustration with traditional Christianity, or religion in general (Mercadante, 2014:75-125).

Spirituality has become unhinged from the church as a religious institution, with the church now merely regarded as a manifestation of a particular tradition embodying a dead religiosity unable to confront the social ills of its time. James Kavanaugh (1968:xiii-xiv), a former Roman Catholic priest, bemoaned the irrelevance of the church and wrote almost fifty years ago that, “The world has become man-centred, meaning-centred, and the individual measures the traditional truths in terms of personal value.” For that reason, the church must face the changes in contemporary culture or die. As pertinent as it was fifty years ago, these sentiments are still held today. Spirituality in the twenty-first century is an individualistic endeavor, not needing the support of a particular religious community, for, as a matter of fact, group membership often hinders spiritual growth. Linda Mercadante (2014:35-67) found that many of her interviewees preferred to do religion their own way, by exploring different spiritual avenues; membership of a religious group would limit that freedom. Personal happiness is one of the main goals for the spiritual postmodern, along with joy and peace. Group membership often stands in the way of that pursuit. It becomes clear in the postmodern ethos that, contrary to the secularization thesis as proposed in the 1960s and 70s, society is not growing less religious but, “the real change is in where authority resides” (Mercadante
Theology and the Church, recognizing the postmodern trend, are making an attempt to draw people back by accommodating the mindset of the postmodern spiritual seeker.

3.3.1 Modern Principles in Postmodern Thinking

Contemporary theology proposes that, in its opinion, the old perception of a God domesticated by the Church must be re-addressed. Bonhoeffer (1953:122), in his letter from prison on April 30th 1944, had already posed a similar question, writing, “If we reach the stage of being radically without religion—and I think this is more or less the case already—what does that mean for Christianity?” He continued and wondered, “How do we speak (but perhaps we are no longer capable of speaking of such things as we used to) in secular fashion of God?” (Bonhoeffer, 1953:123). Harvey Cox, who gained considerable traction in the 1960s, made an attempt to answer Bonhoeffer’s question in his landmark book The Secular City and asserted that the word “God” has lost its significance and meaning. Cox alleged that we cannot use the name “God” without being reminded of the past fraught with antiquated religious baggage. If theology is to survive and make sense of the contemporary world, “it must neither cling to the metaphysical worldview nor collapse into a mythical mode; it must push on into the living lexicon of the urban secular man” (Cox, 1965:251). Ironically, however, it is those who are connected to the church who redefine who God is and how we should regard Him in the twenty-first century.

It seems rather curious, in light of postmodernity being a somewhat more recent phenomenon, that we should count the aging Bishop John Shelby Spong among them, but, as we shall see, his rather modern critique of Christianity fits well into the postmodern context. John Shelby Spong, the now retired bishop of the Episcopal Church of Newark, asserts that Christianity, as articulated in the creeds, is hopelessly outdated and unworthy of any serious contention. No clear-thinking intelligent person in these postmodern times can or should accept the premodern paradigm from which the Christian faith sprang (Spong, 1998:4; 2000:21-22). Spong, not unlike other liberal and postmodern theologians, does not define God as a supernatural being (Spong, 2000:3) and thus does not accept Christ as the earthly incarnation of this supernatural deity.

Similar sentiments have been voiced in Canada, particularly by the United Church of Canada minister and self-proclaimed atheist Greta Vosper, who voices many of the same concerns as did John Shelby Spong regarding the outdated beliefs of Christianity. Almost exasperatedly, Vosper calls us to get up from our knees and leave the outdated beliefs behind, to give back the lost dignity and find the crucial ways we need “to live love into the world” (Vosper, 2012:203). Ironically, both John Shelby Spong and Greta Vosper are modern in their approach and use modern categories to deny the Christian faith as articulated in the Scriptures. By denying God as a personal being they
have reduced Him to a concept that we can experience much like Christ experienced it on His earthly sojourn, which Spong expressed as the “Christ-experience” (Spong, 2000:3) Although much of this thinking strongly resembles twentieth-century liberalism, many of the principles are still accepted and expanded upon by postmodern theologians and philosophers of theology. Both modernists and postmodernists reject many of the supernatural aspects of Christianity. Both Spong and Vosper have deconstructed biblical Christianity and emptied it of its supernatural content, much like many postmodern thinkers (cf. Taylor, 1984:11; Cupitt, 1997:7-8). As mentioned, postmodern culture is not abandoning Christianity as such but is re-interpreting and deconstructing the major doctrines to fit the contemporary ethos.

3.3.2 Postmodernism and theology: the death of transcendence

John Caputo (2013:ix) quips in the preface of his book *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, “God as the highest being—a steady hand at the wheel of the universe, ordering all things to good purpose, the spanning providential eye o’erseeing all—has had a good run.” He suggests that we must admit that the traditional foundations and the old absolutes must be reconsidered and re-interpreted. Christian theology has responded by using postmodern principles in the attempt to make Christianity culturally appealing again and indeed has reconsidered and re-interpreted the metaphysical God of Tradition. This study would like to use three particular postmodern thinkers: Mark C. Taylor, John Caputo and Richard Kearney, as theological spokesmen who appropriate postmodern principles into their philosophy of religion. These three philosophers of religion have distinct theologies but similar aims. All three agree that religion, especially Christianity, is not erased from the postmodern mind, but all concur that the traditional God of metaphysics is dead, as already articulated by Nietzsche, and we must re-interpret and reconstruct the Judeo-Christian God and leave behind classic theism with its neo-Platonic ideas that have plagued Christian theology for so long, in order for Christianity to remain relevant (cf. Taylor,1984:7-17; 65; Caputo, 1999:10-11; Kearney, 1999:112-130; 2010:3-8).

In many ways, postmodern theology is an ambivalent enterprise of deconstruction and reconstruction with its focus on re-interpreting and re-naming the God of Christianity in light of the secular ethos in which contemporary culture finds itself. Postmodern theology is a reaction against medieval scholastic theology with its emphasis on God as Being. For many postmodern philosophers of religion, this emphasis depicted God as a static Being unable to relate to his creation, and, according to them, was a far cry from the God who made himself known to Moses in the burning bush (Kearney, 2001:54). As in any reaction, postmodern theologians and philosophers of religion have overreacted, and in so doing have negated the Creator/creature distinction, making God out to be a contingent Being wholly dependent on his creation.
The God of metaphysics, the postmodern claims, is the transcendent *causa sui* who stands above and beyond the temporal reality in which we live. This God is dead and must be deconstructed, and “deconstruction is the ‘hermeneutic’ of the death of God,” according to Mark C. Taylor (1984:6). The deconstruction of the God of metaphysics by postmodern theologians and philosophers of religion has taken on variable forms. Those who can be identified as Radical Theologians (John Caputo and Richard Kearney) have re-interpreted the God of the Bible to something akin to how Open Theists describe God or deconstruct God to something less recognizable, as in Mark Taylor’s “a/theology” (Taylor, 1984:104). All of these theologians object to the transcendence of God viewed from the traditional sense and emphasize a postmodern immanent transcendence or horizontal transcendence (Sandbeck, 2011:20), the former depicting a distant impersonal deity, and the latter denoting, in their opinion, a process made possible by a power, capacity or a “certain void of being” (Sandbeck, 2011:20).

Mark C. Taylor (1984:7), a philosopher of religion at Columbia University, bemoans the fact that Western theology has failed to come to grips with the radical implications of the death of God, which has made it impossible to properly approach postmodernism. Mark Taylor makes extensive use of both Nietzsche and Hegel in his explication of his theological schema, and posits that, in light of the death of God, we can no longer write or do theology in a traditional way; thus Taylor (1984:13) suggests a new and more radical theology, what he labels “a/theology.” He describes this as follows:

> The a/theologian asks errant questions and suggests responses that often seem erratic, or even erroneous. Since his reflection wanders, roams, and strays from the “proper” course, it tends to deviate from well-established ways. To traditional eyes, a/theology doubtless appears to be irregular, eccentric, and vagrant. At best it seems aimless, at worst devious. Within this framework, a/theology is, in fact, heretical. For the a/theologian, however, heresy and aimlessness are unavoidable. Ideas are never fixed but are always in transition; thus they are irrepressibly transitory. For this reason, a/theology might be labeled ‘Nomad Thought.’

The purpose of Taylor’s a/theology becomes crystal clear in that the entire enterprise is a protest against traditional theology and orthodox Christianity, which, in his opinion, is based upon the idea of a transcendent God, emphasized in classical theism. The abstract transcendent God, according to Taylor (2007:159-160), “dies and is reborn in the human figure of Jesus, who is also divine,” and this individual Jesus is crucified “as an integral member of a universal community, which emerges in a global process.” In other words, the incarnation is the negation of the transcendent God, the crucifixion is the negation of the individual, and the resurrection is negation of death itself (Hegel *in
Taylor, 2007:160). This process opens up the immanent transcendence of “altarity”, or oscillation, that Taylor identifies as the imagination, which he posits as one with God (Taylor, 2007:311). In other words, the realities of the Christian faith, God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, are mere symbols pointing to a more immanent reality, the imagination, always creating, always re-creating; God is a process of creative emergence or emergent creativity (Taylor, 2007:164).

Religion does not go away, Taylor affirms, so he resorts to a religion without God. Taylor (2007:317) envisages this religion without God played out in nature and its dialectical processes. Nature is one of altarity and the processes of change are autopoietic. All of life is one of self-creativity and is in no need of a divine being. Life after God is indeed a life without God, without hope. Taylor (2007:377) ends his book After God with a somewhat hopeless statement, “There is nothing else—there is nowhere else. Neither One nor the Other. To err in the wake of the virtual is to be after God—forever after God.”

Not all postmodern theologians or philosophers of religion are as radical as Mark Taylor, and some make an attempt to remain faithful to orthodox Christianity, but upon closer examination we must conclude that even their attempts have failed to remain true to orthodox Christianity. Richard Kearney, professor of philosophy at Boston College, is a postmodern thinker who has appropriated postmodern principles into his philosophy/theology and reinterpreted traditional Christian doctrines. Especially in the doctrine of God he accentuates the immanence of God at the cost of God’s transcendence, much like Mark Taylor in this regard. In so doing, his theology has much affinity with what we would now call Open Theism, a belief system that was made mainstream by theologians like John Sanders and Clark Pinnock.

Kearney objects to an onto-theological reading of the divine, which in his opinion is fraught with Hellenistic philosophy. Stoker Wessel (2015:3), a theologian at the Free University in Amsterdam, in his article, “God in het dagelijkse,” objects to an onto-theological reading as well and asserts that to speak onto-theologically about God is to deny God as mystery and to speak as if all of reality is within human grasp. The onto-theological reading of the divine is judged harshly by Kearney because it has the tendency to objectify, to dominate and to possess the divine. This kind of desire was set already in place in the Fall, practiced in the story of Babel and articulated in modern theology. Kearney suggests a different reading that is much more in line with his overall thesis, “God neither is nor is not but may be.” By this he means an opening of ourselves “to the ‘loving possible’ by acting each moment to make the impossible a bit more possible,” and in so doing, we help God to become God (Kearney, 1984:1-111). Kearney (2001:1) suggests an eschatological interpretation that “privileges a God who ‘possibilizes’ our world from out of the future.”
The main text Richard Kearney uses to bolster his thesis is Exodus 3:14, in which he (re)interprets the Tetragrammaton. Kearney stands on hermeneutical thin ice, since the Tetragrammaton is notoriously difficult to decipher and can be translated in many different ways. Traditionally it has been translated as the “I AM” or “I Am Who I AM” denoting both character and Being. This particular interpretation of the Tetragrammaton, according to Kearney, is a mistranslation conceding too much to Hellenistic ontology, referring to a transcendent, distant and immutable Being far removed from his creatures. In light of this, Kearney suggests a different translation more in line with the immanent divine of postmodern theology. He proposes that *eye hasher eyeh* is translated as “I Will Be Who I Will Be,” or more appropriately for his cause, “I Am Who May Be”, denoting a divine commitment and an eschatological openness (Kearney, 2001:27). In the dialogue with Moses, God, as the God of his ancestors, reveals a new plan of action by “becoming different from what he has been until now” (Kearney, 2001:28, italics original). Kearney (2001:29) continues his interpretive freedom and adds, “With the revelation of his Name, God says of himself something like, ‘with you Moses—and with Israel throughout history—I stand or fall!’” This vulnerability of God continues throughout history and so God becomes with us. Kearney clearly interprets Scripture to fit his openness paradigm, which defies God’s immutability and makes Him to be contingent on His creation.

Another example where Richard Kearney re-interprets a theological doctrine to fit his peculiar theological pattern can be seen in his revision of the doctrine of *perichoresis*. In this case, he not only re-interprets but also mistranslates and misappropriates the term. The term *perichoresis* is a theological term that reflects upon the Trinity and the hypostatic union in the incarnation. Oliver Crisp (2007:1) explains it well and succinctly notes that *perichoresis* “fills the conceptual gap with the notion that the two natures of Christ and the persons of the Trinity somehow interpenetrate one another, yet without confusion of substance or commingling of natures.” In other words, *perichoresis* can well be translated as “co-mingling” or “inter-mingling” or “inter-penetration” of the two natures of Christ. Kearney, however, interprets the term as relating to an active inter-relationship with both the Trinity and His creatures. The relationship that we enjoy with the divine is pictured as a “divine or celestial dance.” Kearney (2001:110) adds, “If God has created the world for us, we recreate the world for God. We carry each other within; we give birth to each other. And when we do, we cannot tell the dancer from the dance.” The God of Kearney is made vulnerable and contingent upon His creatures; He is a God who is always moving, dancing and possibilizing, but also a God who has made Himself weak or absolutely immutable. Kearney, like Mark Taylor, denies the God as articulated in the Scriptures. Kearney (2010:57-81) concludes that the God upheld by Christians for millennia cannot be spoken of in our contemporary culture, especially in light of the horrors of the Holocaust. When we speak of God, we speak of “something that gestures
toward a divinity that may be in flesh and blood, here and now” (Kearney, 2010:57). God is seen in the Stranger to whom we must show hospitality. In other words, the God of transcendence is dead and gone; God is now reduced to *imago hominis*.

One of the hallmarks of postmodern theology is its inclusivity; it is unthinkable in our contemporary society to be religiously exclusive and prefer or promote one religion over another. It is not surprising, in light of Kearney’s view of God, that his philosophy of religion is overtly pluralistic. He is not promoting one religion or a syncretistic whole, but the very *modus operandi* of Kearney’s “anatheism” is the recognition of the distinctive paths of each particular wisdom tradition. Without this recognition of distinctiveness “there can be no opening to what is not ourselves,” thus there can be no real sense of hospitality (Kearney, 2010:175). It is only through hospitality that we can recognize something that is not in our own tradition, according to Kearney. In short, we must be open to learn from other religions and expose ourselves to the Gods of other traditions, lest “we take the risk of dying into our own” (Kearney, 2010:181). Kearney clearly does not dismiss the Christian tradition, or his interpretation of it, but does not in any way elevate this tradition above other religious expressions.

The lack of certainty regarding the doctrine of God also characterizes the theology of John Caputo, professor of religion at Syracuse University, who reshapes the doctrine of God a little bit more radically than Richard Kearney. Kearney and Caputo titled their books, *The God Who May Be* and *A Theology of Perhaps* respectively, strongly accentuating this very principle of uncertainty. John Caputo, relying heavily on Derrida and Nietzsche, is far more extreme in his assessment of who or rather what the God of postmodernity really is. Whereas Kearney’s view of God has some semblance of clarity, Caputo radically undercuts all comprehensibility. God, according to Caputo (2013:14), does not exist as Being, as in classical theology, but His very existence depends solely on our response. Caputo most ambivalently defines God as an “event,” and in his opinion, “the event is not what happens but what is going on in what happens, what is provocative about what happens” (Caputo, 2013:53). This means that we can never see God coming and, most ironically, “even God cannot see God coming” (Caputo, 2013:53). He is clear in his assessment that God is not a Being but rather the name of a deed that “speaks about the heart of our experience of the event” (Caputo, 2013:179), and where he (2006:299) states elsewhere, “the truth of the event is not a name but a deed.”

The theologians of the “perhaps,” or radical theologians, as Caputo calls them (and he counts himself among them), are open to new interpretations. Caputo likens the radical theologians to scientists who deal with the “perhaps” because they must protect the “revisability” of scientific explanations. Science, as theology, can change depending on the newest discoveries or
interpretations that can be presented at any time. Caputo completely ignores the last two thousand years of Christian tradition that has sustained Christian dogma up until the present. The doctrine of God’s sovereignty, the atoning work of Christ and the redemption of His people are being deconstructed and re-interpreted in order to keep pace with the wiles of human experience lest these doctrines lose their relevance to contemporary culture. Philosophical prowess and societal structures are dictating the Christian understanding of God, Christ and His Church, usurping and destroying two millennia of Christian dogma.

Up until now we have mostly looked at the more radical conclusions that were born out of a protest against the cold modernist rationalism that began with Descartes and continued with Kant. These could give us the impression that all seems lost theologically. It becomes clear that most postmodern theologians have a healthy fear for the fundamentalist reaction to the liberalism of the twentieth century and for good reason. The over-reaction of modern fundamentalist evangelicalism has painted a rather negative picture of Christianity that many do not want to be a part of. Most orthodox Christians would agree with fundamentalism as it was articulated by Gresham Machen. The term “fundamentalism” has fallen on hard times and is now negatively associated with anti-scientism, anti-intellectualism, and intolerance, to such an extent that most evangelicals have shied away from its affiliation. This is especially acute in the United States where right-wing evangelicalism is associated with a particular political party. Unfortunately, contemporary evangelicalism is equated with fundamentalism; therefore, theologians have scrambled to find new terms to call themselves, such as postevangelicals, postliberals, postconservative, etc. in order to disassociate themselves from the old guard and to remain somewhat relevant in the twenty-first century. An over-reaction is often the result, in both modern fundamentalism and postmodernism, resulting in a deviation from biblical Christianity.

Paul Lakeland (1997:30) is correct in identifying three responses to postmodernism, which he describes as radical postmodernism, moderate postmodernism and nostalgic conservative postmodernism. The first dismisses the traditional sense of God entirely, as we have already described above. The last group, who, according to Lakeland, are alarmed by postmodern culture but remain conversant with postmodernism, albeit reservedly and cautiously, but ultimately, emphasize a premodern understanding of Christianity. We can easily agree that the latter is the most preferred option. A central figure in the conversation that would be identified as a moderate postmodern is the philosopher at Calvin College, James K.A. Smith. His contributions are significant and cannot be ignored, and his attempt to positively incorporate postmodern principles in contemporary theology is commendable. The questions that must be asked, however, are: does James K.A. Smith capitulate to the postmodern principles and in so doing compromise the Gospel? And are we to consider his assertions valid in contemporary theology, or are his pronouncements
consistent with contemporary postmodernism? In other words, is James K.A. Smith as postmodern as he makes himself out to be?

Smith’s corpus of work has mostly been dedicated to the task of incorporating postmodern principles into contemporary theology, thereby trying to dismiss the fear that exists among evangelicals that postmodernity is anti-Christian and that its principles are antagonistic towards evangelicalism as we know it. In short, Smith endeavors to draw evangelicals out of their modern fundamentalist hiding place in order to engage positively and become conversant with the postmodern culture. Smith calls for a “persistent” postmodernism, which in his opinion works with the logic of the incarnation. It juxtaposes a postmodernism (“timid” postmodernism) that he sees as a modernism in despair because it “assumes a logic inherited from modernity, the so-called logic of determination” (Smith in DeRoo and Lightbody, 2009:10). The logic of the incarnation, which persistent postmodernism espouses, is informed by the narrative wherein the “transcendent, infinite Other condescends to finite immanence without loss or remainder” (Smith in DeRoo and Lightbody, 2009:17); thus it draws on the logic of Jesus as articulated in the Chalcedonian Creed, according to Smith. It can be argued that most evangelicals of all stripes have no issue with that, as long as this is what the “persistent” postmodern defends.

In one of his books, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, Smith is most clear in his attempt to appropriate the postmodern principles articulated by the aforementioned French philosophers. At closer examination, we come to realize that Smith must first Christianize the principles of all these philosophers before he can take them to church. Take for example Smith’s assessment of Lyotard’s incredulity toward metanarrative. Smith (2006:62-70) suggests that Lyotard’s metanarratives refer to grand theories that are self-evidently true and verifiable by a universal and autonomous Reason. If that is what Lyotard means we can agree with that. Is that, however, what Lyotard has in mind?

Lyotard (1993:17-19, 29) goes further than that; he suggests that no faith, including the Christian faith, should be privileged over another. This means that an objective truth, regardless of what we call it, has a place. Has God's revelation a place in the formation of a metanarrative or overarching objective truth, which could form our beliefs? It can and it should. Smith is in full agreement with Lyotard as he understands Lyotard’s definition of metanarratives, suggesting that in Lyotard we can find an ally and that “orthodox Christian faith actually requires that we, too, stop believing in metanarratives” (Smith, 2006:64). Smith (2006:69) asserts that the biblical narrative is not properly a metanarrative, and postmodernity is not necessarily an incredulity toward narrative or myth but that all knowledge is grounded in these. Can we not positively affirm that the biblical narrative is grounded in the metanarrative as articulated in the sixty-six books of the Bible? Smith (2006:79)
posits that the postmodern church recognizes that “its primary responsibility is to live the story for the world,” a statement with which we can agree, but would add that the story must be grounded in the larger story of the Bible. Smith (2006:74-75, emphasis mine) states, “But isn’t it curious that God’s revelation to humanity is given not as a collection of propositions or facts but rather within a narrative—a grand sweeping story from Genesis to Revelation? Is there not a sense in which we’ve forgotten that God’s primary vehicle for Revelation is a story unfolded within the biblical canon?” But is it not also true that propositions and facts are embedded in narrative?

In the final analysis, James Smith must realize here that, in this regard, he is actually more premodern than postmodern. We can understand his unease with modern fundamentalism and therefore his eagerness to distance himself from that way of thinking, but we do not necessarily need to espouse postmodern principles in order to object to modern assumptions. It is his opinion that if one wants to engage with postmodern philosophy and appropriate its principles for contemporary Christianity, one must alter and Christianize the postmodern presumptions in order to become conversant with the postmodern. It is possible to do so only after critically analyzing the postmodern principles. In this process we must be careful that we remain true to the biblical assumptions that, ultimately, trump the whims of postmodern aspirations which aim to deconstruct biblical doctrines and the propositional language used throughout the biblical narrative.

The philosopher Ronald T. Michener (2006:239), an American and a member of the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Belgium, makes a similar assertion and suggests an appropriation of non-Christian thought that can be critically applied to a careful re-contextualization which gleans the good and rejects the bad. As with James Smith he is careful not to thoughtlessly “christianize” radical postmodernism, however. In this process he is daring to engage postmodern thinkers (Michener, 2006:159-168; 239-240). We can commend both Michener and Smith for their attempt to remain abreast with the current thought within evangelical theology and their correctives in regard to modern rationalism. In this regard, they have given thought to postmodern philosophy that has reinterpreted and reconsidered the basic tenets of the Christian message as articulated in the Scriptures.

### 3.4 Theological Responses and a Postmodern Apologetic

Postmodern thinking in both philosophy and theology has serious repercussions in the way we engage with the unbeliever, the militant atheist or the skeptic. Depending on what side of the postmodern spectrum one stands, there is an opinion regarding apologetics and evangelism: from outright dismissal to friendly accommodation. Before we continue the study we must come to some kind of consensus of how to proceed. If we take the charges leveled against postmodernity,
including lack of certainty and accessibility to objective truth, we can imagine how these would negatively contribute to the task of apologetics. There is an overall unanimity among postmodern theologians, and that is the outright dissolution of modern apologetics mostly characterized by evidentialism or classical apologetics. Are they indeed apologetic “methods” that we must abandon or is there still some merit in using evidences and “proofs”? In order to know where we stand in our use of apologetics we would do well to look at postmodern voices and assess their usefulness in the continuing conversation. First we will hear from philosophers and theologians such as Myron B. Penner, Carl Raschke, and Brian McLaren, and then from some contemporary theological traditions such as Radical Orthodoxy, postliberalism, and postconservativism, to assess a way forward using more traditional voices from Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer.

3.4.1 The End of Apologetics or a New Apologetic?

The common consensus amongst theologians and philosophers is that apologetics has a place for the Christian but a radical change must be presented in order to be relevant and have the ear of the contemporary culture, according to the postmodern apologist. The categories that were used in post-Enlightenment apologetics, especially in the twentieth century, are counter-productive and hopelessly outdated. This is the belief of philosopher Myron B. Penner (2011:21ff) and theologian Carl Raschke (2004:133). Myron B. Penner, philosopher and Kierkegaard scholar, titled his latest book *The End of Apologetics*, which is somewhat of a misnomer, but shocking nonetheless. In his book he contends that both the apologetic method and the language we employ are remnants of an era gone by and are unintelligible to the postmodern ears. The rational defense of Christianity that supposedly makes Christianity intelligible is often misunderstood and overestimates rational warrant for belief.

Both Penner and Raschke have a disdain for modern apologetics and prefer to take their cues from existentialist Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (cf. Penner, 2011:9-12; Raschke, 2004:210-211). Penner (2013:9) refers to Kierkegaard and suggests, “The one who came up with the idea of defending Christianity in modernity is a second Judas who *betrays* the Christ under the guise of a friendly kiss.” It becomes quite clear that what Penner means is not apologetics *per se* that is a threat to Christianity but that the threat is a certain apologetic method that ignores the postmodern *zeitgeist* of today and continues in its modern rational arrogance to defend the Christian faith.

For that reason, Penner sets out to redefine an apologetic that is in tune with the contemporary culture. Christianity, according to Penner, is more a way or an invitation to live in the truth than it is a doctrine or a set of beliefs whose truths we can grasp and cognitively master; Christian truth-
telling involves our overall patterns of action and behaviour (Penner, 2013:127). This has become the apologetics of the postmodern, as Christina Gschwandter (2013:227) reiterates, in her book Postmodern Apologetics? She writes, “Faith must be expressed in concrete action on behalf of the poor, oppressed and suffering.” Carl Raschke calls for similar action, which he would define as a horizontal expression of the faith. He (2004:154) takes issue with the vertical expression, which he suggests is “the cognitive pattern of the modernist worldview.” Raschke, in similar fashion as Richard Kearney, believes that this is best expressed in charismatic Pentecostal circles, having contempt for the Reformed expression, which in Raschke’s opinion is hopelessly modern and outdated.

Both Myron B. Penner and Carl Raschke key in on the practical or incarnational aspects of apologetics and negate the traditional oral facet, which often devolves into a militant argument that seems counter-productive and un-Christian. Both Penner and Raschke are guilty of caricaturing traditional apologetics by creating straw man arguments to bolster their point. It is commendable to level a critique where one is needed and, unfortunately, modern apologetics can, and has, devolved in bitter arguments and debates that have resulted in little else than skepticism towards apologetics in general. As well, incarnational apologetics is an important aspect of apologetics that must be stressed, but an either/or approach results in a lopsided apologetic that fails to take into account the imperatives given to us in Scripture.

Another significant voice in the realm of postmodern theology and ecclesiology is Brian McLaren. A prolific writer in the areas of theology and apologetics, all without a formal degree in theology or philosophy, he has the ear of many (post)evangelicals. He holds the same opinion about modern apologetics as do Penner and Raschke. McLaren sees a need to re-think the way we do apologetics, the way we conduct church, and the way we view some of the moral imperatives and core doctrines of Scripture (McLaren, 2011:67ff and 207ff). As a former Calvinist, McLaren takes to task Calvinism, which he considers deterministic and controlling (McLaren, 2004:205ff; Burson, 2016:95-116), and thus counterproductive for a postmodern audience.

To be fair, McLaren takes more issue with modern Calvinists than with Calvin’s theology regarding the issue of determinism (McLaren, 2004:209-210). However, he deconstructs the core teachings of Calvinism in order to make Calvinism palatable to a more postmodern audience, all the while remaining overtly Arminian. By his own admission, he does not like the Arminian/Calvinism debate and would like nothing more than to eradicate the differences that exist between the two positions; unfortunately, by so doing he muddies the waters for both positions (cf. McLaren, 2006:205-238). Clearly he dislikes and dismisses Calvin’s theological concepts that are more difficult to grasp and, in the end, he endorses a kind of libertarian Arminianism that expresses itself
in the openness of God as articulated by Clark Pinnock, John Sanders and postmodern thinkers like Richard Kearney. McLaren admonishes many of the core doctrines from both theological spectra, but upon closer examination we see that, not unlike other postmodern theologians, he critiques the caricaturized and distorts views that are neither Calvinistic nor Arminian. By trying to give a corrective, McLaren deviates from traditional Christianity that he considers too Hellenized, which does not comport with the Hebraic form of Christianity that we must adhere to or defend. Are postmodern theologians right in accusing classical or traditional theology of being corrupted by Greek philosophy?

Brian McLaren, not unlike other postmodern theologians, takes issue with the apparent Hellenization of Christianity and the manner in which Christianity has been interpreted over the last two millennia. The common consensus is that postmodern theologians are able to return to a purely Hebraic interpretation and that the Hellenized Christianity of the Church Fathers must be left behind. McLaren affirms that he has denounced the so-called Theos, who is the God of Greek philosophy that the West has adopted for the past two millennia, and returns to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus (McLaren, 2011:98). McLaren is not the only theologian who denounces the so-called Hellenized gospel. The British bishop N.T. Wright (2011:54) in his book How God Became King and the late Canadian theologian Clark Pinnock (2001:65) in his book Most Moved Mover, to name two, do in similar fashion reject the Hellenized readings of Scripture that have infiltrated the minds of the modern Christian. The Roman Catholic theologian and Pope Joseph Ratzinger, or Benedict XVI (2004:94), is of the opposite mind and regards “the encounter between the faith and Greek philosophy as truly providential.” He suggests that Greek philosophical influence, which was present already as a result of the Septuagint, protected the divine sonship of Jesus from Greek mythological influences, as we can see in Jesus’ designation as articulated in the Creeds using the term homoousios (Ratzinger, 2004:90-94). It was Greek philosophy that maintained the Hebraic view of God and guarded it from Greco-Roman corruption.

Professor of New Testament Richard Bauckham has different reasons for accepting the Hellenistic notions in Western theology and reassures us that the West adhered to the Hebraic understanding of God. He notes that Greek philosophical categories “made it difficult to attribute true and full divinity to Jesus,” and it was a Jewish understanding that was open to the inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity (Bauckham, 1998:78). The very acceptance of Jesus as fully divine is a Jewish understanding but is articulated in Greek terminology. Bauckham, again, expresses that the creedal term homoousian, depicting Christ as the same substance as the Father, seems a capitulation to Greek categories, but in the context of the Nicene and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds the term functions “to ensure that this divine identity is truly the identity of the one and only God. In its own way it expresses the christological monotheism of the New Testament” (Bauckham, 1998:78-
79). In other words, ancient Greek christological expressions remained true to the Jewish monotheistic interpretations as were found in the Scriptures.

As a matter of fact, traditional Christian writers in the second century were adamant to maintain Hebraic categories set aside for the God of the Scriptures and fought against Greek influences that distorted the Christian faith as understood by the early Christians steeped in Hellenistic culture, as for instance seen in Irenaeus’s work Against Heresies (2012:309ff). The charge of Brian McLaren and other postmodern theologians that Christianity is distorted by the use of Hellenistic categories is unfounded and their accusers can be found guilty of chronological snobbery. Although it is true that Christianity was influenced by Hellenistic philosophy because of its growth within Greek culture, the Church Fathers and the Reformers remained true to the Scriptures and maintained a robust Hebraic monotheism that found its expression in the Trinity as articulated in the entire canon.

Brian McLaren, like so many other postmodern theologians and pastors, is extremely frustrated with modern fundamentalism as expressed in the early to mid-twentieth century. Their disdain for modernism has caused people like McLaren to re-interpret the major doctrines of the Bible most affected by fundamentalism, such as the authority of Scripture, the exclusiveness of Christ, the existence of hell, and moral aspects such as the gender issue that is most prevalent in North American evangelical churches (McLaren, 2011:67, 137, 173, 207). The reinterpretations of the major doctrines of Scripture bear significant weight on the way Christian apologetics must be carried out. Without Scripture as the authoritative word of God that is very clear on issues such as pluralism, universalism and morality, Christian apologetics becomes a rather hollow and superfluous enterprise. In order to avoid the need to defend the doctrines of Scripture, McLaren, much like Penner and Raschke, focuses on the more incarnational aspect of apologetics (McLaren, 2001:16).

3.4.2 Apologetics and the New Movements within Evangelicalism

Brian McLaren’s theology has a close affinity with several postmodern theological movements, especially when it comes to Christian apologetics. Four theological movements that are making serious inroads in North American seminaries and divinity schools are postliberalism, postconservatism, postevangelicalism, and Radical Orthodoxy, all of which are critical of the modern rationalism that expressed itself in early twentieth-century fundamentalism and late twentieth-century evangelicalism. Two of these movements, postliberalism and Radical Orthodoxy, are of particular interest for this study because of their relative interest in apologetics.

The theological consensus of these movements seems to be that a biblical theology based on the authoritative Word of God or a theology of revelation centred on Jesus Christ does not have the
same viability as it once had. A new and innovative alternative theology must colour the theological landscape of the twenty-first century to capture the attention of the seeker, the skeptic, and even the Christian.

The theological novelties must keep pace with the shifting cultural ethos, lest Christianity be relegated to the dusty archives of ancient and archaic beliefs. Modern theology has struggled to come to grips with the epistemological question regarding theological interpretations. As we have seen, two distinct theological foundations have developed over the past two hundred years, which can be identified as scriptural and experiential. The conservative branch of theology has opted for the former and liberal theology for the latter. Both conservative and liberal branches are modern theological expressions that postmodern theology is protesting. A new option must be presented, and postmodern theology has opted for postmodern conservative theology. Postliberalism, or the so-called Yale school, with close affinities to the theology of Karl Barth, is one branch of postmodern conservative theology that has become a significant force in evangelical circles.

George Lindbeck (1984:30-32), one of the more prominent spokespersons of postliberal theology, critiques the experiential-expressive model of theology, as in liberal theology, and suggests a move towards a cultural-linguistic alternative. Lindbeck (1984:33) explains, “A religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought.” According to postliberalism, religion is not a set of beliefs about the true and the good, but rather is an idiom that describes reality as “the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings and sentiments” (Lindbeck, 1984:33). Just like a language, which has both cognitive and behavioural dimensions, so does religion, according to Lindbeck, hence the cultural-linguistic comparison. We see a deviation from the liberal model of religion, which is merely being experiential and expressionist, but we also see a connection to liberal theology in that postliberalism does not concern itself with providing a theory of Christianity but with a theory of religion generally. As Nancy Murphy (1997:118) explains, “[postliberalism] assumes that Christianity is but one class of phenomena, all instances of ‘religion’.”

In a cultural-linguistic model of theology it is impossible to regard Christianity as the highest expression of faith. Lindbeck and postliberalism warn Christians about boasting of superiority. The warning might be justified, but Lindbeck, in so doing, excludes an explicit Christian witness. Lindbeck (1984:61-62) suggests that “one of the ways in which Christians can serve their neighbours may be through helping adherents of other religions to purify and enrich their heritages, to make them better speakers of the languages they have.” Salvation in Christ should not be our main concern, according to postliberalism, for ultimately, in death the final decision is made for or against Christ (Lindbeck, 1984:59). Lindbeck (1984:59) clearly expresses a universalist attitude and
explains, “We must trust and hope, although we cannot know, that in this dreadful yet wondrous end and climax of life no one will be lost.” Daniel Liechty (1990:90-91), a postliberal theologian, is clear in his view concerning other religions and affirms that “a postliberalism approach to other religious traditions seeks neither conversion from one religion to another nor a ‘ranking’ of the religions according to some external value system, nor in ‘unification’ of the religious traditions on some higher, transcendental level.” We must encourage those of other religions to seek their strengths from within their own tradition (Liechty, 1990:91).

It is somewhat surprising in light of postliberalism’s affinity with Karl Barth and neo-orthodoxy that the theological movement does adhere to a particular apologetic method. It is a fact that postliberalism opposes a certain brand of rationalistic apologetics (Michener, 2013; Frei, 2013), but favours an apologetic that has been dubbed ad hoc apologetics. William Werpehowsky (1986:284) is credited with the further development of this particular apologetic method and defines it as follows:

   An “ad hoc apologetics” would make a case for the reasonableness of Christian belief not by referring to some putatively neutral datum of experience to which the Christian religion conforms but rather through the skillful demonstration of how our common and every world in its variety really conforms to the biblical world.

Postliberalism is correct in suggesting that if we must provide empirical evidences or rational justifications prior to accepting the faith, apologetics is misguided. We should always hold to Augustine’s and Anselm’s dictum of “faith seeking understanding,” but the question remains, does postliberalism hold to that as well, or do postliberals mean something different? We can conclude that they do. Ronald Michener (2013:104, emphasis mine) explains the position of the postliberals, and correctly states that “Christianity is only understood by those who willingly submit themselves to the distinctive practices of the faith and are willing to live as Christians.” However, the moral influence that accompanies such practices, then, would provide the persuasive power of the Christian faith. In other words, the actions of the Christian faith, or the incarnational aspects of apologetics alone, are supposed to hold the persuasive power to lead someone into the saving knowledge of Christ. The persuasive reasoning and evidential arguments are disregarded and considered meaningless.

The postliberal has problems in speculating on the evidential arguments on the basis of their view of history. In a cultural/linguistic framework the Gospels have a religious function, and to attach historical categories to these stories is to deviate from the original religious intent. Hans Frei creates a new and a most ambiguous category, which he calls “history-like” (Frei,1974:14; 2013:143). In reaction to modern historians who “look with a jaundiced eye on those who appeal to miracles as
explanatory accounts of events,” Hans Frei suggests that the miraculous events narrated in Scripture are “history-like, (but not therefore historical and in that sense factually true)” and “indispensable to the rendering of a particular character, divine or human, or a particular story” (Frei, 1974:14). In other words, Hans Frei and other postliberals reject historical events and contend that if we would attribute historical values to the biblical narrative, we would lose the true meaning of the miraculous accounts, which are only history-like, not historical.

Another question that must be asked in regard to the apologetic method suggested by the postliberals is whether there is even a need for an apologetic, especially in light of their view concerning the inclusivity of Christianity in reference to interreligious relations. If, as postliberals like George Lindbeck suggest, a post-mortem salvation is a definitive possibility and if there is “no damnation outside the church,” apologetics would be a rather futile undertaking. William Placher (1989:167) still recognizes the need for an ad hoc apologetic in that “Christians can and should seek common ground with particular non-Christians on particular issues,” not necessarily to show them the light of Christ, but solely to work together with non-believers of all stripes to alleviate the social concerns around the world. We can commend the postliberals for their willingness to ease social concerns, their eagerness to cooperate with those outside the Christian faith, and their recognition that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to apologetics, but to withhold the Christian message rooted in the historical event of the resurrection would be to ignore the ample biblical imperatives. It is a precarious assumption to rely on the unbiblical notion that every human being is ultimately and expressly confronted by the gospel at the point of dying, and that it is only then “that the final decision is made for or against Christ, not only of unbelievers but also of believers” (Lindbeck, 1984:59).

A theological school of thought that counters modern rationalism somewhat differently than postliberalism is Radical Orthodoxy (RO). Radical Orthodoxy is broadly Catholic in its orientation and is committed to the ancient creeds and ecumenical councils (Milbank, 2005:25), but is not necessarily committed to a particular tradition, thus feeling free to “offer critiques of all existing Christian denominations in connection with a particular genealogy of Christian history” (Milbank, 2005:26). It must be noted that RO is neither modern nor premodern but, in many ways, postmodern; it draws from a variety of postmodern thinkers such as Wittgenstein, Lyotard and Derrida. The positive aspects of RO lie in the fact that it also draws from Church Fathers such as Augustine and Aquinas and it takes seriously the ecumenical councils.

The interest in Radical Orthodoxy for this study is twofold. Firstly, RO counters modernism in that it draws from Christian Tradition, and engages, albeit critically, postmodernity. The danger with RO, although it has affinities with Reformed orthodoxy, is that it does, at times, fall into the trap of
accommodationism, in which, as we have discussed above, theology capitulates to the whims of postmodernist culture in order to remain relevant to contemporary culture. Secondly, RO has an acute awareness of the need to engage with contemporary culture, thus placing high value on Christian apologetics. Graham Ward (2005:46), a spokesperson for RO, is adamant and states that besides apologetics being thoroughly christological with its focus on communicating the redemptive work of Christ, “[Christians] cannot remain indifferent to the social, political and economic circumstances in which they live.”

Positively, Graham Ward (2012:125) calls for the apologist to be a “hermeneut of culture,” who must speak to the culture and “assist the gospel in setting people free—from false desires, assumed needs, bewitching ideas, unreflected habits and substitutions for the real objects of their longing—to worship God and recognize the true orientation of the human heart towards such worship.” John Milbank (2012:xx) is adamant as well regarding the importance of apologetics and asserts, “[W]e need a mode of apologetics prepared to question the world’s assumptions down to their very roots and to expose how they lie within paganism, heterodoxy or else an atheism with no ground in reason and a tendency to deny the ontological reality of reason altogether.”

Radical Orthodoxy sees the task of apologetics as both evangelical and doxological, to “disseminate the good news, and to bring about cultural and historical transformations concomitant with the coming of the Kingdom of God” (Ward, 2005:43). RO also suggests an end to a particular brand of apologetics based on the autonomy of reason. Milbank (1993:1) affirms, “If my Christian perspective is persuasive, then this should be a persuasion intrinsic to the Christian logos itself, not the apologetic mediation of a universal human reason.” Here we see a connection between Radical Orthodoxy, postmodernity and Reformed apologetics. James K.A. Smith (2004:182) clarifies: “Milbank's account remarkably parallels the accounts of ‘new apologists’ in the Reformed tradition, such as Dooyeweerd (who analyzed the inner antinomies of apostate ground-motives), Cornelius Van Til, and Francis Schaefer.” Much like the aforementioned apologists, Milbank does not see apologetics as a syllogistic demonstration, as in classical apologetics, but rather as narrative persuasion. However, RO has such an aversion to reason that, seemingly, all use of reason has been done away with. Milbank (1993:330) states, “But my case is rather that it is only a mythos, and therefore cannot be refuted, but only out-narrated, if we can persuade people—for reason of ‘literary taste’—that Christianity offers a much better story.”

James Smith in his work Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology, in which he articulates and clarifies the thought of Radical Orthodoxy, suggests a close affinity between RO and Reformation thought as espoused by Dutch thinkers like Kuyper and Dooyeweerd. It is Smith's understanding that both RO and Reformed theology stand in protest to the Tübingen
school of thought that produced both liberalism and fundamentalism (Smith, 2004:41). Having points of agreement with Reformation theology does not mean an uncritical acceptance of Radical Orthodoxy. First, a word of caution must be submitted in regard to the theological leanings of RO. For the most part, RO is theologically situated within high Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. As common in Roman Catholic theology, Reformed theology and especially theology from the Calvinist persuasion does not often meet with approval, to say the least. We can agree that autonomous reason must be opposed, especially in light of the Reformed understanding of the effects of sin, but moving to a Roman Catholic ecclesiology with its high sacramentality must be met with a word of caution. Concerning RO’s ecclesiology and its sacramentality we can be in agreement with theologian Hans Boersma, who gives warning regarding RO beliefs. This becomes immediately apparent in Graham Ward’s assessment of the displacement of Jesus’ gendered body in the incarnation, the eucharist, the crucifixion, the resurrection and in the ascension. Ultimately, according to RO, Christ's gendered body has been replaced by the Church, in order to “move towards a Christology that is both cosmological and embodied; move toward that new construal of incarnation so longed for by some contemporary feminists, and glimpsed also by those involved in men’s studies and queer theory” (Ward, 2000:116). Hans Boersma recognizes this as well and affirms that RO’s understanding of reality brings with it a thinning of boundaries and identities, which are “at the very least always in flux and always dependent on human powers of persuasion” (Boersma, 2006:419).

For Graham Ward (2000:116) and RO, the thinning of the boundaries is realized in its doctrine of Christ. Christ's body has been transposed in his ascension, “where the Church is born within the space opened for redemption.” This thinning of the boundaries works itself out in the gender identification of Christ. Ward (2000:106) explains, “Our bodies, too, sexually specific, will perform in ways which transgress the gendered boundaries of established codes.” Ward and RO clearly capitulate to the cultural trends and theologize the culturally accepted obliteration of gender boundaries. John Milbank (2003:208) reiterates this further in his work Being Reconciled, where he states that we should have “no problem whatsoever with the idea that homosexual practice is part of the richness of God's Creation.”

Radical Orthodoxy, like other postmodern theologies, considers how we view God as culturally contingent. Graham Ward (2000:115) explains, “[S]ince we configure God always and only within our own categories, in terms of our creaturely realities, and since these categories and realities are also culturally and historically variable, so what we take to be ‘God’ is never the same in any culture or historical frame.” RO must admit that it has trouble confronting contemporary culture, regarding its sexual ethics; it can only theologically affirm what our culture has already socially accepted.
Another aspect that RO is unwilling to address is the matter of different faiths. Graham Ward (2000:257) is very clear in his work *Cities of God* as he states, “As Christians we have to suspend judgment concerning other faiths. We must suspend our judgment about those who pursue love, mercy, justice, and righteousness in other practices, in other communities, with other liturgies and symbolic exchanges.” Thus Graham Ward does not see apologetics as a challenge between secular culture and the Christian, in which the latter confronts culture with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but “the theologian’s task is to keep alive the vision of better things—of justice, salvation and the common good—and work to clarify the worldview conducive to the promotion of those things” (Ward, 2000:260). RO comes close to an emphasis on *praxis* of the Christian faith as an apologetic, as does postliberalism’s *ad hoc* methodology. It must be stressed that it is not an either/or but a both/and approach that is preferred. The Christian *praxis* is a powerful apologetic, as long as this *praxis* is rooted in the historical biblical ground-motive. Radical Orthodoxy then, placing a high priority on apologetics, must clarify how and what it is able to address.

Theologically RO appears to have close affinities with the Reformed tradition because of its Augustinian roots, and for that reason James K.A. Smith is far less suspicious of Radical Orthodoxy than Hans Boersma and finds far more commonalities between RO and the Reformed tradition. Smith even finds agreements between RO and Kuyperian thought and Dooyeweerdian philosophy, which is not fully shared by Milbank himself, who incidentally suggests that Kuyper’s understanding of theology was rather “bizarre and inadequate” (Milbank, 2004:14). Smith, by his own admission, baptizes Radical Orthodoxy in the waters of Reformed theology in order to maintain a theological conversation partner in the challenge to confront the contemporary culture. Nevertheless, a word of caution must be given and discernment must be encouraged regarding RO’s accommodationism.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Postmodernity, with its long history starting at the beginning of the twentieth century, has firmly taken root in North America. The postmodern ethos had been heavily influenced by European, and especially German, philosophy, which in turn was permeated with irrationalism inherited from the Vienna Circle and Nietzsche’s philosophy, all in protest of modern post-Enlightened rationalism. The Vienna Circle consisted of philosophers who began their quest to eliminate metaphysics, thus a tie to logical positivism is fundamental to the Circle’s essential thought. In other words, philosophical statements can only have true meaning if they are empirically verifiable. Original member of the Vienna Circle Victor Kraft (2007: Loc. 326) explains, “The Vienna Circle shares with traditional positivism the restriction of all positive knowledge to the special sciences and of
philosophy the logic of science.” The Circle disbanded a few years before the War in 1939 but continues to have extensive influence especially in the United States.

Irrationalism with its connection to the Vienna Circle has influenced a revived spirituality that found a new and enthusiastic audience which was largely disenchanted with traditional institutionalized religion and began calling themselves ‘nones’, or ‘spiritual but not religious’. This spirituality of contemporary culture is a mixture of westernized Eastern religion and Christianity that typically suits the postmodern mindset, and is characterized by an irrationalism and vitalism with its emphasis on experience. A personalized and individualistic spirituality caters to the postmodern culture, a culture that is characterized by pluralism and tolerance. Nietzsche’s philosophy found allies among a variety of different persuasions, from Lebensphilosophie (Lukács, 1980) to Nazism (cf. Aschheim, 1992; Whyte, 2008; Weikart, 2016), especially under the influence of Heidegger and Bäumler (Weikart, 2016:23) to postmodernism (Caputo, 2013). A variety of Nietzsche’s principles such as the end of metaphysics, the lack of certainty and truth, and his famous dictum “God is dead”, found fertile ground in postmodern theology. A renewed search for ways to articulate “God in a secular culture” became the new quest. God as Being, as expressed in the Scriptures, must be rethought and reinterpreted, according to postmodern theologians such as Mark C. Taylor, John Caputo and Richard Kearney. It has been their task to deconstruct orthodox Christianity in order to speak to a postmodern culture, which was influenced by postmodern Nietzschean philosophy that doubted the certainty of biblical Christianity and rejected objective truth.

The postmodern turn has had an enormous effect on the way theologians perceived the task of apologetics. By and large, the modern method with its appeal to empirical evidences (i.e., classical apologetics and evidentialism) has been scorned by most postmodern theologians. A renewed emphasis has been put on social justice as an apologetic and an ecclesiastical praxis as a way to attract seekers to the Christian faith. Unfortunately, many of the core doctrines of the Christian faith have been re-interpreted in order to keep Christianity relevant in a postmodern culture and thus have become rather difficult to defend.

Christian apologetics that is scripturally based, that is reliant on tradition and that holds to the dictum fides quaerens intellectum still speak to a postmodern culture. It would be a grave mistake to relegate Christian thinkers of the past to the dustbin, as if they had nothing to contribute. Reformed theology, espoused by the great Reformer Calvin, continues to be relevant and must be appropriated in our Christian apologetics suitable to a postmodern audience that has capitulated to the whims of secularism. The positive aspect of postmodernity is the recognition that autonomous reason, which modernity offered, is an ignis fatuus (deception) and ultimately puts humanity in the place of God.
We do well to heed the warning of the postmodernist and offer a corrective that comports to the biblical standard by looking back to the premodern epistemology of John Calvin. Calvin’s thought, as we shall see, is, in many facets, surprisingly compatible with postmodern thinking.
4.0 CALVIN AND APOLOGETICS

4.1 Introduction

To look for an explicit apologetic method in any of Calvin’s writings would be a futile endeavour indeed. Nowhere in all of Calvin’s works does the word “apologetic” appear, so to call Calvin an apologist in the more contemporary sense would be wrongheaded. In the sixteenth century, apologetics did not appear to be of central importance to the Reformers, as was the case for Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) some four hundred years earlier. The thirteenth century was one of philosophical and theological change with the import of Aristotelian thought through Islamic channels. Aquinas was thus far more deliberate in his philosophical defense of the Christian faith than the Reformers were in the sixteenth century. Their task was more polemical in character, levelled against the teachings of the established Roman Catholic Church. However, this does not mean that we cannot detect a measure of apologia in the works of the Reformers such as in Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion. Calvin starts his Institutes of the Christian Religion not unlike Tertullian, as an address to a political leader. Tertullian addresses his Apology to Roman rulers and Calvin to King Francis of France. Both men addressed their treatise in reaction to an imposed injustice done to fellow believers, and both tended to expose the flaws in the thinking of their addressees (cf. Calvin, 1960:9-31; Tertullian, 2004:2).

