



The Doctrine of God in Mormonism: A Christian Moral Apologetic Critique

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This work is affectionally dedicated to Samuel Edwards, Jesse Thomas, and Jude Patrick. *Deus vobiscum.*

ABSTRACT

This research uses the DEUS Challenge's mnemonic to present four-pronged apologetic engagement with Mormonism. Each of the letters in the acrostic provides a question that serves as one of the four avenues of dialogue with Mormons. The “D” is for the Deity Question and asks: Are the Christian and Mormon Gods the same? The response: The Mormon God is not the Christian God. Evidence is presented for the answer based on a discussion of the doctrine of God. The “E” is for the Ethics Question and asks: What is the Mormon account of morality? The response: Mormon morality derives from moral standards outside God. The evidence for this response focuses on moral realism. The “U” is for the Uprightness Question and asks: Does Mormon morality conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God’s existence? The response: Mormon morality does not conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God’s existence. The evidence at this point investigates moral apologetics. The “S” is for the Subjectivity Question and asks: Is the “burning in the bosom” reliable evidence for Mormon claims? The response: Mormon affective claims contradict rational claims for Mormon doctrine. The evidence considers passional reason. Additionally, each of the four questions includes a practical application of the gist of the relative arguments, presented in the form of an imagined dialogue between a Mormon missionary and a Christian.

Key Words: Apologetics, Cults, Doctrine of God, Evangelism, Moral Apologetics, Moral Realism, Mormonism, Passional Reason

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

From a historic orthodox Christian perspective, Mormon theology and practice represent, among other things, an enigmatic blend of polytheistic teachings about God, conservative family ethics and social morality, fantastical historical claims, an overt reliance upon the affective aspects of belief formation, and a works-based approach to personal salvation and male deification (Martin 2016). Among Mormon adherents—also known as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)—one will find converts from numerous Christian groups, including multiple Protestant denominations, Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and even Eastern Orthodoxy (Administrator 2018c).

When asked why they convert, many new Mormons avoid presenting a rational, closely reasoned defense of their decision based on theological and other considerations, choosing, instead, to appeal to the commonly shared experiential claim that they sensed a “burning within their bosom” that confirmed the teachings of Mormonism as the proper way to God (Beckwith *et al.* 2002). To be sure, there are those within the Mormon ranks that do attempt to make a reasoned defense of their faith, appealing in the process to additional sources of authority outside the Bible (e.g., the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price), and to a particular view of God with eerie similarities to the early Christian heresies concerning the Trinity, the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, and the nature of the Christian gospel (Oden 1992).

Though there are convincing critiques of Mormons' theological and experiential claims, not all Christians are prepared to engage with Mormons, especially the trained Mormon missionaries traveling in pairs throughout much of the world. Thus, it is essential for Christian scholars and ministry leaders to find ways to equip believers to answer Mormon claims about God, Jesus, salvation, and the Bible. Thankfully for Christians, there are numerous resources available in print and online to help Christians learn about Mormonism and defend Christian claims against Mormon challenges (e.g., Beckwith *et al.* 2002; Geisler 2013; Groothuis 2011; Lewis & Demarest 1996; Martin 2016; Rhodes 2001; and Sweis & Meister 2012). The research presented herein seeks to

add to these resources by focusing on a four-fold apologetic to Mormons, including 1) the Mormon doctrine of God; 2) the Mormon approach to moral realism; 3) the relationship of Mormon theology to a moral argument for God's existence; and 4) the Mormon approach to affective elements in belief formation (i.e., the "burning in the bosom" claimed by many Mormons as a testimony of the validity of their beliefs) and how it relates to passionate reason.

In critiquing Mormonism from a combination of these four perspectives, there is an opportunity to help fill a gap in current Christian apologetics efforts to Mormons. Further, insofar as what is presented provides a model of apologetic methodology for all Christians to use when encountering Mormons (Cowan 2000; Koukl 2009), Christian ministers and laity will have access to another tool to use in their efforts to "give a defense to everyone who asks [for] a reason for the hope that is in [them]" (1 Pet. 3:15¹).

The rest of the research overview in this chapter includes the following items. A background discussion and problem statement further develop the need for Mormon apologetical resources, supplying a narrower research problem statement. Next, a view of the research aim and objectives is presented, followed by a consideration of the central theoretical argument of the research. Then, the research design and method are overviewed, clarification of key concepts relevant to the discussion is presented, and a summary of the remaining chapters is offered.