Tertullian’s Apology is fully recognized as a Christian apologetic work, whereas Calvin's treatise of the Christian faith concerns a theological apologetical polemic in opposition to the Roman Catholic expression of the Christian faith. Apparently public hatred was aroused by some regarding the evangelical doctrines espoused by the Reformation, which caused “bloody sentences to be meted out against this doctrine without a hearing” (Calvin, 1960:10). Calvin thought it necessary to give instruction and make confession before Francis I so that he “may learn the nature of the doctrine against which those madmen burn with rage who today disturb your [Francis’] realm with fire and sword” (Calvin, 1961:9). In exposing the errors of the accusers, Calvin hoped to “dispose the mind to give a hearing to the actual presentation of our case,” and so that he could regain the King’s favor by reading the defense of the Reformation doctrines (Calvin, 1960:31). In his preface to the Psalms, Calvin’s only biographical writing, the French Reformer gives the reason for publishing his Institutes, saying, “My objects were first, to prove that these reports were false and calumnious, and thus to vindicate my brethren, whose death was precious in the sight of the Lord” (Calvin, 2005b:xlii). The only reason for publishing his Institutes was to vindicate his brethren who were falsely accused of upending the social and civil order. Thus, Calvin’s Institutes can be regarded as an apologetic work, albeit not in the traditional sense. Calvin’s apologetic work is wholly in line with his definition of apologetics as found in his Commentaries on the First Epistle of Peter where
he states in his commentary on 1 Peter 3:16, “And this, as I think, is the meaning of the word 
apology, which Peter uses, that is, that the Christians were to make it evident to the world that they 
were far off from every impiety, and did not corrupt true religion, on which account they were 
suspected by the ignorant” (Calvin, 2005i:109).

Calvin’s explicit theology is extremely beneficial to help one arrive at a biblically faithful and 
thetically sound Christian apologetic that is, on the one hand, maybe surprisingly, in tune with 
some of the postmodern protests against modernity and, on the other hand, stands in stark contrast 
to postmodern thinking. As well, it can correct some of the misconceptions and erroneous theistic 
interpretations of contemporary postmodern theologians. In all, Calvin’s theology is valuable to 
construct a Christian apologetic that speaks to the postmodern skeptic, to correct a confused 
postmodern spirituality, and to rectify erroneous conceptions of God that are so prevalent in 
postmodern theology.

It is not the goal of this study to put words in the mouth of Calvin, to have him say things he never 
intended to say, or even to make him out to be some proto-postmodern, but to listen to Calvin in 
order to employ a solid theological grounding in the task of our Christian apologetic that is effective 
in our contemporary environment. On the one hand, we can agree with Richard Muller (1999:188), 
who asserts that “a faithful theologian will seek to listen to Calvin, not to use him,” but on the other 
hand, we cannot leave Calvin in the sixteenth century, as if he has nothing important to contribute 
in the twenty-first century. Although Calvin addressed a particular audience for a particular purpose 
pertinent in the sixteenth century, he remains relevant for us today.

There are several aspects of Calvin’s theology that are significant for an apologetic that is most 
effective. One of the aspects most pertinent concerns the issue of knowledge—who we are as 
human beings and how we arrive at the knowledge of who God is. Another matter, and connected to 
the previous issue, is the more hotly debated subject of natural theology and the use of evidences. 
This issue appears to be a point of contention for many postmodern philosophers who have denied 
the legitimacy of Christian apologetics for just this reason. Lastly, on the more positive side, 
postmodern apologists have emphasized the incarnational aspect of apologetics with which Calvin 
would readily and wholeheartedly agree (McLaren, 2006:17; Metzger, 2012:3-12). The French 
theologian, however, would not create an either/or dichotomy but would affirm a both/and 
approach. This means that the Christian life that Calvin proposed can be an effective Christian 
apologetic and also that persuasion can be employed as far as this is grounded in the biblical 
witness. Thus, at closer examination we discover the riches of Calvin’s theology, distinct in neo-
Calvinist thought that can be applied to a Christian apologetic that speaks to an audience steeped in 
postmodern principles but, ironically, longs for structure and certainty.
4.2 Calvin in Context

The mere mention of Calvin can cause some to conjure up images of a cruel despot wielding enormous influence in the city of Geneva trying to create a theocracy that squashed the joy from all its inhabitants. Bruce Gordon (2016:9) poses the question, “If Doctor Frankenstein were to create a Calvinist monster out of the enduring clichés, what would emerge from the laboratory?” He answers his own question by stating,

> Probably a self-righteous, wealthy workaholic, who thinks everything to be exploited for profit, and, driven by guilt, feels himself superior to others but cannot decide whether God loves him or hates him. If required to make a decision about things divine or human, he would create a committee from which he would split. And it goes without saying that the monster would be humourless company.

Calvin has been accused of many things, not the least of which was the murder of Servetus. The execution of Michael Servetus on October 27, 1553 has dogged the French Reformer for centuries. Without the slightest knowledge of the context of the execution, some have condemned Calvin for his participation, regardless of the degree of support and cooperation Calvin gave the Genevan magistrates (Bernard Cottret, 2000:205). As a matter of fact, Servetus, already condemned to die as a heretic in Vienne from where he escaped six months earlier, was re-tried in Geneva. It was actually the Council of Geneva (the petit Conseil) and the churches from Zürich, Basel, Bern and Schaffhausen who condemned Servetus to die on the stake as a heretic. Calvin, involved in the trial mostly at the request of Servetus, did not pronounce the death sentence upon Servetus and even endeavoured to change the mode of execution, but did so in vain (Kayayan, 1992; Tweedie, 1846).

Theologically, Calvin is, unfortunately, best known for the doctrine of double predestination and the creation of the acronym TULIP, although Calvin had never seen a tulip in his life and really cannot be credited for this description of Reformed theology. As a matter of fact, it was Lorraine Boettner (1901-1990) who was the one to first use this acronym (Gordon, 2016:154). At closer inspection we discover a brilliant theologian with a heart for the Church and an intimate knowledge of the Scriptures and the writings of patristic and medieval theologians. The doctrines that Calvin espoused were the doctrines of the Church. It can be stated that Calvin was not original in any of his doctrinal elaborations, but adopted those already adhered to by the patristic writers and especially Augustine. Richard Muller (1999:7) asserts as well that Calvin’s originality” must be sought more in the manner of presenting Christian doctrine, in the way he received, incorporated, or modified forms and arguments of patristic and medieval theology, in his particular fusion of older theological substance either with his own exegetical results or with Renaissance rhetorical forms, and in the nuances that he gave to the elements of extant tradition.”
The disdain for Calvin is often the result of trying to see the theology articulated by the French Reformer through the grid of contemporary theology, ignoring the sixteenth-century context in which Calvin lived and worked. It is easy to fall into the temptation to create a particular contemporary Calvin that addresses the issues of our time. We must remember that our issues were not Calvin’s issues and vice versa. For example, Calvin did not deal with issues such as science and faith, evolution, or many of the New Atheists’ challenges to the Christian faith. This does not mean that Calvin’s theology is essentially silent when the Church has to deal with these contemporary issues. We can agree with Abraham Kuyper (1931:41) who stated more than eighty-five years ago in his Lectures on Calvinism that we must return to Calvinism, “not to restore its worn-out form, but once more to catch hold of the Calvinistic principles, in order to embody them in such a form as suiting the requirements of our own century.” T.H.L. Parker (1952:4) also observed that Calvin “is not willing to remain buried in the sixteenth century, but comes forward to carry on a theological discussion in his incisive manner with us today.”

In order to address the issues of today and appropriate Calvinistic principles in our apologetic method, we must come to grips with Calvin’s theology, especially the doctrines that are most crucial for apologetics, such as his doctrines of faith, knowledge, natural theology and the use of general revelation. As we will see, many of the postmodern principles must be repudiated in light of Calvin’s theology, especially those espoused by Nietzsche and irrationalism, but some, such as the postmodern disdain for the Enlightenment’s adherence to autonomous reason, can be aligned with Calvin’s thought.

4.3 Calvin’s Theological Distinctive

There are many opinions regarding the validity of Calvin’s thought and its appropriateness to the method of apologetics. Reformed theology has been divided on the issue of whether or not apologetics is even welcomed or legitimate in light of Calvin’s theology. Abraham Kuyper had very little faith in an apologetic method, although he recognized the discipline as a legitimate branch of theology (1898:160, 167, 366, 664). B.B. Warfield, in the introduction to Francis Beattie’s Apologetics or Rational Vindication of Christianity, lamented the fact that Abraham Kuyper, not necessarily abolishing apologetics altogether, hid it away as a subdivision of a subdivision in his Encyclopaedia of Sacred Theology (Beattie, 1903:21). Other Reformed theologians such as Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer welcomed Calvin’s theology and, in the case of Van Til, constructed a particular method, using Calvin’s theology as a driving component, which he dubbed presuppositional or transcendental apologetics. Other philosophers, such as Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, appropriated a particular Calvinistic doctrine, the sensus divinitatis, to affirm

Reformed apologetics can embrace Calvin’s theology, even though the French Reformer never mentioned the apologetic task and never affirmed a particular philosophy. However, the theology espoused by Calvin is thoroughly biblical and thus is fitting to incorporate and appropriate into a thoroughly Reformed and biblical apologetic. In order to understand the relevancy of Calvin’s theology to Christian apologetics we must investigate Calvin’s theological distinctive in regard to the knowledge of God and of ourselves and the place of reason within this. These particular issues are germane, especially in light of the postmodern response to contemporary apologetics.

4.3.1 The Place of Reason in Calvin’s Thought

One of the more important but contentious issues in the way we approach the task of apologetics is the matter of reason in the natural human being. The issue of knowledge in relation to the noetic effects of the Fall and, subsequently, whether or not autonomous reason is able to grasp the things of God, are pertinent questions that have occupied the minds of theologians for centuries. Calvin gives answers to these questions throughout his writings. There are times when it seems as though Calvin attributes knowledge of God significantly to the natural mind, until he dashes all hopes of any knowledge of God unless illumined by the Spirit of God (Calvin, 1960:43-74, 290). Calvin strikes a delicate balance but is unapologetic in his judgment of autonomous reason and his praise for the mercy of God. Calvin’s view regarding human reason stands in stark contrast to Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment ideal, ideas which elevated the natural ability of human reason.

Nicolaas Vorster (2014:2) is correct in stating that, before we condemn Calvin for emphasizing the perverted nature of human reason, we must consider Calvin’s theological framework measured in light of sixteenth-century scholasticism “that exhibited optimism in the human’s ability to know things as they really are.” Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth century Roman Catholic theologian, along with the medieval scholastics, is very clear in expressing natural human abilities. In his Summa Theologica Aquinas lays out natural reason and its innate ability to understand God based on the fact that we are created in God’s image. Aquinas (1945:898) declares, “Thus the image of God is found in the soul according as the soul turns to God, or possesses a nature that enables it to turn to God.” Aquinas replies to the objection that if it is only by grace that we can know and love God then the image of God is not in us by nature but by grace, and thus not common to all. He states (1945:899, emphasis mine), “Yet there is a certain natural knowledge and love, so too, it is natural that the mind can make use of reason in order to understand God.” Humans have a natural
aptitude for understanding and loving God (Aquinas, 1945:890). It is clear in Thomas’ writing that there can be a natural knowledge of God. Juvenal Merriel (2005:134) affirms this as well and insists that “Aquinas does allow that man can know and love God in the state of nature unaided by grace.” Calvin stands in contrast to Aquinas and scholastic theology and emphasizes human reliance upon God to understand and love him.

In his writings, Calvin gives three distinct aspects of human reason set forth in his argument regarding our apprehension of God. He mentions in his Tracts Containing Treatises on the Sacraments that there are three kinds of reasons to be considered: reason as naturally implanted, another kind of reason which is vicious, especially in corrupt nature, and the third kind of reason, “which both the Spirit of God and Scripture sanction” (Calvin, 1849:512). Calvin points to human reason firstly in the prelapsarian state, secondly the state of human reason in the postlapsarian plight, and lastly, reason redeemed by the Spirit of God. These conditions of reason, as we shall see, affect the manner in which we are able to apprehend, understand and love God, as well as our capacity to grasp reality.

### 4.3.1.1 Human Reason in the Prelapsarian State

Calvin’s view concerning human intellect and reason and its ability to apprehend truth is closely tied to the initial state of humanity and the subsequent Fall. In his Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Calvin makes abundantly clear that mankind’s initial state was one of pure wonder, which deserved contemplation unlike all other aspects of creation. Calvin (2005a:92) boasts, “Man is, among other creatures, a certain pre- eminent specimen of Divine wisdom and justice and goodness, so that he is deservedly called by the ancients, ‘a world in miniature’.” We are created in the untainted image of God, which is guided by pure reason with its ability to apprehend our Maker. Calvin (2005a:95) states, “In the mind perfect intelligence flourished and reigned, uprightness attended as its companion, and all the senses were prepared and moulded for due obedience to reason; and in the body there was a suitable correspondence with the internal order.” In that regard, there exists a definite distinction between mankind and the rest of creation, but lest mankind falls into pride because of its superiority, Calvin (2005e:32) stresses that “it is not in vain that God imparts his light to their minds, it follows that the purpose for which they were created was that they might acknowledge Him who is the Author of so excellent a blessing.” This excellent blessing is that humanity has been endued with reason, and thus has obtained a higher rank. The mind and the body worked in unison to the glory of God the Creator.

For Calvin, the image of God and proper reason are closely connected. The seat of the image of God is in the human soul which is endowed with proper understanding and reason. Charles Partee
(2011:4), confirms this and states that “the image of God extends to the body, but the proper seat is the soul.” Thus the image of God in Adam’s original integrity meant the full possession of right understanding. The divine image was in the mind and heart and shone forth in all parts, so Adam in his prelapsarian state was able to apprehend his maker and obey with all his affections. According to Calvin (2005a:95), “Adam was endued with a right judgment, had affections in harmony with reason, had all his senses sound and well regulated and truly excelled in everything good.”

4.3.1.2 The State of Human Postlapsarian Reason

The fall of the original humans as described in Genesis had devastating consequences on their ability to apprehend God and to interpret the reality into which they were originally placed. At times Calvin seems to be of two minds regarding the extent to which the image of God was affected by the Fall. Calvin (2005a:94) suggests that the image of God, with its untainted reason marked by perfect obedience to God, was destroyed. However, in his Institutes, Calvin (1960:189) reminds us that the image of God was not totally annihilated and destroyed but was “so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity.” Again in his commentary on Genesis, Calvin (2005a:95) is adamant regarding our postlapsarian dullness of mind and affirms that the image of God is so maimed and so deformed that it may be truly said to be destroyed.

The human fall into sin brought about the most calamitous effects regarding our proper reason. Calvin clearly and decisively rules out our capacity to use proper reason to grasp God after the Fall. He (2005a:155) insists, “But after they had given place to Satan’s blasphemy, they began like persons fascinated, to lose reason and judgment; yea since they were become the slaves of Satan, he held their very senses bound.” Again, Calvin (2005d:39) states in his Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah that even though man remains a reasonable being and is able to hear the voice of God, he “remains unmoved, like one bereft of his senses, and cannot bend the neck to submit to him.” The natural person is unable to apprehend God without the prevenient grace God provides, as Calvin (2005e:34) confirms: “natural reason never will direct men to Christ.”

Trying to penetrate into heaven using autonomous reason is not a modern phenomenon, for Calvin already admonished those who in vain made the attempt to gain access to God autonomously (Calvin, 1960:67). Barry Waugh (2010:9) explains, “This is vicious reason, which is audacious, arrogant and autonomous. It is folly to seek redemptive knowledge of God through any means other than through his Word.”

Calvin in his response to Albert Pighius’ controversial comments regarding original sin and his denial of the corruption of human nature as a result of the Fall, asserts that “man’s mind is smitten with blindness, so that of itself it can in no way reach the knowledge of the truth; we say that his will is corrupted by wickedness, so that he can neither love God nor obey his righteousness”
We are despoiled of the gifts including reason and now are prone to do every evil; mankind is subjected to death, declares Calvin. The ability to apprehend God and to perfectly obey one’s Maker is lost. The question immediately arises whether reason is so utterly destroyed that humans are incapable of doing anything reasonable. Common sense and experience seem to deny our utter incapability to perform reasonably.

The French Reformer makes it abundantly clear that our fallen mind is utterly incapable of searching and apprehending God. Having made this clear, Calvin (1960:270) does, however, carefully articulate that “reason by which man distinguishes between good and evil, and by which he understands and judges, is a natural gift; it could not be completely wiped out, but it was partly weakened and partly corrupted, so that its misshapen ruins appear.” Calvin affirms that by natural instinct we have an awareness of divinity or a divinitatis sensum or seed of religion and have the ability to make the distinction between good and evil. God himself, according to Calvin (1960:43), “has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty.” Calvin (2005e:34) also assures us that this divinitatis sensum does not mean that we in our natural capability seek God, but only renders us inexcusable, for ultimately the fruits of the religion “degenerates into a thousand monsters of superstition.” As far as the heavenly things are concerned “the human being is totally blind” (Vorster, 2014:6).

Calvin makes sure to confirm that humans remain rational beings who differ in that respect from brute beasts. He makes a distinction between two kinds of understandings: one of heavenly things and another of earthly. As already discussed, we are incapable of apprehending the heavenly things in our postlapsarian state, but in the arrangement of this life we are not without the light of reason. In other words, in regard to the things that concern this present life such as government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts, we have a universal apprehension of reason and understanding by nature implanted in us; even then, the Reformer leaves nothing out of the gracious hands of God (Calvin, 1960:272-273). Calvin affirms that, although there is evidence that testifies to a universal apprehension of reason and understanding, or a natural light, this is a free gift of His beneficence to all people (Calvin, 1960:273). The human mind, according to Calvin (1960:273), “although it is fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts.” Calvin (1996:167) calls this grace, “grace of creation” or “general grace” that is implanted in our nature; it is the common possession of everyone.

This common grace, as it would become known, is by no means efficacious, and Calvin carefully articulates that although we are endowed with reason and understanding, there are limits to our understanding. The grace that God has bestowed upon mankind functions in the tasks of daily life and can even “enable us to competently read apt statements about God here and there in the
philosophers, but these always show a certain giddy imagination” (Calvin, 1960:277). Calvin wants to impress upon his audience that reason is proper to our nature and that traces of the image of God remain in us, which distinguishes us from the other creatures, but that ultimately we are utterly hopeless in our discernment of God. In contrast to the Thomists he dismisses any trace of natural ability to apprehend God, “because man’s keenness of mind is mere blindness as far as the knowledge of God is concerned” (Calvin, 1960:278). In order for us to acquire proper knowledge of God, we must rely on the Spirit of regeneration.

4.3.1.3. Restored Reason and the Knowledge of God

In order for people to come to a proper knowledge of God, the mind, or reason, must be restored. When Calvin approaches the topic of our redemption, he explicitly mentions reason or mind in relation to God’s work in fallen mankind by initiating faith and restoring a proper knowledge of Himself. In his commentary on the book of Ephesians Calvin (2005h:295) affirms that as part of our holy life we are to be renewed “not only with respect to the inferior appetites or desires, which are manifestly sinful, but with respect also to that part of the soul which is reckoned most noble and excellent.” What Calvin means is the reason or the mind, “the Queen which philosophers are accustomed almost to adore.”

Calvin (1960:279) states that the words of Christ have no power unless “the Lord through his Spirit gives understanding.” In other words, the mind remains ignorant of the mysteries of God unless bestowed with the gift of illumination. Calvin (1960:279) insists, “It therefore remains for us to understand that the way to the Kingdom of God is open only to him whose mind has been made new by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.” Barry Waugh (2010:21) also affirms that “only the Christian enjoys the privilege of plumbing the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God through the grace of redemptive reason.”

Calvin wants to make sure we understand that knowledge of God is not attributed to human reason but to the work of God alone. Reason, then, is assumed to be redeemed and mankind is liberated from the bondage of ignorance. Calvin carefully explains that our apprehension of God is a supernatural gift that God bestows upon His elect. In The Bondage of the Will (not to be confused with Luther’s work of the same title), he reiterates this fact and adds that we exist and move in two distinct senses: one sense as human beings and the other as sons of God—the former endowed with the grace of creation implanted in our nature, and the latter graced with a supernatural gift only given to the elect (Calvin, 1996:167). Calvin posits that the natural human person, who depends upon the light of nature, or natural reason, is closed to God’s spiritual mysteries and whose mind must be made new by the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Calvin, 1960:279). Thus, to apprehend
God and to know Him, not as He is in His essence (quid sit Deus), as the scholastics assumed was possible, but rather as of what sort He is (qualis sit Deus), our minds must be renewed.

Proper reason, or as Calvin (1960:35-37) puts it, “sound wisdom,” consists of two parts: knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves. The knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are indispensable ingredients for true wisdom, according to Calvin. He asserts that we must look at ourselves in order to contemplate God, for we are nothing but subsistence in the one God, or as John Frame states, “we are an especially important form of God’s self-disclosure” (cited by Hart et al., 2011:294). But we must see ourselves for who we really are in light of who God really is. It is only when we are prompted by our own ills that we contemplate the good things of God; “we cannot seriously aspire to Him before we begin to become displeased with ourselves” (Calvin, 1960:37). Do we see who we really are and contemplate our own unrighteousness on our own accord? By no means, as Calvin (1960:37) asserts, “it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face.” This is only possible when God graciously intervenes and grants us faith, which Calvin (1960:551) defines as “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

Calvin remains consistent and contends that we must apprehend God, not in our own cogitations, but we must be “carried up into heaven with the wings of faith” (2005g:160). Faith is indispensable in the two sources that God provides for us to be able to apprehend him: creation and Scripture. Unless our eyes are illumined by the inner revelation of God through faith, we are unable to grasp “the invisible divinity” that is apparent in nature. In the same way, Scripture is indistinguishable without the aid or the light of faith (Calvin, 1960:68). Calvin clearly stresses that faith must precede all knowledge of God. In other words, Calvin stands in the tradition of Augustine and Anselm who, regarding the knowledge of God, both presupposed faith. Augustine (1888:Loc. 7775) clearly states, “Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.” Anselm (1952:7) in a similar vein, asserts in his Proslogion, “I long to understand, in some degree, your truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand (credo ut intelligam). For this also I believe, that unless I believed, I should not understand.”

4.4 Taking the Postmodern to Geneva

After laying the groundwork in our understanding of Calvin’s theological distinctive we can appeal to postmodern thinkers who have applied postmodern principles to their theology, in order to identify whether or not there is a point of contact, or to see how Calvin can provide the proper
correctives which can ultimately assist us in providing a proper apologetic method suitable to contemporary culture. In order to do this we must take the postmodern to Geneva and look at some of the characteristics of postmodern spirituality and postmodern theology, allow Calvin to offer a corrective, and grant the Reformer a renewed hearing to show that, despite the chronological distance, Calvin can offer hope and a theological structure in a rather fragmented world. The aspects most contentious to the postmodern are the authority of Scripture, the matter of objective truth, and the exclusivity of Christianity. Many of these aspects have been addressed in the previous chapter, but here we will weigh the issues in light of Calvin’s theology.

4.4.1 Calvin, Postmodernity and Scripture

A central tenet of Calvin’s theology is the authority of Scripture. Calvin makes clear his high view of Scripture and does not question its authoritative value (Calvin, 1960:69-96). It is not just the contemporary apologist who must deal with skeptics who are making feeble attempts to discredit Scripture and question its authority, for Calvin also had to contend with those who disputed the authenticity of Scripture. He (1960:88) lashed out against those who “bawl out in corners in order to display the keenness of their wit in assailing God’s truth.” Calvin devotes several sections of Chapter viii of Book I of his Institutes to defending the authenticity and authority of Scripture. He begins with Moses and continues with the prophets, then the Gospels, and ends with the fidelity to the Word by the martyrs. Having given these confirmations, Calvin (1960:92) ultimately credits the certainty of Scripture to the “inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit.” It becomes clear that Calvin lays great value upon Scripture as a sure way to know God. His view regarding Scripture’s authority is undaunted and he unequivocally acknowledges that “the principal purpose of Scripture is to lead disciples into a more discerning engagement with God and with the world as a divine gift and mirror of God” (Boulton, 2011:109). To this end, Calvin must confront the postmodern perspective on the Scriptures.

4.4.1.1 Metanarrative, Deconstruction and Language in Light of Scripture

One of the characteristics of postmodernity is skepticism, especially regarding authority. This skepticism is leveled against any religion, especially the Christian faith and its Scriptures. Many who can be identified as “spiritual-but-not-religious”, or “nones” as Linda Mercadante describes them, have abandoned Scripture altogether because of their disdain for any kind of religious authority (Mercadante, 2014:1; cf. Bibby, 2002). Calvin (1960:93) warns that those “who have forsaken Scripture, or imagine some way or other of reaching God, ought to be thought of as not so
much gripped by error as carried away with frenzy.” Those who still consider themselves evangelical are investigating new ways of reading the Bible and are posing questions such as, “Can ancient Scriptures still (be made) to speak in the postmodern world?” (Havea, 2007:547). In a recent interview with Oprah Winfrey, the former American evangelical pastor Rob Bell suggests that the Bible is not relevant to today’s culture (Bell, 2015). The issues our contemporary culture are struggling with are complex and an ancient document has very little to say about these matters, according to Bell. In other words, the Bible does not have any authority over the affairs of contemporary culture. Similarly, American biblical scholar and teacher Peter Enns voices similar concerns and concludes that a reinterpretation of many of the ancient biblical stories is needed to fit the paradigm of the contemporary audience (Enns, 2014; 2019).

Others have not been so dire and are willing to give some level of influence to the Scriptures, albeit on their own terms and according to their own interpretation, especially regarding the legitimacy of the over-arching narrative, or meta-narrative present in Scripture. Metanarratives, including the biblical metanarrative, are controlling and dominating, according to postmodernist Jione Havea (2007:553) who asserts that “we must avoid one biblical narrative (such as John’s understanding of Jesus) to control the meanings of all other (biblical and non-biblical) narratives.” One grand narrative leaves little room for dialogue between other religions; accepting a biblical metanarrative is too exclusive, according to Havea (2007:556). According to the postmodern, the Bible is made up of narratives or stories, independent of the grand narrative, that are in conversation with narratives from people of different faiths. Jione Havea (2007:555-557) suggests that the emphasis on the marginalized in respect to race, class and gender dictates how to read all narratives including Scripture. The true grand narrative, or over-arching story of Scripture, must be ignored so as to make room for all other non-biblical stories.

Rightly, however, the postmodern points to the fact that narrative discourse has changed through the centuries. Walter Fisher (1987:24, 49) asserts:

Rational discourse had by the twentieth century come to be thought of as occurring primarily in philosophical and technical discourse … and technical logic had reified reason to mathematical symbolic form, and rhetorical logic had continued its tradition of conceiving of reason as a form of argumentative proof.

It is indeed that misconstrued conception of narrative discourse that must be corrected. It is a fact that human beings are inherently storytellers, as the Bible can attest to, and as Fisher (1987:24) claims: “[human beings] have a natural capacity to recognize the coherence and fidelity of stories they tell and experience.” This coherence of stories can be recognized in Scripture as the metanarrative of love. Thus, with the postmodern, we agree on the importance of stories but we
must disagree in their seeming aversion to the coherence of the grand story that exists throughout Scripture.

Calvin recognizes the presence and the importance of stories in Scripture, but does not in any way see them as independent from the grand story starting in Genesis and ending in Revelation. He is consistent throughout his *Institutes* and his commentaries that the grand story of the Bible is” Christ the hope of glory”. This is what drives all other stories, and if we unhinge any story that the Bible contains from the knowledge of Christ, we hopelessly miss the point. Postmodern readers like Jione Havea have indeed fragmented the Scriptures to make room for other fragmented stories, which has resulted in an array of pointless stories that say whatever they want them to say. By looking for a narrative independent of the biblical metanarrative and making room for narratives that do not recognize Christ as Lord, the Bible has been made irrelevant. Calvin (1960:71) does not recognize any other narrative as profitable and urges us to learn from Scripture that “God, the creator of the universe, can, by sure marks, be distinguished from all the throng of feigned gods.”

Others have a more positive view of how to deal with the postmodern incredulity concerning metanarratives. For example, James K.A. Smith (2006:59-79) makes an attempt to convince the contemporary audience that they ought to reject the modern notion of metanarrative, but does not agree with Havea’s interpretation of Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of metanarrative. According to Smith’s (2006:64-65) assessment of Lyotard, “the problem isn’t the stories but the way they tell them (and to a degree, why they tell them).” The focus for Lyotard, according to Smith (2006:65), concerns the “supposed rationality of modern scientific stories about the world that makes them a metanarrative.” In other words, the metanarrative, as a modern phenomenon, is concerned only with scientific stories and these stories claim to be demonstrable by reason alone. With this we can agree, if it is what Lyotard meant, and according to Smith this is indeed the case. It is the opinion of Smith (2006:65) that the biblical narrative falls outside of the scope of Lyotard’s interpretation because it concerns a proclamation that demands a response. As already alluded to in the previous chapter, Smith’s assessment, however, does not comport with Lyotard (1992:25), who is far more direct and admits that all metanarratives have lost credibility, including the “Christian narrative of the redemption of original sin through love.” The Christian metanarrative, according to Lyotard and contrary to Smith’s assessment, falls under the same rubric as other modern political narratives such as the Marxist and capitalist narratives of emancipation, and thus should be rejected (Lyotard, 1992:25-30). Smith fails to realize that Lyotard includes the Christian narrative as a “modern” narrative of oppression and thus objectionable, and trying to change the interpretation does not change the fact that Scripture contains a metanarrative that makes universal claims about human nature.
Calvin (1960:71) is explicit in his explanation that “God, the Artificer of the universe, is made manifest to us in Scripture, and that what we ought to think of him is set forth there, lest we seek some uncertain deity by devious paths.” Scripture is not only authoritative in the true knowledge of God but the word of God in Scripture is “a luminous window through which disciples can see the world as it truly is: a ‘dazzling theatre’ of divine glory” (Boulton, 2011:110). The narratives of Scripture interpreted through the lens of the metanarrative are indispensable for the knowledge of God and the world.

On the one hand we can appreciate Jean-François Lyotard’s warning against modernity’s placement of people as sovereign over stories. On the other hand, we must reject Lyotard’s interpretation of the biblical metanarrative—“salvation through the conversion of souls to the Christian narrative of martyred love”—as strictly modern (Lyotard, 1992:18). This is the Christian message, reiterated by Calvin (2005g:62) and the biblical metanarrative challenges the notion of paganism, pantheism and autonomous or carnal reason (cf. Calvin, 2005g:1:18-23). We must reject the postmodern notion that the biblical narratives are of no greater value than all other narratives, as articulated by Jione Havea, and accept Calvin’s notion that only Scripture “gathers up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, disperses our dullness, and clearly shows the true God” (Calvin, 1960:70).

We must challenge the postmodern notion regarding the authority of Scripture and its incredulity towards metanarratives, especially in light of Calvin’s theological assumptions. In assessing the postmodern presumptions, we can conclude that the incredulity towards metanarratives has become the new metanarrative, as can be seen in Jione Havea’s assessment. In addition, the rejection of authority, especially biblical authority, has become the new authority. It is impossible to reject any authority and not replace the authority with a new authority. In the case of scriptural authority, the new authority in the postmodern context is the authority of self. In rejection of biblical authority the postmodern has given in to “a precarious authority dependent solely upon the good pleasure of men” (Calvin, 1960:75).

The matter of language is a contentious topic for many postmodern philosophers, and this has resulted in a skeptical approach to all forms of writing. This issue has carried itself into biblical hermeneutics. On the one hand, there are postmodern thinkers that dismiss Scripture and relegate it to a mere “human historical document tied to certain past times and places” (Cupitt, 1984:80). On the other hand, there are postmodern philosophers of religion who approach Scripture with suspicion and “a hermeneutic of deconstruction, which begins with the existentialist dictum that there is no transcendent meaning, that meaning is a human construction” (Veith, 1993:135, emphasis original). For the deconstructionist, meaning within the text is elusive and by no means
absolute. As the definition of Gene Edward Veith alluded to, transcendental meaning, or meaning that points to realities beyond itself, is impossible. Veith (1993:137) explains, “Words point only to other words. Language is a prison house.”

Deconstructionists like Jacques Derrida, who was much influenced by Heidegger, strongly disagree with the so-called Western “logocentric” reading of the text (Derrida, 1991:31-32). Logocentrism assumes an external point of reference that presumes a degree of authority. In other words, there exists an origin and a foundation from which everything else derives (Broitman, 1996:18). Calvin insists on the fact that Scripture is logocentric because it is the authority of all truth and, ultimately, it derives that authority from God. God, for Calvin, is the “transcendental signified” who communicates his moral absolutes through human language (Veith, 1993:141). Caryn Broitman (1996:18) affirms this as well and states, “God is both the transcendent signifier and transcendent signified.” It is God who conveys ultimate truth using humans in particular contexts and in particular cultures, yet, according to Calvin, speaking of the Gospel writers, “the truth cries out openly that these men who, previously contemptible among common folk, suddenly began to discourse so gloriously of the heavenly mysteries must have been instructed by the Holy Spirit” (Calvin, 1960:91).

Calvin acknowledges as well that God’s use of lowly words through these feeble people is an accommodation solely because of the imperfection of the human understanding (Calvin, 2005c:73). This does not take away from the fact that “God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in the Scriptures” (Calvin, 1960:69). Those who condone the deconstructionist approach, like the Jewish Rabbi Caryn Broitman, have downplayed the seriousness of the matter and have tried to convince the conventional reader that “deconstruction is not the idea that there is no meaning in a text, or that all readings are equal, or all truth is relative. It is instead the idea that meaning is complex, divided against itself, and cannot be traced to an original and simple source or foundation” (Broitman, 1996:17). Taking Calvin’s understanding of Scripture, it is difficult to accept this explanation by Broitman, because one must wonder how one can avoid relativity if meaning cannot be traced to an original source or foundation. We must acknowledge Scripture as having God as its foundation lest we be left with a meaningless book that could easily be ignored. Calvin (1960:130) states, “Unchangeable, the Word abides everlastingly one and the same with God, and is God himself.” In this regard, there are evangelical Christians, such as the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, who would consider this to be an overstatement and regard the Bible not the Word – divine revelation – in and of itself. He regards the Word as translucent to this revelation by virtue of the Spirit of God working within it and within the mind of the reader and hearer” (Bloesch, 1994:27; cf. Barth, 1956: 538ff).
4.4.1.2 Scripture, Calvin and Radical Postmodern Theology: Michel Henry

In the late twentieth century, liberal theology with its dictum “God is dead” proved to be empty and void of any meaning and in need of a theological rethinking (Cowdell, 1991:62). Radical postmodern theology is convinced that Christianity is not dead, but still has a lot to offer. Commendable as that may be, the Christianity they defend is often not in line with orthodox Christianity as upheld by Reformers like Calvin. Much like the liberal theology of the early twentieth century, postmodern theology uses Christian categories to make theological statements. However, at closer examination we can discover that different meanings are assigned to these statements that cause a wealth of confusion for twenty-first century Christians. Michel Henry the French philosopher, who was heavily influenced by Husserlian phenomenology, is a good example of a radical postmodern theologian. He uses Christian categories that are ambiguous and confusing in meaning and, ultimately, cannot be regarded as orthodox Christianity. Some have made an attempt to “Christianize” Henry’s theological concepts and tried to bring them into the Christian fold (cf. Gschwandtner, 2013:125-142), but we must conclude that Henry’s assessment of Christianity and the Scriptures is found wanting.

Calvin insists that the proper meaning of the biblical text cannot be attained and accepted unless the heart is sealed by “the inward testimony of the Spirit” (Calvin, 1960:78). At first blush, the French postmodern phenomenologist Michel Henry seems to take a similar approach to Scripture when he claims in his work I Am the Truth that the truth of Christianity is not determined by the mere writings of an historical figure named Jesus unless the “One who called himself the Messiah was truly that Messiah, the Christ the Son of God, born before Abraham and before time, the bearer in himself of Eternal Life which he communicated to whomever he wanted making that which is be no longer, or else that which is dead come alive” (Henry, 2002:6).

The language of postmodern philosophers like Henry appears to lean towards a Calvinistic high understanding of Scripture, but at closer inspection we come to realize that it stands opposed to Calvin’s view because Henry (2002:2) suggests that we cannot even begin with “the corpus of texts in which its contents are offered.” Scripture in and of itself is not the Word of God, according to Henry, who insists that “it is not the word of Scripture that lets us hear the Word of Life.” It is far more ambiguous in that “it is only because I am the Son generated at each moment in the self-generation of Life, self-revealed in the self-revelation that is its Word, that the Word of Life can tell me that I am this Son, and in this way that what Scripture says (to wit, that I am the Son) is true” (Henry, 2002:230-231). For the postmodern Michel Henry (2002:231) it is the “Word of Life” in him or the “phenomenological realization of life” that tells him what Scripture says is true.
Grasping the Scriptures as true only comes after the awareness of the self as Son, thus from within. Henry explains Christianity solely on a phenomenological basis, concentrating on conscious experience without any trace of metaphysical assumptions.

Calvin on the other hand opposes this subjectivity and attributes the recognition of Scripture as true to the Spirit of God. Richard Muller (1979:18) asserts, “The testimony of the Spirit occurs not in isolation or in some mystic experience but in the reading, hearing and searching of the Scriptures.” We believe Scripture is from God, according to Calvin (1960:95), not because of our own, or anyone else’s judgment but rather “God sent down the same Spirit by whose power he had dispensed the Word, to complete his work by the efficacious confirmation of the Word.”

Is Michel Henry’s assessment of “the self” similar to Calvin’s quest of knowledge of self, as articulated in Book I Chapter One of his Institutes? When comparing the language of postmoderns like Henry in regard to God and the self, we come to the realization that Calvin and Michel Henry stand opposed. For Henry the knowledge of self is a realization of its condition as Son. The expression “condition as Son” is rather ambivalent and can also be interpreted as “Son within the Son.” By this, Henry does not mean the presence of the Holy Spirit within the believer, but rather a universal condition of mankind as being one with the Son. The downfall of mankind is the fact that they forget this “divine” condition, which causes mankind to attribute all “powers to be” to itself or to the ego. Henry (2002:140-143) describes this condition as “transcendental illusion of the ego,” or “transcendental egoism,” where it takes itself as “the ground of its Being.” This misguided egoism concentrates its powers solely on “worldly goods”, according to Henry.

Humankind must be reminded of its condition as Son. A realization of this condition leads to the Christian ethic of love and works of mercy (Henry, 2002:166). Gschwandtner (2013:135) explains this as follows: “One finds oneself precisely by forgetting the self in care for the poor and outcast.” A Christian ethic becomes the emphasis and the mark of the condition as Son. Henry uses the Christian terminology “being born again” where one re-discovers one’s own life as within the life of God (Henry, 2002:152-170). Here is where Scripture becomes an important feature in Henry’s theology, as he explains,

> It is man’s forgetting of his condition of Son that motivates the promise and coming of a Messiah, all of his words and deeds—in short, the content to which the text of the Old and New Testament refers. It is precisely, we might say, because man forgot his condition of Son that he needs Scripture to remind him of it (Henry, 2002:232).

To use biblical terminology, “sin” is forgetfulness of our condition, and “salvation” is our recovery and realization of its condition as Sons of Life, where Scripture serves as a reminder. It is not difficult to realize that Calvin’s views stand diametrically opposed to Michel Henry’s ideas.
regarding the knowledge of self. Calvin’s entire theological enterprise is anti-phenomenological, marked thoroughly by the emphasis on the metaphysical essence of God, which is lacking in postmodern thought that ultimately began with Nietzsche. Thomas Torrance (1988:65) asserts as well that the knowledge of self and the knowledge of God are related to one another “when our knowledge of God strikes home to us in such a way that we really know ourselves, and when in knowing ourselves in our own poverty and corruption, we place everything in Christ and not in ourselves.” The knowledge of self, in Calvin’s thought, is a realization of our own unhappiness—a realization of our own “ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity, and—what is more—depravity, corruption, in order to recognize that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone” (Calvin, 1960:36). It is ultimately a realization that we stand condemned and in need of redemption.

Scripture, according to Calvin, reveals God as the Creator to whom we are accountable, but also as the Redeemer. Our sin is not one of forgetfulness but is one of depravity, which causes us to stand opposed to God. Salvation, according to Calvin, is not one of reminder but rather of renewal that can only be accomplished by God himself. Here Calvin is emphatic that renewal must take place, not only that of the flesh, or of the inferior part of the soul, but of the mind also, which Calvin calls the most excellent part of us (Calvin, 2005g:454). Calvin uses the term “born again” in a more scriptural sense than Michel Henry does, and he defines the term as a “renovation of the whole nature,” as he explains in his Commentary on the Gospel According to John (Calvin, 2005e:108). There is nothing in us, for in mind and heart we are altogether alienated from the righteousness of God, and again, there is nothing in us that is not sinful; “reformation is necessary in the whole and each part” (Calvin, 2005e:108; Calvin, 2005g:454).

Salvation, according to Calvin, is first and foremost a right standing before God, which results in an attentiveness “to the only will of God, the knowledge of which is true wisdom” (Calvin, 2005:454). It becomes clear that Calvin’s interpretation of the self and of God is thoroughly Christocentric and it emphasizes our miserable state in light of the majesty of God, whereas the postmodern theological consensus is not so much centred on the work of Christ but more on who we are and our moral and ethical obligations, which “allows people to overcome their forgetting of their condition as Son in order to rediscover the absolute Life into which they were born” (Henry, 2002:171). The centrality of Calvin’s theology is the self-authenticating (autopistos) Word of God, and the awareness of Jesus as Son, whereas the centrality of postmoderns like Michel Henry’s theology is the self-awareness as a Son.

4.4.1.3 Scripture, Calvin and Moderate Postmodern Theology: Postliberalism
The battle of scriptural authority is still being waged within Protestantism. Whereas radical postmodern theology has deviated from the essential message of the Bible, moderate postmodern theology, such as postliberal theology, is making a renewed call to a return to the Bible as the source and rule of faith. It is commendable and refreshing to see this renewed interest in Scripture as the norm for the postmodern church. As admirable as it is, we cannot be uncritical regarding the postliberal approach, especially in light of Calvin’s view and subsequent Reformed perspective. The important question to be considered is the use of Scripture in its apologetic task, and what role it can play, or even does play, in postliberal theology, especially in light of Calvin’s viewpoint.

As mentioned previously, postliberal theology is associated with a community of scholars from Yale University. Consequently, it is often referred to as the “Yale School” (Pruitt, 2012:161). Although being around since the 1970s, postliberal theology has made significant inroads into evangelical churches, seminaries and Bible colleges all across North America. The reason that evangelicals find so much affinity with postliberal theology is its renewed interest in biblical realism and, probably most importantly, its accommodation with contemporary culture and its inclusive tone, which fits well with North American postmodern tolerance. Much of the theological distinctive of postliberalism can be traced to its perspective of biblical hermeneutics and the use of doctrine in the Christian community.

Postliberal theology is a reaction against the liberal hermeneutic of myth, where the true meaning of Scripture is hidden in myths and grounded in universal human experience, and against the conservative emphasis on objective historical events and timeless truths (Olson, 1992:32). Richard Pruitt (2012:161-162) asserts that, “At the heart of postliberal theology is the premise that biblical understanding must be shaped by the narrative of Scripture rather than by attention to historical context or reliance on propositional truth claims.”

Hans Frei (1922-1988), one of the leading spokesmen of postliberal theology, is clear regarding his lack of interest in historical accuracy or even in historical facts within the Scriptures. To seek a historical figure such as Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospel narratives is a fool-hearted enterprise, according to Frei. Frei suggests that the identity of Jesus becomes clear only in the passion narratives of the Gospels, which are historical in intent and fictional in form (Frei, 2013:145). Hans Frei (2013:143) suggests:

Jesus’ individual identity comes to focus directly in the passion-resurrection narrative rather than the account of his person and teaching in his earlier ministry … it is simply to affirm that Jesus in his unique identity is not available to us directly or unambiguously—either as a character in a story or historically—in the portion of the gospel accounts describing his ministry.
Frei gives an example of this in the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He asserts that this story is not biographical or even historical, for those around Jesus were asleep (Frei, 2013:145). In other words, throughout the Gospel narratives, we simply do not know if these stories are historical or not, and even asking whether they are historical is asking the wrong question.

Calvin would largely agree with Hans Frei and with postliberalism that concentrating on historical issues is missing the important points in what the Gospels are trying to tell us. However, for Calvin, it does not negate the fact that the Gospel narratives are historical. Calvin (2005:v:xxxviii, xl) refers to the three Gospel writers as the “three writers of the Evangelical history”, and calls the Gospels “the three histories.” Calvin (1960:90) in his Institutes declares that the three evangelists recount their history in a “humble and lowly style.” For Calvin it was unmistakable that the identity of Christ all through the narratives of the synoptic Gospels was grounded in the historical Jesus and this was clear from the beginning of each Gospel narrative. The historical aspect of each Gospel was assumed by Calvin because he clearly saw the books as God’s words, as the Gospel writers “previously contemptible among common folk were instructed by the Spirit” (Calvin, 1960:91).

In resistance to rational apologetics, lest one appeals to evidence and proofs, Frei shies away from all historical aspects of the Gospel narratives. The resurrection is not based on historical evidences but rather on the structure of the narrative itself (Olson, 1996:34). Calvin does agree that the authority of Scripture cannot be fortified by arguments, but “since we have embraced Scripture’s authority certain evidences become useful aids” (Calvin, 1960:82). Among these evidences are the historical aspects of both Old and New Testaments which serve as affirmations of the authority of Scripture. We can fully agree with Roger Olson (1996:34) that “Evangelicals need to encourage postliberal theologians to reconsider and rediscover the historical nature of the ‘mighty acts of God’ recorded and interpreted in the biblical narratives.”

Closely connected to the postliberal historical approach to biblical narrative is the interpretation of Christian doctrine in postliberal theology, using the cultural-linguistic approach. The cultural-linguistic model that postliberalism suggests is an alternative to the modern experiential-expressivism of liberalism and the cognitive-propositional position of evangelicalism especially made popular by Carl F.H. Henry, who reacted “against the understanding of revelation associated with neo-orthodoxy by stressing the informative content of divine revelation and its articulation in propositional form” (Henry in McGrath, 1996:29). The question involves the matter of authority and where we find the locus of truth claims, which gives authoritative power to the Scriptures. It was often assumed that the biblical propositions were instances of truth where language or religious experience bore the locus of divine revelation. However, both are dismissed by postliberals because, in the case of the cognitive-propositional position, the Bible is more than divine data and it
presupposes the modern form of epistemology, namely foundationalism (Vanhoozer, 2005:5). The expressive-experientialism is disregarded simply because experiences are unreliable and too varied. Thus, postliberalism has come up with ecclesiology as the locus of authority; the practice of the church is at the centre of doctrines espoused by Christianity. George Linbeck (1984:18) explains, “The function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this [religions as cultures] perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action.” In other words, doctrines cannot be looked at as binding truths for all situations or settings, and when differences occur, the oppositions can be resolved “by specifying when or where they [rules] apply or by stipulating which of the competing directions takes precedence” (Lindbeck, 1984:18).

It is not difficult to see through the ambiguity of the postliberal suggestion. At first blush, it appears that postliberalism returns to the Bible as the authority of Christianity. Upon further investigation we discover that it is not in Scripture that the authority lies but rather in the community of believers that dictate the truths of biblical doctrine. Kevin Vanhoozer’s (2005:10) critique is valuable here, and he states:

The prevailing postmodern cultural winds currently blow away from sola scriptura toward tradition. Now that the modern myth of universal reason (one size fits all) has been deconstructed, even philosophers have begun to speak in terms of “tradition-based rationality.” Postmoderns have discovered an alternative to the modern extremes of the absolute objectivity of universal reason and the absolute subjectivity of personal preference: a relatively absolute intersubjectivity in a word, the authority of communal tradition.

The main question that arises out of this assessment and is important for apologetics is: what makes Scripture authoritative? Alister McGrath asks that question as well, and in comparing Scripture to the Qur’an he asserts that, similar to the Qur’an, the priority of Scripture is defended on grounds that appear to be cultural, historical and contractual. We cannot evade the truth claims of Scripture. McGrath (1996:40) concludes, “Scripture has authority not because of what the Christian community has chosen to make of it, but because of what it is and what it conveys.” Kevin Vanhoozer has a similar assessment and rejects the cultural-linguistic approach of Lindbeck, instead favouring a different viewpoint that he dubs the “canonical-linguistic” approach. Although Vanhoozer recognizes similarities, he perceives a fundamental difference. He explains that, “Both [the cultural-linguistic approach and the canonical-linguistic approach] agree that meaning and truth are crucially related to language use; however, the canonical-linguistic approach maintains that the normative use is ultimately not that of ecclesial culture but of the biblical norm (Vanhoozer, 2005:16, emphasis in original).
George Lindbeck does not propose anything new regarding the church or the community as the locus of authority regarding Scripture. The still popular Cardinal Newman (1956:132), former Anglican priest turned Roman Catholic, contends as well that “the sacred text was never intended to teach doctrine, but only to prove it, and if we would learn doctrine, we must have recourse to the formularies of the Church.” Clearly, in this view, Scripture is made subordinate to the Church’s teaching, as in the postliberal perspective as adduced by George Lindbeck.

Calvin recognizes as well that the authority of Scripture does not reside in the Christian community but in Scripture itself. Calvin (1960:76) assures his readers that Scripture preceded the community (the church) so it would be “utterly vain then to pretend that the power of judging Scripture so lies with the church that its certainty depends upon churchly assent.” The authority of Scripture, according to Calvin, is indistinguishably linked to the power of the Holy Spirit, an aspect neglected by the postliberals. Calvin (1960:78) accords with other theologians such as Aquinas that God is the Author of Scripture; “God in person speaks in it.” We are unable to recognize this through reason, judgments or conjectures, but must seek this conviction in a higher place, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit. In short, for Calvin the locus of authority is placed within Scripture itself, and the truth therein can only be apprehended through the power of the Spirit. The truth within Scripture is the knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer; historical matters are of secondary importance.

What are we to make then of postliberalism as espoused by Hans Frei and George Lindbeck? First, the cultural-linguistic approach is susceptible to relativism and subjectivism. At Lindbeck’s own admission, the cultural-linguistic approach is extremely beneficial in ecumenical work that postliberalism favors. Secondly, the cultural-linguistic model affirms the pragmatic approach to biblical truth. Vanhoozer (2005:11) asserts that the cultural-linguistic misstep is to locate the authority in the use of Scripture by the believing community, instead of divine authorial discourse. Finally, as Alister McGrath already alluded to, different religious expressions, and even non-religious expressions, are in their own right cultural-linguistic systems, according to Lindbeck. This poses a significant problem in determining which cultural-linguistic approach is correct, or in other words, which religion corresponds to the ultimate truth? According to postliberalism this question is wrongheaded and arrogant. The motive for interreligious dialogue is “to help other movements and other religions make their own particular contributions, which may be quite distinct from the Christian one” (Lindbeck, 1984:54). Calvin, on the other hand, is adamant that we should learn from Scripture that God, the Creator of the universe, must be distinguished from all the throng of feigned gods” (Calvin, 1960:70). All religions that seek God without Christ are illegitimate, Calvin (2012:loc.5576) exclaims:
For though in old time there were many who boasted that they worshipped the supreme Deity, the Maker of heaven and earth, yet as they had no Mediator, it was impossible for them truly to enjoy the mercy of God, so as to feel persuaded that he was their Father. Not holding the head, that is, Christ, their knowledge of God was evanescent; and hence they at length fell way to gross and foul superstitions, betraying their ignorance, just as the Turks in the present day, who though proclaiming, with full throat, that the Creator of heaven and earth is their God, yet by their rejection of Christ, substitute an idol in his place.

Calvin is adamant that we find God nowhere else but in Christ. Wilhelm Niesel accentuates this sentiment as well in his work, *The Theology of Calvin*, where he quotes from *Calvin’s Works* stating that Islam and Judaism “like to speak of God, but, since they disassociate the name of God from Jesus Christ, God can be no more to them than a phantom” (Niesel, 1980:34). To Calvin, there is only one true knowledge of God, and that is in Christ as articulated in Scripture (Calvin, 1960:746). Postliberalism has capitulated, in this respect, to the cultural pressures to stress interfaith dialogue with the attitude of religious tolerance and acceptance. The postmodern impulse towards tolerance as generally expressed in postliberalism is a reaction to modern imperialism that at times wrought havoc in various cultures around the world. Intolerance and arrogance has no place in Christianity, and a reminder from postliberalism should invoke a sense of self-examination and humility when confronted with those of different faith expressions or those who are non-religious. Calvin understood this as well, encouraging believers to unremittingly examine their faults and calling them back to humility (Calvin, 1960:694). In our confrontations, Scripture teaches us that “we are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honor and love” (Calvin, 1960:696). In other words, even when we proclaim salvation through Christ alone, we do so in humility and with respect to those we meet.

In sum, there are aspects of postmodern theology that we must agree with, but there are also various features that must be critically examined vis-à-vis Calvin’s theology of Scripture. We can appreciate the postmodernists’ disparagement of autonomous reason and the importance of biblical narrative by some postmodern theological expressions. However, we must be critical of those who have abandoned Scripture and discarded its use as irrelevant. Many of those who claim to be “spiritual but not religious” must heed Calvin’s assertion that “those who, having forsaken Scripture, imagine some way or other of reaching God, ought to be thought of as not so much gripped by error as carried away with frenzy” (Calvin, 1960:93). Postmodern theology must return to Scripture as God’s Word articulating the objective truth of Christ as Redeemer.

We must also critically assess postliberalism’s attempt to return to the Bible and reject the cultural-linguistic approach in light of Calvin’s emphasis on the work of the Spirit as He illumines the
believer and confirms the authority of God’s Word. We can agree with Kevin Vanhoozer’s assessment of the contemporary view of Scripture:

[Scripture is] neither a textbook of propositional truths that serves as the foundation for knowledge [fundamentalism] nor a narrative that relies on its position in the church’s web of belief for its meaning and truth [postliberalism]. Scripture is rather a canonical atlas: a collection of maps that variously render the way, the truth and the life (Vanhoozer, 2005:294).

Calvin is uninterested in the factual and historical facets of the biblical narrative as propositional truths to be apprehended. Ronald Wallace (1982:111) asserts, “Calvin, while he affirms the general accuracy of Holy Scripture in historical matters, is at times careless about details.” He was more interested in the knowledge of God as Creator and Christ as Redeemer as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in Holy Scripture.

If we earnestly commit ourselves to the postliberal position as discussed above, then apologetics would be an unnecessary endeavor. If we, however, take seriously Calvin’s theological position, we can and must engage in apologetics with Scripture as the foundation. It has become clear that the Calvinistic apologist will not and certainly cannot appeal to autonomous reason or “try to produce the initial act of faith by the constraints of the syllogism” (Lecerf, 1981:208). The apologist, according to Auguste Lecerf (1981:208), “knows that efficacious grace alone can bring it about infallibly, without destroying the liberty in the process, since it persuades but does not prove. He [the apologist] will seek to be the instrument of this grace by presenting reasons of wisdom rather than proofs of reason.” The apologist must present God as articulated in Scripture. This does not mean that the unbeliever cannot be pointed to anything outside of Scripture. As Calvin (2005g:157-158) states in his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, “Furthermore, because he has to deal with profane men, he draws proofs from nature itself; for in vain should he have cited testimonies of Scripture.” Taking Calvin seriously, the testimonies must be grounded in Scripture, for nothing in creation lies outside the authority of Scripture. We can appeal, with the postmodern, to the narratives of Scripture, but with the perception that these narratives are grounded in the biblical metanarrative of love.

4.5 Calvin’s Legacy: the Christian Life as an Apologetic in Postmodern Society

Ever since the inception of the Church at Pentecost, she has been confronted by cultures that are antithetical to the Gospel. Christianity initially tried to come to grips with the task of how it would, or whether it should, fit into the Hellenistic culture of the day. In answering the question of whether Christianity was compatible to Hellenistic paganism or not, two distinct observations arose. One
opinion, held by Tertullian and others, was a resounding “No.” The other opinion, held by Justin Martyr, was affirmative. Henry Stob (1974:19) explains that neither opinion received wide traction in the church and “the Christ the church most decisively confessed was neither against culture, nor the Christ of culture, but either the Christ above culture or the Christ who transforms culture. What came to be advocated in Christendom was some sort of synthesis.”

We find the distinct differences, as stated above, manifested in the thought of both Aquinas and John Calvin. The former view (Christ above culture) comes to the fore in Aquinas’ perspective concerning nature and grace “where the world is divided into an upper and lower half given respectively to the domination of faith and reason” (Henry Van Til, 1974:98). Calvin rejects this viewpoint because it downplays the pervasiveness of sin. Calvin recognizes that “nature and natural reason have been despoiled by sin, and they can be retrieved and utilized only after they have been renewed by grace, and only after they have been viewed and exercised in the closest possible association with faith” (Stob, 1974:20). Thus, it becomes clear that Aquinas stands in opposition to Calvin in this regard, which affects their perspectives on culture. Whereas Aquinas regards Christ as above culture, Calvin sees Christ as transforming culture. The latter opinion is, according to Calvin, strictly grounded in Scripture.

The centrality of Scripture in Calvin’s theology is not to be regarded as something abstract or devoid of practical meaning. Scripture ruled Calvin’s private life as well as his involvement in larger society. John Leith (1984:vii) argues, “The purpose of theology [for Calvin] is to edify, to transform human life and society, not so much to answer questions.” The Reformer opposed the idea of idle curiosity and the hollow inquiries into the things that God has chosen not to reveal. For Calvin, the knowledge of God, as articulated in his Institutes, is inextricably linked to the Christian life or what Calvin calls pietas, or piety. Leith (1984:ix) explains, “Piety, as the proper attitude toward God, is also a disposition toward creation as the work of God and toward the neighbor who bears the divine image.” In other words, apologetics must be closely associated with the Christian life in relation to both neighbor and society at large. The influences both in Calvin’s personal life and society were forever grounded in Scripture. Henry Van Til (1974:116), summarizes this well, and states, “Calvin, as the theologian of culture, was concerned to bring it under the rule of Christ through his Word.”

The legacy of Calvin’s influence can again be felt today in the rise of what is now called neo-Calvinism, which had its beginnings in the Netherlands and has found renewed interest in North America. There again is a need to gain involvement in society at large and to promote Christian influence in a culture that has long abandoned the Christian virtues. In North America renewed interest is shown in the Dutch neo-Calvinist giants such as Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck and
Herman Dooyeweerd, who espoused a thorough Calvinistic concept of society and Christian life with Scripture as its ultimate authority.

4.5.1 Neo-Calvinism: Apologetics, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck

Neo-Calvinism began as a Calvinistic “revival” in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, when, following Groen Van Prinsterer, Abraham Kuyper brought Calvinism out from the doldrums of cold dogmaticism and mere ecclesiastical rule into a life-system that affects all aspects of life. Herman Paul (2010:179) argues that “Kuyper had known well that a ‘return’ to the premodern theologies of John Calvin or the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619), as advocated by groups of Dutch Pietists, was not feasible. He had therefore devoted his intellectual powers to what one might call a reformulation of Calvinistic thought in nineteenth-century terms.” Kuyper did not so much concern himself with Calvin’s dogmatics but applied the Calvinistic principles to an all-encompassing life-system. The renaissance of neo-Calvinism in North America is again reformulating the Kuyperian principles to the concerns of twenty-first century thought.

Both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck exerted most of their influence in the early decades of the twentieth century and were confronted by modernism marked by biblical criticism and the faith/science debate on the one hand and atheism and skepticism on the other, two issues not much different from the ones we face today. Both Kuyper and Bavinck tried to answer the question of how Christianity must deal with the culture at large in a most biblical way, drawing on the theological ideas of Calvin. For that reason, it is not difficult to find significant correlation and relevancy between Kuyper, Bavinck and postmodernism when we realize the connection between early twentieth-century modernism and postmodernism, as articulated in the previous chapter. Even though apologetics was not highly thought of by both Kuyper and Bavinck, the answers to the question of Christianity and culture, such as the doctrine of common grace and their explanation of worldview, are highly relevant to the issue of apologetics today. Many apologists, such as Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Edward John Carnell and Os Guinness draw on many of the ideas from what has been dubbed neo-Calvinism espoused by men such as Bavinck, Kuyper, Dooyeweerd and Rookmaaker.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), who had an illustrious and diverse career in the Netherlands as both theologian and politician, articulated Calvinism and appropriated its theological distinctive to the practical life of the Christian in contemporary culture. The two most lasting contributions of Kuyper that have most significance to apologetics are the interpretation of the Calvinistic doctrine of common grace, and the aspect of the Christian worldview. Both of these teachings Kuyper expressed in his Lectures on Calvinism at Princeton in the fall of 1898. The importance of Kuyper
lies in the fact that “he represents an unusual blend of theological orthodoxy and cultural progressiveness” (Heslam, 1998:4). He saw Calvinism as more than just a theological position and asserted that Calvinism affected all of one’s life-style. He was in agreement with the Presbyterian theologian James Orr (1844-1913), who concluded that “the Christian view of things in general is attacked, and it is by an exposition and vindication of the Christian view of things as a whole that the attack can be most successfully met” (Orr, 1960:4). Apologetics, however, has not, according to Kuyper, achieved desirable results; on the contrary, “Apologetics have advanced us not one single step. Apologists have invariably begun by abandoning the assailed breastwork, in order to entrench themselves cowardly in a ravelin behind it” (Kuyper, 1931:11).

Abraham Kuyper brought with him from the Free University of Amsterdam a different, and in many ways an opposing, view of apologetics to Princeton. Princeton Theological Seminary, under the leadership of B.B. Warfield (1851-1921), espoused a robust method of apologetics that was adopted by subsequent leaders such as Gresham Machen (1881-1937). Warfield (cited in Masselink, 1953:164) exclaimed, “It is the distinction of Christianity that it has come into the world clothed with the mission to reason its way to its dominion.” This viewpoint was also endorsed by Machen, who saw apologetics as the foundation of every theological course (Masselink, 1953:164). For the Old Princeton, then, apologetics took on a prominent place as the crown subject for all theological discourse; apologetics took on the offensive position. Kuyper disagreed most vehemently with this perspective and gave apologetics the posture of defense against dogma, which contains our view of God as well as our worldview (Masselink, 1953:172). Kuyper (cited in Masselink, 1953:170) insists,

What it must defend is the dogma, either in its definite declarations or in the grounds upon which the dogma rests, or in the conclusions which follow from the dogma. It is not diathetical, because it does not describe the dogma, it is not thetical because it does not establish not prove the dogma, but it is antithetical because it carries on its defense on behalf of the dogma against that which the false philosophy places as grounds or conclusions against the dogma. Its place is, therefore, not before, but after Dogmatics and Ethics. Its purpose is not to prepare a place for the dogma, nor to guarantee for the dogma its right of existence in the domain of truth which it already has jure divino, but to defend it against the attacks of false philosophy [pseudo-philosophie].

From the above quotation, we can certainly conclude that Kuyper was not opposed to apologetics per se, but against a certain apologetic method held by the Princeton School. The latter, as expressed by Warfield and Machen, emphasizes the “evidences” of the Christian faith and the intellectual aspects, an emphasis which ultimately downplays “the element of mystery which occupies an important place in the Reformed System” (Masselink, 1953:173). Rational proofs,
according to the Amsterdam School, have no place in Kuyper’s system. Neo-Calvinism accuses the Princeton School of placing the reasons for our belief in the existence of God in the “category of Mathematical Science” (Masselink, 1953:175). This is exactly the argument postmodernity brings against apologetics (cf. Penner, 2013:22ff), the difference being, however, that the latter’s total rejection of Christian apologetics as a legitimate task must be rectified. For neo-Calvinists, apologetics is the defense of Calvinism as a life system and worldview, as described in the Stone Lectures by Abraham Kuyper. We can thus appreciate Kuyper’s emphasis on the defensive posture of apologetics. In addition, we can appreciate Abraham Kuyper’s insistence on the defense of the Calvinist worldview. However, we cannot be uncritical regarding the narrow sense of Kuyper’s view on apologetics. Although we defend the faith on Calvinistic principles, we must contend the core truths of the Christian faith that make up the Christian worldview, much in line with Van Til’s or Schaeffer’s approach.

Herman Bavinck, who at the invitation of Abraham Kuyper became professor of theology at the Free University of Amsterdam, held a similar view of apologetics as his contemporary, but seemed at times to speak more favorably regarding the discipline. He writes that “apologetics is not only perfectly justified but a science that at all times, but especially in this century, deserves to be seriously practiced and can spread rich blessing all around” (Bavinck, 2003:515). In his magnum opus, Reformed Dogmatics, he discusses the task and validity of apologetics “because of the importance of the matter” (Bavinck, 2003:55). Much like Kuyper, he seeks a middle way, avoiding the placement of apologetics “at the top of the entire theological enterprise,” but avert attempts to banish apologetics completely from the theological domain (Bavinck, 2003:55). He carefully concludes that “there is no valid reason for either such overvaluation or such disdain” (Bavinck, 2003:55). In proper Reformed fashion, Bavinck reiterates that apologetics has a proper place, but it cannot precede faith and does not attempt a priori to argue the truth of revelation. He is careful to maintain a Calvinistic stance regarding the role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of Scripture in our coming to understand and defend the Christian faith (Bavinck, 2003:515). It becomes clear that both Kuyper and Bavinck hold to the traditional orthodox and Calvinistic dictum of faith seeking understanding.

Reformed apologists such as Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer have advanced the neo-Calvinist emphasis on the defense of the Christian worldview (or, in the case of Van Til, “the Christian philosophy of life”). For that reason, we are hard pressed to agree with Masselink’s critique of Van Til’s definition of apologetics as straying from historic Reformed theology (Masselink, 1953:176-186). Van Til (2003:17) defines apologetics as “the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life,” and is adamant that his apologetic methodology is consistently Calvinistic and stands in the line of
historic Reformed theology (cf. Van Til, 2003; Van Til, 1967). Van Til and, subsequently, Francis Schaeffer, uphold Calvin’s high view of Scripture and the Holy Spirit’s work in apologetics, as can be said of Kuyper, and Bavinck of the V.U. of Amsterdam but also B.B. Warfield and Gresham Machen of the Old Princeton School, although Kuyper and Bavinck did not explicitly appeal to apologetics. We can agree with Cornelius Van Til (1967:299) who, although disagreeing on some particulars, declared, “Standing on the shoulders of Warfield and Kuyper we honor them best if we build on the main thrust of their thought rather than if we insist on carrying on what is inconsistent with their basic positions. Then are we most faithful to Calvin and to St. Paul.”

4.5.2 Abraham Kuyper, Neo-Calvinism and the Concept of Worldview

Abraham Kuyper began his Stone Lectures with a stern warning that Christianity on both sides of the Atlantic was in grave danger. He understood that the Christian faith was under attack from modernism with its principles rooted in the French Revolution, Darwinian evolution and German pantheism (Kuyper, 1931:9-40). He asserted that two opposing life-systems were engaged in mortal combat. It is here that Kuyper articulated the all-encompassing Calvinistic viewpoint as a particular Christian worldview. The term “worldview” was not used by Kuyper before he engaged in his lectures at Princeton.

In the footnote of his lectures he explained his indebtedness to James Orr, who then recently had published his The Christian View of God and the World in 1897 (Kuyper, 1931:11). In it Orr explained the German word weltanschauung, which has no precise equivalent in English. Kuyper thus limits himself in the use of the word “worldview” and rather employs the term “life-system” or the more encompassing “life and world-view” (levens- en wereldbeschouwing) throughout his lectures. Kuyper is more particular than Orr in his use of worldview or life-system in that he refers to Calvinism as the life-system. He (1931:12) exclaims, “Calvinism, [is] the only decisive, lawful and consistent defense for Protestant nations against encroaching and overwhelming Modernism.”

Although Kuyper relies in many ways on Orr’s explication of the concept of worldview (cf. Heslam, 1998:93-95; Naugle, 2002:17-20), the Dutchman deviates from Orr in that he explains the Calvinistic life-system (worldview) in cultural terms, such as ramifications on issues like religion, politics, science and art, whereas James Orr in his lectures describes the Christian worldview more theologically, using theological concepts like the incarnation, the nature of humanity, sin and redemption (cf. Naugle, 2002:20). In other words, Orr describes the central tenets of the Christian worldview and Kuyper describes the cultural implications of a Calvinistic worldview.
In Kuyper’s sixth and final lecture of the Stone Lectures held at Princeton in 1898, he reiterated the Calvinistic life- and worldview as one that “is able to fit itself to the need of every stage of human development in every department of life” (Kuyper, 1931:171). He emphasized the Calvinistic aspect of worldview in reaction to those who reduced Calvinism to a mere dogmatical and ecclesiastical movement. Calvinism, according to Kuyper and other neo-Calvinists, is so much more in that it encompasses a life system that affects all aspects of ecclesial, cultural, political, social and aesthetic life. Kuyper saw modernism as the antithesis of the Calvinistic worldview—the former grounded in evolutionary Darwinism and the principles of the French Revolution, and the latter as grounded in the Gospel as articulated by Calvin (Kuyper, 1931:179).

What Kuyper feared in 1898 and articulated in his Stone Lectures can well be repeated today. The dangers of modernism that Kuyper so aptly noted more than a hundred years ago are very much present in contemporary culture, as expressed in postmodernism. Kuyper laments the high value that is placed on the material things and the fascination with the comforts of this life and the neglect of the inward or spiritual life. One of the characteristics of postmodernity is consumerism with its principle of instant gratification, to which we can echo Kuyper’s (1931:172) warning that “in this inner consciousness we are becoming more and more painfully aware how the hypertrophy of our external life results in a serious atrophy of the spiritual.” James Olthuis (1989:35) in his essay “On worldviews” in a similar vein as Kuyper but one hundred years removed from the Stone Lectures, confronts us with a worldview crisis in contemporary culture. He warns us of a fragmented worldview and an overall loss or lack of any life conviction which ultimately leads to anxiety and fear. Kuyper also recognized the crisis in worldview but asserted that it is the Christian, or rather, the Calvinistic worldview, that is rejected and replaced by a modern worldview grounded in anti-Christian sentiments. He put much of the blame on a variety of anti-Christian intellectuals such a Friedrich Nietzsche, who wielded significant influence in Europe, resulting in the modern philosophy that considered itself “in ever-increasing measure as having outgrown Christianity” (Kuyper, 1931:175). This is a philosophy that is still prevalent in postmodernity.

Similar to this modern philosophy is the postmodern tendency, even within theology, to “destroy the authority of the Holy Scriptures as a sacred book; to see in sin nothing but a lack of development; to view redemption as a mere reversal of our subjective mode of thinking” (Kuyper, 1931:182). Abraham Kuyper warns that the impulse to resolve this is either practical or mystical in character. The former is characterized by works or deeds of philanthropy. Christianity must prove itself in character, lest it degenerates into dry scholasticism or idle talk. If we do not have a well-defined Gospel we are no better than the “liberal missionaries preaching only humanity and colorless piety” (Kuyper, 1931:188). The mystical tendency, according to Kuyper (1931:188) is “in its very nature seclusive, and strives rather to avoid contact with the outside world.” Again, Kuyper
does not dismiss the mystical aspect outright, but he calls both tendencies to task because acceptance of one or the other is to inevitably accept the modern worldview characterized by Darwin and Rousseau. Therefore, Kuyper (1931:191) calls for a worldview centred on the Calvinistic principle “as the sole trustworthy foundation on which to build.” In order to accomplish this, Kuyper offers several ways in which we can return to a Calvinism that emphasizes the Christian worldview in order to counter its modern antithesis. It is his opinion that we cannot ignore Calvinism as a life-system and it must be studied so that the outside world will again come to know it. The principles of Calvinism as a life-system must again be developed with the needs of our time and “consistently applied to the various domains of life,” and lastly, the churches must again proclaim and confess Calvinism without shame or reserve (Kuyper, 1931:192).

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) was a most prolific Dutch neo-Calvinist who concerned himself mostly with juridical matters but could also be called the most influential philosopher among the neo-Calvinists of the twentieth century (Naugle, 2002:25). He suggests that the ultimate factor in both worldview and philosophy is the religious ground-motive, “which gives contents to the central mainspring of the entire attitude of life and thought” (Dooyeweerd, 1984:61). In his opinion there are only two main springs operative. The first, he claims, is the “dynamis of the Holy Ghost,” who brings people into proper relationship with the Father, and has as its ground-motive the Divine Word-Revelation. The second main spring is the antithesis or the spirit of apostasy from the true God. This religious power “leads the human heart in an apostate direction” (Dooyeweerd, 1984:61). The former gives rise to the Christian worldview and the latter to the non-Christian worldview.

In his work *Roots of Western Culture* that appeared in the weekly *Nieuw Nederland* from 1945 to 1948, Dooyeweerd explains that the development of Western culture has been controlled by several religious ground-motives: the ancient civilization of Greece and Rome, Christendom, and modern humanism (Dooyeweerd, 2012:9). For Dooyeweerd, the ground-motives have been, and still are, the driving forces behind the cultural and spiritual development of the West, and the driving force behind all disciplines in which we are all engaged. In other words, these disciplines are driven by a particular ground-motive, whether Christian or non-Christian. It is not a philosophy that is at the foundation of our thinking but it is the particular ground-motive that shapes the worldview that we have.

Dooyeweerd elucidates the worldview concept in his *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*, especially in regard to science and philosophy. In his explanation regarding the fundamental significance, Dooyeweerd (2013:2) asserts:
It [a worldview] keeps its adherents constantly aware of the religious ground-motive as a genuinely communal driving force that controls not only scientific thought, but also the entire attitude to life of its adherents. The worldview therefore prevents science from detaching itself from the fullness of life in splendid isolation, an isolation that can only be bought at the price of sterility.

Thus, Dooyeweerd understands worldview to be a consistent driving force affecting all aspects and disciplines of life, but that it is fundamentally driven by a particular ground-motive. Dooyeweerd’s understanding of worldview has close affinities to Kuyper’s, although Dooyeweerd’s nuanced articulation is more modest and irenic toward non-Christian viewpoints. In many ways it can be said that Dooyeweerd has built upon Kuyper’s idea of worldview and has given us a more refined articulation of the concept.

Kuyper (1931:190) in his articulation of the concept of worldview warns us against creating a “life and world-view of our own founded as firmly on the base of our own principle…” Dooyeweerd fully agrees with Kuyper, but would say that this principle is the “ground-motive” upon which the worldview depends. This does not mean we can create our personal worldview, for the worldview Dooyeweerd (2013:3) speaks of “demands a strong communal faith in the absolute truth of its religious foundation.” To Kuyper this means a return to Calvinism. Dooyeweerd admires Kuyper for elevating Calvinism, which in his opinion is the most radical movement within the Protestant Reformation, but articulates the concept of worldview not in Calvinistic or non-Calvinistic terms but in either Christian or apostate terms. His favour to Calvinism is more implicit than it is for Kuyper, although Dooyeweerd is thoroughly Reformed in all his thinking.

In regard to philosophy and science, Dooyeweerd holds a similar view as does Kuyper. He (1984:114) points out that “genuine Christian philosophy requires a radical rejection of the supra-theoretical presuppositions and ‘axioms’ of immanence-philosophy.” Dooyeweerd admits that philosophy is not autonomous and must conduct itself obediently to the biblical ground-motive (Holmes, 1963:15). He (1984:176) recognizes the ever-present danger of sin and the cause of hubris (pride) in Christian philosophy and science which can seem to have the monopoly on theoretical truth. He (2013:6) asserts that “the reformational Scriptural principle poses a task of ongoing reformation, also for science, and a never-ending task while the present dispensation lasts.” This means that idolatrous motives that stand contrary to the ground-motive of the Divine Word-revelation can creep into the various disciplines. Because of our solidarity in the Fall and the concept of common grace we cannot dismiss the philosophical or scientific schools that are dominated by apostate ground-motives.
However, Dooyeweerd is careful and seeks to guard against the notion that common grace provides an autonomous common ground for human thought and action. Dooyeweerd is more pronounced in his explanation that even though there are commonalities between the Christian and non-Christian as far as scientific or philosophical discoveries go, what is at stake is the foundation upon which interpretation of the data is based. After all, Dooyeweerd (1984:116) claims, “2+2=4 is true whether one is a Christian, pagan or humanist, but the equation is only true in the context of the laws of number and the logical law of thought.” Ultimately, Dooyeweerd (1984:116) claims that this partial theoretical truth is truth “only in the coherence of the theoretical truths, and this coherence in its relativity pre-supposes the fullness or the totality of truth.” Dooyeweerd (1984:116) is correct in his claim that “there exists no partial truth which is sufficient to itself” (Er bestaat geen partieele waarheid, die zichzelf genoegzaam is).

Although Dooyeweerd builds on the Kuyperian concept of life- and worldview, and admiration for the Dutch statesman shines through all of his writings, his nuanced interpretation seems to suggest not just the Calvinistic, but an overall Christian ground-motive that is the driving-force of the worldview that stands in antithetical position to its apostate non-Christian counterpart. As a matter of fact, although Dooyeweerd regards his work as a fruit of the Calvinistic Reformation, he removed the term “Calvinistic” philosophy from the English edition of his first trilogy A New Critique of Theoretical Thought (in Hughes, 1969:273). He clarifies that all worldviews are dominated by a ground-motive that is religious at root and therefore fundamentally originates in the heart. This avoids the danger, sometimes found in Kuyper’s writings, of a Calvinistic worldview as just another worldview beside any other life-system. By using the term “Calvinism” as a “life-system” it can appear static and therefore the thrust of the Calvinistic worldview which is rooted in the ground-motive of Scripture appears to be lost. On the other hand, we can regard the Christian worldview grounded and rooted in Scripture as a set of spectacles through which we can observe reality for what it really is. In connection to this, Richard Mouw (2011:93) assesses the concept of worldview from a more dynamic and active perspective: it is a process by which we shine the light of God’s Word on the new realities that we encounter every day.

The concept of worldview has significant implications on how apologetics is conducted. For both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd, a rationalistic and evidentialist approach to apologetics is both naive and counterproductive. As David Naugle (2002:23) suggests, “It must be replaced by a method that recognizes the influence of underlying presuppositions on the mind’s perception of what constitutes reason and evidence in the first place. Apologetic warfare must be conducted at the more basic level of underlying worldviews.” Or in a more Dooyeweerdian manner, we must understand the underlying religious ground-motive that moves the worldview. Apologetics in a neo-Calvinist way must emphasize the importance of presenting the faith as a complete life-system or
fundamental interpretive principle (Naugle, 2002:23). A Christian (or Calvinistic) worldview rooted in the ground-motive of Scripture involves all of life and the meaning of all creation. It is the task of the apologists to detect the apostate presuppositions or underlying principles of the non-Christian worldview. In this regard, Dooyeweerd makes an important contribution to apologetics in what he dubs “transcendental criticism.”

Although Dooyeweerd is silent on the subject of apologetics throughout his writings, we can infer that, in many ways, he stands in solidarity with Kuyper in that he repudiates the apologetic method which stands on the modernist principles of common neutral ground of reason. However, his concept of transcendental criticism can be appropriated as an effectual principle of apologetics. Dooyeweerd makes an important distinction between transcendent criticism and transcendental criticism. Dooyeweerd, in his work *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, assesses the autonomous theoretical thought of Western philosophy, which has prevailed throughout the centuries and especially the last century through philosophies influenced by the *Lebensphilosophie* and by existentialism, remnants of which can still be detected in postmodern philosophy and theology. Dooyeweerd (2012:6) suggests that we must assess theoretical thought, though not necessarily through transcendent critique, for it does not really touch the inner character and the immanent structure of the theoretical attitude of thought. Brian Walsh (1983:13) explains that “a transcendent critique would affirm that the belief in the autonomy of theoretical thought is obviously wrong because it conflicts with the biblical view of the heart-rootedness of human life.” This is true, but, according to Dooyeweerd (1984:38), in confronting science and philosophy dogmatically it encounters “two different spheres whose inner point of contact is left completely in the dark.”

In contradistinction to this somewhat “cheap” or “valueless” critique, Dooyeweerd suggests the transcendental critique of theoretical attitude of thought, which he describes in the prolegomena of his work, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. This work is in opposition to Kant’s critique of reason by means of reason, hence Dooyeweerd’s new critique which he levels against the structures and foundations of pre-theoretical thought, or the presuppositions behind theoretical thought, the subject of which is not the logical or thinking *ego* (Kant) but, according to Dooyeweerd, the religious *ego* (Walsh and Chaplin, 1983:13; Wolters in McIntire, 1985:12). Dooyeweerd (1984:37) describes the transcendental critique as a “critical inquiry into the universally valid conditions which alone make theoretical thought possible, and which are required by the immanent structure of this thought itself.” Jacob Klapwijk (1980:22) clarifies Dooyeweerd’s definition and asserts, “It [transcendental critique] does not test the results of science with the text of the Bible, but zeroes in on the phenomenon of science itself, retracing from the inside out, as it were, the train of thought which science follows, so as to finally arrive at its point of origin: the hidden religious starting point.
of all scientific activity.” Transcendental critique goes right to the heart of religious presuppositions that motivate all theoretical thought. William Young insightfully concludes as well that Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique is an extremely powerful weapon for the defense of the Christian faith. He states, “To the charge that Christians are irrational and prejudiced in giving faith to an alleged revelation, it replies in a way that puts the infidel critic on the defensive” (in Hughes, 1969:294). Later apologists, like Francis Schaeffer, have appropriated Dooyeweerd’s insights to their apologetic method.

4.5.3 Calvinism, Neo-Calvinism and Cultural Engagement

Apologetics must not be considered a mere academic discipline. As broadly used in this study, apologetics is a practical outworking of our theology, or in this case Reformed theology, in all aspects of our lives. Although we can appreciate Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s articulations regarding apologetics, this study is critical of their assessment that apologetics is a “mere” subdivision of theology (if that, in the case of Kuyper). We suggest that apologetics is far more than that, for when we engage in theology we are engaging in apologetics; thus, to put it more radically, theology is apologetics. This is in line with the biblical mandate as articulated by Peter in his first letter, which states, “…but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15-16, NASB). Apologetics/theology, then, must not only be appropriated in disciplines such as philosophy, science or the arts, but also in the more practical domains such as politics, education and family life. This means that the Christian standing in the Calvinistic tradition must take cultural involvement to heart.

When we take seriously Kuyper’s and neo-Calvinism’s assessment of Calvinism as more than an ecclesiastical movement and a dogmatic position and thus as encompassing all aspects of practical life, we must also take seriously the call for cultural engagement in the twenty-first century. One of Kuyper’s most famous quotes must be applied to the cultural mandate; “… and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine’” (Kuyper in Bratt, 1998:488). We do well to take the words of Herman Bavinck (2006:21) to heart, as he claims, “The bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead is conclusive proof that Christianity does not adopt a hostile attitude towards anything human or natural, but intends only to deliver creation from all that is sinful, and to sanctify it completely.”

One of the most decisive doctrines for both Kuyper and Bavinck regarding the way they perceived culture and the Christian’s involvement in it is the doctrine of common grace. Neo-Calvinists under the leadership of Kuyper take seriously the scriptural assertions that, as disciples of Christ, we are
not to be taken out of the world but are to be preserved in the world, and that we are to live differently from others in the world. Skillen and McCarthy (1991:400) in their evaluation of the neo-Calvinist doctrines concerning sphere sovereignty, creation order and public justice, assess Kuyper’s meaning of the possibility and necessity of the Christian’s involvement in the world in his own words:

The calling of the Christian can in no way be fulfilled within the church. The Christian also has a calling in the midst of life in this world. And to the question, “How is this possible?” “How is it thinkable that a child of God can still have business with a sinful world?” comes the loud clear answer: “This is possible and necessary because God Himself still has business with this world!” Moreover, God's business with the world is precisely that which is declared to us in his common grace.

Both Kuyper and Bavinck articulated this doctrine not as something novel but as an interpretation and development of Calvin’s doctrine of *generalem Dei gratiam* as articulated by Calvin in his *Institutes* and throughout his commentaries. Herman Kuiper (1928:180-181) in his *academisch proefschrift* and landmark work *Calvin on Common Grace* shows ample research and gives ample evidence that, although Calvin never used the term “common grace” as such, the French Reformer used the term “universal grace” or “general grace” throughout his writing. In addition, it also shows that Calvin developed the doctrine of common grace as he interpreted it from Scripture.

### 4.5.3.1 Calvin and Common grace

As mentioned above, Calvin never mentioned the expression “common grace” as such but he was explicit in the description of a general grace or a *generalem Dei gratiam* that all of humanity shares and which sustains God’s creation under His sovereign care (Calvin, 1960:276). The importance of this general or universal grace and its apologetic implication is twofold. Firstly, the doctrine of common grace is the impetus for Christians to maintain their involvement in society at large, which he regards as under the sovereign rule of God. Secondly, the Christian regards all of creation with all its societal institutions and sees all of mankind as ruled and created by God, thus having inherent value (Bavinck, 1909:448).

As already discussed above, Calvin assures his readers that, although proper reason is corrupted and misshapen, it is not completely wiped out lest we become like the brute beasts, but we remain rational beings and evidence clearly shows that there is a universal apprehension of reason and understanding. Calvin argues that the light reaches all mankind. Calvin (2005e:38) suggests “that from this light the rays are diffused over all mankind … There is no man, therefore, whom some
perception of the eternal *light* does not reach.” Besides reason and intelligence, common grace also indicates that God has bestowed on mankind free gifts, also called natural gifts, indiscriminately upon the pious and impious (cf. Calvin, 1960:270; 273-275). This means that science, art and literature are to be admired strictly on the basis of common grace bestowed on those involved in these disciplines.

Calvin points out that this common grace must be perceived as a gift from God and leaves unbelievers under the judgment of God when they fail to recognize their gifts as benefits from God. Calvin (1960:579) remarks:

> While the wicked are plied with the huge and repeated benefits of God’s bounty, they bring upon themselves a heavier judgment. For they neither think nor recognize that these benefits come to them from the Lord’s hand; or if they do recognize it, they do not within themselves ponder his goodness. Hence, they cannot be apprised of his mercy any more than brute beasts can, which according to their condition, receive the same fruit of God’s liberality, yet perceive it not.

Calvin is clear to show that his doctrine of *generalem Dei gratiam* or common grace serves two definite purposes. Firstly, for the condemnation of those who do not give glory to God for the grace bestowed upon them, and secondly, as in general revelation and the doctrine of the *sensus divinitatis*, we are without excuse; common grace is poured out on creation to demonstrate God’s mercy on all mankind and love for all of creation. Calvin (2005e:32) asserts in his commentary on John’s Gospel, “As it is not in vain that God imparts his light to their minds, it follows that the purpose for which they were created was that they might acknowledge Him who is the Author of so excellent a blessing.”

**4.5.3.2 Neo-Calvinism, Kuyper and Bavinck and Common Grace**

Both Kuyper and Bavinck built on this doctrine but did not depart from the biblical or Reformational conception of the doctrine. As James Bratt (1998:165) suggests, “Common grace was thus a theology of public responsibility of Christians’ shared community with the rest of the world.” In their view, the doctrine of common grace as espoused by neo-Calvinists is an elaboration of the Calvinistic doctrine and an interpretation that is practical and timely in a period of diminished Christian influence and a withdrawal of cultural engagement as is seen in many evangelical circles. Kuyper is more explicit and calls it the “Anabaptistic” isolationism, “which concentrates all sanctity in the human soul and digs a deep chasm between this inward-looking spirituality and life all around” (Kuyper in Bratt, 1998:172). Inherent in that view, according to Kuyper, is the danger that all that is not directly spiritual and aimed at the soul, such as art, trade business and functions of
government, become unholy and unworthy of pursuit. In this regard, Kuyper asserts that one would be living in two distinct spheres of thought. One sphere concerns the salvation of souls and the other sphere involves the “spacious, life-encompassing sphere of the world,” and Christ only belongs in the former (Kuyper in Bratt, 1998:172). Here Kuyper detects a direct connection to the Thomist nature and grace dichotomy that he so fiercely opposed.

Kuyper’s interpretation of common grace and its connection to special grace in Christ as Creator and Re-creator tries to avoid this dichotomy. By connecting common grace to creation and special grace to re-creation, Kuyper insists that common grace is linked to the sustaining of fallen creation or nature, whereas re-creation belongs to the terrain of special grace. In other words, he grounded both common grace and special grace in the work of Christ. In this, Kuyper obliterates the dichotomy because Christ is at home in both spheres of life. This dual purpose of grace closely resembles Calvin’s claim regarding general grace and special grace (cf. Calvin, 1960:78, 276).

The assertion by Kuyper that common grace is found in connection to creation implies that it can provide cultural cultivation and progression. This, according to Kuyper, is evidenced in the connection between history and common grace; whatever is latent within creation has been and is in the progress of being discovered by mankind for the enrichment of their lives (Kuyper in Bratt, 1998:174-176). Vincent Bacote (2005:103) asserts in a similar fashion, “For the human race at large, life improves as a result of tilling the soil of creation, made fertile through common grace.” A dichotomy could only be construed, according to Kuyper, if special grace and common grace were to exist independently side-by-side. Kuyper, however, makes sure to explain that both common grace and special grace are intricately linked: “special grace presupposes common grace. Without the latter the former cannot function.” Furthermore, without common grace “the elect would not have been born” (Kuyper in Bratt, 1998:169). In other words, common grace makes special grace possible. Sytse Zuidema (1972:59), philosophy professor at the Free University of Amsterdam, asserted quite succinctly:

        Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace is there for the sake of his doctrine of particular grace; and first and foremost for the sake of his doctrine that particular grace gives birth to Christian action which is as broad as life and which is not only not impossible and not forbidden, but possible and even mandatory.

Kuyper takes seriously the role of the Holy Spirit in all aspects of God’s providence over all creation, including over common grace. In his work *Het Werk van den Heiligen Geest*, first published in 1888, thus preceding his work on common grace by ten years, he attributes the gifts and the talents bestowed upon mankind to the work of the Holy Spirit, echoing Calvin’s doctrine on the Holy Spirit. Kuyper (1927:73) asserts, “Maar wat wel nog opzettelijk ter sprake dient te komen,
is de werking van den Heiligen Geest in en op onze talenten, gaven en bekwaamheden, zo in ambacht als in ambt.” [But what still has to be brought up deliberately is the working of the Holy Spirit in and on our talents, gifts and abilities, so in craft and office]. These gifts and talents are bestowed indiscriminately on believer and unbeliever alike: “in de gifte hiervan is God als Souverein even vrij, als Hij vrij is in de gifte der genade” [In the gift of this, God is as Sovereign as free, as He is free in the gift of grace] (Kuyper, 1927:77). There is thus a powerful emphasis by Kuyper on the work of the Spirit, thus when we take seriously Zuidema’s assessment we can assert that the Spirit’s work makes possible the particular work of grace and the common work of the Spirit in creation. It must be emphasized, however, that the ever-underlying principle is God’s sovereignty, which means that both common and particular grace have as their purpose the glorification of God. Implicitly, Kuyper echoes Calvin’s overall thrust regarding the doctrine of general and common grace.

The question that often arises whether Calvin held a similar position on common grace when he elaborated on the generalem Dei gratiam in his Institutes is therefore silenced. It becomes clear that Kuyper, on the one hand, did not merely parrot Calvin’s view on general grace, but elaborated on common grace to fit a particular agenda appropriate for that time and political climate. However, on the other hand, we detect a thoroughly Calvinistic explanation on the doctrine of general grace in relation to creation and the disciplines associated with societal life.

The doctrine of common grace as articulated by Kuyper, however, has not gone unchallenged. Jacob Klapwijk (1980:20-24) saw Kuyper veering into the same direction as the Thomists and medieval scholastics who created the nature and grace dichotomy. Another danger one could fall into is seeing common grace as a common ground in which the believer and unbeliever find themselves working for the common good (cf. Van Til, 1955:1-29). As Zuidema (1972:54) contends,

What Kuyper intended was not at all to pave the way for some sort of “neutral” appreciation of the cultural activity and achievement of the unbelievers. Much rather he wanted to blaze a trail for God’s believing people to engage in their own distinctive way in the “domain of common grace”—an activity having its origin in and deriving its impulse from particular grace.

Both Calvin and Kuyper teach that all disciplines, although perverted and fallen, are “clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts,” through common grace (cf. Calvin, 1960:273), but are in need of correction and critique. For it is not science itself, art in and of itself, or philosophy itself that stand opposed to Christianity, but, as already mentioned in Dooyeweerd’s assessment, it is the ground-motive from which science, art or philosophy are practiced.
In a similar vein, Herman Bavinck articulates the doctrine of common grace, which he sees as the restrainer of sin and the preserver of creation. He (1989:60) asserts that “the entirety of the rich life of nature and society exists thanks to God’s common grace.” All of societal life, familial relations, political realms, the arts and science arena exist as objects of God’s good pleasure and thus “contempt for God’s divine order of creation is illegitimate” (Bavinck, 1989:60). Zuidema (1972:101) sums up the doctrine of common grace as follows:

Common grace should then be confessed as a work of God whereby He upholds His creation, maintains his creation ordinances, and thus opens the way for the militant as well as suffering church to fight her warfare pro Rege throughout this age, with the weapons God in His common grace has provided her—weapons that are forged, in spite of the impulse that is not of God, also by unbelievers, who no less than the believers are fitted by God’s common grace with gifts and talents for their tasks, tasks which they perform, whatever they intend and whatsoever they will, in the service of particular grace.

Therefore, a separation and a “world-flight” is a repudiation of the divine creation order; a cultural and societal involvement must be considered by all Christians.

4.5.3.3 Appropriation of Neo-Calvinism and Common Grace to Apologetics

The topic of common grace as espoused by both Calvin and neo-Calvinism has practical implications for how we, as Christians in a postmodern milieu, present the Gospel. Several points can be made that are valuable to the task of apologetics. Firstly, the doctrine of common grace emphasizes the sovereignty of God in our culture and thus calls for cultural involvement on the part of the Christian; common grace calls for an incarnational apologetic. Secondly, the doctrine of common grace emphasizes the work of the Spirit, not just in the lives of the believer, but in all of creation. This should influence the way we interact with others and the way we connect with creation as a whole. Lastly, the doctrine of common grace causes the believer to interact healthily with what has often been considered “secular” disciplines such as science and philosophy, because they are all under the domain of the sovereign God. All these points, however, stand in judgment of the standard set before us, which means that indiscriminate cooperation must be thought through and a corrective is needed when all the aforementioned issues stray from the biblical pattern to which we must firmly hold. Respectful dialogue must be exercised, solely on the basis of God’s call to bring all aspects of life under the lordship of Christ. Apologetics cannot merely be thought of in the more traditional sense but must encompass all facets of our existence. In other words, living the life God calls us to is a mode of Christian apologetic.
4.5.3.3.1 Cultural Involvement as Apologetics

Ever since the inception of the church as recorded in Acts, Christian believers have struggled with the issue of how to engage with the surrounding culture. Augustine addressed this issue in his apologetic work *City of God*, and some medieval Christians sought a removal from all worldly temptation, believing that this would avoid all worldly defilement. To this day the discussion continues, for instance with Richard Niebuhr, who contemplates the issue in his landmark work *Christ and Culture*, in which he makes an attempt to come to grips with the contentious relationship of Christianity and civilization. Niebuhr (1975:1) is correct in his assessment that the debate has many facets and that it often deals with questions such as “the church’s responsibility for social order or of the need for a new separation of Christ’s followers from the world.” The latter has often been the temptation as we have seen in the monastic movement in medieval Christianity, and the temptation still exists today.

First we must come to grips with what is meant by “culture.” Bavinck (1953:249) in his *Philosophy of Revelation* expresses the meaning of culture in the broadest sense as to include “all the labor which human power expends on nature.” It is not only the visible world that is included in nature but also humanity itself, the body and soul that must be developed and civilized, according to Bavinck. The former is developed through industry such as agriculture and the distribution of goods, whereas the latter is developed and civilized by means of art, literature or science, to name a few. Henry Van Til (1974:30) affirms as well that culture is always a human enterprise and an outworking of the cultural mandate articulated in Genesis 1:28 and 2:15. Henry Van Til (1974:29-30) defines culture as follows: “Culture is any and all human effort and labor expended upon the cosmos, to unearth its treasures and its riches and bring them into the service of man for the enrichment of human existence unto the glory of God.” Given both Bavinck’s and Van Til’s descriptions of culture, be it the cultivation of the external world or the development of the human internal world, it becomes clear that engagement is founded on biblical principles.

Bavinck (1953:250) is clear in his assertion that culture through the centuries has always been closely connected to religion. When we consider the doctrines of providence and common grace, we must admit God’s influence and sustaining hand in the cultures throughout history; the premodern worldview took this for granted. It was not until the transition from premodern to modern in the eighteenth century that culture began to distance itself from religion and Christianity in particular. Bavinck (1953:250) suggests that it is impossible to disconnect culture from religion because of the close association religion has had with culture throughout the past centuries. Neither modern nor postmodern culture have been able to erase the Christian influence, and although it stands in
contention with religion and Christianity and it has to a great extent emancipated itself from Christianity, it is precisely this sinful world that is “continually fed from the sources of the past” (Bavinck, 1953:251).

It is easy to dismiss this assessment when we look at the state of the culture in North America and Europe in the twenty-first century, but there can also be found some truth in this. Attempts have been made in both modernity and postmodernity to erase Christianity from Western culture, but to no avail. As discussed in the previous chapter, postmodern culture has been influenced by philosophies that contradict Christian principles (e.g., Nietzsche et al.) but have not prevailed and have rather caused a confused spirituality and a longing to fill the spiritual void left by the loss of the transcendent (cf. Thomas Luckmann, 1990; Linda Mercadante, 2014). As well, postmodern culture has produced theologies that have accommodated too much to the prevailing culture and stand in need of correction. Neo-Calvinism calls for an engagement in the culture that is in conflict with Christianity, but all the while recognizing God’s sovereignty, common grace and God’s rule over all aspects of culture. The clarion call of neo-Calvinism is to bring all aspects of culture under the Lordship of Christ. Bavinck (1992:224) expresses it well, saying, “While the world is thoroughly corrupted by sin, it is precisely this sinful world that is the object of God’s love.”

The state of the church in North America has caused many church leaders to do some ecclesiastical navel-gazing. Many have found a lack of engagement disturbing and thus different movements have sprung up with the intent to re-create a church that reflects the fledgling church described in Acts 2, especially in verses 44-47. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove is such a church leader. He co-founded Ruba House community in Durham, North Carolina, which is a new monastic movement that is marked by “radical rebirth, grounded in God’s love and drawing on the rich tradition of Christian practices that have long formed disciples in the Simple Way of Christ” (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2008:39). The New Monastic movement seeks to emulate the medieval monastics by looking after the poor and the disenfranchised and committing themselves to a disciplined contemplative life. Jonathan Wilson, father-in-law to Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (2010:x) is far more succinct in his work Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World, regarding this new monasticism, which in his words is “rooted in a stringent critique of modernity and postmodernity and is wary of its relationship to institutions that are deeply shaped by those cultures.”

The term “new monasticism” is a source of confusion because it calls to mind a withdrawal from culture, which is not the intent of either Wilson or Wilson-Hartgrove. It does call the church to withdraw into a new monasticism to recover “faithful living and a renewed understanding of the church’s mission” (Wilson, 2010:59). Wilson suggests that the fragmentation that our culture struggles with has permeated the Church and it has thus become ineffective in its mission.
Ironically, Wilson calls for a new fragmentation within the Church to form a new monasticism which could counter the culture wars of the twenty-first century. He (2010:60) asserts, “The commitment and struggle necessary for a recovery of the Gospel telos has little chance of occurring in the larger church. This task will be accomplished only in small, disciplined groups; in other words, in a new monastic movement.” We can commend Wilson and Wilson-Hartgrove for their commitment to the Gospel and their recognition that the whole of life is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In large, this new “monastic movement” is in reaction to the North American attempt to fight the culture wars through political gain. This has proved itself counter-productive. One only needs to look at the more recent political history in the United States and its peculiar attachment to evangelicalism.

Another more extreme example can be found in the recent publication of The Benedict Option by a recent convert to Catholicism, Rod Dreher. In an alarmist tone he (2017:8) suggests that “there are people alive today who may live to see the effective death of Christianity within our civilization.” Dreher adopts the Benedictine Rule for all aspects of life, which is commendable, but he also takes an escapist stance where he proposes that Christians ought to “quit piling up sandbags and build an ark in which to find shelter until the water recedes and we can put our feet on dry land again” (Dreher, 2017:12). In all, a robust involvement by Christians is not recommended but rather a personal piety removed from culture is suggested by Dreher. Reformed theology assumes a different approach and asserts that the Christian faith is a “religious and ethical power that enters the natural in an immanent fashion and eliminates only that which is unholy” (Bavinck, 1992:236). It agrees that sin corrupts everything and has covered the entire world, but at the same time realizes that the world is not unholy in itself and must not be despised. An incarnational apologetic does not mean a retreat from the world but rather an involvement in all aspects of natural life, all the while recognizing the relevancy of Christianity in all circumstances and that “our conflict is not with anything creaturely but with sin alone” (Bavinck, 1992:249). In fact, a repudiation of the natural world would be a denial of the truth that the world is the object of God’s love and a rejection of the fact that God’s Spirit is active in all aspects of culture.