1.1. Background

As reported on their official website (Administrator 2018b):

[Mormonism] was formally organized in a small log cabin in upstate New York in 1830. It took 117 years — until 1947 — for the Church to grow from the initial six members to one million. Missionaries were a feature of the Church from its earliest days, fanning out to Native American lands, Canada, and, in 1837, beyond the North American continent to England. Not long after, missionaries worked on the European continent and as far away as India and the Pacific Islands. The two-million-member mark was reached just 16 years later, in 1963, and the three-million mark in eight

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from the New King James Version, unless otherwise stated.

years more. This accelerating growth pattern has continued, with about a million new members added every three years or less.... Church membership today is over fifteen million.

Further, Mormons are actively reaching out across South Africa and other parts of the African continent. Total Mormon membership in Africa is currently reported at 578,310, with 2,0004 congregations, thirty-one missions, and three temples (Administrator 2018a). Specific to South Africa, 65,752 LDS members, 183 congregations, four missions, and one temple (Administrator 2018c). Mormons also aggressively evangelize throughout most of the world, claiming a total current church membership of over fifteen million (Administrator 2018b).

Frankly stated from a Christian apologetic perspective, what the growth of Mormonism represents is the growth of a new religious movement that denies the teaching of Christianity regarding God, the Bible, and salvation. As Walker (2001) aptly states, Mormons “have a different gospel” (Kindle loc. 13264) based on a “doctrine that stands in stark contrast to [the doctrines of] Christian monotheism, which teaches that there is only one true God and that every other ‘God’ is a false god” (Kindle loc. 13256). Thus, the growth of Mormonism poses a challenge to Christians around the world and should be taken as a severe threat to the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). An additional challenge Christian apologists face is that Mormon doctrine is replete with equivocation concerning Christian terms. It makes misleading claims regarding who God is, how salvation is achieved concerning Jesus Christ, and what the Bible teaches (Rhodes 2001). Thus, Mormonism is a severe threat to the true church that Jesus founded doctrinally.

As a Christian minister and scholar, this researcher often encounters those who need help giving answers to Mormons, especially regarding Mormon claims about God. Christians are looking for a substantive and accessible way to present a defense of the orthodox doctrine of God and how an apologetic encounter with Mormons can be correlated into an opportunity to evangelize (Rhodes 2001). Further, in an increasingly post-modern, post-Christian milieu where philosophical relativism is entrenched even in religious groups such as Mormons and among numerous Christians (Beckwith *et al.*

2002; Carson 2000), a discussion of the moral implications and affective components of one's beliefs about God can provide a meaningful and direct segue to apologetical and evangelistic opportunities (Baggett & Walls 2016; Budziszewski 2009; Rice 1999).

The relationship between morality and apologetics bears further development, given that the focus of the research includes how moral apologetics, specifically, aids in developing an apologetic response to Mormonism. The significance of moral apologetics for engaging Mormons about the doctrine of God and its implications for moral realism and a moral argument for God's existence may be expressed in two ways. First, as Beckwith *et al.* (2002) argue, Mormon morality is explicitly Christian in its fundamental metaethical construct, affirming mind-independent moral facts based upon an understanding of God that is one, eternal, and omnibenevolent. However, even though Mormons adopt the moral concomitants of a Christian metaethical construct, Mormon theology categorically and unequivocally deviates from the orthodox trinitarian doctrine of God. Thus, there is an inherent contradiction in Mormonism's moral and theological claims concerning God (Baggett & Walls 2011; Beckwith *et al.* 2002; Feinberg 2001).

Second, morality is at the heart of the Christian faith (Budziszewski 2009; Rice 1999), affirming as it does the centrality of God's perfect goodness and the implicit Godward direction any moral claims or sense of moral oughtness require (Baggett & Walls 2011; Geisler 2011; McCormack 2008). This is significant for Mormon apologetics vis-à-vis the doctrine of God since all people, even Mormons, have the divine moral imprimatur in their being, such that there is a commonality of experience when speaking about the inner sense of conscience and *sensus divinitatis* (Dorman 2001). While Christians and Mormons may not have a common starting point in the conversation about God (Koukl 2009), the shared sense of morality rooted in God provides properly equipped Christians with a place of departure into an apologetic conversation that necessarily raises the legitimacy of the Mormon doctrine of God through the lens of moral apologetics (Beckwith *et al.* 2002).

1.2. Problem Statement

Mormons make claims about God contrary to Christian teachings on the same. Further, Mormons make these claims that directly challenge and look to proselytize Christians from various denominational perspectives, often with great effectiveness. Thus, the question is: How should one evaluate and engage the theological teachings of Mormons—specifically regarding the doctrine of God and its implications for moral facts and a moral argument for God’s existence, as well as the affective claims of Mormon’s concerning their epistemic convictions? This is the problem that this study seeks to address. Questions arising from this problem include the following:

- What is the Christian teaching regarding the doctrine of God?
- What is the teaching of Mormons regarding the doctrine of God, and how does it differ from the Christian perspective?
- What is moral realism, how does it relate to a broader metaethical consideration of morality, and how is it consistent with the doctrine of God found in classical theism while inconsistent with Mormon teaching concerning God?
- What is moral apologetics, and what is its relevance for conducting apologetics with Mormons, specifically regarding the Mormon doctrine of God and its relationship to a moral argument for God’s existence?
- What is passion reason, and how does a proper understanding of affective and rational components' intertwining in epistemic matters relate to an apologetic engagement with Mormons?
- What apologetic methodology might be utilized in presenting a moral apologetics-based critique of the Mormon doctrine of God?

1.3. Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to critically evaluate Mormonism from an evangelical Christian viewpoint and through the four-fold approach of the doctrine of God, moral realism, a moral argument for God's existence, and passion reason; and by doing so, to provide a cumulative-case apologetic model for Christian to use in dialogue with Mormons. To this end, the following objectives support the study.

- Study and evaluate the Christian and Mormon doctrines of God.
- Study and evaluate the metaethical construct of moral realism as it relates to orthodox trinitarian teaching about God, as well as its relationship to Mormon teaching.
- Study and evaluate the tenets and practices of moral apologetics and their relevance for conducting apologetics regarding the Mormon doctrine of God and the feasibility of constructing a moral argument for God's existence based on Mormon theology.
- Study and evaluate the meaning and significance of passion reason related to Mormonism's affective claims regarding epistemic matters.
- Draw relevant implications from and make recommendations based upon a study of Mormon teaching from the four areas of investigation.

1.4. Central Theoretical Argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Mormon doctrine of God represents a fundamental departure from the core teachings of the historic Christian faith (Beckwith *et al.* 2002; Frame, 1994) and that a cumulative case apologetic approach (Cowan 2000) based on moral realism, moral apologetics, and passion reason that is rooted in a grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture (Kostenberger & Patterson 2011) offers a viable means to engage Mormons in defense of Christian understanding of God, moral realism, moral argumentation for God's existence, and passion reason

rooted in an appeal to a shared moral conviction that ultimately derives from different bases – the Christian’s from an orthodox doctrine of God and the Mormon’s from a polytheistic and monarchotheistic doctrine of God.

1.5. Research Design/Methodology

This theological-apologetic study is done from the perspective of Christianity as understood within the evangelical tradition. The following methods are used to answer the various research questions:

- To study and evaluate the Christian doctrine of God, a literature analysis is conducted to explain this perspective using a historical theological approach.
- To study and evaluate the Mormon doctrine of God, a literature analysis is conducted to explain this perspective using a historical theological approach.
- To study and evaluate the Mormon doctrine of God from the perspective of moral realism, identifying and explaining its fundamental aspects and considering how it may relate to/critique the Mormon doctrine of God, a literature analysis is conducted.
- To study and evaluate the Mormon doctrine of God from the perspective of moral apologetics, identifying and explaining its fundamental aspects and considering how it may relate to/critique the Mormon doctrine of God, a literature analysis is conducted.
- To study and evaluate the Mormon claims of affective epistemic weight concerning the “burning in the bosom” attending acceptance of Mormon teaching and their relationship to legitimate passionate reason, a literature analysis is conducted.
- To develop an apologetic method for engaging Mormons in the areas of the doctrine of God, moral realism, moral apologetics, and passionate reason, a

literature analysis is conducted, and a cumulative-case apologetic model based on the DEUS acrostic is presented and notionally applied.