4.5.3.3.2 Culture, the Work of the Spirit and Apologetics

Contemporary thought has put significant emphasis on the issue of culture and our cultural mandate. Theology has taken a renewed interest in neo-Calvinism with its emphasis on common grace, which dictates an appreciation of natural life and the believer’s interaction with it, as discussed in the previous section. Calvinism, and subsequently neo-Calvinism, recognizes that the Holy Spirit not only works in the lives of individual believers but is also active in all of creation and
all of natural life that produces culture. The apostle Paul points out to the believers in Philippi, “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is called excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8 NIV). In short, Paul calls the believers to look around them and to recognize God’s working in all aspects of life.

The late Stanley Grenz and John Franke (2001:182) make an acute and valuable observation in their work *Beyond Foundationalism*, where they state, “Because the life-giving Creator Spirit is present wherever life flourishes, the Spirit’s voice can conceivably resound through many media, including the media of human culture.” They also give a stern warning and point out that whatever speaking may occur through whatever media, it must never speak against the biblical text. We must be reminded that confidence in cultural activity should be tempered. As has already been pointed out, culture is human activity and is thus permeated with sin (Calvin, 1960:54). It is sin that has covered the whole earth, but nevertheless the earth remains the object of God’s love. It is the sin we must recognize and it is God’s restraining grace through the power of the Spirit that triumphs over sin. Bavinck (1993:224) exclaims, “The Gospel is a joyful tiding, not only for the individual person but also for humanity, for the family, for society, for the state, for art and science, for the entire cosmos, for the whole groaning creation.”

It is accepted in Reformed circles that God’s Spirit and common grace are operative in aspects of natural life, such as science, philosophy or the arts. The question that has come to the fore and is most pertinent in our pluralistic society concerns the working of God’s Spirit in different religions; what is the measure of truth, if there is truth at all, in the different religions? Especially in regard to defending the Christian faith, it is of utmost importance to know whether we must take a Tertullian stance of robust exclusivism or take a more inclusive approach, much like Justin Martyr.

Throughout history Christianity has had to deal with the issue of different faiths; beginning with Justin Martyr’s logos spermatikos through Aquinas’ natural theology, Christendom has struggled to come to grips with the value of different faith expressions. Calvin was no exception, and although he did not overly concern himself with the problem of interreligious plurality, he nonetheless provided us with a blueprint for thinking about the matter of inter-religious dialogue.

Religion, according to Calvin, is no arbitrary invention, and religious practices would never have been invented if it were not for an imbued conviction about God, the sensus divinitatis. In this scheme of thinking atheism is not an option, for the sense of the divine is implanted by God himself, thus is unable to be destroyed. Richard Plantinga (2004:284) adds, “Calvin says that God, in order to remove the pretense of ignorance, implanted in all human beings a seed of religion (semen religionis). Idolatry, Calvin says, is proof that all have such a seed of religion.”
humankind is unable to produce a pure religion apart from the final revelation that is Christ, as articulated in Scripture, does that mean that no hint of truth or light is to be found outside of Christianity? Whereas in the past pagan religions were harshly judged as demonic, the neo-Calvinist consensus is that this view is untenable because different religions are now better understood. Bavinck (2003a:319) asserts in his *Reformed Dogmatics* that “as a rule, this operation of common grace, though perceived in the life of morality and intellect, society and state, was less frequently recognized in the religions of pagans.” He dismisses the thought that pagan religions were spawned by Satan, but although mixed with error the pagan expressions met a deep-seated need. Bavinck pronounces measures of hope, confidence, resignation and peace, and concludes, “Among pagans there is a revelation of God, an illumination by the Logos, a working of God’s Spirit” (Bavinck, 2003a:318-319)

Bavinck seems to look more favourably on different faith expressions than Calvin, but it must be noted that his viewpoint differs from the aforementioned postmodern postliberal cultural-linguistic system, which sees all religions as valuable, thus devaluing a robust defense of the Christian faith and especially of Christian doctrine. Bavinck and neo-Calvinism recognize glimpses of truth in other religions, but also perceive their deficiencies. They steadfastly hold to the fact that Christianity is the full expression of God’s revelation. In other words, neo-Calvinism is vigorously exclusivistic in the matter of soteriology, inclusivistic in epistemology, and universal in revelation, meaning that non-Christians know that God exists and divine disclosure is available universally, and they recognize the universal scope of the Spirit’s influence (Plantinga, 2004:300).

Amos Yong, a Pentecostal theologian who has done a significant amount of work in regard to a theology of religions, has a similar position and claims, “One could be an exclusivist regarding the foundations of salvation, an inclusivist regarding the question of the unevangelized, and a pluralist regarding the fact of religious diversity” (Yong, 2014:28). We can hold to a position that recognizes the work of the Spirit in the world through common grace but we must be hesitant in overstating the case regarding different faith expressions. We must be cautious with statements as made by Amos Yong (2014:79) who claims that “experiences of the Spirit and alternative specifications of the pneumatological imaginations outside of the explicitly Christian context” are possible. We must hold firm that we “cannot in any way envisage aiming for a synthesis or trying to establish a religious platform which all religions could share” (Kraemer, 1962:122). Although a tempered recognition of the Spirit’s work in different faith expressions can give us a platform for interreligious cooperation, we must continue to recognize the soteriological exclusivist position of Christianity. It is important to acknowledge that if we get fully acquainted with other religions, we come to understand that the differences between the various religions are unbridgeable and irreconcilable (Kraemer, 1962:122).
Ultimately, although other religions contain elements from which we can learn, we must not overstate our case regarding the “truthfulness” found in other religions. We must acknowledge that the ultimate role of the Holy Spirit is to point us to the truth that is only found in Christ. Thus, although a pneumatological approach in a theology of religion, as Yong suggested, is helpful, an uncompromising, unapologetic Christocentric affirmation must be upheld when dealing with different faith expressions.

Along with different faith expressions and the pluralistic concern among postmoderns, a more pressing and contentious issue seems to persist. This issue is the matter of science and the Christian faith. This particular matter has dogged Christianity for the past one and a half centuries. Questions continue to arise and Christianity has not always handled the issues well. Neo-Calvinism has tried to come to grips with the issue and continues to do significant work, remaining involved in its attempt to re-build bridges between theology and recent scientific findings.

4.5.3.3.3 Common Grace, Science, and Apologetics

At the 2016 BioLogos Conference held in Grand Rapids, Scot McKnight suggested that one of the main reasons for young people to leave the church is the seeming contradiction between science and faith. McKnight might be overstating his case but he is right in his assessment that the matter of science and faith is still an important issue for millennials. The current generation is not the only generation that has had to deal with scientific discoveries that seem to contradict the biblical account of, for example, Genesis. It is also true that the church has not always dealt with these issues adequately, which, unfortunately, has caused a rift between science and faith that in turn has caused an “us versus them” mentality. In the twenty-first century, the science-and-religion debate continues among Christians, especially in efforts to counter the seeming contradictions between the biblical narrative of Genesis 1-3 and the scientific findings. The evolution/creation dichotomy is not new and has been raging on both sides of the Atlantic since Darwin’s publication *The Origin of Species*.

This debate has been present among neo-Calvinists in both the Netherlands and North America. In the Netherlands, the percentage of those who believe that evolution is (probably) true (60%) is lower than in most secularized countries in Europe but higher than in North America (40%). Surprisingly, this topic enjoys remarkable popularity because of the American young-earth

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1 BioLogos is a North American organization that invites the church and the world to see the harmony between science and biblical faith as they present an evolutionary understanding of God’s creation (http://biologos.org/about-us/our-mission/). This organization attracts scholars from North America and Europe who are engaged in a variety of different disciplines such as science, theology and philosophy.
creationist influence, not only in American evangelical churches, but also in traditional Reformed (Calvinist) circles (Flipse, 2012:105). The debate is far more complex and has deeper consequences than just finding a consensus between science and religion. It often comes down to the reliability and the authoritative nature of Scripture (cf. Kruyswijk, 2011:57-59) and, as is the case especially in North America, who controls public education (Flipse, 2012:131). For these reasons, the debate has the potential to become heated at times. Nevertheless, a good understanding of the tasks of theology and science can bring both parties together and change the interaction from heated debate to friendly dialogue.

Reformed theology with its Calvinistic principles has, in many ways, taken the lead in building bridges between the scientific community and the Church. This building of bridges has not come without its share of struggles and controversies. Nonetheless it is imperative that we must come to some kind of understanding without compromising the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, on the one hand, and the integrity of scientific discoveries on the other, without putting up walls which exclude one or the other.

Unfortunately, for many years, Christianity has been thought of almost exclusively as “otherworldly” where a love was fostered for the wellbeing of the soul and the temporal “worldly” matters were neglected. Abraham Kuyper (1931:118) remarks, “Christ was conceived exclusively as the Savior, and His cosmological significance was lost out of sight.” Scripture calls us back to an understanding that God cares for the souls but that soteriologically God cares for all of creation; we await the restoration of the entire cosmos. With this realization in mind, scientific endeavors are to be regarded as God-ordained. Kuyper (1931:118) asserts, “Calvinism alone, by means of its dominating principle [God’s fore-ordination] which constantly urges us to go back from the Cross to Creation, and no less by means of its doctrine of common grace, threw open to science the vast field of the cosmos, now illumined by the Sun of Righteousness, of Whom the Scriptures testify that in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

In the realm of science the principle of common grace cannot be overlooked. Calvin (1960:275) tells us, “We ought not to forget those most excellent benefits of the divine Spirit, which he distributes to whomever he wills, for the common good of mankind.” This means that the scientific discoveries made by unbelievers cannot be discarded and that remnants of truth are to be found within them. Calvin also warns that if the capacity to understand these truths is not undergirded by the solid foundation of God’s truth, they are unstable and transitory. In other words, mankind is able to uncover great scientific truths on the basis of God’s gift of common grace and upon the fact that traces of the image of God in humankind are still very much present. God has given us truth in both
nature and Scripture; the one does not contradict the other, but the latter does illumine the former (Calvin, 1960:68).

Is there indeed a conflict between science and faith? Not according to Kuyper (1931:31), who claims that every science must start from faith. Herein lays the problem: what is the starting point in the scientific endeavor? We can agree that scientists heavily rely on a certain set of presuppositions from which they approach reality. For centuries, science was conducted with the presupposition that God exists. Kuyper defines the different approaches or presuppositions as either Normalist or Abnormalist. The former recognizes God as the Creator of the entire cosmos and Scripture as the Word of God. The latter does not recognize God and sees Christ and Scripture as human inventions. Kuyper (1931:134) asserts, “The normal and the abnormal are two absolutely different starting points, which have nothing in common in their origin.” In the case of apologetics then, it is the foundation or the Dooyeweerdian ground-motive upon which the discipline of science is built which must be uncovered and attacked. Bavinck (in Kruyswijk, 2011:65) even asserts that proper science is only possible from a theistic point of view:

Eigenlijk kan er van natuurwetten alleen sprake zijn op het standpunt van het theisme. Natuurwetten zijn er alleen als er een Wetgever is, die boven de natuur staat ... Van God als Wetgever losmaakt, zijn natuurwetten niets anders dan eene menschelijke en altiid feilbare beschrijving van de wiize, waarop de dingen werken ... Wetten, ordeningen zijn ze dan alleen in zoover als ze een metaphysisch karakter dragen.

[Actually, laws of nature can only really exist from a theistic point of view. Laws of nature are only there if there is a Lawgiver, who stands above nature. When God is divorced as Lawmaker, laws of nature are nothing but human inventions which are but fallible descriptions of how things work. They are but Laws and ways of ordering only as long they carry a metaphysical character.]

Keeping this in mind, Kuyper (1931:135) voices his critique regarding the classical way of defending the Christian faith that disregards the foundations or presuppositions upon which science is mounted and compares it to a man “who tries to adjust a crooked window-frame, while he is unconscious of the fact that the building itself is tottering on its foundations.”

The forebearers of neo-Calvinism, Kuyper and Bavinck, recognized the importance of science and religion and they both weighed in on the issue in their respective writings. Kuyper addressed the issue of science in his Stone Lectures on Calvinism and also in his “Evolutie” address that was delivered as a rectoral oration at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1899. Bavinck devotes a section on the material world and human origins in Volume Two of his Reformed Dogmatics, and also in his Philosophy of Revelation he addresses the concept of evolution and natural law more in-
depth. It must be taken into account that both men addressed these issues in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century when, among Christians, evolution was regarded as atheistic and many of the scientific discoveries that we are now aware of were not available to them. The reactions, therefore, are understandable.

Bavinck begins his chapter on the material world by stating that the Bible does not provide us with a scientific cosmology, but uses language of ordinary experience. Bavinck (2003a:473) claims that “the data of natural science must be taken seriously by Christians as general revelation, but only special biblical revelation can describe the true state of the world.” Bavinck understands that the biblical language of Genesis 1 does not necessarily describe a literal six-day creation and that realistic scientific discoveries must be taken into account. He has a high regard for the natural sciences, and acknowledges that the concept of evolution has been helpful as a working hypothesis. Evolution, however, has overstated its case by elevating itself “to the rank of a formula of world-explanation and elaborated into a system of world-conception” (Bavinck, 1953:85). Hitjo Kruyswijk in his doctoral dissertation Baas in eigen boek? suggests that Bavinck gave the impression that newer species could have originated from earlier and older species and that in principle he did not dismiss human descent (afstamming) from simpler animal species. Bavinck, however, did not find this probable on scientific grounds. In private conversation Bavinck felt freer to elaborate on this, but in public discourse he remained more subdued regarding this issue. Kruyswijk also noted that the conversations Bavinck had are difficult to verify, so whether he actually held to these convictions, one may never know (Kuytwijk, 2011:70-71).

Kuyper, in his rectoral address, was far more adamant regarding the issue of Darwinian Evolutionism and saw it as incompatible with Christianity as a life-system. Throughout his address, he specifically dismissed social Darwinism as anti-Christian and, much like Bavinck, he rejected dogmatic evolutionism as a mechanistic system. He considered the Christian religion and the theory of evolution as two mutually exclusive systems, and suggested that “the theory of evolution is no respecter of anything sacred” (Kuyper, 1996:15). Coming down hard on Darwinian Evolutionism, Kuyper was also aware that if God had decided to choose a different method of creating the universe he could certainly have done so.

We will not force our style upon the Chief Architect of the universe. If He is to be the Architect, not in name only but in reality, He will also be supreme in the choice of style. Therefore if it had pleased God not to create the species but to have one species emerge from another, through the medium of enabling a preceding species to produce a higher following species, creation would still be no less miraculous (Kuyper, 1996:49).
Kuyper (1996:49) did, however, recognize some kind of mechanistic aspect of creation, and in remaining true to Scripture, he asserts that *the earth brought forth* vegetation and animals and that “they were not set down upon the earth by God, like pieces upon a chessboard.” He is strong in his opinions about the mechanistic principles of Evolutionism and often caricatures the concept, but Kuyper dismisses evolution because of the atheistic presuppositions that scientists have upheld in presenting this theory.

Can we still hold to these same strong convictions as Kuyper and Bavinck concerning the issue of evolution? Neo-Calvinism as espoused by Kuyper in the late nineteenth century was not meant to bring back the Calvinist doctrines as such from the sixteenth century but rather bring Calvinism into the nineteenth century to combat modernistic tendencies; so we can bring Calvinism into the twenty-first century, taking into account scientific progress, while at the same time being faithful to Calvinistic principles, especially regarding Scripture and the work of Holy Spirit. Within Reformed circles much has been done in regard to science and the science-religion dialogue. Deborah Haarsma, acting president of BioLogos, Alvin Plantinga, American analytic philosopher, and Richard Mouw, Board of Directors of BioLogos have all made great strides in promoting science as a godly endeavor and opening up the dialogue between theologians and scientists.

Being mindful of the authority of Scripture and what the creation story is really telling us about God, many neo-Calvinists take seriously God’s work in the realm of science. In so doing, neo-Calvinism avoids making the mistake of divorcing science from the area of God’s sovereignty. Realizing the importance of both Scripture and science, we must look critically on the presuppositions that underlie the scientific endeavor and so critically judge evolution that dismisses God and promotes mechanistic, purposeless principles. Whatever we make of the assumptions that BioLogos espouses, or whether we even agree with their conclusions, it has opened the door to fruitful dialogue. A word of caution is needed, however, regarding any type of theistic evolutionism and the danger this might present to the authority of Scripture. Science or any other discipline cannot and should not dictate how we are to read the Scriptures; no discipline is to usurp the authority of Scripture and we should avoid embracing certain assumptions in order to be more palatable to the unbelieving world. The dangers of accommodationism always lurk around the corner.

4.6. Conclusion: Calvin and Apologetics in Contemporary Culture

It seems that an apologetic method in the traditional sense is difficult, if not impossible, to extrapolate from Calvin's theology. On the one hand there have been those who are adamant that
Calvin vehemently opposed any kind of apologetic method (cf. Timothy Paul Jones, 1996:387-403) and on the other hand, there are those who read Calvin differently and find a rational apologetic method throughout Calvin's theology (cf. R.C. Sproul et al., 1984). How are we to understand Calvin's theology in regard to apologetics? Do we indeed dismiss apologetics as a futile endeavor or do we read into Calvin’s theology some workable apologetic method as promoted by Ligonier Ministries (a Christian discipleship organization in the US with Reformed leanings) under the guidance of American Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul?

Both viewpoints described must be critically assessed and a third way forward can be proposed. It is true, as Timothy Jones expressed, that a particular apologetic method based on autonomous reason must be dismissed. He is correct in stating that no unregenerate person could ever recognize God’s self-revelation in and through nature, and autonomous reason is incapable of comprehending God (cf. Calvin, 1960:35-69). A Ligonier apologetic method is here far too optimistic regarding the unregenerate mind. It is also correct that, although God’s character can be seen in creation and the sensus divinitatis is apparent in all humankind, Calvin undoubtedly made clear that these leave mankind without excuse.

Does this mean that no apologetic approach is even possible or that an application of Calvin’s theology is rather foolhardy? There is a danger that we dismiss reason outright, as if reason does not come into play when coming to faith and when considering the Gospel message. Here we fall into the danger of fideism, a viewpoint that the Reformers, including Calvin, vehemently opposed. Calvin recognized the work of the Holy Spirit all too well in the process of regeneration, but that did not mean for him that reason could be dismissed. Calvin is clear that reason must be awakened by the Holy Spirit in order to come to faith. Autonomous reason must be dismissed and must give way to an enlightened reason. Reformed theologian Auguste Lecerf (1981:212) explains,

> Since the discernment of the marks of divinity which God has placed in nature and His positive revelation depends on spiritual conditions which the unregenerate man neither wishes to nor can fulfil, this discernment can only result from an act of God, restoring the religious receptivity of the subject, creating the spiritual conditions of this receptivity and effectively determining its acceptance by the subject.

Calvinistic apologetics recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the unbeliever, and for that reason the apologist never tries to produce the initial act of faith by offering well-thought-out syllogisms. He will, as Lecerf (1981:209) notes, “seek to be the instrument of God’s efficacious grace by presenting reasons of wisdom rather than proofs of faith.”

Calvin's theology leaves room for an apologetic method. We must realize that God can, by His Spirit, already be active in the life of the unbeliever, who unbeknownst to him is already,
“potentially, through the power of God a spiritual man” (Lecerf, 1981:209). Apologetic conversations have no persuasive value except when, through grace, we relinquish our autonomous reason and submit ourselves to the truth. In addition, an apologetic method can be effective when the apologist points out to the unbeliever that his presuppositions are unlivable and when taken to their logical conclusions do not comport to reality. It is imperative in this sense to recognize the prevailing presuppositions that form the systems of belief in contemporary culture. These prevailing assumptions that colour contemporary spirituality but also contemporary theology must be evaluated and corrected. This can be accomplished when reading these presuppositions through the grid of Reformed theology that is robustly biblical. Thus apologetics does not only concern itself with presenting reasons for faith to the unbeliever, but also defending orthodoxy against skewed spirituality and heterodoxy in contemporary postmodern theology.

Neo-Calvinism as espoused by Kuyper and Bavinck reacted to modern liberalism and the subsequent silencing of Christianity in the public sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Neo-Calvinism finds itself having a renewed interest for many of the same reasons. Contemporary neo-Calvinists like Richard Mouw, Craig Bartholomew and James K.A. Smith take the principles of Calvinism, not to isolate Calvinism from the contemporary Zeitgeist, but to work them consciously to the needs of the day. Neo-Calvinism is constructive for a Christian apologetic because it remains robustly scriptural; it takes seriously the Calvinistic doctrine of common grace, which allows for a respect towards alternative viewpoints, and sees salvation not only as an individual hope for the believer but also as hope for the renewal of the entire cosmos, dismissing a dualism that has so often plagued fundamentalist Christianity in the past. In sum, Neo-Calvinism allows for a greater and more open dialogue in all areas of life and appreciates the different disciplines that have often been hijacked by those averse to Christian influence. A word of caution, however, must be issued against accommodationism that can sometimes be detected on the peripheries of neo-Calvinism.

An apologetic based on neo-Calvinist principles does not seek a “Christian nation” per se but recognizes the importance of a pluralistic state that allows all confessions to participate on equal terms in the public realm (Chaplin, 2009). We do well to heed the warning of the neo-Calvinist and ethicist Jonathan Chaplin (2009) who states,

When church or organizational leaders lament the “secularization” of public life and the “marginalization” of religion from Christians, we are entitled to ask them if they are prepared to put the required energy and resources into the kind of sustained Christian political education that citizens so desperately need today. The result of not doing so is either muteness or mimicry: Christians either stay silent in the face of such pressures, or
they merely echo an off-the-peg secularist stance with no Christian content. Unless we are all prepared to put our money where our mouth is, our nations will indeed be more “secular”.

As can already be concluded, a Calvinistic apologetics must be viewed not so much in the conventional sense of an individual defense of the faith, although this is important, but in a broader sense of an engagement in all aspects of life, be that the arts, sciences, or public life. In so doing we will exert Christian influence in all corners of society.

Calvin was not, and did not remain, alone in his opposition to autonomous reason in comprehending truth. After the Reformation, as time went on, and the importance of reason became more pronounced, others continued the resistance against autonomous reason and continued to uphold the dictum *fides quaerens intellectum*. One of the more acclaimed apologists that endorsed these thoughts and appropriated them into his thinking is Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), who was by no means a Calvinist, but can be named alongside the French reformer as one who recognized human sinfulness and our inability to grasp the truth apart from God’s grace.
5.0 BLAISE PASCAL AND APOLOGETICS

5.1 Introduction

In 1623, nearly one hundred years after the death of Calvin in the town of Clermont in Auvergne, 400 kilometers due south of Noyon in Picardy, the birthplace of the French Reformer, Blaise Pascal was born to Étienne and Antoinette Pascal. The town of Clermont found its notoriety in the fact that it was there that Pope Urban II had blessed the departure of the First Crusade in 1095, but from this same town came a man who, almost four hundred years later, still amasses significant interest among Christian apologists of all stripes.

At first blush, it might seem somewhat of a stretch to mention Pascal and Calvin in the same sentence because of the former’s antagonistic stance towards the followers of Calvin, but upon closer examination we will discover that many of Pascal’s intentions regarding a Christian apologetic are in line with Calvin’s theological impressions. We must be careful, however, not to overstate our case here, for Pascal was by no means a Calvinist and his tone toward the Calvinist followers was at times acrimonious, as he most ardently expressed in “A Short Exposition of the Problem of Grace” (Pascal, 1948:136). In the exposition, Pascal voiced his displeasure with Calvinists, as he regarded their view of election and free will as heretical, and he, erroneously, implied that in the view of the Calvinists, God is the author of sin, a common misrepresentation of Calvin’s theology. In wholeheartedly affirming Augustine’s views, Pascal, more than likely much to his chagrin, comes closer to Calvin’s views than he might have realized. In this regard, it would be easy to christen Pascal as a Protestant, but we must remember that he remained true to the Roman Church until his death in 1662. Pascal scholar Émile Cailliet (1944:114) aptly noted, “Never was a Roman Catholic nearer to evangelical Protestantism, or farther away.” Peter Kreeft (1993:13) quipped, “he [Pascal] is too Protestant for Catholics and too Catholic for Protestants.” It is for that reason that many have ignored him for so long.

We must conclude that Pascal’s overall theological scheme is thoroughly biblical, despite being wedded to the Roman Church. Consequently, Pascal’s apologetic viewpoints are in line with Calvin and the Reformed points of view. As with many theologians, Pascal’s physical health had a major influence on the way he approached his theology. In addition to, and largely because of, the physical limitations, Pascal experienced spiritual lows, in which he almost felt abandoned by God, but paradoxically through which he felt the near presence of God. Through a life of physical and spiritual ups and downs emerged a spiritual giant whose theology was intensely biblical and devotedly Christocentric. It is for that reason that Christians of all stripes have tried to make Pascal their own. Additionally, because of Pascal’s existentialist leanings, his name has been associated
with Nietzsche and with the Danish existentialist Kierkegaard. For similar reasons and Pascal’s aversion to reason and complete certainty, postmoderns have courted the French apologist as well (cf. Smith, 2006:28, 137; Caputo, 2013:171).

Because of the wide range of interest and renewed enthusiasm in Pascal’s work, it is imperative that we come to the proper conclusions regarding Pascal’s apologetic approach, which must speak to a contemporary postmodern audience. As with Calvin, Pascal’s theological ideas and apologetic method (although far more deliberate and direct than Calvin’s) are extremely relevant to the audiences of the twenty-first century, who long for a sense of wholeness, meaning and hope. Essentially, Pascal’s apologetic method is thoroughly Reformed and is in line with Alvin Plantinga’s explanation of Reformed epistemology and to a certain extent with Cornelius Van Til’s presuppositionalism (cf. Plantinga, 2000:210, 436; Van Til, 2003:153).

5.1.1 Pascal’s Writings

The corpus of Pascal’s writings translated into English is relatively small compared to the body of work that is available in French. The most well-known writings in the English language are Pascal’s Pensées or Thoughts, his disputes with the Jesuits as articulated in his Provincial Letters and an array of letters contained in The Great Shorter Works of Pascal translated by Pascal scholars Émile Cailliet and John Blankenagel. Concerning Pascal’s most famous work Pensées, there are numerous editions in both French and English with different arrangements according to the editor’s preference. To remain consistent regarding the numbering and ordering of the Pensées, one particular edition must be used throughout. For this study the 1966 Penguin edition translated by A.J. Krailsheimer will be used.

Of his writings, Pascal’s Pensées is most well-known in Christian circles. Initially, Pascal intended to write a Christian apology but died before the work was finished. This work would have been made up, arranged and ordered from the Pensées which were collected over a period of time. These Pensées are made up of aphorisms, pithy sayings and shorter thoughts. A few of these are well thought-out but are never overly elaborated. After Pascal’s death, these Pensées were found in piles of scrap paper, ordered by his friends and his family and published posthumously in the year that scholars believe to be 1668 (Stewart, 1915:47). Many have deliberated and tried to systematize the apologetic structure of the Pensées (cf. Cailliet, 1961:325), but the true structure that Pascal has given us to follow is found in Pensées 6: First part: Wretchedness of humanity without God. Second part: Happiness of humanity with God. First part: Nature is corrupt, proved by nature itself. Second part: There is a Redeemer, proved by Scripture (Pascal, 1966:33). As we will discover, the arrangement, especially regarding the placement of Pascal’s Wager, can be debated.
In order to gain a good understanding of Pascal’s context and his theological influences, a short biography, without belaboring the many aspects, is important. There is no shortage of biographies written on the man Pascal. Works by Émile Cailliet such as *The Clue to Pascal* (1944) and *Pascal, The Emergence of a Genius* (1961), Albert Wells’ *Pascal’s Recovery of Man’s Wholeness* (1965) and Donald Adamson *Blaise Pascal: Mathematician, Physicist and Thinker About God* (1995) are excellent examples. Certain events in the life of Pascal were influential in the forming of his theology, which, in turn, influenced his view on apologetics, thus to omit these events would shortchange this study.

### 5.1.2 The Life of Pascal

Pascal’s mother Antoinette died when Pascal was just three years old, leaving his father Étienne to raise young Blaise and his two sisters Gilberte and Jacqueline. Paul Vitz (2013:3-10, 86-88) in his book *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism* describes the positive correlation between the faith of a father figure and the forming of faith in his offspring. In the case of Blaise and Étienne, this theory could very well be valid. Étienne was a devout Roman Catholic who saw the benefit of science and its practical application of mathematics, which he instilled into young Blaise, and took it upon himself to teach “matters known by reason” and “matters known by faith” (Wells, 1965:24). Blaise Pascal excelled in mathematics and the sciences and in many ways he is much more recognized and lauded for his mathematical prowess and inventions than his apologetic endeavors. The latter he undertook relatively later in his short lifetime, mainly after his “final” conversion in 1654 (Pascal, 1948:117). Not everyone was as pleased with his religious fervor that overtook his mathematical aptitude. E.T. Bell, for example, in a most unflattering biographical assessment of Pascal, bemoans the fact that the French mathematician devoted his life to religion and the spread of Christianity in particular rather than to scientific endeavor. He saw Pascal primarily as a highly gifted mathematician who, unfortunately, “let his masochistic proclivities for self-torturing and profitless speculations on the sectarian controversies of his day degrade him to what would now be called a religious neurotic,” and who “allowed himself to be deflected from what he might have done if it were not for his morbid passion for religious subtleties” (Bell, 1937:73-74).

From early childhood Blaise was no stranger to suffering. It seemed that he lived, worked and wrote in a constant frenzy as if he knew his time was short. His time, indeed, was short. Blaise Pascal died in 1662 at the age of thirty-nine. He accomplished more in his short life than many of us will ever accomplish in a life time. His work is as diverse as it is accomplished. He is recognized in the scientific world for his scientific accomplishments, such as his barometric and meteorological
findings, the invention of the calculation machine and the various mathematical calculations such as
the theorem of the mystic hexagon (Adamson, 1995:21-47). In the religious world, Pascal is
probably best known for his Wager as articulated in his *Pensées*.

5.1.3 Pascal’s Theological Context and Influences

France at the time of Pascal’s birth was mired in religious strife. The Protestants had gained some
legitimacy with liberties granted by the Edict of Nantes. These liberties were always in jeopardy
and never fully enjoyed, although the Reformed Church as a legal institution could not be denied
(Armstrong, 1969:3). However, the disputes between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant
Christians remained vehement, until 1640, when the atmosphere had notably changed (Armstrong,
1969:5). On the Catholic side, the Jansenists contributed greatly to this renewed irenic atmosphere.
A new and serious dispute arose within the Roman Catholic fold, namely between the Jansenists
and the Jesuits, which had a lot of bearing on the formation of Pascal’s theology. Robert Bireley
Companion of Christianity explains:

The prolonged painful dispute in France between the Jesuits and the Jansenists revolved
around the relationship between the Christian and the world; more specifically, the value of
human activity vis-à-vis divine action in the process of salvation and the need of the church
to accommodate its moral teaching to a changing world.

More importantly, however, was the Jansenists’ pessimistic view on original sin, which seemed to
suggest the denial of the role of human free will in human salvation. In turn, the Jesuits proposed
that the Jansenists veered too close to the position of the Protestant Reformers. In addition to the
dispute regarding salvation, the Jansenists questioned the Jesuits’ moral theology (Bireley,
2007:1960). It is the latter dispute that Pascal’s *Provincial Letters* are noted for.

Much has been made of Pascal’s connection with Jansenism and whether or not he was a Jansenist
himself. The Pascal family came into contact with Jansenism more or less by accident. Étienne
Pascal suffered a fall and was assisted by two men “who practiced medicine and surgery and were
also dedicated to good works” (Cailliet, 1961:53). These two men were converts to Jansenism and
had great influence on Blaise Pascal, so much so that throughout his life he defended the Jansenist
viewpoints in his polemics against the Jesuits. The attachment to Jansenism followed Pascal all his
life. Although the connection to Jansenism was a close one, it is generally understood that Pascal, at
the end of life, distanced himself from the movement because of its schismatic tendencies (Cailliet,
1944:111). It is undisputed that Pascal died an ardent Roman Catholic. Thomas Morris (1992:9)
makes a similar assertion and adds, “Involved as he was with them, and with their defense, he learned many fine points of theology and began to develop a new sense of importance of the Christian faith for a meaningful human existence.”

Pascal’s theology had close affinities to Augustine and throughout his thinking Pascal drew theological conclusions similar to the Church Fathers and especially to Augustine, without first actually having read them, according to Monsieur de Saci (Pascal, 1948:122). Émile Cailliet (1961:77) notes, “Pascal’s God is the God of Saint Augustine involved in his creation; it is the God of election, the God of the Bible, who blinds man and lights the way, who hides Himself and lets Himself be found. No man ever finds Him until He has already been found of Him. Not to seek Him is to be abandoned by Him.” Although Pascal never uttered the words of Augustine, fides quaerens intellectum, for him, as it was for Augustine, faith in God had an existential beginning. For both Augustine and Pascal, “right believing conditions right thinking; over against the a priori rational principle he sets a priori commitment” (Wells, 1965:42). As we found in Calvin, Pascal contends that God cannot be grasped through autonomous reasoning. It is here where we can establish Pascal’s connection to both Augustine and Calvin; it is on this principle that his Christian apologetic is built.

Another important aspect that is in agreement with both Augustine and Calvin is Pascal’s view of humanity. What spoke to Pascal was the Jansenist theological emphasis regarding the state of mankind in relationship to salvation. It may very well be that Pascal’s ill health attracted him to Jansensim, for it claimed that we are helpless and this helplessness is illustrated by our physical suffering (Cailliet, 1961:54). This struck a chord with Pascal, whose health was quickly deteriorating. As Calvin claims, in order to come to know God, we must also come to know our own wretchedness. Calvin (1960:37) states that “we are prompted by our own ills to contemplate the good things of God; and we cannot seriously aspire to him before we begin to become displeased with ourselves.” The aspect of reason and human wretchedness looms large in Pascal’s overall scheme in the vindication of the Christian faith. This theological viewpoint, which he appropriated in his Christian apologetic, frees us from the shackles of modernity’s autonomous reason and postmodernity’s sense of radical autonomy of experience and feeling, as both have capitulated, in different ways, to the temptation of autonomy.

5.2 Pascal and Theology
For a long time, Blaise Pascal did not show any interest in the investigation of religious and theological matters. Young Blaise concerned himself mostly with the natural sciences, “leaving his emotional life to express itself in the traditional pieties of his inherited religion” (Wilde, 1916:60).
Undoubtedly, Blaise Pascal took his father’s sentiments regarding religious matters seriously, which he saw as lying outside the field of human reason but firmly belonging to the heart. It was not until his family’s conversion to Jansenism that Pascal began to think more seriously about theological matters. There are those who suggest that this conversion lacked real depth of conviction and that it was largely a matter of the head rather than of the heart (Wilde, 1916:61). E.T. Bell (1937:79) even blamed his youthfulness and love of mathematics for the alleged superficiality of his conversion. We must conclude, however, that no matter how serious Pascal took his conversion, the Jansenist turnaround of his family impacted him deeply. He continued his scientific experiments, while his spiritual life experienced ups and downs. It was not until 1654 at the age of thirty-one that Blaise experienced a deep conversion that he penned down as what is now known as Pascal’s Mémoire (Paschal, 1966:309-310).

After his intense experience, he began to devote all his time to studying the Scriptures and gathering thoughts for the vindication of Christianity or his Apology. Pascal was no theological novice and no stranger to debating theological issues, and he appeared to be no match for heretics, as his so-called Provincial Letters attest. One of the more important issues that Pascal debated was the relationship between reason and faith, a topic well-debated in the seventeenth century in light of Descartes’ publication of Discourse on Method in 1637. Debating the correlation between faith and reason was not a novel experience to Pascal. Already at the age of twenty-four he confronted the philosopher Jacques Forton, who appealed to the heresy of Ramon Lull which declared that “man can by the mere exercise of reason attain comprehension of the Trinity and all the mysteries of the Faith” (Stewart, 1941:2). Pascal did not waiver and remained firm that reason alone could not comprehend or apprehend God. The interrelationship between faith and reason becomes abundantly clear in his Pensées.

5.2.1 Pascal and Reason

As already described in the previous chapter, reason and its place within modernity and postmodernity have significant bearing on the way we conduct our task as apologists. The way we view reason dictates the way we approach Christian apologetics. The proper starting point is Pascal’s philosophical and theological perspective in the way he perceives reason in his overall apologetic strategy. The majority of Pascalian scholars have drawn immediate parallels between Augustine and Pascal, and rightly so (Cailliet, 1944:34-40; Miel, 1969:1; Wetsel, 2003:162-180). But there are few who dare to make similar corollaries between Pascal and his countryman Calvin, for obvious reasons, although some have made some vague references to a theological connection between Paschal and Calvin (cf. Moriarty, 2003:144-158; Parish, 2003:182-199). The relationship
between Calvinism and Pascal is tenuous to say the least, but laying aside the somewhat precarious doctrine of predestination as viewed by Calvinism and Pascal, we can conclude that, regarding the issue of human reason in relation to human knowledge and apprehension of God, the two Frenchmen are in considerable agreement. That these views are analogous is no surprise, however, because both Pascal and Calvin find a common theological partner in Augustine. Coming to a proper Pascalian understanding of the use of reason will give us a solid appreciation of the foundation on which Pascal built his Apology. Pascal’s views regarding reason and faith can counter the postmodern disillusionment with the rationalism of modernity and its own subsequent attraction to relativism and its call for the end of traditional Christianity with its metanarrative rooted in love.

While Pascal was wrestling with his own faith, France was shrouded in an air of skepticism and disenchantment regarding Church and religion. During this religious upheaval, French libertinage² made progressive inroads. According to John Boitano (2002:26), “Libertinism in Pascal’s time combined the rational with the occult in a unique challenge to political, moral, and traditional authority of the time.” In the area of science and philosophy, progress abounded. Philosophers and scientists such as Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and Nicholas Malebranche (1638-1715) enjoyed immense popularity and success in seventeenth-century France and in the rest of Europe. The former advanced an epistemological system that would be standard fare for over three centuries. The central principle of Cartesian thought is the high value of autonomous reason, which is to be incorporated into methods and systems of thought. Hans Küng (1980:7) explains that “the ‘spirit’ of the mathematical ethos was to permeate all other sciences,” including theology. Only what we can know clearly and distinctly is true. Religious knowledge was reduced to a scientific method. In France and beyond, this Cartesian thinking of claire et distincte became a slogan for philosophy and intellectual life (Küng, 1980:7). It is against this somewhat arrogant acceptance of autonomous reason that Pascal responded with all vigour. It is because of his anti-Cartesian sentiments that postmoderns are drawn to Pascal and would like to call him their own.

Pascal and Descartes met on several occasions. These meetings were not overly congenial and when Pascal mentions him in his Pensées the tone is curt, to the point, and not inordinately cordial (cf. Pascal, 1966:300) and it seemed there was no love lost between these two brilliant scientists. Although the two Frenchmen had a lot in common as far as interests were concerned, the two could not be further apart when it came to Christian knowledge. Where Descartes probed into the sciences

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² Libertinism has a wide range of meanings and this label was put on many different groups, ranging from the religious “liberal” who refused to be bound by religious restraints (spiritual libertines) to those who showed little respect or even blatant disrespect for religious matters (philosophical or erudite libertines), those who we would call atheists. Calvin encountered Libertines in Geneva who could be counted amongst the former (Collins, 1968), and Pascal dealt with the latter.
with all vigour and brilliance and treated religion as a rational science, Pascal, although a brilliant
scientist in his own right, saw the shortcomings of reason alone when it came to religion. Although
a scientist himself, Pascal (1966:220) warned against “those who probe science too deeply.” In his
letter to the mathematician Pierre de Fermat in 1660, he voiced his opinion regarding the task of
science and downplayed the importance of it, possibly in relation to the importance of studying
Scripture. Pascal (1948:216) pointed out, “I call it [geometry] the most beautiful trade in all the
world, but after all it is only a trade...”

Pascal approached faith and reason much differently than Descartes, and he called for a return to the
approach of the Church Fathers, especially Augustine, emphasizing the role of the heart in our
apprehension of God. For that reason David Roberts (1957:17) counts Pascal among the precursors
of Christian existentialists, and as Thomas Morris (1992:183) exclaimed, Pascal was
“contemptuously dismissed as a ‘mystic’.”

Besides Descartes, Blaise Pascal’s thought was influenced by two philosophers who stood on
opposite sides of the spectrum in regard to the use of reason. On the one hand there was the first-
century Stoic philosopher Epictetus (55-135), and on the other hand was the influential French
essayist and philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). In the conversation with Monsieur de
SacI, Blaise Pascal expounded on both these philosophers with whom he was well acquainted
(Pascal, 1948:122). Both these philosophers had their own particular views concerning natural
reason. Pascal described Epictetus as one who saw “God as the principal end”, and that “God ruled
with justice.” But to call Epictetus a Christian in the traditional sense would be a misunderstanding
of Epictetus’ beliefs (cf. Epictetus:1865). Pascal did not fully repudiate all of Epictetus’
philosophical musings, but he criticized Epictetus’ sense and power of autonomous reason that
would ultimately lead to pride, or as Pascal (1948:123) asserts, “he [Epictetus] was carried away by
presumptuousness with regards to man’s powers.”

Michel de Montaigne stands on the other side of the spectrum. Whereas Epictetus overvalued
reason in the natural human being, Montaigne undervalued reason, and relegated humanity to the
level of a common beast. Montaigne’s entire philosophy was marked by the motto, Que sais-je?
(What do I know?). Montaigne (1877:loc.12567) gives in to skepticism akin to Nietzsche, a man
also taking his cue from Pliny, who stated, “Solum certum, nihil esse certi, et homine miserius ant
superbius” (It is only certain that there is nothing certain, and that nothing is more miserable
[wretched] or more proud than man). The well-travelled and well-read Montaigne in his Essays
continued to point out that for every argument there is a counter-argument, so therefore we must
avoid judging one way or the other, avoiding all certainty. Pascal (1948:124) notes that by his
skepticism Montaigne “imperceptibly destroys everything that men regard as most certain, not in
order to establish the contrary with a certainty to which he is hostile, but merely in order to reveal that, appearances being equal on both sides, one does not know on what to base one’s belief.” Donald Adamson (1995:152) comes to a similar conclusion and states, “Pascal does not subscribe to Montaigne’s belief that certainty is nowhere attainable in human life.” He poses the rhetorical question, “For if all were relative and nothing absolutely sure, what certainty could one then have of the existence of God? Indeed, would it be possible for God to exist at all?” (Adamson, 1995:152).

As was the case concerning Epictetus, Pascal had the highest regard for Montaigne, and he used him extensively throughout his *Pensées*, but he repudiated the opposites proposed by both Epictetus and Montaigne, where the former “establishes certainty and man’s greatness,” and the latter “establishes doubt and man’s weakness”, and ultimately, “they undermine each other’s truth as well as each other’s falsity” (Pascal, 1948:131). This contradiction posed by the two philosophers can only be reconciled by the truth of the Gospel. Pascal (1966:87) sums his thought up well in his *Pensées*:

Knowing God without knowing our own wretchedness makes for pride.

Knowing our own wretchedness without knowing God makes for despair.

Knowing Jesus Christ strikes the balance because he shows us both God and our own wretchedness.

Although Epictetus’ philosophy is still very much apparent in our day, it is Montaigne’s philosophy that finds root in Nietzscheism and is thus present in postmodern thought. The German philosopher was very much influenced by Montaigne and said of the French philosopher, “I only know a single author that I can rank with Schopenhauer, or even above him, in the matter of honesty; and that is Montaigne” (Nietzsche, 2015:Loc. 10035-10036). Charles Sarolea goes so far as to say that Montaigne’s *Essays* provided the foundations of Nietzsche’s philosophy, and that the Frenchman may rightly be called, and in a very definite sense, the “spiritual father” of the German (Sarolea in Nietzsche, 2015:loc 59764-59765). Sarolea is adamant in drawing these definite parallels between Nietzsche and Montaigne to such an extent that he downplays Montaigne’s Roman Catholicism and his Christian convictions. He even calls Montaigne a “pagan” much like his German counterpart and asserts that he is “uncompromisingly hostile to Christianity” (Sarolea in Nietzsche, 2015:loc. 59816). We cannot draw these same conclusions from reading Montaigne’s *Essays*, and even Pascal, although disagreeing with a number of Montaigne’s conclusions, recognized him as one who “professes the Catholic faith” (Pascal, 1948:124). What Nietzsche does have in common with Montaigne is the skepticism and a sense of human wretchedness that ultimately leads to despair, or in the case of Nietzsche, nihilism. Both Pascal and Nietzsche were influenced by Montaigne, yet the
two parted ways in the conclusions they drew from Montaigne’s assertions; whereas the former saw belief in God as the answer, the latter remained mired in hopeless despair.

It must be noted that Pascal was by no means an irrationalist or an enemy of reason, but he recognized the limits of reason and the role it played in regard to faith. Pascal (1966:83) calls for “submission and use of reason; that is what makes true Christianity.” The submission he calls for is an admission of the fact that the knowledge of the Christian God cannot come solely through reason alone. He states, “If we submit everything to reason our religion will be left with nothing mysterious or supernatural. If we offend the principles of reason our religion will be absurd and ridiculous” (Pascal, 1966:83). Here Pascal strikes a delicate balance between reason and the heart, and clarifies this balance as follows:

Those who are accustomed to judge by feeling have no understanding of matters involving reasoning. For they want to go right to the bottom of things at a glance, and are not accustomed to look for principles. The others, on the contrary, who are accustomed to reason from principles, have no understanding of matters involving feeling, because they look for principles and are unable to see things at a glance (Pascal, 1966:257).

From these two pensées we can conclude that both feeling, or the heart, and reasoning, the mind, are very much at play in the Christian faith. Pascal’s reference to sentiment du coeur must not be translated as sentimentality, which is in opposition to raisonnement, but both must be regarded as two aspects of the whole person in harmony with each other. Hans Küng (1980:49) explains that le coeur, or the heart, in Pascal’s scheme does not refer to “the irrational-emotional factor as opposed to the rational-logical; it is not ‘soul’ as contrasted with ‘spirit’.” Küng (1980:49) continues to explain that “the heart means the personal, spiritual centre of man, his innermost operative centre, the starting point of his dynamic personal relationships with other people, the precision instrument by which he grasps reality in its wholeness,” or as Wells (1965:127) puts it, “The term (le coeur) is not a physiological one; it refers to the basic disposition of the whole person.” In a similar fashion, Jan Miel (1969:158) explains Pascal’s use of the word “heart” as follows:

We can safely say, I think, that he uses the word, not as it was used in sentimental novels, and not even altogether as it was used at Port-Royal with overtones of a systematic, rational theological status: he uses the word “heart” as it is used in the Bible, where it occurs perhaps a thousand times and designates the seat of all the faculties of the soul, whether volitional, affective, or intellectual.

Pascal is not averse to reason, and claims that religion is not contrary to reason. He (1966:34) states in the beginning of his Pensées, “Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true.
The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect.” This harmony between the heart and the mind can best be illustrated by the way Jesus conveyed principles that were grounded in reality and truth. Jesus spoke truths and appealed to the heart using parables that were centered on situations that spoke to the audience. It would have been sufficient to give facts and principles for the people to absorb, but, rather, Jesus appealed to the hearts and the minds using everyday situations. Thus, rather than appealing to the mere knowing (mind), Jesus solicited a response that required an acknowledging (heart) of their sinful state. The truths spoken by Jesus and received by his audience must go through the heart to make a reasonable response.

Pascal is clear that faith involves the whole person; both reason and feeling are involved. This stands in stark contrast to Descartes’ viewpoint that the whole person is wrapped up in the mind only. In the 1960 edition of Discourse on Method and Meditations, René Descartes (1960:30) stresses this point by asserting that “in truth, whether we are asleep or awake, we should never allow ourselves to be convinced except on the evidence of our reason.” Pascal (1966:58) asserts in his critique of Descartes’ assumption, “We know the truth not only through our reason but also through our hearts.” First knowledge of principles such as space, time, motion or number are apprehended through the heart and are as reliable as if they were derived by reason (Pascal, 1966:58). He continues to explain that these first principles are “felt,” not proven, and it would be absurd to demand reasons for certainty. Reason is not the only way we learn. The heart is the “mind” that intuitively senses and existentially apprehends (Küng, 1980:49). Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth-century Congregationalist Protestant preacher, in a similar vein as Küng, affirms, “This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the inclination; and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the will; and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart” (Edwards, 1746:9).

Once we understand what Pascal means by “heart” we can fully understand Pascal’s (1966:154) oft-quoted pensée: “Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connait point; on le sait en mille choses” (The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know; we feel it in a thousand things). In other words, the heart apprehends realities, that reason, or cognitive centre, is unable to judge for certainty, or as Peters (2009:91) suggests, “the heart has its own ‘rationality’.” Pascal (1966:58) regards the apprehension of God as an apprehension through the heart: “it is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason.” Similarly, for Calvin, the knowledge of God is more a matter of the heart rather than of the intellect. Calvin (1960:552) states in his Institutes, “…that very assent itself is more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than of the understanding.”
Jonathan Edwards, who had much good to say about religious affections, expounded upon the relationship between the heart and the mind in correlation with Christian belief in his *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, first published in 1746, in which he balanced the two extremes of emotionalism and intellectualism. His comments are drawn from his Calvinistic stance but are perfectly in line with Pascal’s understanding of reasonable understanding in relation to the affections of the heart. Edwards (1746:11-12) emphasizes, as did Pascal, that “religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference; God, in his word, greatly insists upon it, that we be good in earnest, ‘fervent in spirit,’ and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion.” Edwards (1746:148) sums up his understanding as follows:

Spiritual understanding consists primarily in a sense of heart of that spiritual beauty. I say, a sense of heart; for it is not speculation merely that is concerned in this kind of understanding; nor can there be a clear distinction made between the two faculties of understanding and will, as acting distinctly and separately, in this matter. When the mind is sensible of the sweet beauty and amiableness of a thing, that implies a sensibleness of sweetness and delight in the presence of the idea of it: and this sensibleness of the amiableness or delightfulness of beauty, carries in the very nature of it the sense of the heart; or an effect and impression the soul is the subject of, as a substance possessed of taste, inclination and will (cf. Peters, 2009:41; Plantinga, 2000:297).

Again, we must be careful not to charge Calvin, Edwards or Pascal with fideism here, since at first blush reason has been pushed into the background regarding religious matters. Specifically, all three warn us against the dangers of rationalism and emphasize the role of the heart, which must work in tandem to apprehend the Christian faith.