1.6. Concept Clarification and Development

1.6.1. Apologetic Methodology

Not all apologists will continue upon the same path to engage their interlocutors, so it is reasonable that there are numerous methods of apologetics. Thus, an apologetic method is usually one or a combination of approaches to defending the Christian faith against claims to the contrary. Methods for consideration here are the classical, evidential, presuppositional, reformed epistemological, and cumulative case.

1.6.1.1. Classical Apologetics

Classical apologetics uses a method of presenting and defending the Christian faith that draws upon a commitment to natural theology as derived from general revelation and Christian theology derived from special revelation. The classical apologist is committed to two presuppositions and two methodological steps. The first presupposition is an epistemic common ground between believers and unbelievers. The two may meaningfully engage in reasoned, logical discourse in evaluating the evidence for theism, in general, and particularly for Christian theism. The second presupposition is that to ascertain the claims of Christian theism properly (e.g., the veracity of Scripture, the deity of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus), certain metaphysical preconditions must be met, including the demonstration to the unbeliever of a coherent case for theism.

When engaged in apologetics, the classical apologist takes two methodological steps from these presuppositions. First, the apologist uses philosophical and scientific evidence and argumentation to make a case for theism, in general. In this step, arguments are drawn from ethics, cosmology, aesthetics, teleology, and similar areas to supply the basis for presenting a coherent demonstration of the existence of God. Second, and building/bridging from the arguments used for theism in the first step, the classical apologist turns to consider the evidence for the Christian faith, focusing on the specific truth claims of the Bible regarding the person and work of Jesus, as well as other biblical

matters. The classical apologist seeks to answer two vital apologetic questions in this two-step manner: 1) Why God? 2) Why the Christian God?

There are two practical benefits derived from a classical apologetic method. First, classical apologetics provides the apologist a starting point that centers upon broad existential concerns such as God's existence or why there is something rather than nothing, instead of beginning with narrowly conceived questions specific to Christian matters. By starting in this comprehensive manner, the classical apologist can engage a wider audience of seekers who, while they may wish to discuss evidence for and against theism, are wont to quickly dismiss any discussion of the biblical text since they have been previously inundated with critical assessments of Christian claims and a prevailing anti-supernaturalism and materialism. Second, the classical apologetic method, with its commitment to the precondition of an appropriately nuanced metaphysic rooted in a Judeo-Christian understanding of theism, segues effortlessly into a specific discussion of Christian truth claims. The first step in classical apologetics is defending the existence of God as personal, self-existent, moral, all-powerful, necessary, absolute, and one. Once the case for theism is made, these attributes make the path to the God of the Bible more readily visible and accessible. Classical apologists include Norman Geisler (2013) and William Lane Craig (2008).

1.6.1.2. Evidential Apologetics

Evidential apologetics is a one-step method. Rather than beginning with theistic arguments and then moving to Christian claims, evidentialists begin by using evidence (historical, in particular) to defend the truth claims of Christianity. Evidential apologists may start with the veracity of Scripture (i.e., a top-down approach), or with the resurrection of Jesus (i.e., a bottom-up approach); either way (and Scripture or the resurrection do not exhaust the list of potential areas for initiating the apologetic dialogue), the starting point for an evidential apologetic methodology is some component

of the Christian message derived from special revelation.² Proponents of this method include John Warwick Montgomery (2015) and Gary Habermas (2004).

1.6.1.3. Evidential or Classical?

Consider briefly, though in more detail than the definitions already provided, the similarities and differences between evidentialist and classical methods. The similarities may be summarized in three ways. First, both classical and evidential methods value the role of reason and evidence in conducting apologetics. In this regard, and contra presuppositional and Reformed Epistemology methods of apologetics, both classical and evidential apologists argue for, rather than assume or assert, the truthfulness of the Christian message. Second, both approaches assume some level of epistemic common ground between believers and non-believers about the claims of Christianity. Though valuing and using it differently, this recognition of epistemic common ground reveals that both classic and evidential methods recognize someplace for a universally discernible natural theology in the apologetic task.³ Third, classical and evidential apologetics seeks to use the evidence to bridge the gospel message, albeit differently. However, the goal of the apologist in both methods is the same, to use reason and evidence to “affirm (1) the existence of the God of creation disclosed in (2) the Jesus of history and (3) the teaching of Scripture” (Lewis & Demarest 1996: 129).