### 5.2.2 Pascal and Faith

It has become clear that Pascal’s entire theological scheme is based on the harmony that exists between the heart and the mind. Ironically, the role played by the Holy Spirit is not overtly pronounced in his *Pensées* as compared to Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This is not an indication that Pascal does not recognize that the origin of faith lies solely in the hands of God. One of the few places where Pascal explicitly expresses the role of the Holy Spirit as central to faith is his reply to Father Noël in a letter written around 1647. In it Pascal (1948:43) states, “And we reserve for the mysteries of faith, which the Holy Spirit himself has revealed, this submission of spirit which directs our belief to mysteries that are hidden from the senses and reason.” Pascal
(1966:227) is explicit in his Pensées that faith originates in God, as he states, “Faith is a gift of God. Do not imagine that we describe it as a gift of reason,” and God “who disposes all things with gentleness, is to instil [sic] religion into our minds with reasoned arguments and into our hearts with grace…” (Pascal, 1966:83). This intricate relationship between faith and reason differs from the Thomistic idea of putting faith and reason into different spheres. For Aquinas (2008:19-23) and medieval scholasticism, reason has a field of inquiry that can apprehend God, his attributes, providence and the immortality of the soul as natural truths without divine revelation, where faith is required to apprehend higher revealed truths (e.g., the Trinity). Pascal, in line with Augustine, maintains a unity of the two spheres: faith and reason. Hans Küng (1981:68) affirms that for Pascal and Augustine “faith and reason, philosophy and theology are intertwined: we are thinking when we are believing and believing when we are thinking. What is known and what is believed cannot be adequately distinguished from each other.”

The Augustinian influence becomes apparent in Pascal’s view of faith in connection to reason. For both men, faith and reason are intrinsically linked and they regard both in service of one another; faith has to do with reason and reason has to do with faith. It is not only that faith is necessary to apprehend Christian truths but also to apprehend all questions for everyday life. In addition, for both Augustine and Pascal, and Calvin should be added to these as well, apprehending God has a Christocentric emphasis. Pascal (1966:86) asserts, “It is not only impossible but useless to know God without Christ.” In turn Augustine (1961:206) declares, “…man, by means of the God-man, could find his way to man’s God. I speak of the ‘Mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus.’” Calvin (1960:544), regarding faith, asserts that the invisible Father is to be sought “solely in this image [Christ],” and again “Faith consists in the knowledge of God and Christ” (Calvin, 1960:545). Because of Pascal’s close theological affinities with Augustine, his views concerning faith are not surprising, but his prerequisite for faith, our knowledge of ourselves, closely resembles Calvin’s views, as the latter explicates in Book I of his Institutes of the Christian Religion.

5.2.2.1 The Prerequisite of Faith: Our Knowledge of Ourselves

When we are confronted with conditions that force us to look at ourselves in a more sober manner, much of our plight becomes clearer. When Pascal was confronted with the death of his father, a most devastating event for Blaise, he articulated the condition of humanity in the most Augustinian fashion. In Pascal’s letter to Monsieur and Madame Perier, at Clermont, on the occasion of the death of Monsieur Pascal who died in Paris, Blaise Pascal recognized that we are created with two loves: the love of God and the love of self, and that with the entrance of sin we lost the first of these
loves. Pascal (1948:87-88) states, “…and since love of self has remained alone in this great soul which is capable of infinite love, this self-love has spread and overflowed into the vacuum which the love of God has left. And thus he has loved himself and all things for himself, that is to say, infinitely.” This self-love has resulted in narcissism where only the self is considered.

For a more contemporary assessment, David Kinnaman of the Barna Group discovered that the faith of young people in America lacks an essential ingredient: humility. He (2011:118) states,

> If you already know all there is to know, if you have been told your entire life that you’re “just right” exactly the way you are, if the main job of the god you believe in is to make you feel good about yourself (because you are entitled to great self-esteem, along with everything else), then there are not a lot of compelling reasons to sit in the dirt at the feet of Jesus and live the humble life of a disciple.

This is not an entirely new phenomenon, because humanity has always suffered from narcissistic tendencies since the Fall, and to humbly examine oneself does not, and never has, come naturally since then. Kinnaman is only pointing out that the tendencies of the current generation have become more pronounced. The reason for this might be the emphasis society has put upon the self and its persistent need to promote individual rights, which ultimately feeds into the postmodern principles of pluralism and relativism. Pascal calls us out of our slumber and forces us to examine ourselves and discover who we really are.

According to Pascal (1966:347), the human race must see itself as a great paradox: “[Self-love] wants to be great and sees that it is small; it wants to be happy and sees that it is wretched; it wants to be perfect and sees that it is full of imperfections; it wants to be the object of men’s love and esteem and sees that its faults deserve only their dislike and contempt.” These feelings, according to Pascal, arouse within him a hatred for truth. Human life is nothing but a perpetual illusion; it cannot stand telling the truth or to be told the truth. Pascal (1966:64) uses strong words to describe mankind in this state of illusion and wretchedness:

> Quelle chimère est-ce donc que l’homme? Quelle nouveauté, quel monstre, quel chaos, quel sujet de contradictions, quel prodige? Juge de toutes choses, imbécile, ver de terre, dépositaire du vrai, cloaque d’incertitude et d’erreur, gloire et rebut de l’univers.

(What kind of freak is man? What novelty, what monster, what chaos, what subject of contradiction, what prodigy? Judge of all things, stupid, earthworm, possessor of truth, cloaca of uncertainty and error, glory and waste of the universe).

Despite the plight of human beings, as scathingly assessed above by Pascal, they insist on comparing themselves to the Creator and exaggerate their divine essence as far as reason is
concerned. Pascal (1966:242) emphasizes this point and declares, “Man is neither angel nor beast, and it is unfortunately the case that anyone trying to act the angel acts the beast.” This is all because of our persistence in loving ourselves (amour-propre) rather than our Creator. Augustine (1958:301) posits a similar thought in his City of God, where he proposes the existence of two opposing cities because “some men live according to the flesh [self-love] and others live according to the spirit.” In other words, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly city of self-love and the heavenly of the love of God. Both Pascal and Augustine call us to approach religion with humility to discover our own wretchedness. A great reversal of state needs to develop, and that great reversal must impress on us the state of illusion in which we dwell.

Pascal (1966:234) warns us and insists that we must hate the self-love within us, that anyone who does not hate “the instinct which leads him to make himself into a God must be really blind.” In his articulation of the human condition, Pascal (1966:33) affirms the prerequisite of faith: admitting our wretchedness (misère) without God. Pascal spends an entire section [III] of his Pensées on the topic of misère, not unlike Calvin (Calvin, 1960:37). Pascal is firm in his sense that it is only God who can reach out to people and rescue them from their wretched state. He (1966:102) asserts that, “It is unworthy of God to unite himself to wretched man, but it is not unworthy of God to raise him out of his wretchedness.” James Peters (2009:96) affirms this same opinion and contends, “Knowing God becomes possible through knowing oneself as the kind of creature who needs grace; in both these forms of knowledge, the way in which one becomes capable of knowing is a function in part of the heart of the knower.” C.S. Lewis (1952:32) came to the same conclusion in his work Mere Christianity, where he admits that Christianity offers unspeakable comfort only after having gone through a period of dismay (Lewis, 1952:32).

Pascal does, however, recognize the paradox in humanity despite our wretchedness. Section VI of his Pensées is entitled “Greatness” (Grandeur)—there is a greatness in this wretchedness (grandeur dans la misère). Remnants of divine essence or, as Calvin puts it, the image of God, are still present despite the Fall in the Garden. Pascal (1966:95) sees reason as a divine quality: “Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed.” Reason has not altogether left us after the Fall. It must be noted that in reference to the ability of reason, Pascal is far more Calvinistic than Thomistic regarding the noetic effects of the Fall, for nowhere does Pascal indicate that reason enables us to proceed in the apprehension of divine knowledge on the sole basis of natural reason (cf. Aquinas, 2008:22; Calvin, 1960:63-64). Pascal (1966:59) perceives that the goal of reason is the recognition of his own wretchedness, so “man’s greatness comes from knowing he is wretched … there is greatness in knowing one is wretched.” John Boitano (2002:83) alludes to Pascal’s implication that
mortal beings can make progress only by “confessing their inherent weaknesses and submitting their limited capacity to the superior authority of Christian faith.”

As already stated, Pascal’s theology is thoroughly Christological and this fact comes especially to the fore in regard to his treatment of the knowledge of God and of ourselves. Here again we see affinities to Calvin’s theology, notably as stated and articulated in Book I of Calvin’s *Institutes*. Pascal states in his *Pensées* that we are unable to know ourselves apart from Jesus Christ, who is the apex of the Christian faith. Pascal (1966:148) claims, “Not only do we know God through Jesus Christ, but we only know ourselves through Jesus Christ; we only know life and death through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ we cannot know the meaning of our life, our death, of God or of ourselves.” Calvin (1960:70) asserts, “…it was necessary to recognize God not only as Creator but also as Redeemer.” In other words, to know ourselves we must know God as the One who created us and also as the One who has redeemed us in Christ. Closely connected to this is, and must be, the view of Scripture, because it is only with the revelation of God’s Word that we are able to understand the nature of God. In this aspect we find Pascal and Calvin on common ground. For both Calvin and Pascal, the Scriptures are the only source for religious truth and without them we are unable to “prove absolutely that God exists, or to teach sound doctrine and sound morality” (Pascal, 1966:86). Moreover, it is only through the Scriptures that we can come to know Christ fully and come to understand the nature of God. In other words, Pascal (1966:148) acknowledges that “without Scripture, whose only object is Christ, we know nothing, and can see nothing but obscurity and confusion in the nature of God and in nature itself.” In a similar vein Calvin (1960:69) posits that “God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in the Scriptures.” In essence, the apologetic of Pascal and Calvin is earnestly Christological, and both men hold to the presupposition that Scripture is God’s infallible Word.

5.3 Pascal’s Apologetic Method

For Pascal, the vindication, the truth, and the reasonableness of the Christian faith are of utmost importance, and thus he spent the remainder of his life from around 1658 until his death in 1662 writing his great work of apologetics. He (1966:325) expounded on the folly of skepticism and atheism and he regarded it “false zeal to preserve truth at the expense of charity.” This showed itself in his apologetics and his polemics; whether he was defending the Christian faith to the philosophical libertines in the *Pensées*, or defending Augustinian doctrine to the Jesuits in his *Provincial Letters*, his aim was to make Christianity attractive and reasonable, “to make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is” (Pascal, 1966:34).
Pascal’s apologetic as laid out in his *Pensées* contains four important aspects that are relevant to our apologetic method in the twenty-first century. Firstly, Pascal had an intimate knowledge of the prevailing mindsets and belief systems that he was confronted with on a daily basis. Secondly, Pascal confronted the different belief systems on epistemological and existential grounds. Thirdly, Pascal did not set out to “prove” the existence of God by giving proofs and natural evidences but instead pointed out the unreasonableness of the belief systems of the libertines, Descartes and Montaigne. Lastly, Pascal’s apologetic was marked with humility. Victor Giraud (1905:42) found Pascal’s insights and apologetics so winsome that he, in his work *Pascal et les Pensées* that appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1905, gave a significant compliment: “Pascal, dans l’histoire de l’apologétique, un nom aussi considérable que celui de Socrate dans l’histoire de la philosophie” (Pascal, in the history of apologetics, a name that is as considerable as Socrates in the history of philosophy).

### 5.3.1 Pascal’s Main Audience(s) in His *Pensées*

Pascal’s context and audience to which his *Pensées* are directed are relevant in the twenty-first century, because the systems of belief and unbelief in seventeenth-century France show remarkable similarities to North American postmodern spirituality, unbelief and skepticism. As discussed above, Pascal learned much theologically from Augustine, and philosophically from Montaigne and Epictetus, although he severely criticized the latter two. These are not the only influences on Pascal’s thinking, for the context in which Pascal lived was rich in diversity of thought.

Boitano (2002:17) suggests that “Pascal writes his *Pensées* after this historical context of tremendous social upheaval, unprecedented unbelief, and open libertine defiance of Catholicism.” This historical context of social upheaval included the Counter Reformation and the Thirty Years War. It is to the French libertines in such a time as this that Pascal’s apologetic is addressed. The beauty of Pascal’s apologetic lays in is his keen insights into the prevailing mindset of the people he had come in contact with.

We can assume that Pascal was no stranger to the seventeenth-century philosophical or erudite libertines, because of what has been dubbed his *periode mondaine* (worldly period). This worldly period must not be thought of as a period of debauchery or a straying from religion altogether, but more so of a period where Pascal devoted more time to matters of scientific and mathematical importance. T.S. Eliot (1943:141) spoke of this time in more positive terms: “It [the worldly period] enlarged his knowledge of men and refined his tastes; he became a man of the world and never lost his thoughts wholly towards religion; his worldly knowledge was a part of his
composition which is essential to the value of his work.” This positive aspect served him well when he decided to pen down his *Pensées* as a vindication of the Christian faith. After the death of Étienne Pascal on September 24, 1651, and his sister’s final vows to become Sister Saint Euphema in 1653, Blaise Pascal went through a time of intense loneliness, in which for two years he devoted much of his attention to scientific activity and rubbed shoulders with the freethinkers and libertines of Paris. The *libertinage érudit* of seventeenth-century France was not one of merely religious indifference but was, rather, a religion or “spirituality” with occultist or cabalistic overtones left over from Renaissance thinking, as fully explained by Frances Yates (1964:124-125, 422-439) and John Boitano (2002:46-62). This intimate knowledge of libertinism, according to Boitano (2002:25), provided Pascal with “direct knowledge of the exact type of persuasive argumentation which would have appealed to actual seventeenth-century libertines.”

The libertines thought that through science and worldly knowledge divine truth and spiritual elevation was possible, and in addition, through a peculiar hermeneutical process the hidden meaning of the Bible could be discovered. This hermeneutical process relies on the proof of the rational alternative of Christian faith and the two essential forms of allegory (historical allegory or *allegoria in factis* and verbal allegory or *allegoria verbis*) (Boitano, 2002:29, 68-69). In his objection to the libertine approach, Pascal appeals to the Augustinian and biblical notion of *Deus absconditus*, with which the cabalistic libertines were well familiar (cf. Yates, 1964; 124-125). The occultist libertine notion of *Deus absconditus* is rather paradoxical for it indicates that God cannot be designated by one or by a multiplicity of names; God has no name, or rather he has all names (Trismegistus in Yates, 2002:125). Pascal (1966:155) is explicit and notes, “…that this is the very name which he gives himself in Scripture: *Deus absconditus* [the hidden God].” Pascal bases this designation on Isaiah 45:15, “Truly you are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel Savior.” What Pascal is getting at is the repudiation of finding the spiritual meaning through natural theology. He is adamant in pointing out that human reason is corrupted because of original sin.

In the matter of allegory and the libertine notion that God’s names or spiritual truths were hidden in the Hebrew language, Pascal takes to task the Philosopher’s Stone as “a hermeneutical tool for the proper discernment of the true meaning of Christian enlightenment” (Boitano, 2002:76; cf. Pascal, 1966:272). By appealing to libertine principles, Pascal deliberately and systematically appeals to the unreasonableness of philosophical libertinism and the reasonableness of the Christian faith. Pascal refuses to fall into the trap of giving the libertines a chance to dismantle rational evidences and proofs taken from nature, but appeals to the true meaning of the familiar term *Deus absconditus* that God indeed has “appointed visible signs in the Church so that he shall be recognized by those who seek him with all their heart” (Pascal, 1966:155). Above all, the *Deus absconditus* does not remain
hidden but is revealed in Christ (Pascal, 1966:85-86). If the libertine is honest with himself, argues Pascal, he would make any effort to seek the truth, even if that means investigating what the Church offers by way of instruction. Pascal knows the heart of those who object to the Christian faith. He knows that those who denounce Christianity have not properly investigated the truths of Christianity. According to Pascal (1966:156):

> We know well enough how people in this frame of mind behave. They think they have made great efforts to learn when they have spent a few hours reading some book of the Bible, and have questioned some ecclesiastic about the truths of the faith. After that they boast that they have sought without success in books and among men. But in fact, I should say to them what I have often said: such negligence is intolerable.

Pascal is not altogether without hope in this regard and calls for charity despite their disdain for the Christian faith. His apologetics is aimed at the truth, which must be laced with charity. This sentiment is emphasized in letter XI of his Provincial Letters where he quotes Augustine, “We ought ever to preserve charity in the heart, even while we are obliged to pursue a line of external conduct which to man has the appearance of harshness; we ought to smite them with a sharpness, severe but kindly, remembering that their advantage is more to be studied than their gratification” (Pascal, 2015:304). He holds out hope that as long as they live they are capable of receiving grace. Pascal (1966:161) appeals to them to “have pity on themselves and to take at least a few steps in an attempt to find some light.” He calls the libertines to look at the proofs that he has collected and find them convincing. These proofs and evidences that Pascal provides are not the rational proofs of the evidentialist, for when reading through his Pensées we come to the realization that classical apologetics or evidentialism is not the method that fit into Pascal’s theological scheme. The use of evidences in apologetics has a long history and has always had a place. It is the type of evidences used that have varied in apologetics. In the case of Pascal, although he was by no means an evidentialist, the Christian faith was always considered reasonable and evidences of a certain kind could be used to prove just that. Calling on evidences was not at the forefront of Pascal’s apologetic method.

### 5.3.2 Pascal and Evidences

All apologists throughout the ages have worked within a certain context and have kept in mind a particular audience. For centuries, the apologists could take for granted an epistemology that accepted the supernatural and the existence of God or the gods. As time went on and Christianity spread, even the existence of the God of the Bible could be presupposed; openness to the divine was assumed. Evidences and proofs were used to affirm the faith and to remove the obstacles to faith
(cf. Aquinas, 2008:22). For many years, atheists and skeptics continued to use rational arguments to debunk Christianity, and in turn, Christians have responded in similar fashion. In a post-Christian society there is very little religious openness and, thus, a different approach to apologetics is needed. Pascal recognized that the obstacle to faith does not always lie in the evidences that can or cannot be provided but is rooted in the attitude and will that seem unmovable by rational apologetics (Gilbert, 2011:5). Jim Spiegel, philosophy professor at Taylor University, has come to the same conclusion and suggests that the cause for unbelief is far more complex than even atheists often realize. He gives moral and psychological reasons for the rejection of any religious adherence, not dismissing rational evidences altogether but suggesting that existential aspects to unbelief cannot be discounted (Spiegel, 2011:43-44).

Pascal (1966:263) is adamant that giving proofs or natural evidences to the skeptic is far from beneficial and exclaims that those who are deprived of faith and grace will not be moved by any of the proofs presented to them. He even scoffs at those who offer up proofs of the existence of God from the works of nature. Pascal (1966:263) does not see anything wrong with evidences from nature per se if they were presented to the faithful, “for those with living faith in their hearts … can certainly see at once that everything which exists is entirely the work of God they worship.” Above all, according to Pascal (1966:86), “The metaphysical proofs for the existence of God are so remote from human reasoning and so involved that they make little impact, and, even if they did help some people, it would only be for the moment during which they watched the demonstration, because an hour later they would be afraid they had made a mistake.” In light of this, it would be a misunderstanding to accuse Pascal of fideism or anti-rationalism. Pascal is committed to showing that the Christian faith is indeed deeply rational. He does, however, disregard an apologetic method solely based on mere rational foundations—modern natural theology. In all, he repudiates the notion of finding God “apart from a loving surrender of the heart” (Peters, 2009:87). Instead of merely addressing natural evidences for the existence of God, Pascal’s apologetic focus is far more encompassing and attends to the whole person. Phil Fernandes (2007:32) sums up Pascal’s apologetic as follows:

Blaise Pascal had a unique methodology. He was not a traditional apologist, for he denied that the traditional theistic proofs would persuade non-believers. He was not a fideist, for he defended the faith. And he was not a pure presuppositionalist, for he used historical evidences to prove the truth of Christianity. At best, Pascal’s methodology could be classified as a type of psychological apologetics, for he attempted to speak to the entire man, not just his intellect.
For Pascal it is the will that is one of the chief organs of belief, “not because it creates belief, but because things are true or false according to the aspect by which we judge them … and the mind, keeping in step with the will, remains looking at the aspect preferred by the will and so judges by what it sees there” (Pascal, 1966:218). In other words, it is the will that directs the mind depending on the pleasure we derive from it. It is not, as the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans, that people do not believe but that they suppress the truth. Calvin, in driving home this same point, affirms that because of the awareness of divinity, or what Leszek Kolakowski (1995:147) calls “this natural feeling,” we are without excuse. Kolakowski (1995:147) stresses Pascal’s point and asserts, “Atheists, who have no faith, do not lack this ‘natural feeling,’ but they do not want to discover it in their hearts because their will and the attraction of temporal pleasures conceal it from them.” What is needed in matters of faith is not the *esprit de géométrie* but the *esprit finesse*, “a sensitively apprehending of the whole person” (Küng, 1981:62). Proof or evidences are not needed to produce faith because theistic belief, according to Pascal (1966:138), is triggered from within by the work of God. Pascal exclaims, “Do not be astonished to see simple people believing without argument. God makes them love him and hate themselves. He inclines their hearts to believe. We shall never believe, with an effective belief and faith, unless God inclines our hearts, and we shall believe as soon as he does so.”

The question remains, however, whether Pascal put any stock in evidences as confirmation of the Christian faith. Like Augustine and Calvin, Pascal is selective and careful in pointing to “proofs” or “evidences” that affirm the Christian faith. What he points to, as do the others, are proofs associated with Scripture and the Church, and empirical evidences are all neglected, not mentioned or seen as superfluous. Pascal (1966:359) mentions in one of his additional *Pensées* that “visible signs of Him have always existed throughout the ages. Ours are the prophecies, other ages had different signs.”

Besides these, Pascal mentions many more, not unlike Augustine, who mentions miracles as proofs of the Christian faith, and Calvin, who sees the miracles and the prophecies as central to the credibility of Scripture (cf. Augustine, 1958:512-518; Calvin, 1960:85-88). Pascal (1966:181) also recognizes the value of proofs and mentions several of them:

We do sense from Pascal, however, that, although these evidences exist, they are not what ultimately brings one to faith. For Pascal the Christian faith is far more existential, and for that reason his apologetic method appeals existentially to the whole person, and for this reason we must see the Christian faith as affecting the whole of reality.

5.3.3 Pascal’s Existential Approach

When we hear the term “existential” in connection with theology, the philosophical term “existentialism” comes to mind. In that light we cannot help but to draw comparisons between Pascal and the Danish existentialist Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). David Roberts (1957:15) refers to Pascal as “the most important precursor of modern existentialism.” Isaiah Berlin (2013:160) gives a proper assessment of existentialism in his work *The Roots of Romanticism*. He rightly suggests that existentialism “is the truest heir of Romanticism.” If his appraisal of Romanticism is correct, and many would agree it is, postmodernism has significant affinities to Romanticism. In other words, existentialism is largely in line with postmodern thought. It is true that there are a fair number of affinities between Pascal and Kierkegaard, but to view Pascal’s existentialist approach as being similar to existentialism as emphasized by Kierkegaard would be somewhat of an overstatement. A full comparison between the French apologist and the Danish existentialist is beyond the scope of this study, but a few similarities and the essential difference, especially regarding the approach to apologetics, is helpful.

The philosophy of existentialism has many adherents of all stripes and colours and as many variations as there are representatives. There are several schools, including those who synthesize Christianity with existential concepts and those whose existentialism results in atheistic nihilism (Spier, 1953:3). Kierkegaard can be counted among the former and Nietzsche as an example of the latter. Both views, however, have irrationalism as the common denominator, so a certain affinity exists between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Regarding the more positive connection, Pascal and Kierkegaard were both disenchanted with the current state of their respective Church denominations; for Pascal this was the Roman Catholic Church and especially the Jesuit connection, and for Kierkegaard the Lutheran State Church. Pascal’s lament is similar to Kierkegaard’s: “At the time of the birth of the Church we saw only Christians perfected in all matters necessary to salvation. Today, however, we see such crude ignorance that it causes all those to groan who have feelings of tenderness to the Church” (Pascal, 1948:156-157). The protest within the current state of Christianity caused both of these men to take a closer look at what makes a person a Christian. They both came to the conclusion that Christian
belief does not lie solely in the mind but that the affections of the heart are as much at play, and, 
ultimately, that Christian belief must be expressed in the lives lived by those who profess to be 
believers; an inner work is needed for a faithful outward expression.

Pascal and Kierkegaard both gave assent to the fact that philosophical and natural proofs for the 
existence of God could not be presented to bring someone to faith. Where Pascal and Kierkegaard 
part ways is in the way they perceived the correlation between reason and faith. As already noted, 
Pascal was not averse to reason but saw reason working in harmony with the heart. Pascal (1966:83) clearly states, “Submission and use of reason; that is what makes true Christianity.” As a 
matter of fact, according to Pascal (1966:85), reason does come into play when coming to faith, for 
the denial of reason is inconsistent with reason. It was autonomous reason that Pascal was arguing 
against. His aim was to make Christianity respectful and reasonable; Pascal never suggests that 
Christianity is irrational or even fideistic. We cannot deny the fact that Christianity has an 
existential element, for even Augustine and Calvin would attest to that, but for the reasons 
mentioned above Pascal should not be found guilty of existentialism.

Kierkegaard, on the other hand, applies the existentialist principle of uncertainty and irrationalism 
to the aspect of faith. To him faith is utterly irrational and the only way we should accept 
Christianity is through a “leap of faith” or a taking of a great risk. Kierkegaard (1968:188) admits in 
his Unscientific Postscript, “For without risk there is no faith, and the greater the risk the greater the 
faith.” He regards the object of the Christian faith as the Great Paradox and just because of that fact 
it is called faith. He (1968:188) asserts, “When the paradox is paradoxical in itself, it repels the 
individual by virtue of its absurdity, and the corresponding passion of inwardness is faith.” For 
Kierkegaard (1968:30), certainty in faith does not exist, “for if passion is eliminated, faith no longer 
exists, and certainty and passion do not go together.” This is in contrast to Pascal (1966:230) who 
suggests that only faith supplies certainty. Certainty can only be experienced in true faith, as shown 
Peace. God of Jesus Christ. Deum meum et Deum vestrum.” In many ways, Kierkegaard’s 
existentialism has more in common with Nietzsche’s philosophy than Pascal’s, for both 
Kierkegaard and Nietzsche “liken the experience of the inability to choose existential values to the 
feeling of plunging into the bottomless pit” (Woodward, 2009:11). Epistemic certitude, or certainty, 
does not come into play in either Kierkegaard or Nietzsche.

Another aspect of contention between Pascal and Kierkegaard is the role apologetics plays in the 
life of a Christian. For the Danish existentialist, apologetics has no place in his philosophical 
project, for the leap of faith that Kierkegaard proposes is based on an individual and personal 
experience; trying to convey the Christian faith to another is hopelessly inadequate. No historical
“proofs” can ever be communicated, as David Roberts (1957:92) alleges: “Kierkegaard refuses to offer demonstrations and answers, trying rather to arouse the reader to his own struggle by leaving the answer uncertain.” Pascal, although showing his interlocutor the wretched state in which he is muddled, does provide the answer which is certain and true: Jesus Christ. It is on this answer that Pascal’s entire Pensées is based. To Pascal, Christianity is reasonable and could be reasonably defended.

5.3.4 Pascal’s Apologetic Appeal

In many ways, the deepest desires of mankind have not changed throughout history and the remedy for what ails mankind has not changed either; it is the Christian faith that offers the answers to humanity’s deepest need: meaning and true lasting happiness. Pascal follows an existential order that ultimately leads from recognizing our own wretchedness to realizing happiness with God.

5.3.4.1 The Search for Meaning

The search for meaning has occupied the minds of philosophers throughout history and continues to be a topic of great concern after the postmodern turn and, undoubtedly, will endure well beyond. Every epoch had its philosophers that tried to make sense of the world, but after the seventeenth century, with “man coming of age,” the very thought of God became more and more superfluous, and the attempt to find meaning and value in life became more pronounced. This emphasis reached its apex with the arrival of Nietzsche (2015:Loc. 43235) who argues, “What does Nihilism [meaninglessness] mean? – That the highest values are losing their value. There is no bourne. There is no answer to the question: ‘to what purpose?’” In his explanation in his Will to Power, Nietzsche confers (2015:loc. 43238) that nihilism excludes the assumption of the existence of transcendental objects or things in themselves, “which would be either divine or morality incarnate.” In other words, nihilism for Nietzsche is the repudiation of the highest value that gives meaning to life.

Ashley Woodward in his work Nihilism in Postmodernity traces nihilism from Nietzsche through postmodern philosophers like Lyotard, Baudrillard and Vattimo. He makes the connection between Nietzsche’s religious nihilism and postmodern semiotics as nihilism. According to Woodward (2009:31-32), Nietzsche saw the seeds of nihilism embedded in religion. Modernism, according to Nietzsche, has killed God and devalued the highest value, the Christian-moral interpretation of the world. This process, however, is inevitable and it “represents a chance to revitalize Western culture by renewing the possibility of interpreting life in ways that affirm its value” (Woodard, 2009:31).
For Nietzsche, this chance is found in the principles for renewed value and meaning such as the will to power, the Übermensch or the eternal recurrence.

With the devaluation of Christian signs for Nietzsche and the postmodern repudiation of language as signifiers, meaning and value are lost and new principles of valuation must be considered. For the postmodern, finding new principles of meaning proves to be more complicated because of its contingency on social relations and cultural conditions (Woodward, 2009:242). Finding meaning, for the postmodernist, remains relative because of these aforementioned conditions. The problem with abandoning God as the great signifier from whom all meaning derives is that Nietzsche and the postmodernists must find meaning and value in different places that are sure to disappoint. In both cases, dismissing one principle of meaning without replacing it with another will inevitably become frustrating, and meaning and value is lost. What is true for the postmodernist was true for Nietzsche but was also true for the seventeenth-century libertine. In other words, this loss of meaning, although more pronounced after Nietzsche in postmodern thought, was present in the seventeenth century as well. Meaning could be found only in reason and the use of the hard sciences, according to the seventeenth-century philosophers. The central thrust of Pascal’s apologetic juxtaposes these seventeenth-century principles. He declares in his Pensées the centrality of meaning of the Christian faith: we cannot know the meaning of our life or our death, of God or of ourselves, apart from Jesus Christ (Pascal, 1966:149). Pascal is unapologetic in his affirmation of the authoritative status of Scripture; thus in his apologetic method he affirms the existence of an objective transcendent Being to give meaning to life and the essence of language to convey principles of truth in contradistinction to postmodernity’s repudiation of language as signifier.

The commonalities of the conclusions drawn by Nietzsche and postmodern philosophers such as Lyotard, Baudrillard and Vatimo are that meaning and value can be discovered by each individual (Nietzsche) or collectively (postmodernism) apart from a transcendent Being outside of the individual or apart from the social and cultural relations. In both cases, therefore, a true valuation of the human condition is utterly impossible. Pascal appeals to a certain degree of honesty that makes room for clarity regarding the human condition, which can only occur when recognizing a transcendent Being. It seems the stubborn pride that refuses and represses the truth creates a sense of annoyance for Pascal. He (1966:55) notes, “How is it that the lame man does not annoy us while a lame mind does? Because a lame man recognizes that we are walking straight, while a lame mind says that it is we who are limping. But for that we should feel sorry rather than angry.” Although a recognition exists that value and meaning are indispensable to happiness, in the case of Nietzsche and the postmodern philosopher, the “lame mind” does continue to blindly operate within the paradigm of human pride. Whether the meaning can be found in each individual or in collective social construction, the real dilemma in which mankind exists is not addressed by either Nietzsche
or the postmodern philosopher. Pascal’s *point de départ* is the realization of our own state of affairs that brings us to our knees in despair. Nietzsche (2015:Loc. 18010), aware of Pascal’s existential *angst*, scathingly notes:

> Christianity has the instinct of a hunter for finding out all those who may by hook or by crook be driven to despair—only a very small number of men can be brought to this despair. Christianity lies in wait for such as these, and pursues them. Pascal made an attempt to find out whether it was not possible, with the help of the very subtlest knowledge, to drive everybody into despair. He failed: to his second despair.

But it is only in despair and the realization of our own wretchedness that we look to the One who is outside of ourselves for meaning and happiness.

### 5.3.4.2 The Search for Happiness

As now becomes clear, happiness is closely related to finding meaning and value in life. But just like meaning and value, happiness seems elusive to those whom Pascal addressed in the seventeenth century, and the search continues to this very day. As Reginald Bibby (2002:103), a Canadian sociologist, confirms, “approximately 90% of Canadians claim that they have raised the question of how they can experience happiness, with the question currently being asked by some 70%.” Bibby (2002:106-107) mentions a number of findings that reveal a consensus as to what people think will bring them happiness. Among those are freedom and relationships, a comfortable life, being successful and having a spiritual or religious experience. This spiritual experience, however, depends to a large degree on the personal comfort it brings. As Linda Mercadante (2014:166) discovers, “Interviewees often indicated that following their own instincts would result in a personal happiness which would automatically radiate out to the world.” Paul Vitz (2006:xiii) agrees that a personal spirituality that is fluid and changes according to a felt need has, as its ultimate goal, a degree of happiness at any given moment.

To a large extent, the postmodern consensus that meaning, thus happiness, must be, and can be, extrapolated within the social construct or community, is a *mirage*. This is due, according to Craig Gay (1998:209), to “the impersonality of much of (post)modern life.” Despite the postmodern emphasis on community and relationality, happiness and meaning is sought in the private sphere, such as in private spirituality or self-help therapeutic psychology. Craig Gay (1998:191) concludes, however, “If there has been a triumph of the therapeutic in contemporary culture, then this cannot simply be blamed upon secular psychological theorists or upon the emergence of so-called helping professionals, but it reflects an entire cultural ethos characterized by profound self-centeredness.”
This self-centeredness in contemporary culture is pronounced by the rights of the individual; our pursuit of happiness hinges on the pursuit of individual rights. The only human telos, according to Gay (1998:191), is earthly happiness and satisfaction.

At the core of this thinking, Pascal suggests, is an insatiable search for true and lasting happiness. Pascal (1966:75) knows that there was once in humanity a true state of happiness, of which “all that now remains is the empty print and trace.” He (1966:66) recognizes that we are reluctant to face our own mortality and state of wretchedness, and for that reason humankind “has decided, in order to be happy, not to think about these things.” He accuses humanity of indulging in diversions to avoid dealing with its own wretched state. He perceives the inconsistencies of the human pursuit of happiness. According to Pascal (1966:148), man admits his own wretchedness but is unable to face that fact, and the “only thing that consoles him for his miseries are diversions.” The only thing to help a person cope, according to Pascal (1966:68), is to be “diverted from thinking of what he is, either by some occupation which takes his mind off it or by some novel and agreeable passion which keeps him busy, like gambling, hunting, some absorbing show, in short by what is called diversion.”

Zygmunt Bauman (1997:169) suggests that there is little in daily routine that prompts the urge to get answers to the fundamental questions regarding the purpose of life because of how we have arranged and filled our days. He states:

> Cattle must be fed, crops harvested, taxes paid, dinners cooked, roofs repaired; or the briefs must be written or studied, letters mailed, applications filed, appointments kept, videos repaired, tickets bought … Before one has the time to think of eternity, bedtime is coming, and then another day filled to the brim with things to be done or undone.

Bauman (1997:169-170) is right in suggesting that we have arranged our days to such an extent that little time for contemplating eternity is afforded, but he is incorrect in proposing that “worrying about eternity does not come naturally.” Pascal is clear that the desire for happiness and the search for eternity are innate. Pascal points out that this innate desire only leads us to conclusion of who we really are and how far we have fallen, which, in turn, creates in us a yearning for restoration (Pascal, 1966:146). There is present within us what Peter Gilbert describes as a “God-shaped vacuum”, or what Calvin (1960:43) characterizes as “a natural awareness of divinity.”

Besides having filled the days to the brim, North American culture has managed to fill the little spare time it has with diversions such as sports and entertainment to avoid facing the realities of its wretched state. If diversions were the cure and would give us ultimate happiness, North America would be the happiest place on earth. According to Pascal’s assessment regarding diversions, North America is the unhappiest nation; “We run heedlessly into the abyss after putting something in front
of us to stop us from seeing it” (Pascal, 1966:82). In sum, Peter Gilbert (2011:47) is correct when he states, “Pascal’s point is that diversions are a false solution to our fundamental problem of unhappiness.”

Pascal does not leave us in a state of uncertainty or despair, but gives us hope and points to the apex of his entire Apology, which lies solely in the person of Christ (cf. Pascal 1966:164). He (1966:148) points out, “Without Christ man can only be vicious and wretched. With Christ man is free from vice and wretchedness. In him is all our virtue and all our happiness. Apart from him there is only vice, wretchedness, error, darkness, death, despair.” As Calvin (1960:498) notes, “No, our happiness belongs to the heavenly life.” Pascal’s conclusion echoes Augustine’s (1958:300) sense of happiness, who states in The City of God, “Man indeed desires happiness … the happiness of man can come not from himself but only from God.”

Besides all the diversions that keep some from finding true happiness, Pascal discovers a greater tragedy, and one for which he has significantly less tolerance, that is indifference. David Wetsel (1994:309) identifies these seventeenth-century skeptics and libertines as “pseudo-libertins”, who according to him “have adopted a conscious veneer of religious doubt because they think that it is intellectually avant-garde to do so.” Pascal argues that many who attack the Christian religion do so without having thoroughly researched what they are contending, and finds their attacks groundless, for they clearly make their arguments from ignorance. If they want to be fair in their argument, they should have made every effort to seek the truth everywhere, even if that means going to the Church for instruction (Pascal, 1966:155).

As is the case today, many who attack the Christian faith do so with very little biblical knowledge and have done shoddy research to gain the little knowledge that they claim to have. One only has to read the works of New Atheists like Sam Harris or Richard Dawkins to realize that much of what is said about the Christian faith and religion in general is fraught with statements that are not well-researched and appeal to the religious ignorance of the masses (cf. Dawkins, 2006:137-188, 388-420; Harris, 2008:3-19). This religious ignorance is especially acute among the current generation, but, as Armand Boehme (2013:98) suggests, this decline in religious knowledge must be blamed on the general decline in knowledge that is prevalent in our culture and society today. David Kinnaman (2011:27) has come to the same conclusion and proposes that among Christians in North America knowledge of Scripture, doctrine and church history is poor, and not only among young adult believers. George Barna (2016:54-55) of the American Culture & Faith Institute made some rather sober discoveries regarding the Bible and its value among those under the age of thirty. Barna (2016:54) found that it is becoming more and more difficult for the Bible to find acceptance and value among young adults in America, and that “fewer and fewer Americans possess a worldview
predominantly shaped by the Bible,” which he attributes to the lack of biblical preaching and teaching in the churches and homes during the most formative years of young Americans. As in the time of Pascal, religious indifference is an alarming statistic in the twenty-first century. It seems that the contemplation of religious matters, such as eternity or the immortality of the soul, is on the decline in contemporary culture.

One of the more pressing religious questions, according to Pascal, is whether or not the soul is immortal. He discovers that the answer to this question can only be found through the contemplation of Scripture. He encourages his hearers to search and find the answer to this most important question; his concern turns to compassion regarding those who lament their doubt, but to those who appear indifferent, he has very little patience. He (1966:156) states, 

> Who spend their lives without a thought for this final end of life and who solely because they do not find within themselves the light of conviction, neglect to look elsewhere, and to examine thoroughly whether this opinion is one of those which people accept out of credulous simplicity or one of those which, though obscure in themselves, none the less have a most solid and unshakeable foundation: as for them I view them very differently.

As a matter of fact, Pascal regards this kind of intellectual neglect appalling and even irritating. For Pascal, the distinction is not between believer and unbeliever, but between the seeker and the non-seeker (Kreeft, 1993:197); it is between those who seek the truth and those who willingly suppress the truth. In the words of Pascal (1966:160), “there is no surer sign of extreme weakness of mind than the failure to recognize the unhappy state of man without God; there is no surer sign of an evil heart than failure to desire that the eternal promises be true; nothing is more cowardly than to brazen it out with God.” It would be tempting to neglect the latter class of people and leave them to their foolishness; however, Christianity compels us to show grace, as Pascal notes, so we must persist in our apologetic because as long as they live they are capable of receiving faith. Pascal is insistent that the proofs of religion can satisfy the unbeliever’s real desire to find the truth. Here we recognize that Pascal does not dismiss the use of proofs to captivate the heart of the unbeliever; they can pique the curiosity of the unbeliever and turn the non-seeker into a seeker. For him, even though proofs exist to satisfy the most ardent unbeliever, they are not necessary, and Pascal (1966:151) finds it utterly incomprehensible to neglect the truth that is for him so blatantly obvious. He appeals to the unbeliever’s desire to know the truth and to choose God; “if you win you win everything, if you lose you lose nothing.”

5.3.5 Pascal’s Wager
Pascal’s apology will always be associated with his famous Wager. His *Pensées* might long be ignored, but this section of his *Thoughts* has been remembered and analyzed for more than three hundred years. As David Wetsel (1994:248) exclaimed, “No other single passage in the *Pensées* has generated more commentary than the ‘infini/rien’ fragment, popularly known as ‘the Wager.’”

Several issues must be taken into consideration when scrutinizing Pascal’s Wager. Firstly, it would be misguided to evaluate and interpret Pascal’s Wager in isolation from the rest of his *Pensées*. Secondly, we must keep in mind the audience of Pascal when he proposed the religious wager. Ignoring the overall context in which the wager is placed can lead to a skewed interpretation such as presented by Slavoj Žižek (2010:136-140) in his article “The Atheist Wager,” in which he interprets and critiques Pascal’s Wager in isolation, ignoring all the other *pensées* regarding the existence of God and the proofs that Pascal presents in subsequent fragments. Above all, because of its emphasis on the existential aspect of religion, the Wager still speaks to a postmodern audience well over 350 years after it was first written.

Although a reference or an allusion to some kind of wager was not original (cf. Ryan, 1994:11-18), Pascal was the first who explicitly and elaborately used the wager as an apologetic tool. According to Roger Hazelton, in Pascal’s time nine versions of the wager argument were in currency and Pascal simply adapted a model to his own purposes (Hazelton in Van Vliet, 2000:53-54). Others after Pascal, such as John Tillotson, Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury from 1691 to 1694, have made use of the wager. In his sermon “The Wisdom of Being Religious” he contends that venturing into the Christian faith is far more advantageous for “he [the Christian] is inwardly more contented and happy, and usually more healthful, and perhaps meets with more respect and faithfuller [sic] friends, and lives in a more secure and flourishing condition” (Tillotson, 1819:108-109). Apologists have been known to be concerned with proving or demonstrating the existence of God using a variety of evidences. Pascal, in his Wager, was not at all concerned with establishing an apology for the existence of God. Pascal’s Wager and his subsequent elaboration in the remainder of his *Pensées* as a vindication of the Christian faith bore down to existential aspects that spoke to the gambling libertine and, as a matter of fact, can speak to the contemporary postmodern audience. Sister Marie Louise Hubert (1973:69) aptly notes, “With the firm conviction, mingled with sympathetic understanding, which resulted from his own religious experience, Pascal realized that something more dynamic was needed in order to reach the heart as well as the mind of the libertines.” This more dynamic approach, which is not only employed in the Wager but also in the rest of the *Pensées*, stresses the need for “happiness and welfare, temporal as well as eternal” (Hubert, 1973:69).

Much research has been done to discover the true meaning of Pascal’s Wager and many objections have been leveled to discredit it. Books are devoted to explain in-depth the rationale, whether
philosophical or existential, behind this famous fragment (cf. Jordan, 1994, 2006; Rota, 2016), and some have confused us more with philosophical formulae (Jordan, 2002:213-223) or mathematical equations (Adamson, 1995:161-166). A definitive and clear understanding of the Wager seems illusive, mainly because this fragment appears to be situated in the *Pensées* somewhat disconnected from the rest of the fragments. David Wetsel (1994:244) quotes Michel and Marie-Rose Le Guern as arguing for this exact conclusion. Both suggest that the *Infini/Rien* (or Wager) fragment forms a self-contained unit as an independent apology (Le Guern in Wetsel, 1994:244). It is understandable that speculations have been made regarding the placing of the Wager in Pascal’s overall apologetic scheme because the arrangement of Pascal’s *Thoughts* has mostly been dependent on different editors. But to propose that fragment 418 is an independent apology must be dismissed. On the contrary, it can be argued that the Wager could be posited early in Pascal’s entire Apology, and that the rest of the *Pensées* is an elaboration and a clarification of the reason why wagering on God is reasonable. David Wetsel (1994:275) has come to the same conclusions and suggests, “As I see it, we should perhaps best think of the wager fragment as a kind of prelude to the Apology sketched by the dossier of 1658. Perhaps it is a kind of lure, intended to draw a certain kind of unbeliever into the chapters that will follow.”

At first blush, Pascal’s Wager suggests a questionable proposal and reveals some dubious theological propositions. At closer examination, however, we discover that Pascal is entirely consistent in his overall scheme of thinking, as his *Pensées* indicate. What becomes clear is his deep desire to promote the Christian faith to his interlocutor. Speculations abound, however, regarding the type of interlocutor(s) Pascal addressed in his Wager. David Wetsel (1994:243-275) spends an entire chapter in his book *Pascal and Disbelief* speculating on the nature of Pascal’s interlocutor. There are those who wonder if the audience could be the libertines, as addressed above, or the skeptics like Montaigne (Henri Gouhier and Paul Bénichou in Wetsel, 1994:248 respectively). Sister Marie Louise Hubert (1973:14) in her work *Pascal’s Unfinished Apology* suggests as well that Pascal’s audience indeed consists of libertines who are indifferent to religion, but well-acquainted with the Christian faith. These libertines are addressed in *Pensées* 427, where they despairingly note, “Just as I don’t know whence I come from, so I don’t know whither I am going. All I know is that when I leave this world I shall fall for ever into nothingness or into the hands of a wrathful God” (Pascal, 1966:158). It is more than likely that the interlocutor is “the one who is starting to seek God or who at least is unhappy” (Wetsel, 1994:248). One thing is clear when reading the Wager: the interlocutor is not an ardent atheist or comfortable unbeliever. The person, or persons, whom Pascal addresses has a listening ear and is somewhat familiar with Pascal’s theological position and, although rebutting the proposal of Pascal, the interlocutor is interested in hearing more of what the apologist has to say. The manner in which Pascal addresses the
speculative gamble suggests that the interlocutor is one that he is familiar with from his so-called “worldly period”, which was marked with selfishness, pride and materialism (Krailsheimer, 1966:14). It appears that Pascal had intimate knowledge of the mindset of the gambler who, in all appearances, enjoyed a carefree lifestyle but was utterly unhappy and was bound to search for the truth.

In consistent fashion, Pascal begins his Wager denouncing the high place of reason in matters of religion. On the one hand, he stresses that no rational demonstrable proofs of God’s existence are available, yet on the other hand he emphasizes that betting on God is most reasonable. The Wager goes directly to the heart of the matter. It does not deal with the existence of God, as a matter of fact it does not intend to prove God’s existence at all, but it deals with the existential implications of the meaning and purpose of life. In other words, the Wager deals with the question we all have to answer at one point in the context of our own mortality. The urgency of this question was not only pertinent in Pascal’s day but is still very much the question the contemporary mortal has to deal with as well. Whether we want to admit it or not, there exists a human urge to search for the truth and God. The fact that humankind has a God-shaped vacuum leads all of us to contemplate the human telos. Pascal keys in on this human desire for truth that can only be found in the infinite God. His argument runs counter to the nihilistic outlook on our existence as proposed by the likes of Nietzsche and the relativistic sense of reality of the pragmatic postmodern. In all, the Wager appeals to our desire for true happiness, which comes through the affections rather than through reasoning. Thus fragment 418 does not set out to produce an apologetic argument for the existence of God or to prove “the real possibility of God, but rather to set people on fire to seek God” (Gilbert, 2011:211).

In his Wager, Pascal stresses, in accordance with the rest of his Pensées, that, humanly speaking, it is impossible for the finite (human) to comprehend the infinite (God). Asking then for rational grounds or proofs for the Christian’s belief is futile, for there are none, according to Pascal. We must not conclude from this that Pascal is admitting to the irrationality of the Christian faith; all Pascal is saying is that proofs like scientific formulae are not available to convince the unbeliever of the truth of Christianity. He (1966:150) admits that “reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong.” In what follows, Pascal invites the gambler to make a choice, “either God is or he is not.” The essence of the gamble is found in fragment 387: “I should be much more afraid of being mistaken and then finding out that Christianity is true than of being mistaken in believing it to be true” (Pascal, 1966:143). Pascal appeals to the psychological element of the Christian belief; the stakes are infinitely high: find relief from your wretched state and receive ultimate happiness in this life and the next or remain in your current state of wretchedness and receive your due reward.
The third-century apologist Arnobius (AD 255-330), who made use of a wager to convince the unbeliever of the truth of Christianity, was far less subtle in pointing out the high stakes to the heathen in his *Adversus Gentes*, where he (2004:457) states, “Your interests are in jeopardy—the salvation, I mean, of your souls—and unless you give yourselves to seek to know the Supreme God, a cruel death awaits you when freed from the bonds of the body, not bringing sudden annihilation, but destroying by the bitterness of its grievous and long-protracted punishment.” Although Pascal never explicitly mentions the aspect of punishment in fragment 418, the loss incurred when ignoring the wager is clear. He refuses to use the fear of punishment as the sole motivator for the gambler to take the wager; Pascal points out what the gambler has to gain and allows him to weigh the gains against the losses, all the while making sure that the gains are infinitely more than the losses. Peter Kreeft (1993:297) explains it as follows:

The Wager can easily be recast to appeal to a higher motive than the fear of Hell. One could wager as follows: if God exists, he deserves all my allegiance and faith. And I don’t know whether he exists or not. Therefore, to avoid the terrible injustice of refusing God his rights, I will believe. Thus, we can simply substitute the ‘high’ motive of love (giving God his due) and fear of injustice for the love of Heaven and the fear of Hell, and everything in the Wager remains unchanged.

To no surprise, the interlocutor suggests that “the right thing is not to wager at all” (Pascal, 1966:150). Pascal cleverly points out that the gambler must wager, for by not wagering he is already committed. One cannot remain indifferent or neutral, for the agnostic has already made his bet against God; not to wager is simply not an option. Peter Kreeft (1993:299) rightly points out, “The option of agnosticism is closed to us, not by thought but by life—or rather, by death.” Now that the interlocutor has been made aware of his obligation to make a choice, Pascal offers him a risk assessment. As a gambler, the interlocutor is familiar with the bets he takes on a regular basis; risk assessment is something every gambler intentionally participates in. Pascal (1966:151) assesses the gamble as follows: “if you win, you win everything, if you lose, you lose nothing.”

Afraid and unsatisfied, the gambler fears he is still wagering too much, still depending on his reason to assess the tangible benefits that the gamble should be giving him; he needs to place his bet “in accordance with a certain calculation, a calculation that can be represented by a simple formula for the determining what can be called Expected Value: (EV): (Probability x Payoff) – Cost = Expected Value” (Morris, 1992:112). Pascal offers the “expected value” as an infinitely happy life to be won when choosing God. For him, the gamble is reasonable, for the reward is obviously immeasurable. Christianity offers eternal happiness, therefore you gain everything and lose nothing, while if you
do not believe you gain nothing and you lose everything; in atheism there is no eternal bliss, only nothingness at death.

There is also a crass psychological edge to the gamble for Christianity as opposed to the gamble against: on the one hand, if Christianity is true, then after death the Christian will have the satisfaction of knowing he was right; if he loses he will never discover that he was wrong. On the other hand, the atheist, if he loses, will be consciously aware of the fact that he was wrong; if he wins the bet, he will never discover that he was right because of his extinction at death. Pascal offers a gamble worth taking.

One thing must be made clear: Pascal does not offer his interlocutor an irrational leap into the dark, as if evidences do not play a crucial role in the Wager. These evidences, however, are not and cannot ever be the determining factors in considering Christianity. In fragment 835, Pascal (1966:286) clarifies the role of these evidences, explaining, “The prophecies, even the miracles and proofs of our religion, are not of such a kind that they can be said to be absolutely convincing, but they are at the same time such that it cannot be said to be unreasonable to believe in them.” The gambler cannot blame Pascal for making an irrational choice, but as is true with any stubborn unbeliever, the interlocutor insists on making excuses. First, he blames Pascal for not seeing what the cards are before making the gamble. Pascal (1966:152) responds by giving reasonable proofs such as “Scripture and the rest, etc.” He does not elaborate on the “rest” of these evidences, for the gambler probably has some knowledge of what these are. Not satisfied by this, the interlocutor resorts to blaming God for his unbelief, complaining that, “I am being forced to wager and I am not free; I am being held fast and I am so made that I cannot believe.”

Again, the gambler has a somewhat skewed theological knowledge regarding Pascal’s notion of predestination; how can a person believe if he is not chosen? Pascal knows very well what his interlocutor is trying to do, and responds swiftly by turning the tables on him. He calls out the gambler for trying to conjure up enough evidences so as to make an airtight choice based solely on reason alone. Pascal appeals to the centre of belief and unbelief: the heart. He blames the gambler’s unbelief on his own passions. Pascal (1966:152) asserts, “Concentrate then not on convincing yourself by multiplying proofs of God’s existence but by diminishing your passions.” The interlocutor believes that when he has faith he will give up his passions, but Pascal turns this around and posits that he must give up his passions and then faith will come. Fragment 816 (Pascal, 1966:273) is clear on this issue:

‘I should soon have given up a life of pleasure,’ they say, ‘if I had faith.’ But I tell you:
‘You would soon have faith if you give up a life of pleasure. Now it is up to you to begin. If
I could give you faith I would. But I cannot, nor can I test the truth of what you say, but you can easily give up your pleasure and test whether I am telling the truth.

Implied here is not that the seeker is able to give himself faith, for only God can give him faith, but earthly pleasures prevent him from accepting his faith.

Pascal’s proposal seems somewhat ambiguous and theologically dubious, and many have speculated on what Pascal means when he implies that to be cured of unbelief one should act as if he believes. On the surface Pascal seems to indicate that acting religiously can produce faith. Some have suggested that Pascal reverses the Augustinian, Anselmian and Calvinistic credo of “faith seeking understanding” into “understanding seeking faith” (cf. Hartle, 2017:22). We must conclude, however, that Pascal was far too Augustinian to make that reversal, and that this would destroy Pascal’s entire theological impetus and would again put the onus on our reasonable capacity (cf. Pascal, 1966:34, 85, 138, 149-153, 248). At closer examination, Pascal is not inconsistent in his theology, but he is also not ignorant of the fact that outward religious actions conjure up inward affections; outward actions cannot be divorced from inward affections. *Pensées* 944 clearly states,

> We must combine outward and inward to obtain anything from God; in other words we must go down on our knees, pray with our lips, etc., so that the proud man who would not submit to God must now submit to his creature. If we expect help from this outward part we are being superstitious; if we refuse to combine it with the inward we are being arrogant (Pascal, 1966:324).

As with faith, the heart and the mind cannot be separated, so also outward actions must accompany inward affections. The serious seeker, according to Pascal, is able to overcome the affliction of unbelief by, firstly, observing the actions of the Christian and, secondly, by attending church services and studying the rituals as tangible tools of instruction. Pascal refers to this practice in *Pensées* 427, where he charges the unbeliever for religious ignorance and lack of effort to seek what the Church has to offer by way of instruction. For him, Christian belief and the practice of that belief in the Church are inseparable.

The proposition to “act as if you believe” as suggested by Pascal (1966:152) is closely connected to the worldly passions the libertine gambler is caught up in that prevents him from believing. Pascal calls for a certain openness of mind: associate with the believer, imitate the believer and attend the religious services that confirm Christian belief. Pascal calls the interlocutor to leave his passions that aggravate his unbelief. It becomes clear that Pascal’s interlocutor wants to believe but does not want to leave his life of worldly passions. Pascal encourages the gambler to avoid the dispositions that lead him to unbelief, and “to act as if you believe” by associating with believers. It seems here that Pascal calls upon the “implicit” faith that Calvin (1960:545) warned about, where the believer
might share “implicitly” by his trust in the church, “understanding nothing but submitting his feeling obediently to the church; calling the believer to the teaching of the church without the benefits of understanding the meaning of that teaching.” This would be a fair criticism, for Pascal was and remained a true Roman Catholic, but Pascal does not leave his interlocutor without the eventual understanding of what he may get himself into. We can also interpret Pascal’s imperative using Calvin’s (1960:547) definition of “implicit” faith, where the observation and participation of ecclesiastical “rituals” can be seen as implicit faith as a preparation for faith. Pascal would never deny Calvin’s (1960:547) proposition that “faith consists in the knowledge of God and Christ.” The remainder of the Pensées can attest to this proposition and is devoted to the clarification of true faith in Christ.

To be a Christian, or a seeker for that matter, and neglect the instructions and the rituals that the Church has to offer is incomprehensible. Thus, the suggestion of Pascal “to act as if you believe,” is not too far-fetched. In a similar vein, C.S. Lewis instructs his listeners, regarding the case of charity, to begin by acting to “love” the neighbor even if it does not come easy. He (2000:131) states, “As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.” He continues to explain that this outward action of love must accompany the inward affection that the object of our love is a person made by God. In other words, just like Pascal, C.S. Lewis encourages the action without compromising the affection that must accompany it.

Pascal poses the crucial question to his interlocutor regarding the benefits of choosing Christianity and deciding to follow his advice, asking: what harm has come to you from choosing to take the aforementioned course of action? The French apologist (1966:153) quickly answers his own question and lists the benefits gained: being “faithful, honest, humble, grateful, full of good works, a sincere and true friend.” This runs in total opposition to the choice of agnosticism or indifference. In fragment 427, Pascal (1966:159) states,

"Now what advantage is it to us to hear someone say he has shaken off the yoke, that he does not believe that there is a God watching over his actions, that he considers himself sole master of his behavior, and that he proposes to account for it to no one but himself? Does he think that by doing so he has henceforth won our full confidence, and made us expect from him consolation, counsel and assistance in all life’s needs?"

For Pascal, not choosing God has left the person without respect, and his counsel should be disregarded. As a matter of fact, no self-respecting person would even ask life counsel from those who have willingly disregarded the God of the Bible. This is a serious indictment but it shows the seriousness and apologetic fervor that Pascal possesses. He ends his Wager assuring his interlocutor
that he has been where they are at and so convinces the gambler that the Wager is rationally compelling and reasonably plausible. For the seventeenth-century seeker there were few options: Christianity or atheism. In a time of numerous options, when Christianity has less and less credibility, is the Wager still a viable option, and would a postmodern millennial still heed the advice of Pascal to consider Christianity?

5.3.6 The Postmodern Appeal to Pascal’s Wager

In contemporary postmodern thought, there is a particular attractiveness to the Pascalian Wager and the apologetic method of Pascal as a whole, mostly because of Pascal’s appeal to the affections. Some postmoderns, such as Richard Kearney (2010:40-56) in his work Anatheism, have also alluded to a religious wager, but, in many ways, they have bastardized the concept to fit the postmodern thought process. Another aspect of the Wager that might be attractive to the postmodern is the matter of uncertainty, which is the postmodern epistemic distinctive. Initially, therefore, the Wager might speak to the mind of the “postmodern libertine,” but a clarification of the essence of Pascal’s apology must be given before it can take a foothold in the mind of the contemporary listener, not unlike the seventeenth-century libertine gambler in the days of Pascal.

As already alluded to, the postmodern rejects the aspect of reason as the determining factor in all cases of knowing. Whereas Christian thought might stand in the postmodern position when seeking to expose the pretensions of the modernist precept of autonomous and objective human reason, it must avoid disregarding the use of reason in religious knowledge. The driving force of postmodern epistemology, especially in the case of religious knowledge, is the existential impulse. Here is where the postmodern has entirely minimalized the concept of reason in religious knowledge. Pascal, without a doubt, abhorred the use of autonomous reason in apprehending God, and he made sure that he downplayed the initial use of empirical evidences to come to the knowledge of God. However, he did not and would never have neglected reason. We can contend that Pascal was not averse to the evidences, and thus the use of reason, in religious apprehension, for a large segment of his Pensées is devoted to giving enough evidences, secondary as they may be, to make the Christian faith reasonable. Ultimately, giving evidences or proofs was not what Pascal had in mind when he presented his Wager. Sister Hubert (1973:70) asserts that “Pascal intended the wager argument to be, an exhortation, not a proof … it served as the preliminary step to their acceptance of the proofs based on Scripture which were to form the substantial part of Pascal’s Apology of the Christian religion.” Nicholas Rescher makes an acute observation that disparages the accusation of inconsistency and clarifies Pascal’s position by making the distinction between the use of
“evidential” reason and “practical” reason, employed by Pascal in his Wager. Rescher (1985:44) suggests,

For two very distinct species of ‘reason’ are at issue in Pascal—the evidential that seeks to establish facts (and in his view entirely inadequate to the demands of apologetics) and the practical that seeks to legitimate actions (and can indeed justify us in ‘betting on God’ via the practical step of accepting that he exists). The heart too has its reasons. Only by blithely ignoring this crucial distinction between evidentially fact-establishing and pragmatically action-validating reason can one press the charge of inconsistency against Pascal.

Rescher (1985:45-46) continues to explain that when evidences fail to settle the issue, and when waiting for the evidential situation to change is not a viable option, one must make a decision one way or the other, for suspending any judgment might prove catastrophic. The best available course must be considered in these circumstances but must still be done under the guidance of rational considerations. Pascal is perfectly consistent in his use of practical reason throughout his Wager. Betting on God is the reasonable thing to do on rational reasons when evidential reasons are insufficient.

When the more moderate postmodern accepts a semblance of the Christian faith or any other religious faith practice but neglects the aforementioned distinction mentioned by Rescher, and equates the wager with a leap, he is in danger of falling prey to extreme fideism, something Pascal (1966:76-80) did not succumb to. Alvin Plantinga (2000:87-88) makes the distinction between the extreme fideism where reason and faith are in conflict and the fideism of the Reformed epistemologist. Pascal could be counted among the latter, where faith is placed over against demonstration but not over against knowing. Although the existential impulse might engender postmodern interest in the Pascalian Wager, the postmodern assumptions that degrade the true meaning of Pascal’s Apology must be taken seriously. Pascal might have the ear of the postmodern, and points of contact are present in their interpretation, but we must avoid seeking too close an affiliation with and allegiance to the postmodern wager; a careful Pascalian corrective can and must be applied.

In addition to the existential impulse that incites interest in the concept of wager for the postmodern, the matter of uncertainty is another factor favourable to postmodern interest. After all, uncertainty is one of the hallmarks of postmodern thought, which repeats Nietzsche’s (2015:Loc. 12954-12960) statement that “men prefer the uncertainty of their intellectual horizon.” The beauty of faith, according to postmodern theology that is guided by the hermeneutics of suspicion, is the lack of absoluteness and certainty (cf. Kearney, 2011:7). Keeping this in mind, the postmodern philosopher Brian Treanor (2010:558) holds out the hope that “by returning to the deep ground that
necessitates the wager, we can recover faith, ‘returning’ to a second innocence, one still open to the surplus of meaning found at the wellspring of faith, but without the ignorance of the first.” Treanor refers here to Richard Kearney’s “anatheism”, better described as a return to faith from the faith; “faith as an accident of our birth to a more mature faith that frees us from the limitations of our first naiveté” (Treanor, 2010:558). According to both Kearney (2011:8) and Treanor (2010:546-559), this requires an anatheistic wager, which is “marked by a moment of radicalized ‘innocence’ that opens the door to ulterior dimensions of truth.”

Richard Kearney describes this wager more in detail in his work Anatheism: Returning to God After God. In this work, Kearney (2011:xvii) points out two aspects of the wager: the philosophical and the existential. According to Kearney, the Pascalian Wager is charged with calculation, blind leaps and even fideism. In other words, Kearney erroneously charges Pascal with proposing an existential wager, which ultimately results in an existential “leap” not unlike Kierkegaard’s. Kearney and other postmoderns, so they claim, adhere to an existential wager that solicits fidelity and is based on imagination and hospitality (Kearney, 2011:xvii). According to Kearney, our lives consist of making wagers, and religious wagers are no exception. Upon closer examination, however, we discover that Kearney has misinterpreted Pascal’s views and unlike Pascal’s Wager, where the choice and the object of the wager is made abundantly clear, his wager is far more ambivalent and does not point directly to God but to a “God” of our own choosing. Kearney (2011:7) explains,

The *ana* signals a movement of return to what I call a primordial wager, to an inaugural instant of reckoning at the root of belief. It marks a reopening of that space where we are free to choose between faith or nonfaith… Anatheism, in short, is an invitation to revisit what might be termed a primary scene of religion: the encounter with a radical Stranger who we choose, or don’t choose, to call God.

Here it becomes clear that it is Richard Kearney who proposes an existential wager that contradicts Pascal’s Wager, the object of which is not a Stranger whom we “choose” to call God but is the God of the Bible. Kearney (2011:30) continues to explain that these encounters with the Stranger are not new but have occurred all throughout history. He cites Abraham’s encounter with God in Genesis 18, but also, and just as legitimate, Muhammad’s encounter on the summit of Mount Hira, which Kearney describes as the “Islamic wager.” In other words, the wager that Kearney describes is a religious existential wager regardless of the object of the wager. For the postmodern, the attractiveness of the wager is in exactly the reasons Kearney describes. As discussed, one of the characteristics of postmodern theology is the call to either pluralism or inclusivism; Christianity is just the religion of choice, one among a myriad of choices. It is not a matter of ultimate truth but a matter of religious preference. In other words, one wagers on Christianity but could wager on any
other available religion. Here Kearney touches on the main objection to Pascal’s Wager, what is best known as the “Many Gods Objection.” Jeff Jordan (1994:101) describes the Many Gods Objection as follows: “The range of betting options is not limited solely to Christianity because one could formulate a Pascalian wager for Islam, certain sects of Buddhism, or for any of the competing sects found within Christianity itself.” In the entire scheme of Christian apologetics, the Many Gods Objection could be a formidable objection were it not for the fact that we must read Pascal’s Wager as part of his whole Apology.

When we consider the Wager in isolation, the objection seems quite legitimate. Pascal’s Wager, however, must be regarded as a primer where the reasonableness of Christianity will be spelled out in far more detail in the rest of his Apology. As well, the Pensées clearly spell out the reasonableness of Christianity in juxtaposition to different religions. In our apologetics we call on Pascal’s Wager rather than Kearney’s rendition of the wager, which is far too ambivalent and still does not give the seeker any certainty and hope (although this is exactly what postmodernists like Kearney shy away from).

5.3.7 Pascal and Different Religions

One of the features of postmodern theology and postmodern spirituality is their attraction to religious pluralism. Christianity cannot be thought of as the only true religion that features salvation for mankind, according to contemporary culture. The hyper-ecumenism of postmodern theology has set all religions on an equal footing (cf. Kearney, 2010:30-34; Cupitt, 1980:113-114; 1997:123-128) and, when Christianity is thought of as the superior faith, the doctrine of post-mortem salvation is introduced to ensure that all who adhere to different faiths are welcomed into the Kingdom of God (cf. Lindbeck, 1984:59). For that reason, the “Many Gods Objection” leveled against Pascal’s Wager is not an objection at all for the postmodernist, but can be regarded as an attractive feature. Throughout his Pensées, however, Pascal is clear on what he thought of different religions. Adamson (1995:178) suggests that the Pensées that deal with the other religions, and primarily with Islam, show “one of the least attractive features as they reveal Pascal at his fiercest and least ecumenical.” Although Pascal’s main aim is the vindication of the Christian faith, he, not unlike Calvin, does not hesitate to condemn Islam because it stands in stark opposition to Christianity (Calvin, 1960:346-347). Pascal’s aim is to bring out the distinctive features of Christianity and to prove that Christianity is uniquely true; there is something about the Christian faith that other religions, especially Islam, lack.

Pascal devotes a number of Pensées to the distinctiveness of Christianity as the true religion, especially in comparison to Islam (Pascal, 1966:95-99, 103, 127, 267). Pascal asserts that he
seriously considered the reasonableness of Christianity as opposed to other religions and finds the latter wanting in morality and proof. Especially in comparing the founders of both religions, Pascal sees the stark contrasts to such an extent that there is no doubt, in his opinion, which of the two is the true religion, for no other founder of any religion can be compared to Christ. Pascal lists some of the major differences in a number of Pensées: “Mahomet [sic] was not foretold, Jesus was foretold, Mohammed slew, Jesus caused his followers to be slain, Mohammed forbade reading, the Apostles commanded it, Mohammed followed the path of success, humanly speaking, Jesus followed that of death, humanly speaking” (Pascal, 1966:97). In Pensées 243, Pascal (1966:103) poses the rhetorical questions, “What miracles does he [Mohammed] himself claim to have performed? What mystery did he teach according to his own tradition?” Pascal (1966:127) answers his own question and states, “For he performed no miracles and was not foretold. No man can do what Christ did.” Pascal does not just call into question the founder of Islam, but disputes the teachings of the Koran as suspect as well. Pascal (1966:99) declares,

It is not by what is obscure in Mahomet [sic], and might be claimed to have a mystical sense, that I want him to be judged, but by what is clear, by his paradise and all the rest. That is what is ridiculous about him, and that is why it is not right to take his obscurities for mysteries, seeing that what is clear in him is ridiculous.

After pointing out that Islam is far less reasonable than Christianity when comparing its founders, Pascal makes his case for Christianity all the more clear by asserting the characteristics of a true religion. “If all things,” Pascal (1966:96) asserts, “have a single principle and a single end and all things exist for and in him, as both Islam and Christianity suggest, we do not have a choice but to worship and love him and him alone.” We also understand, however, that we come to the realization that we cannot and do not love anything but ourselves, and are unable to do otherwise. But the religion that teaches us that we must worship him alone must also teach us our inability and, above all, tell us the remedy. Pascal (1966:98) claims that only true religion teaches us our duties, our weaknesses, pride and concupiscence, and the remedies, humility and mortification. It is Christianity alone that meets all the criteria for true religion, according to Pascal. It is Christianity that teaches us that “through one man all was lost and the bond was broken between God and man and that through one man the bond was restored” (Pascal, 1966:96). In other words, the essence of a true religion, according to Pascal, is both the declaration of human helplessness and the message of hope by proclaiming the means of obtaining the cure. In examining all religions and philosophies, Pascal (1966:76) comes to one conclusion: it is only Christianity that teaches both. As Peter Gilbert (2011:7) points out, “Pascal argues that only Christianity provides an efficacious cure for Man’s wretched state.”
One more important point that needs yet to be made regarding Pascal’s apologetics is the contention that, much like other seventeenth-century apologists such as Robert Boyle, John Tillotson and William Paley, Pascal set forth a two-step apologetic (cf. Jeff Jordan, 2002:213-214). This two-step apologetic begins by trying to convince the interlocutor that a God exists; thus beginning with a generic theistic emphasis. The next step would be the vindication of Christianity in particular. Even a cursory reading of Pascal’s *Pensées* indicates that the French apologist does not, in any way, begin to stress a generic God. The beauty of Pascal’s apologetic is his deviation from the common seventeenth-century apologetic approach and his straightforward method in his vindication of the Christian God. We can only say that Pascal had a one-step method in the vindication of the Christian faith: the assertion that Jesus Christ is the sole object of Christianity (Pascal, 1966:86). In *Pensées* 449, Pascal (1966:169-170) makes it abundantly clear that an apologetic that lacks the Christian impetus from the very beginning “falls into either atheism or deism, two things almost equally abhorrent to Christianity.” Deism, according to Pascal (1966:355), is equal to atheism, and he makes this clear in his response to Descartes in regard to deism, saying, “I cannot forgive Descartes: in his whole philosophy he would like to do without God; but he could not help allowing him a flick of the fingers to set the world in motion; after that he had no more use of God.” Pascal, in order to avoid misleading his interlocutor or even leading him into the treacherous direction of deism, makes sure there is no doubt that the vindication of the Christian faith must begin and end with Christ. Pascal’s Apology, including his Wager, deliberately sets out to convince the reasonableness of the *Christian* faith, not just the reasonableness of theism. As in Calvin’s work, Pascal sets forth to spell out the uniqueness of the Christian faith, and the most unique element is Christ himself. There are several particular features that Pascal mentions, such as: no other religion but Christianity has proposed that we should hate ourselves (self-denial); no other religion but Christianity teaches that sin is innate within us and that we are obliged to resist it; only Christianity teaches that there is a cure; that the teachings of Christianity are both profound and understood by children, and lastly, that Christianity is both reasonable and paradoxical. By the latter feature Pascal means that it is only in our own wretchedness that we discover true happiness in Christ (cf. Pascal, 1966:99, 102, 234, 290; Calvin, 1960:37, 39, 41, 48, 505ff). Apologetics can only be called Christian apologetics when it contains these features that are defended by both Calvin and Pascal.

### 5.4 Conclusion

After a turbulent but short life, and an intense conversion experience, Pascal set out to write a vindication of the Christian faith to the libertines he so well knew from his worldly period. His fierce spiritual fervor and love for Scripture and for Christ is apparent throughout his entire Apology. T.S. Eliot glowingly praises Pascal for his work, its existential element and its religious
application to the whole being, which he finds most applicable to his time. Although Eliot penned this approving assertion almost eighty years ago, the commendation for Pascal can still be professed today. Eliot (1949:158-159) states in his work Essays Ancient & Modern, “But I think of no Christian writer more to be commended than Pascal to those who doubt, but who have the mind to conceive, and the sensibility to feel, the disorder, the futility, the meaningless, the mystery of life and suffering, and who can only find peace through the satisfaction of the whole being.”

Pascal’s apologetic starting point has close affinities to Calvin. Although not wanting to overstate our case in regard to Pascal’s sympathies with Calvin’s, we have no trouble mentioning Pascal and Calvin in the same sentence as far as apologetics is concerned. It is appealing to the contemporary mind because Pascal refuses to call on external evidences as proofs for God’s existence or on autonomous reason to apprehend God. Pascal appeals to the affections, or the mind and the heart in the apprehension of the divine. With Calvin, Pascal regards the external evidences unrecognizable without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In addition, Pascal appeals to the spiritual seeker of the seventeenth century, not unlike the contemporary seeker, and maintains that the Christian faith is a most reasonable option, the only option to our existential predicament.

The existential approach, which differs significantly from other theological existential suggestions, such as Kierkegaard’s, can be regarded as a more novel approach in Pascal’s time, when the Cartesian epistemic model made significant inroads among French intelligentsia. Pascal steered away from the emphasis on autonomous reason and adopted the more ancient Augustinian assumption, fides quaerens intellectum. Thus we can suggest Pascal as a novel apologist in his particular context; his method is actually one of more pre-modern origin, one that has more in common with Augustine and Calvin than his English contemporaries such as the evidentialist apologist John Locke (1632-1704) or the later Joseph Butler (1692-1752). Pascal’s emphasis, not unlike Calvin’s, aims at the wretched state of humanity and God’s abounding grace. He points to the paradoxical state of humanity; its greatness as creature and its wretchedness seeking happiness. Pascal and Calvin both understand that true happiness can only be found in the person of Jesus Christ. The true beauty of Pascal’s Apology and one that can appeal to the contemporary mind is not so much his imploration to the available evidences or proofs but the interconnectedness of the heart and reason, both working in harmony when coming to faith. Pascal, in this way, brings a proper balance of heart and reason to the apologetic method.

With the postmodern, Pascal attacks the Cartesian model of reason, but in clear opposition to the postmodern, Pascal upholds a metaphysical realism and the assumption that objective reality exists and that the objective reality can offer us what we naturally cannot achieve: happiness. In addition, Pascal, in contradistinction to the radical postmodern, is adamant that objective truth exists. James
Peters (2009:268) asserts that “No amount of scepticism can undermine our belief in ultimate truth for Pascal, because our belief in objective truth, or belief that the nature of things does not depend on our thinking, is one of the basic intuitions of the heart.” Peters, along with Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (1983:135-181), considers this belief to be basic to our human nature and that its rationality does not depend on rational proofs. Trying to offer proof would assume a possible denial of the fact. The denial of metaphysical realism and the abnegation of objective truth by the radical postmodernist becomes incoherent and inconsistent, and Pascal offers a clear rebuttal of both assumptions. Pascal (1966:58) assumes objective truth that is knowable. It is knowable, insofar as God is willing to reveal it, and it is transcendent. Pascal says,

Let us then concede to the sceptics what they have so often proclaimed, that truth lies beyond our scope and is an unattainable quarry, that it is no earthly denizen, but at home in heaven, lying in the lap of God, to be known only in so far as it pleases him to reveal it. Let us learn our true nature from the uncreated and incarnate truth (Pascal, 1966:64).

This counters the claims of postmoderns like John Caputo (2013:262), who claims that truth is a mere mirage and is unattainable.

Pascal felt at home among the intellectuals, the gamblers and the poor of Paris, and brought the message of the paradox of humanity all the same. In addition, he debated the theologians of his day in order to prove the grace of God and the centrality of the cross to the Christian faith. The overall message of Pascal’s Apology encompasses both the wretchedness and the greatness of humanity. The message of Pascal still appeals to a contemporary audience seeking the meaning of existence. In the twenty-first century the meaning of self proves to be the most pressing among us. Creating diversions, according to Pascal, keeps us from coming face to face with the truth of our meaningless existence without God. As Carol Zaleski (2017:35) admits, Pascal’s constant theme in his Pensées is the “inconsistency of the human heart. He exposes the malaise that our Internet age merely amplifies: ‘Take away their diversion and you will see them bored to extinction.’” Pascal forces us to look in the mirror and recognize our wretched state, but also declares that the meaning of life can only be found in the God of Christianity. Pascal’s Apology is a Christian Apology centred on the person of Jesus Christ, opposing the views of the more moderate postmodern whose trademark is tolerance, inclusivism and pluralism. The Pascalian tradition and the Calvinistic tradition, using the paradoxical state of humanity—our wretchedness and our greatness—as evidence of Christianity, still reverberates in the Christian apologetic of Francis Schaeffer (1990:133), who rightly asserts, “Christian apologetics do not start somewhere beyond the stars. They begin with man and what he knows about himself.”
6.0 FRANCIS SCHAFFER AND APOLOGETICS

6.1 Introduction

After the death of Pascal, Western Europe slowly began to move away from the Christian principles it had stood upon for so long. Now looking at the twenty-first century, the influence of Christianity in Europe has come to an all-time low, and the European assumptions have now fully reached the North American continent. The post-Christian sentiments of Canada reflect the European tendencies far more than the religious position and attitudes of her counterpart south of her border in the United States. Throughout the tumultuous years of the twentieth century some have continued to stand firm and continued the work of apologetics against disbelief, skepticism, blatant atheism and liberal theology. One such man was the American Francis Schaeffer, whose apologetic impetus still has clear relevance in the twenty-first century.

Although the deterioration of Christianity in Europe began much earlier, the decline of Christian influence reached its zenith in the twentieth century. Liberal theology and the progression of postmodern thought that started in the nineteenth century with liberal Protestant David Strauss, German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach and Nietzsche caused, in large part, the erosion of Christian influences that had stood the test of time for centuries. In the theologically and religiously turbulent years of twentieth century America, Francis August Schaeffer was born on January 30, 1912 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Although he never explicitly promoted a particular doctrinal viewpoint, educationally Schaeffer was very much influenced by great Reformed thinkers such as Gresham Machen and Cornelius Van Til, who acquainted him with neo-Calvinist greats such as Abraham Kuyper. Through friendships with Hans Rookmaaker, he became familiar with the neo-Calvinist philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd. Schaeffer never considered himself a scholar, but his Reformed scholarly influences certainly coloured his apologetic method that has often been dubbed “presuppositional.” However, it was distinctly different from that of his mentor and teacher Cornelius Van Til. It can be said that Schaeffer took his specifically Reformed apologetics to the masses—students who were disenchanted with Christianity and those who were seeking hope amidst the chaotic culture of the 60s and 70s. The American evangelist/apologist enjoyed a wide audience and still to this day has numerous admirers. Francis Schaeffer brought the Christian intellectual mind out of the doldrums of fundamentalism, and as Mark Edwards (1998:193) confirms, “Schaeffer became one of the leaders in the resurgence of evangelical intellectual endeavor.”

Some have argued that Francis Schaeffer’s apologetics can only be appreciated in the context in which he lived because of his heavy emphasis on reason. As Barry Hankins (2008:235) suggests in
his work *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America*, “The weakness of Schaeffer’s apologetic was that he consistently over-emphasized the power of human reason to lead to correct conclusions about ultimate matters.” For this particular reason Schaeffer’s apologetic method has little effect in a postmodern context, according to Hankins; this study will assert that the contrary is true. After carefully investigating Schaeffer’s work pertaining to the task of apologetics, we can come to the conclusion that, besides his emphasis on reason, more important aspects such as love, lifestyle and community are present in his apologetics, making it applicable to a postmodern audience. Additionally, for his valiant attempt to underscore and submit all aspects of life under the dominion of Christ, Francis Schaeffer remains extremely relevant in a postmodern context.

6.1.1 Francis Schaeffer in Context

Theologically, twentieth-century America was mired in a war between Christian conservatives and liberals who questioned the applicability and the relevancy of the Christian religion in contemporary America. Nancy Murphy (1996:1) affirms, “American Protestant Christianity is often described as a two party system. The division between ‘liberals’ and ‘conservatives’ is a deep one, and often marked by acrimony and stereotypes.” As today, the question was asked how we could interpret the Scriptures in light of modern science and whether the Christian religion still had relevancy in contemporary twentieth-century culture. As in postmodern culture, scriptural interpretation was often dictated by the prevailing cultural mindset of the time. Christian theology of the twentieth century was firmly influenced by a modernism that was characterized by German higher criticism and German philosophy. The influences took to task the authoritative nature of Scripture and the supernatural aspects of the Christian faith, together with Christian doctrines, such as salvation, which were seen to be in need of re-interpretation.

Gresham Machen (1923:69), professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in the early twentieth century, states in his work *Christianity and Liberalism*, “Modern liberalism has lost sight of the two great presuppositions of the Christian message—the living God and the fact of sin. The liberal doctrine of God and the liberal doctrine of man are both diametrically opposite to the Christian view.” Machen (1923:79) continues to explain that the aforementioned Christian presuppositions are clearly stated in the Bible, but when the authority of the Bible is questioned and denounced, the foundation of the Christian faith shifts as it did in liberalism. Whereas Christianity is founded upon the Bible, liberalism is founded upon “the shifting emotions of sinful man.” The authority of the Bible became the battleground of the war between conservatives and the liberals. Conservative Christians, such as Gresham Machen, reiterated the fundamentals of the Christian faith, which slowly turned into a movement that became known as
“fundamentalism.” The fundamentalist movement was not without its pitfalls; one of its unintentional characteristics was its anti-intellectualism. Mark Noll has strong words about the state of intellectual endeavours within the evangelical movement and names fundamentalism as the culprit. Noll (1994:123) boldly states that “fundamentalism hurt the effort to use the mind for the glory of God and for a better understanding of the world he had made by indulging in new forms of anti-intellectualism.” Noll (1994:239) concludes in his book The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind that the actual scandal of the evangelical mind is that “no mind arises from evangelicalism.”

Amidst the theological wrangling, Francis Schaeffer began his educational career and, under the influence of his wife Edith Schaeffer, the daughter of missionaries to China, he went to Westminster Seminary, where he studied under Gresham Machen and apologist Cornelius Van Til; thus he became well acquainted with the fundamentalist movement. During his time at Westminster, the seminary was not without its own controversies and experienced a schism whereby a number of faculty members left to form Faith Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware (Hankins, 2007:17). The fundamentalist rhetoric became increasingly abrasive and Francis Schaeffer became more influenced especially by the likes of the most well-known militant fundamentalist Carl McIntire, who relentlessly attacked liberal theology and all things that reflected religious modernism (cf. McIntire, 1967:10-47). As Philip Yancey (1982:104-105) confirms, “Schaeffer followed the arch-fundamentalist Carl McIntire to the newly formed Bible Presbyterian Church and Faith Theological Seminary, and he continued his training amid controversy and doctrinal hairsplitting.”

During the early years of Schaeffer’s ministry he had a difficult time shaking the fundamentalist principles taught at Westminster Seminary and Faith Theological Seminary in the 1930s. As a fundamentalist missionary in Europe he discovered that the “nitpicking battles that McIntire and the Bible Presbyterians usually engaged in were insignificant in a European culture where young people were struggling with existentialism and other philosophies that were antithetical to a Christian worldview” (Hankins, 2007:18). Although tired of the fundamentalist hardline rhetoric, this fundamentalist legacy remained and followed him like a dark cloud well after his passing in 1984 (cf. Frank Schaeffer, 2008:14, 116). Although Francis Schaeffer’s theology was formed within the fundamentalist-modernist conflict of the early twentieth century, it can be said that he never really adopted the edgy, sometimes confrontational, attitude that seemed to be part and parcel of the fundamentalist movement of the twentieth century. The fundamentalist attitude of Schaeffer expressed itself most noticeably in his battle for the inerrancy of Scripture.

When we closely examine the theology of Schaeffer we discover that, although he relentlessly held to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, he was surprisingly progressive in his Christian views,
and his apologetic endeavors showed this progressiveness. Frank Schaeffer, his son, alluded to this in an interview with Brian McLaren (Meredith, 2014). As a matter of fact, Schaeffer on several occasions spoke out against the rhetoric and the anti-intellectualism of the fundamentalist movement. His own description of “fundamentalism” was non-threatening and non-problematic, but as Schaeffer (1984:96) attests, “the term fundamentalism took on a connotation for many people which had no necessary relationship to its original meaning.” He (1984f:96) continues to explain in his work The Great Evangelical Disaster:

> It [fundamentalism] came to connote a form of pietism which shut Christian interest up to only a very limited view of spirituality. In this new connotation, many things having to do with the arts, culture and social involvement were considered to be “unspiritual” and not a proper area of concern for the Christian. Spirituality had to do with a very narrow sphere of the Christian’s life and all other things were considered to be suspect. Fundamentalism also, at times, became overly harsh and lacking in love, while properly saying that the liberal doctrine that was false to the Bible had to be met with confrontation.

Can Francis Schaeffer be counted among twentieth-century fundamentalists? Some might concur solely on the basis of Schaeffer’s militant rhetoric in his cultural engagement later in his life. Barry Hankins reports that in 1982 the magazine Newsweek published an article titled “Guru of Fundamentalism” devoted to Francis Schaeffer. In the strictest sense of the word, Schaeffer was indeed a fundamentalist who adhered to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but to put Francis Schaeffer in the camp of fundamentalism would be going too far. In the July/August 1984 edition of the Fundamentalist Journal Francis Schaeffer (1984g:50-51) wrote the article “The Practice of Truth: Fundamentalism As It Should Be” where he refrained from dismissing fundamentalism outright, but offered a corrective on a legitimate form of fundamentalism guided by love, which he found sorely lacking in the fundamentalist movement of early twentieth-century American evangelicalism.

This lack of love and true spirituality drove Francis Schaeffer to his own spiritual crisis. Francis Schaeffer experienced his own “dark night of the soul” in which he wrestled with his faith that he had held on to for so many years. Although he might have admitted that his “first” conversion was an intellectual one (Hankins, 2007:16), his “second” conversion was far more existential. He retells his spiritual struggle that occurred while in Switzerland between 1951 and 1952 in his pamphlet 2 Contents, 2 Realities. Schaeffer (1974:20-22) admits that he failed to see true spiritual reality among those who called themselves Christian. He felt the need to rethink the Christian teachings for their truthfulness, and after he came to realize that he had been right in becoming a Christian, he set out to re-examine his own spirituality and what it really meant to be a Christian. This experience
shaped Francis Schaeffer’s entire apologetics, for he came to know that becoming a Christian is not only an intellectual struggle, true as it may be, but also consists of an existential conflict.

Francis Schaeffer is best known for his work at L’Abri in Huémoz in the Swiss Alps. It was there that Edith and Francis Schaeffer met with intellectuals from Europe and other parts of the world. The Schaeffers not only confronted the intellectual questions of the day, but also met the physical needs of disgruntled youths. In all, for Francis and Edith Schaeffer, apologetics was not merely intellectual but must be viewed as a holistic effort. It was often the latter that left an indelible impression on those who visited L’Abri over the years. Barry Hankins (2008:63) explains, “True it [L’Abri] was a place where ideas and intellectual exchange were taken seriously, but L’Abri was not a place where people were simply argued into the Kingdom of God. Here they were also drawn in by Christian hospitality and love.” Making Christianity intelligible and intellectually relevant in the latter part of the twentieth century convinced many, such as Os Guiness and Nancy Pearcey, to pursue successful careers (Hankins, 2008:63-73). Many of the questions that Francis Schaeffer was confronted with could still be asked today by many of our contemporary youths. What appealed to the twentieth-century existentialist skeptic was Schaeffer’s broad interest from philosophy to art to environmental care that he brought under the Kingship of God. This holistic apologetic approach can still be appreciated today by the postmodern millennials who are educated and action-driven regarding social injustices and environmental exploitations.

As we shall see and have noted in a previous chapter, the postmodern spirit of the age of twenty-first century contemporary culture has close affinities to the modern mindset in which Francis Schaeffer was steeped. For that reason, the principles of Schaeffer’s thought that expressed itself in his apologetic discussions are extremely relevant to an apologetic method employed in a postmodern setting. Schaeffer understood very well that, in order to know how to reach the contemporary culture, one must have a good perception of the prevailing presuppositions. Much of what Schaeffer observed from his surrounding modern culture can be applied to the postmodern culture, which is nothing but a ramped-up version of modernism. The ills of twentieth-century modernism seem to have germinated in twenty-first-century postmodernism, thus for that reason Francis Schaeffer’s voice can, at times, be considered prophetic. For Schaeffer, cultural hermeneutic and thought form examinations are essential for a proper Christian apologetic, a sentiment that must be emulated by all contemporary apologists. In the foreword of Escape from Reason Francis Schaeffer (1968:7) explains, “Every generation of Christians has this problem of learning how to speak meaningfully to its own age. If we are to communicate the Christian faith effectively, therefore, we must know and understand the thought forms of our generation.” Here lies the attractiveness of Schaeffer’s entire apologetic method.
The starting points of Schaeffer’s apologetic endeavor have close affinities, not only with Calvin and Reformed theology, but also with Pascal. One of the aspects that is compatible with Reformed and Calvinistic theology is the neo-Calvinist notion of an all-encompassing Christian worldview that is characteristic of Schaeffer’s apologetic. In addition, the emphasis on human significance (humanity as created in the image of God) and our paradoxical state (great as God’s creature yet lost because of the Fall), has affinities with Calvin and Pascal. Mankind as significant being, created in the image of God, stood out in Schaeffer’s theology; it is the Christian message of meaning and love and the clarifying biblical worldview that Francis Schaeffer stressed, which makes his apologetic so relevant in the twenty-first century. Another aspect that cannot be ignored is the importance of “incarnational apologetics,” the idea of the integrity of the messenger or the concern for authenticity in action. Schaeffer concerned himself as much with the authenticity of the message as he did with the authenticity of the messenger. In addition, Schaeffer called for an intellectual apologetic to give honest answers to honest questions, always characterized by love. Finally, although Francis Schaeffer encouraged a pre-evangelistic apologetic for individuals, he also emphasized a corporate Christian apologetic employed by the church that is marked by love.

6.1.2 Francis Schaeffer and His Critics

Gregory Reynolds (2009:n.p.) once quipped, “If we cannot see the weaknesses as well as the strengths of our mentors, we have probably not learned much from them.” Without a doubt, Francis Schaeffer had his share of critics, and his detractors have come out in full force and criticized Schaeffer on a variety of fronts. Although Francis Schaeffer had disputes with some of the more contemporary scholars (Ronald Wells, Mark Noll) he remained irenic and seldom called his adversaries by name. Only on one occasion did Schaeffer refer to one of his critics but never mentioned the name of his detractors in the text (Schaeffer, 1984f:118). Most of the critique is leveled against the “later Schaeffer” who became more and more involved in political issues such as the pro-life movement, as well as his participation in the New Christian Right and the Moral Majority, a movement spearheaded by Jerry Falwell. At that time, Schaeffer penned some rather militant ideas in his Christian Manifesto, which seemed rather uncharacteristic of his otherwise irenic spirit. In defense of Schaeffer, the issues he addressed and felt so strongly about in his Christian Manifesto were consistent with his entire theological/apologetic scheme. There are, however, some who are critical of his more scholarly work and apologetic approach, such as Thomas Morris (1987:101-108), Ronald Wells (1982:16-20), and Clark Pinnock (1986:176-193) to name a few.
It must be noted that Frank Schaeffer, the son of Francis Schaeffer, was far less irenic in his rhetoric than the elder Schaeffer, and far more critical of those who leveled any critique against his father (cf. 1984:49ff). It can be assumed, therefore, that in some ways, Frank Schaeffer did not in any way help the matter but kept the fire of antagonism burning between the Schaeffers and those who criticized the American apologist. Frank Schaeffer would later turn against the work of his parent and the work at L’Abri. Os Guiness, a close acquaintance of Francis Schaeffer and best man at Frank Schaeffer’s wedding, had strong words regarding Frank Schaeffer’s critique of his parents’ ministry. Guiness (2008:32) in his review of Frank Schaeffer’s Crazy for God published in Books and Culture, states, “The problem is not so much that Frank exposes and trumpets his parents’ flaws and frailties, or that he skewers them with his characteristic mockery. It is more than that. For all his softening, the portrait he paints amounts to a death-dealing charge of hypocrisy and insincerity at the very heart of their life and work.” Guiness (2008:32) scathingly and rhetorically adds, “With such a son, who needs enemies?” Such a severe and ad hominem critique, which Guiness was addressing, was only leveled by Frank Schaeffer. Others in the academic world took issue with Francis Schaeffer’s intellectual approach. It is worthwhile to analyze some of the critiques leveled against Francis Schaeffer to assess whether they are justified, in order to gain a better understanding of Schaeffer’s influence on contemporary apologetics.

Much of this critique has come from academics who disagree with either Schaeffer’s view on history or the assessments and references to particular theologians and philosophers, such as Aquinas and Kierkegaard. In their opinion, Schaeffer has little knowledge of many of the references that he gives throughout his writings. Ronald Wells (1982:17), professor of history at Calvin College, scathingly noted, “While I laud Schaeffer’s attempt to encourage Christians to realize that ideas have consequences, and that religion is related to life, he has offered his work with such sophomoric bombast and careless simplicity that it is very difficult to endorse his characterizations of modern society, much less the remedies he offers.” The point of contention for historians like Ronald Wells or Mark Noll was Schaeffer’s assertion that America was founded on Christian principles and that the founders, such as Benjamin Franklin, worked from a Reformation base rather than the secularized views of Locke (Hankins, 2008:210). Schaeffer might have overstated his case here but we can agree with Jeremy Hexham (2010:36) that the Christian influence was more indirect. Immigrants from Europe brought with them a strong biblical Christianity that began to pervade the American ethos of the time. For that reason, although the founders of America were mostly deists or agnostics, the moral mindset was insistently Christian. Thus, although Francis Schaeffer’s contentions about the Founding Fathers of America might have been too romantic, his overall assessment of Christian influence on the Founding Fathers of America was not far off the mark.
Another aspect of criticism concerns Schaeffer’s assessment of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Among his more moderate critics, Ronald Ruegsegger (1986:120) contends that Schaeffer “seemed to have misunderstood the Danish thinker’s contentions.” According to Ruegsegger, contrary to what Francis Schaeffer asserts, Kierkegaard did not advocate an irrationalistic view of faith. As already discussed in a previous chapter, Kierkegaard certainly by his own admission thought faith utterly irrational, paradoxical, and absurd; the existence itself emerges from the demonstration by a leap (cf. Kierkegaard, 1968:188; 1987:43 and Schaeffer, 1990:15). Certainly Francis Schaeffer appears to have a more accurate reading of Kierkegaard than Ruegsegger and others would like to admit. Ruegsegger sums up his overall assessment of Francis Schaeffer as being more of a popularizer rather than a scholar. As such “it is not fair to expect him to understand the details of philosophy as well as someone who is trained in the discipline” (Ruegsegger, 1986:126). This conclusion undermines Francis Schaeffer’s careful investigation and research. It must also be taken into consideration that Schaeffer never made any assessments without careful consultations. He did, however, admit that he summarized particular viewpoints, which makes it impossible to consider all the different nuances (Yancey, 1982:114-116). It would be unfair to focus solely on the missed subtleties of the vast array of thinkers in the writings of Francis Schaeffer.

The late Jack Rogers (1977:15), who taught at Westminster Seminary and Fuller Seminary in the area of philosophical theology, erroneously asserts that “Schaeffer would never quote any modern theologians. He does not want people to read them lest they become confused. At L’Abri students do not study original sources,” and he finds Schaeffer’s “inexactitude of the arguments exasperating” (Rogers, 1977:19). In an interview with Philip Yancey, Schaeffer was asked if he indeed read the primary sources or only secondary sources. Francis Schaeffer answered by pointing out that he indeed read the primary sources alongside the secondary sources and, in addition, he asserted that studying or teaching at L’Abri was never done in isolation but alongside many other excellent scholars. Schaeffer mentioned Hans Rookmaaker as a case in point (Yancey, 1982:117). An important thing to note here as well is that many have put labels on Schaeffer which he would never have given himself, and the label of scholar is one of them; Schaeffer was and always remained an evangelist. Wells might have been correct in suggesting that when making scholarly claims proper references must be required, but we must also remember that most of Schaeffer’s books were transcribed lectures and proper references were deemed unnecessary in public engagement. Francis Schaeffer’s audience was broad and, as Laurel Gasque (2005:24) suggests, in reaction to similar criticism leveled against Schaeffer’s friend Hans Rookmaaker, “In the academy there is often, unfortunately, a price to pay for the ability to communicate with a broad audience. Popularizing is not at all popular with most academics.”
More important and more pertinent to this study are the critiques leveled against Francis Schaeffer’s apologetic method. Two individuals who stand out in this regard are Thomas V. Morris, former philosophy professor at Notre Dame, and the late Clark Pinnock, former professor at McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada (Morris, 1987:17-24, 101-121; Pinnock, 1986:173-192). To be fair, much of the critique has been handled with care and grace, but nevertheless it is serious and runs counter to Francis Schaeffer’s theological ideas and, maybe unwittingly, against the characteristics of his apologetics and teachings at L’Abri.

Morris judges Schaeffer’s presuppositional approach in his apologetics even though Schaeffer would never have called himself a presuppositionalist. Although not diminishing or disagreeing with the presuppositional principles in apologetics, he levels his critique against the way Francis Schaeffer used presuppositions in his argument. Morris (1987:18) claims in his work Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetics: A Critique that “Schaeffer is presenting a formalized or depersonalized view of human thought of which he himself seems not to be convinced but which permeates his philosophical apologetic discussions.” In addition, Morris (1987:119) claims that Schaeffer was far more concerned with propositional beliefs that can be argued than he was with the personal predisposition of the believer. Schaeffer (1990:177), in opposition to this critique, asserts that what is written in his books should never be applied mechanically, as a set formula, and above all, if it meets anyone’s need it is only an act of God’s mercy. To take the apologetic method of Francis Schaeffer in isolation from Francis Schaeffer the man might seem distorted and mechanical. We can uncritically assert that few who sat under his teachings at L’Abri would concur with Morris’ assessment. Bryan Follis (2006:103) is correct in pointing out as well that Morris’ critique points to his own hidden assumption of evidentialism by claiming an alleged lack of rational argument and evidence in asserting the Christian presuppositions. We must understand that Francis Schaeffer was neither a rationalist nor an evidentialist.

Thus, critics like Clark Pinnock (1986:173-192), who charges Francis Schaeffer with cold rationalism, must be dismissed. As a matter of fact, there appears to be somewhat of an intellectual about-face where Pinnock is concerned, for in an article published in 1970 titled “Cultural Apologetics: An Evangelical Standpoint” Pinnock makes claims that are very similar to the claims made by Francis Schaeffer regarding the need to provide reasonable answers in a post-Christian world. He calls the Christian to be culturally discerning and to provide Christian answers to combat the negative influences of anti-Christian media that seem to undermine all Christian values (Pinnock, 1970:58-63). It can be asserted that Schaeffer put more stock in the rational arguments for the Christian faith as compared to thinkers such as Blaise Pascal, but he would never deny the existential and holistic aspects of coming to the Christian faith. For example, in 2 Contents, 2 Realities, Schaeffer (1974:8) unapologetically asserts that it must be the whole person who comes
to understand that the gospel is truth and believes that we are convinced on the basis of good and sufficient reason that it is truth. By the term “the whole person” Schaeffer contends that both heart and mind are involved in accepting the truth of the gospel. Francis Schaeffer’s view of reason and the ability of the mind are similar to Calvin’s contentions. The issue that Schaeffer disputes is the ability of autonomous reason to grasp the truths of God as suggested by Thomas Aquinas (Schaeffer, 1968:11-12).

Schaeffer (1984a:218) denounces autonomous reason, thus denounces rationalism, and states, “…there is nothing man can do; no autonomous or humanistic religious or moral effort of man can help.” He was well aware, as were all Reformers, of the role of the Holy Spirit in persons coming to faith and grasping the truths of God, and also in the work of apologetics. He (1990:135) claims, “We, in love, looking to the work of the Holy Spirit, must reach down into that person and try to find where the point of tension is.” Brian Follis reiterates Schaeffer’s admission of the limits of reason and the need for the Holy Spirit. He (2006:95) states that, “of course, he [Schaeffer] recognized the limitation of the mind and its inability to reason through to a saving power of God without special revelation.” Schaeffer cannot be charged with being a rationalist in the sense where he would make himself the starting point of religious knowledge. It must be noted that Francis Schaeffer makes a clear distinction between “rationalism” and the “rational”. The former has close affinities to positivism, which has as its starting point the autonomous human mind, whereas the rational merely recognizes the validity of reason (Schaeffer, 1984a:228).

In all, Schaeffer’s critics, mostly from North America, have often misread Schaeffer and have not allowed him to speak in his own particular context. In labeling Schaeffer as scholar or academic they have unfairly characterized his philosophical and apologetic approach, and by accusing him of rationalism they have not adequately investigated Schaeffer’s entire apologetic method.

The disputes put an unfortunate blemish on Francis Schaeffer's otherwise impressive career. This, however, cannot take away from the fact that Schaeffer inspired a generation to pursue scholarly endeavors. In addition, and more pertinent to this study, is Schaeffer’s commitment to a holistic approach to apologetics that involves both the mind and the heart. Keeping this aspect in view, we must concentrate on the less contentious aspects of Schaeffer before he gave his all to the more single-issue political causes that consumed him in the later years of his career.

6.2 Francis Schaeffer’s Cultural Hermeneutics

Francis Schaeffer, more than any other apologist of his time, understood the importance of cultural awareness. He was not averse to reading or analyzing the books of the time that were making an
impact among young university students in Western Europe. He was acutely aware that he was living in a post-Christian world that had left the Reformation principles upon which it had stood for well over three hundred years. Schaeffer (1969:14) notes in his work *Death in the City*,

> Men of our time knew the truth and yet turned away, turned away not only from the biblical truth, the religious truth of the Reformation, but turned away from the total culture built upon that truth, including the balance of freedom and form which the Reformation brought forth in northern Europe in the state and society, a balance which has never been known anywhere in the world before.

The reason we now live in a post-Christian society, according to Schaeffer (1969:58), is that we have turned away from the God who is there and the truth which He has revealed. Like the prophet Jeremiah, Schaeffer suggests that death resides in the post-Christian city, because the city has abandoned the love of her God and His propositional revelation, and stands, for this reason, under the judgment of God. He understood that one needs to be in tune with the thought patterns of secular society in order to grasp the needs of the people, and to therefore know how to bring the gospel to them in a way that is not only effective but also speaks to those who have abandoned the propositional truths of the Scriptures.

In a number of his works, Francis Schaeffer identifies his culture as “plastic” (Schaeffer, 1984c:385; 1970a:24; 1970c:1; 1984c:385). At times he is unclear in his precise definition of the “plastic culture,” but he considers it an applicable term for a culture ruled by the New Bourgeois who are motivated by the two cardinal values of peace and affluence. Francis Schaeffer asserts (1970c:1) in the article “Shattering the Plastic Culture” in *His Magazine*, “Plastic is a good word here, for plastic is synthetic and has no natural grain or form.” Hans Rookmaaker is more pronounced in his description of “man as plastic”, particularly in his work *Modern Art and the Death of Culture*. What Rookmaaker (1971:201) means by “man as plastic” is found in his description of the human situation: “man is plastic—as machine-like, as ugly, as open to manipulation, as cheap and as banal as plastic.” Plastic, Rookmaaker (1971:201) claims, is the “supreme product of technocracy, the fruit of research, organization, big capital, large factories, the clever selling techniques.” Schaeffer is also astute in his discernment and minces no words, pointing his finger at the church for their neglect and lack of recognition and, ultimately, for their accommodation to the surrounding culture that has lost its way. The characteristic of the plastic culture, according to Schaeffer, is the loss of “true truth,” and the infatuation with new absolute freedom (Schaeffer, 1970c:1, 3). The new generation saw the pitfalls of this plastic culture and abandoned the values of their parents but had no base for their own beliefs. Schaeffer put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the evangelical church, who, “being so committed to middle-class norms, and often elevating these norms to an
equal place with God’s absolutes, have slid without thought into accepting the Establishment elite” (Schaeffer, 1970c:8). Schaeffer expressed this sentiment in further detail in his book *The Evangelical Disaster*.

In this work, Schaeffer often accuses the evangelical for not standing for truth as truth, which results in accommodation to the world’s spirit of the age (Schaeffer, 1984f:37). Although perhaps valiant in their opposition to the current culture, the hippies “hoped for something better though they have no reason for hope” (Schaeffer, 1970c:3). The generation that stood up against the values of personal peace and affluence adhered to by their parents had come of age but produced little change, sliding further into hedonism and narcissism. The current generation opposes the values they see in their parents and we can boldly proclaim, as did the students at Berkeley in 1964, that we are still living in a plastic culture. History will again repeat itself unless this generation returns to a scriptural foundation and recognizes the propositional truths as objective norms. Francis Schaeffer’s warnings in the 70s and 80s still ring true in the twenty-first century, and additionally the call for an incarnational apologetic must still be heeded (Schaeffer, 1970d:27-28, 31). The denial of objective truth and the assertion of absolute autonomous freedom must be addressed in order for this generation to hope for something better. Schaeffer (1990:152) warns, “We must prepare Christian young people to face the monolithic twentieth-century culture by teaching them what the particular attack in our generation is, in contrast to the attacks of previous generations.”

6.3 Francis Schaeffer's Worldview and the Lordship of Christ

By teaching and preparing Christian young people, Schaeffer meant to make them aware of the thought-forms of the time and the presuppositions that animated them. It was his understanding that there was not only one particular area in culture that was under attack; all aspects of culture from philosophy and theology to the arts are affected by the lack of any real concept of truth or moral objective standard. Thus the notion of an all-encompassing worldview and the principle of Lordship in relation to all aspects of culture are essential elements of Francis Schaeffer’s thought. Here we see the intellectual influence of neo-Calvinism on Francis Schaeffer, especially through his association with Hans Rookmaaker, who introduced Schaeffer to the Dutch neo-Calvinist Herman Dooyeweerd (Gasque, 2005:73-74). Schaeffer must have been familiar with the neo-Calvinist terminology used by both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd through his education at Westminster, and especially through Cornelius Van Til, but never overtly applied the principles until after his acquaintance with Rookmaaker. Francis Schaeffer adopted the neo-Calvinist concepts of worldview and antithesis and applied these to his apologetic method and his exposition on the culture wars. Critics of Schaeffer's approach (cf. Mark Edwards, 1998:201, Barry Hankins,
have objected to an apparent lack of clarity in his use of the “neo-Calvinist” terminology throughout his works. This is a valid critique, for nowhere in any of his works does Schaeffer actually refer to either Abraham Kuyper or Herman Dooyeweerd to credit them for the ideas adopted by him. Laurel Gasque (2005:99) reiterates this exact sentiment and asserts, “Schaeffer had the utmost respect for Herman Dooyeweerd, but he also admitted he had been virtually untouched by his formal philosophy.” It is true that Schaeffer never slavishly followed a particular philosophy or theological viewpoint. Although he had his own theological outlook, he shied away from putting himself in a certain theological box; his overall theological/apologetic approach revealed his views nonetheless.

Schaeffer used the terminology indiscriminately throughout his work, without precisely defining the terms. He never felt that the terminology so familiar among neo-Calvinists, such as the concepts of worldview and antithesis, needed to be explained. Schaeffer’s statement “I’m just making a point” (Hankins, 2007:15) is indeed a good indicator why Schaeffer was reluctant to communicate some of the details regarding the terminology he used throughout his writings; apparently he saw no need to give further comments and regarded his descriptions as adequate. It must also be taken into consideration that Francis Schaeffer never meant to give philosophical treatises regarding his apologetic approach using neo-Calvinistic concepts, but always sought to emphasize the adequacy of the Christian worldview in juxtaposition to the humanistic worldview, in order to better understand the people he would come into contact with. Additionally, we must also take into consideration that the books that are available from Francis Schaeffer are transcribed lectures, so a thorough exposition on the terms used would not have been included. For clarity, however, it is beneficial to look at his philosophical influences, such as Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, who were far more nuanced in their expressions of terms such as worldview and antithesis, used so often by Schaeffer.

6.3.1 Francis Schaeffer and Herman Dooyeweerd: Worldview and Antithesis

We cannot underestimate the importance of the concept of worldview in Francis Schaeffer’s entire scheme of thought. This particular concept was a well-discussed topic, especially among the Dutch neo-Calvinists Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd, although Kuyper did not expressly define the concept until he gave his Stone Lectures at Princeton (Bartholomew, 2017:106). As a previous chapter has shown, although the difference in nuance was razor thin, they both had their particular interpretation. Francis Schaeffer made extensive use of the concept of worldview to indicate the differences in presuppositions between the Christian and the non-Christian. Although, it seems at times that Schaeffer, contrary to Dooyeweerd, equates worldview with philosophy...
(Schaeffer, 1984a:279) both cannot dismiss the fact that there are only two particular worldviews that determine all other aspects of life: the Christian worldview which draws its impulse from the scriptural Christian ground-motive, to use Dooyeweerdian terminology, and the modern humanistic worldview that stands as the antithesis to the Christian worldview. The presuppositions that animate the worldview control the entire attitude of life (Dooyeweerd, 2013:2-3; 1984:62; Schaeffer, 1984a:279-280).

Explicit in Dooyeweerd and implicit in Schaeffer is their assertion that “a worldview must issue from the religious root, the heart of human existence. It also must influence one’s entire perspective on life, nor merely one’s theory” (Dooyeweerd, 2013:3). It becomes clear that the aspect of worldview, for both Schaeffer and Dooyeweerd, is far more than an abstract concept. Naugle (2002:28) perceives that for Dooyeweerd, “the religion of the heart is the cause; the philosophies and the worldviews are the cognitive effect.” Much of the same can be said about Schaeffer’s perception of worldview. For him the concept of worldview animates all of human thinking and doing: “…people function on the basis of their worldview more consistently than even they themselves may realize. The problem is not an outward thing. The problem is having, and then acting upon, the right worldview—the worldview which gives men and women the truth of what is” (Schaeffer, 1982:252, emphasis mine). There is an essential difference, however, in the way Schaeffer uses the term “worldview” and how Kuyper applies it. Kuyper argues that one’s epistemology is a development of one’s worldview, whereas Schaeffer seems to concede a common epistemological ground with non-Christians on the basis of what Schaeffer calls “the mannishness of man” (cf. Bartholomew, 2017:113). Having a common epistemological ground was exactly the point for Schaeffer, for this enables one to have a reasonable conversation with the unbeliever. This seems a lot more difficult when one applies the Kuyperian viewpoint, not unlike Cornelius Van Til, who employs Kuyperian thought in his apologetic method.

For Schaeffer the concept of worldview is far more a *levensbeschouwing* than merely a *levensovertuiging*. The former has more to do with conviction, whereas the latter has more of an intellectual undercurrent; it indicates a perception as a learned concept. A worldview is fundamentally influenced by the motives of the heart or the religious ground-motive. In postmodern thought, the concept of worldview has lost its luster, because it points to a particular metanarrative.

James K.A. Smith understands the negative connotations that the concept of worldview might conjure up, and he is adamant that worldview cannot be divorced from religious practices, but suggests that maybe we should rather talk about “a Christian social imaginary than a Christian worldview, given that the latter seems tinged with lingering cognitivism” (Smith, 2009:133). Smith here seems a little too worried about the notion of worldview as a modern concept with its
unwanted baggage. The concept of worldview is by no means a mere rationalistic notion. There is far more at stake, as Schaeffer, Kuyper and Dooyeweerd have indicated; they all accepted a Pascalian connection of heart and mind in regard to the concept of worldview. Dooyeweerd (1984:v) asserts in connection to this assumption, “I came to understand the central significance of the ‘heart’, repeatedly proclaimed by Holy Scripture, to be the religious root of human existence.” This same sentiment can be deduced from all of Schaeffer’s writing as well, which serves as a warning to a culture when it abandons the religious, or more specifically the Reformational Christian ground-motive, and adopts humanistic presuppositions which carry devastating effects that influence a multiplicity of disciplines such as philosophy, art, music, general culture and eventually theology. Without a doubt, Francis Schaeffer’s overall modus operandi is to call for a return to the ground-motive of the Scriptures.

With the rise of postmodern thought, the notion of worldview is being questioned especially with the perception of the incredulity of metanarratives. Sander Griffioen (1989:11) notes, “Some observers insist that people no longer adhere to worldviews, they no longer live by a coherent overall vision.” Howard Snyder (1995:213) in his work EarthCurrents asks the question, “Our age has been called the end of ideology, the end of history, and the end of geography. Is it rather the end of worldviews? Has society reached such a state of diversity and pluralism that cogent worldviews are no longer possible or believable, or even wanted or missed?” It stands to reason that with postmodernism’s adherence to relativism and pluralism there seems to be no one particular worldview that is true. If postmodernism does adhere to a worldview concept it maintains a plethora of worldviews as legitimate. Griffioen (1989:12) observes, “In the extreme pluralism of Lyotard, Kuhn, and Feyerabend there is no single ‘world’—there are as many worlds as there are worldviews” (cf. Kuhn, 1970:111-135). In the case of Lyotard, the incredulity toward metanarratives is bound to fall into relativism, and no unity to societal life or consensus to the social sciences could exist if not imposed on society by force (Marshall, Griffioen and Mouw, 1989:12). Thus no one coherent worldview could exist. Kuhn and Feyerabend, philosophers of science, who regarded scientific progress as standard for worldview, held similar positions. The all too familiar paradigm shifts or revolutions would alter the prevailing worldview and a new perspective is deemed to make better sense of the available knowledge. Again, no single worldview could endure, and again the trap of relativism is clearly set.

As to the argument of total denial of any worldview concept, we can only reply that postmodernists have now created their own worldviews from their own particular sets of presuppositions. David Naugle (2002:186) asks the pertinent question, “Is not the postmodern denial of the cogency of any worldview itself a worldview, and therefore self-defeating?” In other words, worldviews are unavoidable wherever there is a system of belief. Postmodernity has created its own worldview with
its own presuppositions and subsequent characteristics. The presuppositions that make up the worldview of the postmodernist are untenable to say the least. Howard Snyder (1995:230) senses this as well, and suggests that “postmodernism fails as a worldview because it has no principle of coherence.” Negation as the driving force behind postmodernism does not cohere. The postmodern worldview fails to draw from the impulse of the biblical ground-motive.

Theologian Ray Griffin (1989:xii) states, “It (postmodernity) overcomes the modern worldview through an anti-worldview; it deconstructs or eliminates the ingredients necessary for a worldview, such as God, self, purpose, meaning, a real world, and truth as correspondence.” The postmodern worldview is merely bringing the unbiblical presuppositions which are so apparent in the modern worldview to their logical conclusion. Griffin (1989:xii) suggests combining modern premises and traditional concepts to arrive at what he calls a “constructive or revisionary postmodern worldview.” Griffin (1989:xiii,48) explains that although he wants to attempt to recover truths and values from various forms of premodern thought and practice, the revisionary postmodern worldview eliminates the “supernatural deity of premodern and early modern Western theology and it is even repugnant to call upon this being.” In other words, a revisionary postmodern worldview, as suggested by Griffin, has disposed of the biblical concept of God, leaving it as empty as any other worldview built on an apostate ground-motive. Here Francis Schaeffer, Dooyeweerd, and Kuyper are helpful for they understood the importance of a worldview grounded in the biblical ground-motive of creation, fall and redemption through Jesus Christ. They all set out to impress upon their readers that the Christian worldview offers a more coherent, consistent and overall better story than the worldview based on postmodern principles which stand in antithesis to the worldview grounded in Scripture.

Another prevalent point in Francis Schaeffer’s writings, and closely connected to the worldview concept, is the notion of antithesis. In his work The God Who Is There, Schaeffer (1990:6-7) explains that the basic prevailing presupposition in the West was the acceptance of absolutes, a view that no longer seems to hold sway; thus pointing to the fact that the West has adopted a relativistic outlook that stands in opposition, or antithesis, to the Christian mindset of absolutes. The twentieth century, according to Schaeffer, has rejected thinking in terms of an antithesis. Dooyeweerd is far more defined in his description of the concept of antithesis and accentuates the same conclusion. He begins by explaining the acceptance of relativism in the dialectical method of Greek thought, where nothing in temporal life is absolute. In the world established through the Christian faith, however, there can be no higher synthesis as in dialectical theoretical thought. The antithesis “pertains to the relation between the creature and its Creator, and thus touches the religious root of all temporal life” (Dooyeweerd, 2012:8). The absolute, according to Dooyeweerd,
can only exist in religion. That which claims absoluteness, or the religious starting point, “penetrates behind theory to the sure, absolute ground of all temporal, and therefore relative, existence” (Dooyeweerd, 2012:8). Nothing is left untouched by the religious starting point; the all-encompassing divine and central character of the Word of God must affect all aspects of existence. For Dooyeweerd (2013:8) it is clear that an antithesis exists between the “divine truth, centered on the Divine Word-revelation, and human inversion.” For Schaeffer, as well, the rejection of absolutes has permeated all aspects of life and has manifested itself throughout all disciplines, including theology. The (post)modern mindset has rejected the absolute divine truth of the Divine Word-revelation and has accepted its antithesis: the false truth of autonomous freedom.

6.3.2 The Lordship of Christ

Closely connected to the concept of worldview and the notion of antithesis is the idea of the Lordship of Christ. In the January 1982 edition of *Moody Monthly* Francis Schaeffer (1982a:13) made an astute observation: “The basic problem of the Christians in this country in the last eighty years or so—in regard to society and in regard to government—is that they have seen things in bits and pieces instead of totals.” The idea of unity was extremely important to Francis Schaeffer, and in his work *The Christian Manifesto* (1982b:19) he explains that Christianity was reduced to only a small isolated part of life and that “the totality of reality was ignored by pietistic thinking.” This idea of unity in life and totality of reality became a driving force in Francis Schaeffer’s thinking. This important facet of Francis Schaeffer’s thought and theology is the concept he would later dub as “the Lordship of Christ over all aspects of life.” Even here we detect the influence of neo-Calvinism, especially of Abraham Kuyper, on Francis Schaeffer. Although Schaeffer was not immediately explicit in his explanation of this particular concept, an overall sense of the Lordship of Christ applied to different topics can be recognized in all of Schaeffer’s writings. It is not until Book IV of his complete works that he (1984d:303-304) explains the importance of the Lordship of Christ:

Throughout all of my work there is a common unifying theme, which I would define as “the Lordship of Christ in the totality of life.” If Christ is indeed Lord, he must be Lord of all of life—in spiritual matters, of course, but just as much across the whole spectrum of life, including intellectual matters and the areas of culture, law and government. I would want to emphasize from beginning to end throughout my work the importance of evangelism (helping men and women come to know Christ as Savior), the need to walk daily with the Lord, to study God’s Word, to live a life of prayer, and to show forth the love, compassion, and the holiness of our Lord. But we must emphasize equally and at the same time the need to live this out in every area of culture and society.
Schaeffer has been criticized by some for his lack of clarity and the reason and meaning concerning the concept of “Lordship of Christ” in most of his work (cf. Mark Edwards, 1998:194). As well, the critique extended to his application of the Lordship concept to only social and ethical ethics such as the anti-abortion movement. Some might have assumed that Schaeffer “subordinated the Lordship idea to a conservative, unreflective political agenda” (Edwards, 1998:209). To the first charge we can only say that all of his works assumed the Lordship of Christ over all of life. Francis Schaeffer (1990:8ff; 230ff) is more than clear in his indication that his first works, _The God Who is There, Escape From Reason_ and _He is There and He is Not Silent_, call for the Lordship of Christ in the arts, literature and philosophy. His later works emphasize the Lordship of Christ in the whole of life as a citizen, especially in the areas of law and government (Schaeffer, 1984b:viii). Already in his 1973 edition of his book _Art and the Bible_, Schaeffer devotes a section to the Lordship of Christ, where he asserts that this concept was relatively novel in Christian circles. He (1984b:376) notes, “Some years ago when I started to work out a Christian concept of culture, many people considered what I was doing suspect.” He fully understood that if Christianity is really true it must involve the whole person; thus the charge of Edwards that Schaeffer is arbitrary in his approach must be dismissed.

To the second charge, we can say that Francis Schaeffer saw the protest against the pressing anti-biblical cultural agenda such as the pro-abortion movement as a natural outworking of his entire theological impulse driven by the Lordship of Christ over all of life. We can deduce from this that both allegations regarding the ambivalence of the Lordship of Christ are unfounded and that Schaeffer’s commitment to the Lordship of Christ over all aspects of the life of the Christian, privately and corporally, is apparent. The reason for Schaeffer’s seeming lack of refinement of definition in regard to the concept of Lordship could be that his emphasis had always been on the notion of Christian worldview, which assumes the Lordship of Christ over all aspects of life.

The concept of the Lordship of Christ in neo-Calvinism, and especially with Abraham Kuyper, is far more centred on the Calvinistic worldview than was Schaeffer’s own pronouncement regarding this idea. Schaeffer, however, articulated his own particular view of the subject, avoiding the typical Reformed Calvinistic emphasis. In a way, Schaeffer released the concepts of worldview and the Lordship of Christ from the confines of the Reformed tradition and gave it a broader understanding. Although Schaeffer was in full agreement with the neo-Calvinist Kuyperian impetus of worldview and Lordship of Christ, and emphasized the Dooyeweerdian (2013:16) description that the “created order expresses itself in the distinct spheres of human society,” he simply turned to Scripture and asserted that the Bible makes clear that salvation concerns the whole person whose whole life is
under the Lordship of Christ (Schaeffer, 1984b:376). Thus, he regarded the Lordship of Christ as completely biblical and not confined to a particular theological tradition.

Schaeffer’s goal was not to promote any particular theological viewpoint, but to reach the broadest possible audience. It stands to reason that, although agreeing with neo-Calvinism as espoused by Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, and his teacher Cornelius Van Til, Schaeffer never used the academic jargon to explain the concepts of antithesis, worldview and Lordship of Christ. His greatest influences, Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, were academics who addressed academic audiences using academic language to explain Calvinistic concepts, whereas Schaeffer’s audience consisted of students of all stripes, mired in a variety of circumstances, who came to hear and assess the intelligibility of the Christian faith and listen to the concepts that would ultimately bring hope and reason to a religion that had lost credibility in the secular universities of Western Europe and North America.

The impetus of the Lordship of Christ in all aspects of intellectual and artistic life, according to Schaeffer, lies in the fact that salvation does not only affect the spiritual condition but involves the whole person. Schaeffer (1990:224) asserts, “… there is redemption for the whole man … There is real Lordship of Christ over the whole man.” Thus true spirituality encompasses the whole person and subsequently all areas of life. Schaeffer (1990:156) notes, “True spirituality cannot be abstracted from truth at one end, nor from the whole man and the whole culture at the other. If there is a true spirituality, it must encompass all.” True spirituality is characterized by the Lordship of Christ over all aspects of life, beginning with the whole person: the will, the mind, the emotions (Schaeffer, 1971:89). Schaeffer suggests that this has not always been a given; in the past, Christianity had created a false dichotomy (a dichotomy that is very much still present in contemporary evangelicalism), which had its roots in seventeenth-century Pietism under the leadership of P.J. Spener (Schaeffer, 1982b:18).

Pietism made a sharp division between the spiritual and the material, resembling ancient Platonic thought. Schaeffer (1982b:19) asserts, “The totality of reality was ignored by the pietistic thinking.” The result was that Christianity shied away from any involvement in cultural and intellectual activities. Neo-Calvinism and Francis Schaeffer called for a renewed interest in intellectual life and stressed the Lordship of Christ over all disciplines and cultural activities. According to Schaeffer (1982b:19), “It is not only that true spirituality covers all of life, but it covers all parts of the spectrum of life equally. In this sense there is nothing concerning reality that is not spiritual.” Francis Schaeffer brought a radical message to young people who were brought up with a “one-sided” spirituality and subsequently asked questions regarding Christianity’s importance in the “secular” disciplines such as philosophy and the arts which were taught at the universities in both Europe and North America.
6.3.2.1 The Lordship of Christ in the Arts

Schaeffer’s interest in disciplines such as philosophy and especially the arts spoke to struggling Christians of the 60s and 70s. It was surprising that an Evangelical coming from a fundamentalist background, such as Francis Schaeffer, could discuss the latest musical genres and works of art with such passion and ease. This helped Schaeffer gain respectability amongst all those who passed through the doors of L’Abri during the tumultuous times of the latter part of the twentieth century. In a way, Francis Schaeffer paved the way for future apologists to integrate wide varieties of cultural aspects, such as the arts, in their apologetic discussions. However skilful Schaeffer was in his discussions regarding the arts with his L’Abri students, much of the credit must go to the Dutch art critic Hans Rookmaaker, whose influence on Francis Schaeffer cannot be underestimated.

6.3.2.1.1 Hans Rookmaaker and Francis Schaeffer

One of the most profound and enduring relationships that enjoyed mutual influence was the relationship between Francis Schaeffer and Hans Roelof Rookmaaker. The Dutch art critic had a profound influence on Schaeffer’s view of Christianity and the arts, and Schaeffer had significant influence on Rookmaaker’s spiritual life. They came from vastly different backgrounds and with distinct personalities and callings, but were focused on a common mission. Rookmaaker’s biographer Laurel Gasque (2005:95) remarks regarding their friendship, “They produced a potent dynamism when they appeared together, as they often did, at L’Abri conferences in North America and Europe.” Both men were intensely aware of the cultural condition of Europe in the late twentieth century and the role it had played in the development of the arts. At a time where Christian interest in the arts was minimal and was often relegated to the fringes of life, Rookmaaker and Schaeffer proposed a new and fresh look at the fine arts and assumed them under the Lordship of Christ. Both men bemoaned the fact that the Christian life was all too often too preoccupied with the devotional life only and that “all other areas of human reality, such as philosophy, science, the arts, economics and politics were handed over to the ‘world’” (Rookmaaker, 2010:21; cf. Schaeffer, 1984b:375).

Francis Schaeffer, under the influence of fundamentalist teachings, had not always been interested in the fine arts and even discouraged his students from attending theatres or art galleries (Hankins, 2008:124). After traveling to Europe and visiting museums, and coming into contact with Hans Rookmaaker, his attitude completely changed regarding the arts. He began to see the intersection of the fine arts and culture and the correlation between the decline of Western culture and the profound
changes in the fine arts. This change in attitude toward the arts can be evidenced in one of Schaeffer’s books, *Art and the Bible*, in which he gives emphasis to the assumption of the arts under the Lordship of Christ. He (1984b:377) states, “The arts and the sciences do have a place in the Christian life—they are not peripheral. For a Christian, redeemed by the work of Christ and living within the norms of Scripture and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the Lordship of Christ should include an interest in the arts.” In this work, Schaeffer continues to give a biblical exposition on the use of artistic expressions throughout the Old and New Testament, thus giving a biblical justification to bring a Christian worldview to bear on the arts.

Both Francis Schaeffer and Hans Rookmaaker lived and wrote in different times and under different circumstances. The cultural problems of the late twentieth century, such as the Vietnam War, racial tensions in America and the effects of the Cold War are not the problems we face today. The warnings sounded by both Schaeffer and Rookmaaker regarding disintegration of culture are still very much relevant in the twenty-first century. Hans Rookmaaker (1971:9) begins his work *Modern Art and the Death of Culture* rather alarmingly, saying, “We live in a time of great change, of protest and revolution. We are aware that something radical is happening around us, but it is not always easy to see just what it is.” His assessment of the culture is much the same as Schaeffer’s, as he blames the breakdown of Western culture on a shift in worldview—in the overall way people view the world and life as a whole (cf. Schaeffer, 1982b:17). This might sound alarmist to some, but unfortunately, even though the problems are different now as compared to the ones in the late twentieth century, they are as urgent and damaging. For Rookmaaker and Schaeffer, art is a significant indicator of the spirit of the age. Rookmaaker is convinced that paintings are more than just decorations or simply things to look at, as he (1971:28) suggests that “paintings give a philosophy of the world and of life; they have a message, and, what is vital to notice, a message realized by artistic means.” As in other disciplines and aspects of life, artistic expressions are guided by the prevailing presuppositions of the artist.

Jonathan Anderson and William Dyrness (2016:56-57), in their recent work *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture*, assess Rookmaaker’s appraisal and note that for Rookmaaker, “the most significant aspect of any artwork is that it inevitably presupposes and is a product of ‘a whole way of thinking’ about the world; it discloses and makes visible a particular orientation toward the world.” In their overall estimation, they feel that Rookmaaker’s ideas, and subsequently Schaeffer’s, are dated and bound to the cultural situation in which they lived and wrote. Anderson and Dyrness are far more optimistic in regard to the positive religious and theological impulse in the progression and history of modern art. Daniel Siedell (2016:331), in his afterword of the same work concludes that Anderson and Dyrness approach modern art “without drawing broad-brushed
abstract conclusions about the fate of art or the fate of culture, conclusions and pronouncements that have been de rigueur among cultural commentators within the North American church since the 1960s.” He counts Rookmaaker and Schaeffer among these commentators.

Both Anderson and Dyrness suggest a different approach to assessing modern art that is free from the narrative of cultural decline but “as a life-giving cultural practice, one that does not deny tensions and conflicts but nevertheless sees God’s presence in the history and development of modern art even as it is often experienced as absence” (Anderson and Dyrness, 2016:331). In their understanding, Rookmaaker (and Schaeffer) interpreted art and made ontological assertions about the things represented (Anderson and Durness, 2016:71). This, in the opinion of Dyrness and Anderson, is too critical and negative and, above all, does not keep in mind that representing a particular reality might not be the central task of the painting. Dyrness and Anderson (2016:71) suggest that “a modernist painting might offer much less of ‘a particular view on reality’ than it does a particular (often particularly critical) view on image construction in the age of modernity.”

Similar to this critique is the criticism levelled against Francis Schaeffer by William Edgar, who thought that Schaeffer’s understanding of art was too simplistic and one-dimensional (Hankins, 2008:126). Edgar asserts, “Schaeffer believed that ideas always come before facts; the painter thinks something, then paints it. This ignores the possibility that consequences can produce ideas, and that social circumstances and the relationships can produce artistic expression” (Hankins, 2008:126).

Whatever we might think of Edgar’s, Dyrness’ and Anderson’s re-evaluations of Rookmaaker (and Schaeffer) and their re-interpretations of modern art, we cannot discard Rookmaaker’s and Schaeffer’s assessments of the underlying presuppositions that come into play when we appraise (post)modern art. We are naïve when we claim that (post)modern art has nothing philosophically to say to us. Postmoderns, such as Lyotard, disagree with the assessments of Edgar, Dyrness and Anderson and readily concur that postmodernist art displays, in various and often indirect ways, the postmodern doctrines (Butler, 2002:64). Christopher Butler (2002:62) asserts, “Lyotard not surprisingly saw it as the job of contemporary artists to question the role of the metanarrative of modernism, which was used to legitimize certain kinds of work.”

We cannot underestimate the messages of the surrealist that are firmly grounded in Nietzschean philosophy. Rookmaaker (1971:143) is right in claiming that for the surrealist “fear, agony, despair and absurdity were the real realities. It was these they wanted to take up and express in their art.” He is not alone in his interpretation of surrealism, which has Nietzsche and Freud as their spiritual leaders (Rookmaaker, 1971:144). Arthur Kroker and David Cook in their work The Postmodern Scene give Giorgio de Chirico as an example of a surrealist painter and identify him as “the artist of
nihilism,” who is the “painter of Nietzsche’s Will to Power” (Kroker and Cook, 1986:30; 33). The Postmodern Scene affirms exactly what Rookmaaker and Schaeffer were trying to convey in their assessment of culture and their valuation of the presuppositions that drive modern art. Kroker and Cook are adamant that postmodern art clearly depicts the spirit of the late twentieth century.

Kroker and Cook (1986:12) declare, “Postmodernist discourse is a violent, restless, and hallucinogenic reflection on the upturned orb of Bataille’s ‘pineal eye’ and Nietzsche’s wiping clean of the ‘entire horizon’ as the dominant mood of late twentieth century experience.” For example, Eric Fischl is one of the artists that “match[es] perfectly the popular mood of an American culture on its downside” and his “artistic vision is a precursor of the hyper-reality of the suicidal nihilism of the postmodern scene” (Kroker and Cook, 1986:281-285; 11). The semi-pornographic paintings capture the narcissistic nihilism of Nietzsche and the hyper-sexual nature of American culture, which, on the one hand, is enamoured with sex, and on the other hand lives in total confusion regarding sex and sexuality. In sum, Kroker and Cook are right in their assertion that (post)modern art depicts the spirit of the culture and takes on the postmodern assumptions or presuppositions that, in many ways, animate a worldview that stands in antithesis to the Christian worldview that is grounded in Scripture.

For Francis Schaeffer and Hans Rookmaaker the expression of modern art is clear and the correlation between the decline of culture and the decline of art is more than apparent. For Schaeffer (1990:27-34, 245-248), the regression of modern art, as in philosophy and subsequently theology, is closely connected to the dichotomy of nature and grace. Art eventually moved below the line of despair without meaning and absolutes. For Rookmaaker, this dichotomy of nature and grace has caused Christians to abandon the arts and to relegate it to the realm of “worldly pursuits” (Rookmaaker, 1971:35). Schaeffer describes the decline of modern art in relation to the post-Christian culture but is as explicit as Rookmaaker in answering the question of how the Christian can make an important difference in the art world and if or how art has any apologetic value. Rookmaaker and Schaeffer are clear in describing the task of the Christian in the arts and how to give some credence to a Christian artistic endeavour in a culture that shows less and less confidence in Christian cultural influences (cf. Schaeffer, 1984b:393-413; Rookmaaker, 1971:220-252).

6.3.2.2 Christianity, the Arts and Apologetics

When we take seriously Francis Schaeffer’s stance on the Lordship of Christ over all aspects of life we must indeed embrace the fine arts as a facet of Christian influence. For Schaeffer, submitting art to the Lordship of Christ is not an option—he believed this is a biblical mandate that has long been
neglected and must be looked at anew by all Christians. Schaeffer (1984b:375-376) states in his booklet *Art and the Bible*, “The Lordship of Christ over the whole of life means that there are no Platonic areas in Christianity, no dichotomy or hierarchy between the body and the soul.” It is within the framework of the Lordship of Christ that we understand the place of art in the Christian life (Schaeffer, 1984b:376). Rookmaaker is far more explicit in his call for Christian artists to express themselves as redeemed humanity, living in the fullness of who they are in Christ. He (2010:36) asserts rather poignantly, “We are not human plus an extra called Christianity. No, our humanity reacts to the world outside and the Word of God, in a way that is specific to our particular personality.” As has already been alluded to, art is a powerful communicator for good or for ill. All forms of art are created with an underlying and particular worldview with its own presuppositions. Art can often be regarded as a window into the culture in which we live, and culture has pushed the prevailing post-Christian presuppositions to the forefront. This situation unfortunately is largely due to the fact that Christians have been silent, have abandoned the field of the arts and condemned them as worldly, almost sinful. Rookmaaker (1971:222) exclaims, “Nowhere is culture more ‘unsalted’ than precisely in the field of the arts—and that in a time when the arts are gaining a stronger influence than ever through the mass communications.” Christians are called to appreciate the arts albeit with a discerning eye, and additionally, Christian artists are encouraged to produce art that reflect their Christian worldview.

For Schaeffer, the Christian must have a proper understanding of the arts. This understanding involves an appreciation of the arts as beauty, not just on the intellectual level but as something to be enjoyed. There are several reasons why the Christian should know that a work of art has value. First, creativity, according to Schaeffer, has value because God is the Creator. Art has value also because humans, created in the image of God, are called to creativity. Schaeffer (1984b:394) notes, “Creativity is intrinsic to our ‘mannishness’.” Here Schaeffer does not explicitly refer to “Christian” art, but art in general, thus although he does not mention the doctrine, he gives credence to the doctrine of common grace. In a similar vein, Rookmaaker (1971:229), when speaking on the appreciation of creativity in the arts regardless of one’s religious stance, asserts, “Human beings, even if they do not love God, do not thereby become devils.” In other words, all human beings are created in the image of God and thus are capable of creating beautiful art. Rookmaaker (1971:229) does explain, however, that because of this fact, and because it is closely connected to a person’s humanity, art is not neutral; it is “his spirit, his insight, his feeling and his sense of beauty, his imagination and his subjectivity that the work of art will show.” When we deny our Creator and thus our own “mannishness” the artistic expression shows the unholy, the despair and the nihilism in which we have plunged ourselves.
This does not mean that all art created by those who do not hold to a Christian worldview is “ugly” in the creative sense; it is the worldview from which the artistic works that must be judged. Schaeffer (1984b:399) agrees and asserts, “We are not being true to the artist as man if we consider his art junk simply because we differ with his outlook on life.” When we, as Christians, observe a piece of art, we can appreciate its greatness in the technical sense, but we can also say that the artist’s worldview is wrong and that the message it conveys is one of despair and meaninglessness. We have thereby judged the artist as a person created in the image of God, but also judged the state of the artist’s fallenness. There must be something distinctly different between the way Christian artists approach their craft and how unbelievers express themselves artistically. Rookmaaker (1971:229) states, concerning the validity of art in a Christian sense, “It is an expression of Christian understanding, itself a fruit of the Spirit of God, including the emotion, the feeling, the sense of beauty that is bound up with it. It is for Christians to show what it means for them to have been ‘made new’ in Christ, in every aspect of their being.”

Both Francis Schaeffer and Hans Rookmaaker identify what Christian art is, but also what it is not. Must Christian art depict religious themes in order to be called Christian? Rookmaaker (1971:228) insists that “Christian art does not lie in the theme, but in the spirit of it, in its wisdom and the understanding of the reality it reflects.” Somewhat tongue in cheek, Rookmaaker (1971:228) asserts, “... a Christian painting is not one in which all the figures have haloes and (if we put our ears to the canvas) can be heard singing hallelujahs.” Christian art, if we can even call it that, depicts reality for what it is; it has integrity in the way the artist holding to a Christian worldview is consistent with norms for the whole of the artist’s Christian life. In other words, the Christian artist has submitted his artistic gifts under the Lordship of Christ. The Christian artist should not be bound to a particular form or technique, but as Schaeffer (1984b:408) notes, “... he must wrestle with the whole question, looking to the Holy Spirit for help to know when to invent, when to adopt, when to adapt, and when to not use a specific style at all.” The Christian artist should be free to artistically re-apply the truth of God's Word in his own time and to his own contemporary circumstances (Rookmaaker, 1971:245). He is called to be the salt in his area of expertise.

When we take seriously the Lordship of Christ over the arts, we can assume that the arts have value in the task of Christian apologetics. This task, however, is more implicit than it is explicit. When we use art in a deliberate apologetic fashion we are in danger of cheapening the arts, and, as Rookmaaker (1971:229) suggests, of giving art a meaning or a sense by showing that “it does something.” Rookmaaker (1971:228) is also adamant that “art must never be used to show the validity of Christianity.” In other words, forcing art to “do something”, in this case to show the truth of Christianity, defeats the purpose and shows art to be banal and trite. As in all other aspects of life and the work that we do, we do not do the thing plus something added that we would call “the
Christian element.” So it is with art, according to Rookmaaker (2010:35), who notes, “A Christian painting should not be just a painting plus an added something. Nor should it be holy in a special sense. Art has its own justification.” A piece of art expresses what is inside the artist and in this sense the “validity of art should be shown through Christianity” (Rookmaaker, 1971:228). Both Schaeffer and Rookmaaker encourage Christian artists, but not to a special task in the sense that they must use their talent to deliberately show the truth of Christianity in their artistic expressions. The truth of the Christian worldview will be shown when Christian artists express themselves, look to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and also acknowledge the source of their gift so as to be able to create the good and the beautiful (cf. Rookmaaker, 1971:245; Schaeffer, 1984:412-413). Francis Schaeffer suggests commonalities between the apologetic task of the Christian artist and the task of all Christians. He (1984b:413) sums it up as follows:

No work of art is more important than the Christian’s own life, and every Christian is called upon to be an artist in this sense. We may have no gift of writing, no gift of composing or singing, but each of us has the gift of creativity in terms of the way we live our lives. In this sense, the Christian’s life is to be an art work. The Christian’s life is to be a thing of truth and also a thing of beauty in the midst of a lost and despairing world.

This sense of incarnational apologetics is a recurring and an all-important theme in the apologetics of Francis Schaeffer, and is most effective in a postmodern culture.

6.3.2.3 The Lordship of Christ and the Environment

Besides the arts, another area of neglect by evangelicals in the latter part of the twentieth century concerned the matter of environmental care. Francis Schaeffer courageously took on this issue in his book Pollutio and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology. Schaeffer brought the issue of environmental care to the attention of the church in a time when environmentalism was first becoming a widespread popular movement. Lawrence Troster (2013:381) suggests that in the late 1960s and early 1970s “there was an attack on traditional religions that claimed that they were one of the main factors for humanity’s destructive exploitation of the natural world.” It was Francis Schaeffer’s opinion that the church shirked her responsibility to articulate a proper Christian view of the environment and had left that responsibility in large part to the hippies of the 1960s (Schaeffer, 1970b:24).

Although well-meaning, the hippies gave no proper answer to the ecological problems; they turned to either pantheism or humanism for an adequate view of nature. According to Schaeffer, it is only Christianity that finds the fitting answers to the ecological questions facing the world in the late twentieth century. Schaeffer (1970b:85) not only laments the neglect on the part of the Christians to
take a prominent role in environmental care but also bemoans the fact that this neglect has contributed to a missed evangelistic opportunity, because “when modern young people have a real sensitivity to nature, many of them turn to the hippie communities or mentality, where there is at least a genuine sense of nature, because they have seen that most Christians simply do not care about the beauty of nature, or nature as such.” Fortunately, evangelicals in the late twentieth century took to heart the call for creation care and bemoaned the fact that the Christian “other-worldly” outlook neglected the needs of the earth (Wilkinson, 1992:12). Additionally, in 1977 Calvin College began an enterprise that took serious the problems facing humankind, including pollution and environmental care (Wilkinson et al., 1980).

Regrettably, in the twenty-first century many who are spiritually adrift and who genuinely care for the environment have not, for the reason mentioned by Schaeffer, turned to Christianity for answers. On the contrary, as David Tacey (2004:181) attests to, “Many young people are finding themselves drawn to ‘ecospirituality’ and to what could broadly be called the spirituality of nature.” Linda Mercadante, in her research among millennials regarding their religious tendencies, discovered as well that many SBNRs (Spiritual But Not Religious) are drawn to some kind of pantheistic “earth-based spirituality” (Mercadenate, 2014:122). The call for a Christian understanding of the environment is a serious one, and Francis Schaeffer’s call to subsume environmental care under the Lordship of Christ is more pertinent now than it was in the late twentieth century.

There is no denying that the concern for the environment has become more acute in the past few decades. The threat of global warming and climate change has raised a considerable awareness in the present generation for the ecological crises that we face today. Daniel Brunner, Jennifer Butler and A.J. Swoboda (2014:92) assert, “The last fifty years have seen significant biblical, theological, and ethical revisions, and changes within a broad range of Christian traditions, all of which make a holistic ecotheology more viable and accessible.”

Indeed, within various Christian traditions there is a renewed interest and engagement in the realm of environmental care, and the aforementioned authors in their work *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology* trace the evolution of Christian ecotheology and mention some of the contemporary theologians who are formidable voices in this area. In a similar vein Paul Santmire in his contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion* mentions Protestant theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and John Cobb as significant contributors and important advocates of ecotheology in the twentieth century (Santmire, 2003:249). Surprisingly, however, the name Francis Schaeffer is not mentioned in either contribution, even though his work *Pollution and the Death of*
Man was remarkably ground-breaking. One of the reasons for this might be that Francis Schaeffer is not regarded as a scholarly voice in academia.

Nevertheless, when comparing the popular evangelical books that have been published in this field, many reiterate much of what Francis Schaeffer had told us in the 1970s (cf. Bauckham, 2010:11, 145ff; Brunner, Butler & Swoboda, 2014:141). Fortunately, Christianity has again voiced a biblical concept of creation that has invigorated a renewed interest and awareness in environmental care among evangelicals. Richard Bauckham (2010:150) states,

> Of course, biblical interpretation never takes place in a cultural vacuum, and often it is a cultural transition that makes it possible to recognize, with hindsight, the mistakes that previous interpreters made. The more holistic, integrated and ecological view of the world that has become available to us in recent decades helps us to read the Bible differently.

It can be suggested, although not recognized, that Francis Schaeffer helped to pave the way for interpreters to re-assess the biblical account and arrive at a more robust theological impetus regarding the environment and environmental care in the twenty-first century.

For Francis Schaeffer, only the Christian view of creation has answers to the ecological crisis we are facing. Additionally, it is the Christian view of humanity that must be the catalyst to environmental care that we are called to. Schaeffer (1970b:47) poignantly notes, “It is only the biblical view of nature that gives nature a value in itself: not to be used merely as a weapon or argument in apologetics, but of value in itself because God made it.” Schaeffer continues his high view of the Reformation, which he considers the incentive to a more robust interpretation of creation and humanity and thus, ultimately, the stimulant for true environmental care. Undoubtedly what Francis Schaeffer had in mind was Calvin’s high view of creation. Calvin calls the works of God’s hands “this most beautiful theatre” and proclaims that “he has so wonderfully adorned heaven and earth with as unlimited abundance, variety, and beauty of all things as could possibly be, quite like a spacious and splendid house, provided and filled with the most exquisite and at the same time most abundance furnishings” (Calvin, 1960:179-180).

Although all things are created for our sake, according to Calvin, it is only in the relationship that we have as created beings to the rest of creation, what Richard Bauckham (2010:151) calls a “christological eco-narrative,” that we see nature as having intrinsic value and realize we must treat it as such. Schaeffer (1970b:89) rightly asserts in connection with Calvin’s assumptions, “If nature and the things of nature are only a meaningless series of particulars in a de-created universe with no universal to give them meaning, then nature has become absurd, wonder is gone from it—and wonder is equally gone from me, because I too am a finite thing.” In other words, nature can only
be viewed as having value in light of God as the Artificer and Creator, and mankind as created in his image. Restoring the proper ecological balance can only be accomplished in light of the biblical worldview. Although one might disagree with much of the mystical language Denis Edwards uses in his work *Jesus the Wisdom of God*, we can readily appreciate his argument that “a Christian trinitarian theology leads to an ecological ethics of intrinsic value” (Edwards, 1995:154). He explains, and in agreement with Schaeffer, that all things have value in themselves because of their relationship with God. As Schaeffer (1970b:58) assert as well, “… for the Christian the value of a thing is not in itself autonomously, but because God made it. It deserves this respect as something which was created by God, as man himself has been created by God.”

One aspect that needs to be stressed, however, is that although we must see other created things with integrity because they are fellow creatures, mankind still exercises dominion over them. The danger in radical eco-theology is that human characteristics and qualities are attributed to created beings. Denis Edwards warns us of this danger as well and reiterates that some ecologists refuse to give a unique place to the human person and argue for an “ecological egalitarianism” (Edwards, 1993:156). Ecofeminism also falls into this category and rejects hierarchical ordering (cf. Edwards, 1993:156). This view runs counter to the biblical mandate of the proper stewardship of humanity over all of creation. Sadly, because of the Fall, mankind has exploited and ravaged creation. It is only when we see ourselves in relation to God that we gain a renewed understanding of what it means to have dominion over nature. Schaeffer (1970b:69-70) affirms, “Man has dominion over the ‘lower’ orders of creation, but he is not sovereign over them … man’s dominion is under God’s Dominion and under God’s Domain.”

Francis Schaeffer calls for a renewed attitude, not only from individual Christians, but from the Christian community as a whole, to actively offer a balanced and healthy approach to nature arising from the truth of its creation by God. It must offer a hope in the here and now that substantial healing in all the divisions, such as person to person, person to nature and of nature to nature, is possible because it arises from the truth of redemption in Christ (Schaeffer, 1970b:81-82). Hope, as Steven Bouma-Prediger (2010:180) explains, is not the same as optimism, for “unlike optimism the source of hope does not derive from this world. Its source lies beyond.” Schaeffer is adamant and calls the church not only to a renewed attitude but also to action, for unless something like this happens Schaeffer does not believe “the world will listen to what we have to say” (Schaeffer, 1970b:82). It is only by the action of the church in the call for environmental care and the restoration of the ecological balance that she will have the ear of the contemporary culture, and it is only the Christian faith that provides the answers to the fears and the hopelessness that are often expressed when dealing with the ecological problems and a creation that is indeed groaning. Daringly, Francis Schaeffer (1970b:92) calls Christians to the task of environmental care, not “for
the practical or pragmatic results but because it is right and because God is the Maker.” We dare to say that, in this way, we may regain an evangelistic opportunity, and our care for nature may recapture an apologetic traction where we can be a living exhibition of the truth and demonstrate that all of creation has intrinsic value because of the God who is there. Schaeffer is clear that even issues such as the arts and environmental care can be central to a more holistic Christian apologetic.

6.4 The Characteristics of Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetics

Since the death of Francis Schaeffer in 1984 his apologetic methodology has been scrutinized, criticized, analyzed and lauded (cf. Morris, 1987; Burson & Walls, 1998; Follis, 2006; Sotak, 2012). There has been the temptation to neatly fit Francis Schaeffer into an apologetic box and to attach labels to his apologetic methods. Schaeffer himself was reluctant to call himself an apologist and did not set out to formulate an apologetic method that could be applied “mechanically as a set formula” (Schaeffer, 1990:176). This study will not analyze Schaeffer’s method as such but rather will focus on the aspects that fit well in a postmodern context. Schaeffer worked during a time when postmodernism was coming of age, thus much of his apologetic input is very much applicable in the twenty-first century. Stephen Wellum (2002:12) puts it more starkly and asserts, “Even though Schaeffer himself never used the term, he certainly anticipated and described it [postmodernism] long before its popular use.”

Schaeffer was ground-breaking in several ways in that his apologetic “method” addressed a way of thinking he anticipated more than forty years ago and his apologetics focused far more on the well-being of the individual than on evidences presented to convince people of the truth of Christianity. Additionally, five distinctive features can be detected in Schaeffer’s works that are effective for a Christian apologetic in a postmodern context. For that reason, Schaeffer’s apologetic can best be defined as a five-point apologetic method: biblical, reasonable, relational, conversational and incarnational.

However important these features are in Schaeffer’s apologetic “method” there are other facets that colour Schaeffer’s apologetic that must first be looked at. As already mentioned, some of the aspects that define Francis Schaeffer’s apologetic thrust are his worldview thinking and his doctrine of the Lordship of Christ as applied to all aspects of life. Besides these, the matter of presuppositions and the state of humanity find prominence in Schaeffer’s apologetic, so much so that we would do a disservice to Schaeffer’s overall scheme if these were not looked at seriously.
6.4.1 Francis Schaeffer and Presuppositions

Much of Schaeffer’s apologetic work is articulated in his trilogy *The God Who Is There, Escape from Reason* and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, where he lays out what he means by presuppositions and discusses the importance of his apologetic approach in light of cultural decline. In regard to presuppositions, some have found close affinities between Schaeffer and his teacher Cornelius Van Til, so much so that there is a danger of dubbing Schaeffer’s apologetic “method” presuppositional (Morris, 1987:17-24; Pinnock, 1986:175-178). This is somewhat understandable because Schaeffer, in his work *The God Who Is There*, speaks highly of a presuppositional apologetics and asserts, “Presuppositional apologetics would have stopped the [cultural] decay” (Schaeffer, 1990:7).

The decay Schaeffer speaks of is the cultural slide into relativism that began to infect all aspects of society from philosophy to theology. Schaeffer’s central point in dealing with the unbeliever revolves around the presuppositions that a person holds. He argues in *The God Who Is There* that at a certain time (prior to 1890 in Europe and 1935 in the US) the vast majority of people held to the same presupposition that there are such things as absolutes (Schaeffer, 1990:6). This presupposition has changed dramatically and this change is especially acute when dealing with evangelism and apologetics. Schaeffer put a lot of emphasis on the prevailing presuppositions because, for him, it is imperative to understand the presuppositions that people hold to in order to be effective in apologetics and evangelism.

In his overall apologetic scheme Schaeffer seems to use the term “presupposition” in a broader sense than does Van Til, but their definitions seem to have a certain commonality. Van Til (1967:99), not unlike Schaeffer, suggests, “To argue by presupposition is to indicate the epistemological and metaphysical principles that underlie one’s method.” In its practical use, however, Van Til appropriates the term in a narrower sense in that the Christian can only be in conversation with the unbeliever when the latter assumes the Christian presupposition. Barry Hankins (2008:91) explains:

> For Van Til a presupposition was revelation, and the question was how one reacted to that revelation. Believers know God only through the revelation of Scripture, not rational argument, and therefore have nothing intellectually in common with unbelievers, who begin their thinking with something other than God. Even to start the reasoning process with something like the law of non-contradiction was problematic for Van Til because it seemed to apply a rational standard to God.

This use was for Francis Schaeffer far too restrictive. When asked about Van Til’s position at the 1983 L’Abri Conference in Atlanta, Schaeffer responded by saying that he could not accept Van
Til’s position, which, in his opinion, was caught in a tension—the tension being that if the unbeliever was caught in his worldview the Christian would not be able to talk to him (Schaeffer, 1983). According to Schaeffer, in reality “no one can live logically according to his own non-Christian presuppositions and because he is faced with the real world and himself, in practice we will find a place where we can talk” (Schaeffer, 1990:137). Here we find Schaeffer’s central point that stands in contradistinction to Van Til’s, because, for the former, there is a common ground between the Christian and the non-Christian, for regardless of their worldviews, both must live in God’s world. In other words, there are shared presuppositions between the Christian and the unbeliever such as the existence of absolutes. These commonalities between the believer’s and the unbeliever’s presuppositions were unacceptable to Van Til. In Schaeffer’s opinion, Van Til’s presuppositionalism was far too abstract and not very useful when confronting an unbeliever, and, at times, Van Til’s writings certainly give credence to Schaeffer’s critique.

Francis Schaeffer was more practical in the way he used his philosophical language and in the way he approached the matter of presuppositions. Schaeffer (1990:139) rightly asserts, “The whole purpose of our speaking to twentieth-century people is not to make them admit that we are right in some personally superior way, nor to push their noses in the dirt, but to make them see their need so they will listen to the gospel.” The ultimate purpose of Christian apologetics for Schaeffer, besides defending the Christian faith, was to communicate Christianity in a way that any given generation could understand (Schaeffer, 1990:151). But for all the disagreements that Van Til voiced against Francis Schaeffer, the two apologists are far more similar in goals and expression than critics, or even Van Til himself, might want to admit. Van Til (1967:180) comes very close to Schaeffer’s assumptions in his *The Defense of the Faith* where Van Til states,

> It is just because the world and man are, as the Scriptures teach, created for one another and directed toward their goal through redemption by Christ, that human predication is possible. And by the same token reasoning with unbelievers is possible and fruitful for believers just so far as believers remain true to their basic presupposition. True to this presupposition they can, for argument’s sake, place themselves with the unbeliever on his presupposition, in order then to show him that he cannot even raise an intelligible objection against the Christian view.

For both Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer the ultimate goal was to set out a Christian apologetics in order to bring the unbeliever to faith in Jesus Christ. Both men, however, approached apologetics using the Calvinistic model, although this was more pronounced for Van Til, whose Kuyperian influence was far more conspicuous. Theological assumptions were not nearly as
important for Schaeffer as they were for Van Til, but for both Schaeffer and Van Til the ultimate goal was to reach the unbeliever and to point out God’s answer to the human dilemma.

6.4.2 Schaeffer’s View of Humanity

It is abundantly clear for Francis Schaeffer that the reason why people reject Christianity does not lie in a lack of evidences, and that evidences ought to be primary in order to show the reasonableness of Christianity. The problem, according to Schaeffer, lies solely within the human person. Therefore, Schaeffer (1990:133) asserts, “Christian apologetics do not start somewhere beyond the stars. They begin with man and what he knows about himself.” For Schaeffer the goal of apologetics is not to give a dogmatic statement of the truth of the Scriptures but “to show the truth of the external world and the truth of what man himself is and to show him the real nature of his lostness” (Schaeffer, 1990:140). Here we find the correlation between Schaeffer, Pascal and Calvin, who all began with the lostness of humanity, or wretchedness as Pascal calls it (Pascal, 1966:59; Calvin, 1960:36ff). For it is only in the realization that we are lost that we can begin to desire to know God, or as Calvin (1960:37) contends, “we cannot seriously aspire to him before we begin to become displeased with ourselves.” Schaeffer assures us, however, that although we are wretched because of the Fall, we have not lost meaning, as he declares that “Christianity does not destroy the meaningfulness of a man. In fact, it is the only system which gives the final and sufficient meaning to man” (Schaeffer, 1972a:81). This is where Schaeffer assumes the point of contact with the unbeliever, saying that although “he is our counterpart, he is lost, but so once were we. We are one flesh, one blood, one kind” (Schaeffer, 1990:131). It is because of our commonality as created beings in the image of God that we can reason with one another.

Francis Schaeffer clung firmly to the doctrine of humanity as created in the image of God. We only find meaning in the fact that we are created by a personal God who has given us personality, or what Schaeffer calls “mannishness”, which distinguishes us from other created beings. Schaeffer was convinced that the image of God was not completely destroyed by the Fall (cf. Calvin, 1960:189) and “because they are image-bearers of God they can assert their unique ‘mannishness’,” which includes “rationality, love, longing for significance, beauty and the fear of non-being” (Follis, 2006:67). We did not stop being human; we did not become a ‘zero’, and although the image of God is broken and twisted and abnormal, we are still image bearers of God (Schaeffer, 1972b:104). It is an indispensable doctrine of the Christian faith that the God who created mankind is a personal God, because if God were a non-personal being we would have an impersonal beginning and mankind would have no personality. Accepting God as a personal being explains the basis for human relationships but is also found as the “basis for building just societies or engaging
in any kind of cultural effort” (Schaeffer, 1972b:21). Schaeffer (1972b:20) explains in his work *Genesis in Space & Time*,

[I]f we begin with an impersonal universe, there is no explanation of personality. In a very real sense, the question of all questions for all generations—but overwhelmingly so for modern man—is ‘Who am I?’ For when I look at the ‘I’ that is me and then look around to those who face me and are also men, one thing is immediately obvious: Man has a mannishness. You find it wherever you find man—not only in the men who live today, but in the artifacts of history. The assumption of an impersonal beginning can never adequately explain the personal beings we see around us, and when men try to explain man on the basis of an original impersonal, man soon disappears.

The unbeliever who holds to the worldview animated by the presupposition of the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system cannot explain the universe as it is or why we have personality or “mannishness.” For that reason we find ourselves in a dilemma that must be explained, and here Francis Schaeffer’s apologetic thrust finds its principle: the unbeliever does not and cannot ever live consistently according to his presuppositions. Schaeffer’s view concerning the “mannishness of man” is so vital because it demonstrates the historic position of the Christian faith in that it gives “evidence of his being created in the image of a personal God” (Schaeffer, 1984a:123, 201).

Because we are created in the image of God and have “mannishness” we have a commonality that allows the believer to have a conversation with the unbeliever. In this way, Schaeffer has his own definition of what Calvin and subsequently neo-Calvinists call “common grace.”

Our “mannishness” or personality, rooted in rationality, love, and the significance of being created by a personal God, gives us identity. It is the Christian faith that assures people that only in Christ can they find rest and find their true selves. It is the question of “who am I” that Francis Schaeffer seeks to answer in his apologetics. The answer he provides, grounded in the “mannishness of man,” runs counter to the postmodern presupposition of a person’s sense of identity that is a composite forged by the forces of the surrounding culture. One of the difficulties of postmodernism is that there exists a sense of uncertainty about how to understand oneself. Paul Vitz (2006:xiv) senses this difficulty as well and suggests that “there is no longer the voice of conscience, or if there is, it is drowned out by the many other voices that we have.” This “polyvocality,” he claims, comes from the many people we are dealing with, or from “the media we are bombarded by and from the cacophony created by the new channels of information” (Vitz, 2006:xiv). Postmodernism is marked by the dissolution of the self that began most earnestly with the likes of Nietzsche in the latter part of the nineteenth century.
For Nietzsche the self was reduced to the will or, to put it more precisely, the will to power; the self is depreciated to the volitional force, not the Will to Life but the Will to Power (Nietzsche, 2015:loc.28384). Postmodernism is the product of Nietzsche’s nihilism that came to fruition with the “death of God” movement in the 60s. Thomas Altizer (1979:153), a death of God theologian of that era, cannot help but affirm this sentiment and admits, “Virtually the whole body of orthodox and conservative theology is united in its insistence that an acceptance of the death of God is a submission to the dehumanization of man.” Altizer, although committed to a theology that can be much maligned, starkly recognized that with the loss of the biblical concept of God, we stand alone, and he puts the blame squarely on the shoulders of the assumption that God is dead. He (1979:153) warns, “The night brought on by the death of God is a night in which every individual identity perishes.” Somehow, Francis Schaeffer could foresee the devolution of humanity and perceived the devastating path civilization was on when people began ignoring the biblical assertion of a personal God. The twenty-first century postmodernist has ignored the warnings and has exchanged the voice of Scripture, which asserts that we are image-bearers of a personal God, with the voices of our techno-media-saturated culture that has fed us the lie that our identity is fluid and dependent on our feelings and current state of mind.

Paul Vitz (2006:xiv) describes it, explaining, “… we become a plastic person, with a kind of chameleon self.” Stewart Kelly (2017:134) explains in a similar vein, “The human being is an open-ended specimen, able to take on any form or adapt to any social influences from one culture to the next. He is defined by these influences, not by a specific nature.” This loss of identity and the idea that personal identity is fluid and dependent on one’s personal feelings at any given time has given way to an identity confusion that has manifested itself in the gender identity problems that our culture is struggling with today. Additionally, the loss of personhood has produced a fascination with artificial intelligence and technology as a whole. The allure of technology and the invasion of technological advances have given us what Peter Mahon calls “posthumanism.” The posthuman “does no longer conceive of himself in purely biological terms, no longer thinking about himself in terms of a purely human body, but in digital technological terms as well” (Mahon, 2017:9).

Technology has given us a false sense of community complete with artificial relationships that have fooled us into thinking that we have a greater grasp on our personal selves and the situations in which we find ourselves. In reality, however, this generation is the loneliest of all generations and suffers more severely from mental health, solely because of the loss of self-awareness and the confusion of identity. For this reason, many have difficulties forming meaningful relationships with those around them. As a matter of fact, Richard Florida posted his results of a recent survey of 2.5 million Americans that examined “how people feel in their day-to-day lives across key dimensions.
of well-being.” He contends, “America is growing increasingly unhappy and the trend toward unhappiness is concentrated in the places that used to be among the very happiest. Whatever the reasons, America’s collective psyche is clearly suffering today” (Florida, 2018).

One of the reasons could well be the loss of understanding of personhood, which results in the loss of understanding of personal relationships. It has come so far that some have sought “meaningful” and “intimate” relationships with so-called “companion robots.” Meghna Bali (2017) in a recent ABC news article titled “Companion robots: What are the ethical implications of intimate human-machine relationships?” discusses the issue of people seeking intimacy with robots to combat loneliness in an isolated world. In the same article visiting fellow of the Queensland University of Technology Professor Arkin remarks, “The advent of robots poses many risks for the future, and intimate robots is one of the top concerns” (Bali, 2017). It is the postmodern dilemma that has forced us on a quest for our true humanity—a humanity that is not contingent on feelings, experiences and social pressures. Meic Pearse (2005:10) comments, “In the absence of stable identity we go looking for who we really are, precisely because postmodern conditions have made our identity so unclear.”

The biblical message that Schaeffer brings is more pertinent and relevant now than ever before. It is the message that on the basis of being made in the image of God we have personality and thus understand the possibility of true fellowship. Schaeffer (1972:49) notes, “We understand that because we are made in the image of God and because God is personal, both a personal relationship with God and the concept of fellowship as fellowship has validity.” It is this news that Francis Schaeffer wanted to convey to the students at L’Abri, and it is this message that the apologist needs to bring to the postmodern audience. In order to do that most effectively we do well to take Schaeffer’s “five point apologetic” method seriously.

6.5 The Five Point Approach of Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetics

As we have already seen, many have tried to pigeon-hole Francis Schaeffer into a particular apologetic camp (cf. Morris, 1987; Lewis, 1986:69). Schaeffer was very adamant not to attach any particular apologetic label to himself. Jack Rogers (1977:12-13) recounts a story in which a student began with a statement, “since you are a presuppositionalist, rather than an evidentialist...” to which Schaeffer replied, “I am neither. I’m not an evidentialist or a presuppositionalist. You’re trying to press me into the category of a theological apologist, which I’m really not. I’m not an academic, scholastic apologist. My interest is in evangelism.” Additionally, some have bemoaned Francis Schaeffer’s use of reason and in so doing have placed him firmly in the modernist camp, relegating
much of his apologetic impetus to the dustbins as irrelevant to the postmodern audience of the twenty-first century. Thomas Morris negatively critiques the terminology used by Schaeffer that seems to indicate rationalistic tendencies. He (1984:18) scathingly remarks, “The reader is almost led to imagine men formulating syllogisms and proof lines over lunch.”

Francis Schaeffer was not averse to using evidences and invited Christianity to seek verification; it is also true that he used presuppositions in his apologetics. We must remember that Schaeffer also believed that there is not a particular apologetic method that meets the needs of all people, or “a set formula that could be applied mechanically” (Schaeffer, 1990:176). Contrary to Morris’ assumptions, Schaeffer knew all too well that it is impossible to argue people into the body of Christ, that “the attainment of a full Christian belief-set is a major conversion experience involving the totality of the person” (Morris, 1987:119-120). Schaeffer unapologetically contends that the conversion experience never occurs short of an act of God’s mercy (Schaeffer, 1990:176). To understand and appreciate Schaeffer’s Christian apologetics we must also look at Francis Schaeffer the man. When we look at his character and his holistic approach we detect an evangelist who is concerned for the well-being of the person he is conversing with rather than for winning an argument. Not underestimating the rational aspect of Christianity, other aspects come into play when presenting a more holistic apologetic method to a contemporary audience. The five aspects most important in Francis Schaeffer’s apologetic are, firstly, the centrality of the Bible; secondly, the reasonableness of the Christian faith; thirdly, the importance of cultivating and nourishing relationships; fourthly, the conversations he was able to have with those who struggled; and lastly, the demonstration of the Christian life that served to show the truth of the Christian faith.

6.5.1 Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetics is Biblical

It cannot be denied that the foundation for Francis Schaeffer’s apologetics has always been the Bible. All through his writings he shows the reasonableness of the Christian faith from a biblical standpoint; apologetics begins and ends with the truth articulated in the Scriptures. Schaeffer is convinced that the chaos in post-Christian Europe and North America began with the abandonment of the full view of Scripture (Schaeffer, 1984f:49). By that, Schaeffer meant the rejection of the Scriptures as infallible and inerrant, giving way to the abnegation of a strong view of absolutes (cf. 1984a:86-89; 1984d:110, 328, 344). Schaeffer (1984f:48) contends that “only a strong view of Scripture is sufficient to withstand the pressure of an all-pervasive culture built upon relativism and relativistic thinking.”
Schaeffer’s view of Scripture might draw the ire of many postmodern theologians regarding the inerrancy and propositional nature of Scripture (cf. McLaren, 2011:33ff; Raschke, 2004:123ff), but he staunchly defended the Bible’s ability to communicate propositional truths concerning all areas of life. In this aspect, Schaeffer has also been accused of violating the basic rules of biblical interpretation: a passage must be understood in its context (Rogers, 1977:16). Rogers recounts Calvin’s assertion that God’s speech is an accommodation and that even those of slight intelligence should understand that God’s speech is like a nurse’s speech to an infant (Calvin, 1960:121). Jack Rogers claims that Schaeffer disconnects the Scriptures from culture, saying that he wants to fit biblical assumptions into a contemporary setting where they do not belong, or to allow Scripture to speak into areas where it has very little to say, such as in science and history. In some ways, Schaeffer’s views on Scripture, the inerrancy conflict in particular, show remnants of his fundamentalist leanings.

Although Schaeffer can be accused of a too literalistic interpretation of Scripture, his main concern was always to stress the relevancy of Scripture to a modern culture. William Edgar (2013:85) adds, “His [Schaeffer’s] central apologetic concern is that we do not dichotomize the Bible’s message as being true only in the religious sphere while fallible in the realms where science and history can verify its claims.” Schaeffer is convinced that God chooses to communicate clearly because he cares for his human creation and on the basis of the link between God’s personality and ours we are able to grasp the propositional truths that God communicates in Scripture (Edgar, 2013:87). Contrary to Roger’s accusation, Schaeffer realizes that we must approach the Bible as fallen creatures and so are not able to know more than we are actually given. Schaeffer (1984a:52) explains, “Wherever it [the Bible] touches upon anything, it does so with true truth, but not with exhaustive truth. That is, where it speaks of the cosmos, science, what it says is true. Likewise, where it touches history, it speaks with what I call true truth—that is, propositional, objective truth.”

Additionally, because of the propositional nature of the Bible, the Scriptures are rational. Schaeffer asserts that we, as autonomous people holding to our own presuppositions, are unable to provide the answers to our dilemma. Because the Bible is a coherent whole providing the answers to the whole unified field of knowledge, Christianity is reasonable and rational and thus its apprehension does not require a “Kierkegaardian” leap in the dark. As well, “not only the things of the cosmos and history match up, but everything on the upper and lower stories matches too: grace and nature; a moral absolute and morals; the universal point of reference and the particulars, and the emotional and aesthetic realities of man as well” (Schaeffer, 1984a:120). For this reason, the centrality of the Scriptures in Schaeffer’s apologetics becomes clear: only the Bible as a unified whole is adequate to provide a unified answer to the reality in which we as modern people find ourselves.
6.5.2 Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetics is Rational

As we saw above, Francis Schaeffer was never averse to the rational aspect of apologetics. He (1984a:163) states, “Christian apologetics must be able to show intellectually that Christianity speaks of true truth.” He never saw Christianity as anything but a rational and reasonable religion that could be defended using rational arguments. It would be inconceivable for Schaeffer to neglect that aspect of his apologetic method, for it was his position that rationality only concerns the possibility to reason (Schaeffer, 1990:183). Much like Pascal, Schaeffer accepted the use of rationality but abhorred the rationalist who “is someone who thinks man can begin with himself and his reason plus what he observes, without information from any other source” (Schaeffer, 1990:183). In other words, it is autonomous reason that Schaeffer argues against. Schaeffer never proposed that autonomous reason could even comprehend or grasp the truth without the aid of the Holy Spirit (Schaeffer, 1984a:270). He did assert a balance between the work of the Holy Spirit and human responsibility, however. We are unable to find the final answers by means of finite reason alone, but, at the same time, we cannot be regarded as a zero either.

The balance that Schaeffer speaks of is “man’s responsibility to be humble enough to give up his or her autonomy to bow to the adequate answers” that are ultimately given to him through the work of the Holy Spirit (Schaeffer, 1984a:185). It is the task of the apologist to give reasonable and rational answers to those who ask. That task can never be separated from the work of the Holy Spirit. In his work *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, Schaeffer (1984b:272) affirms the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian in the midst of an apostate culture, saying, “The Holy Spirit will be Christ’s agent in us—producing a dynamite-power so we can witness to this rebellious world.” Reasonable and rational arguments cannot be discarded in the task of apologetics, for “we, in love, looking to the work of the Holy Spirit, must reach down into that person and try to find where the point of tension is” (Schaeffer, 1984a:135). It is love in the power of the Holy Spirit that drove Francis Schaeffer’s apologetic. Thus Thomas Morris’ (1987:43) critique that rationality and reason motivated and directed Schaeffer’s apologetics is wrongheaded, for the reason that it is exactly Schaeffer’s love that made him evade mechanically formulated arguments. However important rational arguments may be, they must always be wedded to the relational, conversational and incarnational aspects of apologetics. Once rational arguments are taken in isolation and are separated from the relational, conversational and incarnational, apologetics is nothing but an academic exercise that leaves the unbeliever unmoved.

6.5.3 Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetics is Relational
One of the hallmarks of Francis Schaeffer’s apologetics is his desire to develop relationships with all those he would come in contact with. It is clear that without relationships any presentation of the case for the Christian faith falls on deaf ears. As a matter of fact, for the Schaeffers, relationships were the driving force at the L’Abri Centre. It is in Edith Schaeffer’s book *The Tapestry* that we gain a glimpse of the vital work and the valuable relationships Francis and Edith Schaeffer made. The relationship between the Schaeffers and the students that walked through the door of the L’Abri centre took precedence over the conversations that would undoubtedly follow. Harold Brown (1986:26) glowingly compares Schaeffer to Athanasius as the defender of the truth and recalls, “In Schaeffer’s case we know the rigor of his convictions was always tempered with love and understanding in person-to-person relationships as well as in public debates.” Edith Schaeffer (1981:499) recalls her husband’s work and contends that “Francis Schaeffer never had time to ‘sit in an ivory tower’ thinking up answers to possible questions … he gave answers to real people with whom he had real discussions.” These discussions followed after cultivating real relationships, and Edith Schaeffer was a vital part of that endeavor; cultivating relationships happened to be a family affair. Chuck Colson and Timothy George (2012:45) recall, in their article titled “Flaming Truth,” that L’Abri was far more than a study centre; as a matter of fact, “Francis and Edith Schaeffer demonstrated the power of persuasive hospitality lived out in community.”

His entire apologetic method was driven by compassion for every person whom he saw as created in the image of God. It was only after having cultivated a genuine relationship with the unbeliever that he was able to talk to them. According to Schaeffer (1984a:180), “If we love people enough, and we have compassion enough, we can usually find ways to talk to them, no matter how deep in the well they are.” He warns us not to give the skeptic or the unbeliever a prepackaged answer but instead to show the compassion of Christ, so that we can take the person where he is and step into his world in order to have a meaningful conversation with him (Schaeffer, 1984a:177).

Francis Schaeffer was extremely sensitive to the feelings of the person he was talking to. Instead of bombarding unbelievers with evidences that might point to the reasonableness of Christianity, we must move them away from the logical conclusions of their position. At this particular point we must be aware that this is not a game we are playing or merely an intellectual exercise. Schaeffer (1990:138) stresses that as we push unbelievers or skeptics off their false balance we must be able to feel that we care for them. Christian apologetics must involve the well-being of the person we talk to, regardless of the belief system they may hold to. In a postmodern pluralistic setting we must emulate Francis Schaeffer’s care for those we encounter and build relationships with those of different faiths or spiritual interests before we are able to have a meaningful and spiritual dialogue with them. Burson and Walls (1998:154) contend, “Only then will the truly closed person open up
to the intellectual and existential potency of the Christian faith.” Closely connected to the relational aspect Francis Schaeffer promoted in his apologetic method is the fact that apologetics must be conversational.

6.5.4 Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetics is Conversational

Postmodern philosophers, pastors and theologians (cf. Penner, 2013; McLaren, 2001; Raschke, 2004) have abandoned apologetics for a variety of reasons but the main grounds for disapproval seems to be a lack of integrity and amicableness when dealing with unbelievers. Myron Penner (2011:77ff) in his book *The End of Apologetics* recalls an incident between an atheist and an apologist that was less than cordial, pointing out that, ultimately, apologetics is futile at best and un-Christian at worse. To disregard apologetics entirely because of incidents like these would be wrongheaded. A more irenic approach must be taken which has the well-being of the unbeliever in mind; thus a more conversational tone needs to be employed. Francis Schaeffer (1990:139) points out that the purpose of our apologetic conversation is “not to make them admit we are right in a superior way and push their noses in the dirt, but to make them see their need so that they will listen to the gospel.”

We can appreciate McLaren’s (2001:16) assertion as well, who claims, “Good evangelists are people who engage others in good conversation about profound topics such as faith, values, hope, meaning, purpose, goodness, beauty, truth, life after death, life before death and God.” David Clark in his work *Dialogical Apologetics* explains the importance of dialogue in the context of relationship (Clark, 1993:116). Like Schaeffer he promotes an apologetic that is audience-centred, which tends to avoid a particular method and adopts varied strategies for different persons. Clark (1993:99) suggests that the way we do apologetics must be re-evaluated in order to avoid the conception that there exists a perfect system of assertions that will prove the Christian faith once and for all. Francis Schaeffer would agree, and employs the Pauline assertion “I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). Schaeffer avoided the use of any particular apologetic method because he did not believe that there was any apologetic method that would meet the need of all people. He warned Christians not to build a safe house to live in, but he urged Christians to be “in the midst of the world as both witnesses and salt, not sitting in a fortress surrounded by a moat” (Schaeffer, 1990:175). To be in the midst of the world, for Schaeffer, meant to build meaningful relationships and to deal with people with genuine love. He (1990:177) asserts, “If we are to deal with people where they are, we have got to have enough genuine love for them and concern, as a human being, that we would take seriously what they are preoccupied with.”
Dialogue has become a religious buzz-word, especially in light of inter-faith relationships. Within ecumenical circles, inter-faith dialogue involves conversations that have capitulated to the cultural pressures of inclusivity. Rev. Ariaraja of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka epitomizes this exact sentiment and contends, “One of our sins in the past has been to absolutize the Christian religion and theology, implying that the other religions were false, or at any rate ‘not true’” (Ariaraja, 1997:40). Dialogical apologetics, as David Clark has labelled his approach, or conversational apologetics in a more Schaefferian fashion, abhors this kind of discourse and calls for conversations that present the case for Christianity, by the Spirit’s power, with rational force, cultural appropriateness and personal sensitivity in the context of relationships (Clark, 1993:122).

Although apologetic conversations are to be laced with love, they must avoid the mistake of accommodation and must unapologetically stand for the truth; apologetic conversations must be compassionately confrontational. Francis Schaeffer (1984d:110) affirms, “Truth carries with it confrontation. Truth demands confrontation—loving confrontation, but confrontation nevertheless.” Schaeffer understood full well that the truth communicated to the unbeliever must not merely be a dogmatic statement of the truth of Scripture, but rather the truth of the external world and of the nature of humanity. Not unlike Calvin’s and Pascal’s approach, Schaeffer’s order of apologetics began with accentuating the nature of human lostness and the answer to it (Schaeffer, 1990:140). Because Schaeffer’s emphasis was centred on the relational aspect, he recognized the difficulty he might put his conversation partner in; thus he asserted that when we move people towards the logical conclusions of their presuppositions they must always feel that we care for them. In our conversations, we must remove the shelter, or as Schaeffer calls it, “take the roof off,” in order to “allow the truth of the external world and of what man is to beat upon him” (Schaeffer, 1990:140).

Again, Brian McLaren is, in this regard, very much in line with Francis Schaeffer when he declares, “The evangelist is never coercive, pushy, combative; rather, she is patient and gentle like a midwife, knowing that the giving of life takes time and cannot be rushed without potentially lethal damage” (McLaren, 2001:30).

Although we can applaud McLaren for pointing out the conversational tone, he departs from Francis Schaeffer in regard to content. The goal of apologetics is for the unbeliever to understand that his system has no answers to the crucial questions of life and to ultimately give him the answers to these questions. The answers, according to Schaeffer, centre on the truth of Scripture. He emphasizes in his pamphlet 2 Contents, 2 Realities that if we are to meet the need of our age the content of our conversations must be clear in doctrinal content concerning the elements of Christianity (Schaeffer, 1974:7).
For Brian McLaren content is secondary: the content of the Christian faith must be re-interpreted in light of the cultural needs in the twenty-first century. Doctrinal content capitulates to make Christianity relevant to the contemporary audience. Conversations, according to McLaren, are necessary, as a call to action to the prosperity crisis, equity crisis, security crisis and spirituality crisis (McLaren, 2010:253-254). However commendable this may be, Christian action can never be divorced from the biblical truth of the gospel and must ultimately be grounded in the truth of the Scriptures. The content we convey in Christian apologetics must be uncompromisingly and unapologetically biblical, but cannot, and, must never be, just conversational but must also be resolutely practical. To emphasize one over the other would misrepresent Francis Schaeffer’s entire apologetic impulse.

6.5.5 Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetic is Incarnational

Besides the relational and conversational facets of Schaeffer’s apologetics, the practical or incarnational aspect of Schaeffer’s apologetics has often been neglected when assessing Schaeffer’s apologetic method. Schaeffer’s aim was to remove apologetics from the “ivory tower” and bring it to the level where people were at, both intellectually and practically. Thus to judge Schaeffer merely on intellectual grounds would be a mistake. We can agree with Ken Harper, who is convinced that we can only understand Schaeffer as a prophet and an evangelist and not as a pure scholar. His intent was not to create an apologetic method but rather to call an apostate culture to repentance (Harper, 1976:140). Harper (1976:140-141) explains, “Schaeffer denounces a Christ-less culture, shows its emptiness, holds out the gospel as a viable alternative, and encourages a loving lifestyle that will convince others.”

In assessing the incarnational aspect of Schaeffer’s apologetics we can deduce three main aims of his L’Abri ministry that have proven vital and highly effective for those who spent time with the Schaeffers. These goals can be summed up as follows: (1) to build relationship with whoever walked through the doors of the L’Abri chalet, (2) to conduct meaningful spiritual conversations with those who were seeking answers, and (3) to demonstrate the Christian truth in community. Edith Schaeffer (1972:5) in her work L’Abri states it well:

The work of L’Abri has two inter-related aspects. First there is the attempt to give an honest answer to honest questions—intellectually and upon a careful exegetical base … The second aspect is the demonstration that the Personal-Infinite God is really there in our generation. When twentieth-century people come to L’Abri they are faced with these two aspects simultaneously, as two sides of a single coin.
As can be deduced from the above quotation, Schaeffer was convinced that the demonstration of the truth cannot be divorced from the reasonable and intellectual explanation of the biblical content. Schaeffer (1970d:28) sums up this vital combination well when he states, “If we must first speak Christianity with a clear content and an emphasis on truth we must also practice that truth, even when it is costly.” In other words, truth is not only important when we convey the message of Christ to the unbeliever, but the practice of truth bears as much, if not more, weight to our apologetics. Abraham Kuyper (1980:52) also states this: “What one confesses to be the truth, one must also dare to practice in word, deed, and whole manner of life.” Prophetically, Schaeffer (1974:12) makes this clear in 2 Contents, 2 Realities where he asserts, “It will not do in a relativistic age to say that we believe in truth and fail to practice that truth in places where it may be observed and where it is costly.” Francis Schaeffer repeatedly accentuated a balance of true content in conversation and true content in demonstration; both are needed for an effective Christian apologetic. Conversation alone will be ignored, and demonstration alone will lead to cultural accommodation only to remain relevant to a skeptical postmodern audience. Schaeffer (1990:165) contends, “The final apologetic, along with the rational, logical defense and presentation, is what the world sees in the individual Christian and in our corporate relationship together.”

What is most important to Schaeffer is not so much our individual incarnational apologetic that may or may not appeal to the skeptic, however important this may be, but the relationship that we demonstrate within the Christian community. In his book The Mark of the Christian Schaeffer makes abundantly clear that the final apologetic concerns the unity of the church, referencing the high priestly prayer as recorded in John 17 (Schaeffer, 1984d:190-191). Having the most eloquently presented air-tight argument will not do, as Schaeffer (1984d:190) affirms:

“If the world does not see this down to earth practical love, it will not believe that Christ was sent by the Father. People will not believe only on the basis of the proper answers to their honest questions. The two should not be placed in antithesis. The world must have the proper answers to their honest questions, but at the same time there must be a oneness in love between all true Christians. This is what is needed if men are to know that Jesus was sent by the Father and that Christianity is true.

For Schaeffer, then, incarnational apologetics is not only an enterprise conducted by individual Christians but Christian apologetics must be embraced corporately; it must begin and end with the true content of biblical Christianity demonstrated through observable love within the Christian community.

After a mere glance at bookshelves in Christian bookstores, and having casual conversations with millennials disenchanted with the church, one can discover quite quickly that the millennials and
those of Generation Z imbued with postmodern philosophy have strong opinions regarding the way the gospel has been presented and defended in the last fifty years. Sam Eaton (2016), a millennial blogger, bemoans the church’s discrepancies between the time spent on Bible studies and Christian church activities, and spending times “serving the least of these.” Millennials are action-driven and call for a more relational incarnational Christianity, which not only speaks to those who have turned their back on the church but also gives Christianity credibility among those who do not believe (Eaton, 2016).

Francis Schaeffer would agree with much of what the millennials have to say, and would admit that a corrective is needed. However, he would also give proper balance to the critique levelled against the church. Although an incarnational apologetic and an authentic Christian life are imperative to making a difference in our culture, the rational defense cannot be neglected. This rational aspect has created hostile responses from the postmodernist, but, according to Schaeffer, we cannot neglect it from apologetics; however, it can never be divorced from the other aspects of apologetics such as the relational, conversational and incarnational. The combination of the rational, relational, conversational and incarnational aspects of apologetics that Schaeffer promoted proved to be compelling to a modern audience and still has bearing on the postmodernist of the twentieth-first century.

6.6 Conclusion

It is difficult to deny the influence of Francis Schaeffer’s apologetic approach on the twentieth-century intellectual ethos in North America. In spite of all the criticism he received from influential scholars, the legacy of Francis Schaeffer lives on well into the twenty-first century. Intellectuals like Donald Williams (scholar at Toccoa Falls College), Os Guinness and Nancy Pearcey continue to draw on Francis Schaeffer’s assumptions. Neo-Calvinist thinking, especially regarding the issues such as presuppositions, worldview and the Lordship of Christ, popularized by men like Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, ran deep through Francis Schaeffer’s apologetics, a man who brought these aspects of Christian thought into a broader intellectual context. All of these matters are again brought to the fore in a postmodern context by neo-Calvinist philosophers such as James K.A. Smith. Smith suggests that postmodernists like Derrida agree with Christian thinkers such as Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, Van Til and Schaeffer, who all assumed that “ultimately religious presuppositions govern our understanding of the world.” Smith also suggests that the postmodern critique of metanarratives has much in common with the earlier criticism of Dooyeweerd and Schaeffer regarding autonomous reason (Smith, 2006:55,71). The point can be made here, regardless of how we read Smith’s interpretation of postmodern thinkers (see Chapter 3), that Francis Schaeffer and
other thinkers who influenced him are still part of the conversation in philosophical circles in the twenty-first century. It can be argued that the reason for Schaeffer’s continued popularity is that he defied the fundamentalist trend of the twentieth century and stood as an exception to the prevailing mindset that evangelicalism was anti-intellectual.

Some regard Schaeffer as a prophet (Yancey, 1982:104) and in many ways this is true (although he would probably abhor having been assigned this label). He was a cultural interpreter who made it his life’s mission to understand the zeitgeist of the culture in both Europe and North America. Additionally, Schaeffer focused his apologetics to show that the modern presuppositions could only lead to nihilism; that Christianity was the only answer to the meaninglessness of (post)modern thought. The beauty of Schaeffer’s apologetic is that he presents the Christian message reasonably and intellectually and that he continually keeps his focus, not on the argument itself, but on the well-being of the whole person. In this regard, Francis Schaeffer remained true to the words of Paul the apostle, who told the church in Colossae, “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col. 4:5-6).

The similarity of Francis Schaeffer’s approach to those of Pascal and Calvin is striking. Although the well-being of humanity is emphasized and human value accentuated, for Schaeffer, as it was for Calvin and Pascal, the entry point was to make unbelievers understand their own fallen state and to emphasize the futility of autonomous reason. Schaeffer emphasized the positive aspect of humanity, despite our fallenness, thus stressing our intrinsic value as creatures created in the image of God, whereas Pascal, in a more melancholy fashion, accentuated our wretchedness but nevertheless pointed to our most paradoxical state: our greatness and our wretchedness (Pascal, 1966:44, 59, 60). Calvin, in much the same manner as Pascal and often using similar language, saw humanity as a wretched creature but also the pinnacle of God’s creation (Calvin, 1960:39; 1996:167). All three, Calvin, Pascal and Schaeffer, agree that although we are wretched we have intrinsic value, and that happiness can only be achieved when we know God and do what God commands of us (cf. Pascal, 1966:33, 160; Calvin, 1960:41; Schaeffer, 1984e:11).

The danger of apologetics has always been the accommodation of Christian doctrine to the prevailing mindset of the culture. At times, apologists and theologians have fallen to the cultural pressures and have jumped on the postmodern bandwagon in order to remain relevant in a culture marked by tolerance and pluralism (cf. Gschwandtner, 2013:293; McLaren, 2011:207-224). In so doing they might have gained popularity among postmodernists but have ultimately called into question the authority of Scripture. Scott Burson and Jerry Walls (1998:253), in recognizing the dangers of accommodation, caution, “While there is certainly nothing wrong with understanding
and engaging culture on its own terms and shaping our apologetics accordingly, this can easily slip into cultural accommodation.” These words could well have come from Francis Schaeffer, who perceived the same dangers but who was unwavering in his biblical assertions, and remained steadfast in his defense of objective truth. It is true that objective truth may not be the most fruitful point of entry in an apologetic conversation, Schaeffer never soft-pedaled on this issue (Burson & Walls, 1998:253). In sum, Schaeffer, although he was an apologist in the latter part of the twentieth century and was raised and educated in an environment that was thoroughly modern, was well in-tune with the progression (or regression) from modernism into postmodernism. This cultural awareness can be seen in his assessment of postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault (Schaeffer, 1984a:251-254).

Schaeffer critiqued the modern intellectual ethos and saw the move from modernity into postmodernity especially in intellectual and creative disciplines well before evangelicalism caught on to its dangers that have come to fruition today. Not all agree that Schaeffer’s apologetic is pertinent in a postmodern context. Barry Hankins (2008:237) suggests that Schaeffer “fought against postmodernism with the modern weapons of Enlightenment reason,” and is therefore irrelevant to Christianity in the southern hemisphere where Western rationalism does not dominate. Hankins concludes that Schaeffer’s apologetic method is deemed time-bound and relative only to his own particular context, thus not germane to a postmodern audience. We must conclude, however, that although Francis Schaeffer presented Christianity as a reasonable and rational religion, he rejected the Enlightenment emphasis on autonomous reason, and stressed the relational, conversational and incarnational facets of apologetics that deem him extremely relevant to a postmodern audience.
7.0 FINAL THOUGHTS

There is no doubt that the religious ethos has dramatically changed in the last fifty years. With the emergence of postmodern philosophy the theological principles have greatly shifted. A number of theologians and sociologists have spent extensive time trying to figure out the reasons for the religious change that has seen a profound decline in church attendance and religious adherence. Theologian/pastor James Emery White spends considerable time dissecting culture and appraising the religious ethos in the United States and has concluded that the religious mentality is not so much atheistic but rather indifferent to organized religion (White, 2014:11-18). Much like others, White concludes that the “nones” are the fastest growing religious group in America (White, 2014:7, cf. Mercadante, 2014:3; Bibby, 2002:180-182). Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby, in his latest work *Resilient Gods*, concurs and assesses that the prevailing sentiment is not blatant unbelief but indifference; a large segment of the population neither embraces religion nor rejects religion, but finds itself somewhere in the middle, resembling countries such as the Ukraine, Germany and Australia in regard to religious tendencies (Bibby, 2017:61). He also remarks that spirituality is regarded as superior to religion and that SBNRers (those who are spiritual but not religious) can exercise their spiritual devotion without the baggage of religion (Bibby, 2017:143-144). James Emery White makes an observation that is most disturbing but typical of the postmodern mind-set in his book *The Rise of the Nones*. He recalls a comment made by a millennial who was once a Christian but let go of her beliefs and almost exasperatedly quipped, “There is so much I cannot prove. I am not sure truth exists at all. Instead of ‘I believe,’ I say ‘maybe,’ and ‘who knows?'” (White, 2014:18).

Assessing the current postmodern mind-set with its relativism and subjectivism, we find ourselves in a real conundrum: can we still employ an effective Christian apologetics in the twenty-first century? Throughout the centuries the task of apologetics was carried out with much fervour and many responded to the objective truths and the rational arguments presented to those who rejected the Christian faith, seemingly on rational grounds alone. Apologists assured the skeptic, the atheist and the agnostic that the Christian faith was rational and told themselves that evidences could be presented to persuade the most ardent unbeliever. It still holds true that Christianity is reasonable and rational but “any claim to know objective truth or to attempt to propose objective goodness tends to meet now with incredulity at best and defensiveness at worst” (Barron, 2018:28).

As now has become clear, abandoning the task of apologetics is not an option and would be a counterproductive move that would defy the biblical command. Today, more than ever, it is imperative that we faithfully continue to employ an apologetic that is biblical and relevant to a
culture that is steeped in spirituality but that has left the biblical moorings. Robert Barron (2018:29) understands this as well and concludes, “What is desperately needed, if the work of evangelization is to move forward, is a new apologetic.” This new apologetic is not so much focused on different areas of contention, as Barron would suggest, but is centred on an alternative starting point. This study has looked at Calvin’s theology, Pascal’s musings and Francis Schaeffer’s assumptions, all the while assessing the prevailing postmodern mindset, in order to arrive at a Christian apologetic that speaks to a contemporary audience.

It has never been the intention to create a new apologetic method that disapproves of Christian apologetics employed in the past. The proposal, however, keeps in mind that certain apologetic methods, so popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, cannot be utilized when the epistemological ethos is so much different in the twenty-first century. This does not mean that we must capitulate to the thought patterns proposed by postmodernism. Postmodernity that began in the latter part of the nineteenth century and progressed through the twentieth century has come to full fruition in the twenty-first century. The postmodern contentions have affected all aspects of society including religion and evangelicalism. As Reginald Bibby (2017:23) remarks, “religions that align themselves with social changes run the risk of becoming indistinguishable from culture.” On the one hand, we must be sensitive to the predominant epistemological assertions of the postmodern mind-set, and, on the other hand, we must vehemently oppose the postmodern insistence that disputes the biblical message and undermines the gospel of Christ. We are to defend the Christian faith in such a way that speaks positively to this generation without falling into the temptation of accommodation. This study has shown that Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer, working in their own particular contexts, are very much relevant when constructing a Christian apologetic for our contemporary culture. What can be appropriated is their uncompromising and unapologetic faithfulness to the Christian faith, which they defended without a hint of concession.

It cannot be over-emphasized that the Christian apologist must be faithful in defending biblical orthodox Christianity. It is tempting to capitulate to the wiles of postmodern thinking in order to remain relevant to a philosophy and a theology that has deconstructed the biblical message to suit its purposes. We must remain faithful to the reformational worldview that seems to have been all but abandoned. As has been shown, postmodernism has deconstructed Christianity to accommodate a hyper-tolerant, multicultural and pluralistic postmodern culture. Christian apologetics is now more daunting than ever, but also more urgent than ever.

It is impossible to turn the clock back and ignore the postmodern culture in which we are so entrenched. We do well to be attuned to the cultural and spiritual ethos and the particular religious language that is being employed, including the presuppositions from which the postmodernist
argues. At the same time we must discern the proper approach in apologetics that is most effective in a postmodern context and does not capitulate to the whims of postmodernism. It is also essential to ask if postmodernism has anything to offer that is conducive to an effective Christian apologetic. It is well documented that modernism accepted the Enlightenment perception of knowledge, emphasizing reason, science and technology to provide the answers to all human problems and, in turn, reducing experience, emotions and the heart as unreal and illusory. Postmodernism makes an attempt to recapture the existential aspects in epistemology but in doing so has renounced reason and objective truths as legitimate means to apprehend reality. While we condemn the postmodern assumptions of relativism and its rejection of a controlling viewpoint in favor of pluralistic points of view, especially where religion is concerned, we accept their eagerness to recapture the existential posture toward religious knowledge.

Naturally, a correction needs to be accorded because the danger of the postmodern presumption is its over-emphasis on experience and emotion over and against the rational aspects necessary to apprehend religious truths. In this respect Calvin and Pascal offer a much needed emendation. Both Calvin and Pascal do not ignore the cognitive aspects of faith, and accept wholeheartedly the reasonableness of the Christian faith, but they do recognize that the mind cannot be divorced from the heart when it comes to faith. Thus the modern notion of reason alone and the postmodern notion of heart alone is refuted by both Calvin and Pascal, who present a balanced view of heart and mind, which must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit to come to genuine faith. As Eberhard Arnold (1999:402-403) asserts, “The Holy Spirit must speak anew in every heart. Like an illuminating flood of light, the Spirit pours onto our paths, where in spite of our human light we had lost our bearings.”

The disregard of evidences and the indifference to reason in all matters of faith by postmodern philosophers and theologians is imprudent and irresponsible. The approach of Francis Schaeffer is far more effective in regard to Christian apologetics, for, although not emphasizing the use of evidences, he leaves Christianity open to verification, knowing all the while the role of the Holy Spirit in affirming these evidences in the heart of the unbeliever. Calvin and Pascal are of one mind in affirming God’s work in the process of illumination of both heart and mind. Pascal (1966:110) claims,

That is why those to whom God has given religious faith by moving their hearts are very fortunate, and feel quite legitimately convinced, but to those who do not have it we can only give such faith through reasoning, until God gives it by moving their heart, without which faith is only human and useless for salvation.
Calvin (1960:584) affirms as well, “The Spirit accordingly serves as a seal, to seal up in our hearts those very promises the certainty of which it has previously impressed upon our minds, and takes the place of a guarantee to confirm and establish them.”

On a more practical level, rather than absorbing the evidences, convincing as they may be, the postmodernists are far more attuned to a life lived in accordance and in consistence with a held belief. Postmodernists highly value the incarnational aspects associated with the Christian faith. Incarnational apologetics is imperative only when grounded in scriptural truths.

Neo-Calvinists and Francis Schaeffer call for a holistic approach to apologetics that includes an incarnational aspect. Worldview theology, articulated by neo-Calvinists such as Kuyper, Dooyeweerd and Francis Schaeffer, and their emphasis on the Lordship of Christ over all aspects of life, expresses the importance of the Christian life as a Christian apologetic. These aspects not only stress that the Christian faith must be expressed holistically, it also pronounces the reasons for a life lived in accordance with God’s Word. It is only the Christian faith that can accord for its actions consistent with the truth of our reality. Again, Francis Schaeffer’s approach challenges the consistency of apostate worldviews. Atheists, skeptics, and those of different faith traditions must be able to answer the reasons for their moral actions and explain how these actions are consistent with their worldviews.

As Christians we are called to a Christian life that extends beyond the walls of the church and takes seriously all aspects of our contemporary culture. We are to be unapologetically biblical when we approach cultural issues as we confront the anti-biblical presuppositions fraught with postmodern sentiments. We must listen to our culture, recognize the difficulties that the postmodern assertions present, and reformulate them. Additionally, Christian apologetics involves sensitivity to the appraisal of the postmodern generation and the offer of a corrective that is biblically grounded and that avoids the temptation to compromise the message of the gospel just to remain relevant to an audience that is in the process of reinterpreting the scriptural truths to suit the desires based solely on feelings. We can agree with James K.A. Smith (2006:135) who acknowledges that “the postmodern church must be a witness to its contemporary generation by being a peculiar people oriented to a coming kingdom through the practices and language of a living tradition.” We must remember that “these practices” must extend beyond the church and must spread through all aspects of contemporary culture. This can be done when taking seriously the theology of Calvin, the pious existential contemplations of Pascal, and the approach to Christian apologetic of Francis Schaeffer that is not only biblical but also rational, relational, conversational and incarnational.

Above all this stands the authority of the Scriptures. One of the hallmarks of both modernism and postmodernism is its incredulity toward the authority of the Bible. This sentiment has crept into
postmodern theology, which has, in turn, squirmed itself into the evangelical churches. We can see this in the tendencies to capitulate to the cultural attitudes towards same sex attraction, pluralism and universalism. Once we destroy the foundation upon which we stand as Christians, we have lost the battle. If we bow to the whims of our culture we are, indeed, in danger of losing our voice. Abraham Kuyper (1998:398), imbued with Calvinist theology, correctly asserts,

In Scripture we confront a cedar of spiritual authority that for eighteen centuries has pushed its roots into the soil of our human consciousness; in its shadow the religious and moral life of humanity has immeasurably increased in dignity and worth. Now chop that cedar down. For a little while some green shoots will still bud out from its trunk, but who will give us another tree, who will provide future generations with a shade like this? ... You know that I am not conservative, but this indeed is my conservatism: I will attempt to save the abundant cover of that cedar for our people, so that in the future they will not sit down in a scorching desert without shade.

For Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer, the Scriptures are the foundation upon which we must build our argument for Christianity, and the defense of the authority of the Scriptures is indispensable for a Christian apologetic. For Calvin, although the knowledge of God is implanted in us, and nature shows God’s divine wisdom, He bestows His actual knowledge of Himself upon us only in the Scriptures. In other words, the Scriptures are regarded as the spectacles through which we must look in order to recognize God’s divine wisdom displayed in nature, but through Scripture we see Him not only as Creator but also as Redeemer (Calvin, 1960:69-70). Craig Bartholomew (2017:127) adds, “We owe it to God, to our neighbor, to ourselves, and to his world to allow Scripture to polish the lenses of our glasses until they too are aflame with the grandeur of God and his revelation in his creation.”

For Pascal, the Scriptures stood at the centre of his apologia as articulated in his Pensées. As a matter of fact, as David Wetsel (2003:162) contends, of the 800 fragments we read as the Pensées “at least 200 relate directly or indirectly to Pascal’s project of scriptural exegesis.” For both Calvin and Pascal the “proofs” of the Christian faith can be directly extrapolated from both the Old and New Testaments (cf. Calvin, 1960:84-92; Pascal, 1966:121-132). For Francis Schaeffer it is clear that his entire worldview is grounded in the presupposition that the Bible is the true Word of God. Schaeffer (1990:100) resolutely asserts, “It is plain, therefore, that from the viewpoint of the Scriptures themselves there is a unity over the whole field of knowledge. God has spoken, in a linguistic propositional form, truth concerning himself and truth concerning man, history and the universe.” It cannot be denied, therefore, that our apologetics, besides being rational, relational, conversational and incarnational, must be thoroughly grounded in biblical principles. This view
avoids a piecemeal approach and promotes a holistic proposal to Christian apologetics that is not practiced on occasion but can be defined as “lifestyle apologetics.” It must be stressed that the ultimate aim of our apologetics is to show that Jesus is indeed the savior of mankind and that His saving work does not only affect us in the hereafter but, above all, that salvation impinges on all aspects of human life in the here and now. To echo Abraham Kuyper (1998:464), “the King of the Jews is either the saving truth to which all peoples say Amen or the principal lie which all people should oppose.”
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