Aside from these similarities, an evidential critique of the classical apologetic method includes three points. First, with a classical apologetic approach, there is the issue of apologetic priority. The two-step process of classical apologetics gives the first thrust of its defense to general theism that is in no way uniquely Christian. Why not, asks the

² Within the evidential camp there are differences of opinion on the starting point in discussing the evidence for Christianity. A top-down evidentialist begins with a defense of the veracity of Scripture, providing what has been described as an “umbrella approach” that sees Scripture as the overarching concern, and under it such matters as the deity of Jesus, miracles, and the resurrection of Jesus. A bottom-up evidentialist begins with a defense of the resurrection of Jesus, arguing from it to miracles, the deity of Jesus, and the veracity of Scripture.

³ While some classic apologists allege that evidentialists do not have a place for natural theology, this is simply not the case. As Habermas explains, “most evidentialists...encourage various forms of natural theology with regard to arguments for God’s existence,” with the difference being that evidentialists affirm a one-step process from, for example, a defense of the resurrection of Jesus to the existence of God; in such instances the theistic arguments from natural theology play a corroborative, rather than primary role, but they play a role, nonetheless. (Habermas, “Evidential Apologetics,” in Cowan 2000: 98).

evidential apologist, begin with a defense of the Christian God's truth claims in the Bible either, for example, via arguments for the veracity of Scripture or the resurrection of Jesus, and then argue for the existence of the God revealed in Scripture and the resurrection? This tact allows the apologist to make an explicitly Christian argument for God's existence, rather than arguing for generic monotheism first, followed by an attempt to transition to Christian monotheism after that.

Two, there is the issue of apologetic ability concerning the classical apologetic method. The two-step process that begins with an argument for God's existence requires what seems to this researcher to be a significant amount of talent and skill on the part of the apologist as they transition from arguments for theism to arguments for Christian theism. While this may be possible for trained apologists with experience, how does such an intellectual and rhetorical requirement square the command in 1 Pet. 3:15 to all Christians to always be ready to engage in apologetics relative to the hope they affirm in the gospel?

The complexities of the two-step process in classical apologetics appear counterintuitive if apologetics is the ministry of every believer, whereas teaching a believer to defend the Bible. The resurrection of Jesus as their priority in learning apologetics places the emphasis squarely on the source of the believer's hope, which is what lies at the heart of the command for every believer to engage in apologetics.⁴ Three, regarding the classical apologetic method, there is the issue of apologetic example. Is the two-step method of apologetics shown in Scripture? Although a detailed exegetical investigation is beyond the present scope, consider examples of Paul's apologetic work found in Acts.

In Acts 14:8-18, Paul and Barnabas are preaching in Lystra when Paul heals "a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked" (8), leading the crowds to wrongly conclude that Paul and Barnabas were Hermes and Zeus, respectively (12).

⁴ In considering the examples of apologetics in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 14 and 17), and the command in 1 Pet. 3:15 for every believer to be prepared to defend his or her faith, one can conclude that New Testament apologetics is, rather than a technical, scholarly enterprise, a matter of interweaving personal testimony with the historical facts of the gospel.

Paul's response was to explain in an argument from natural theology that he and Barnabas were men, not Gods, but that "the living God...did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (15-17). Is this not an example of the two-step method of classical apologetics? Paul, it seems, begins with natural revelation and general theism, moving (it appears) eventually to the gospel of Jesus.

Possibly but the broader context does not appear to support this claim. Instead, the broader context of Acts 14 explains that Paul and Barnabas left Iconium in the face of persecution (1-5) and "fled to Lystra...and they were preaching the gospel there" (6-7). Why were Paul and Barnabas in Lystra? They were preaching the gospel. What were they doing in the context of the mob action to sacrifice to them? They were preaching the gospel. Thus, the flow of the text supports the conclusion that the appeal to natural theology and the benevolence of God (15-17) comes after, not before, the proclamation of the Christian message (which, according to Paul's custom, was a reasoned defense of the gospel (i.e., an apologetic) to Jew and Gentile, cf. Acts 17:17).⁵

Paul's interaction with the Athenians in Acts 17:16-34 follows the same pattern as Lystra. Paul begins by presenting the gospel to Jews and Greeks (17), which causes something of a stir in the city, leading to his invitation to appear before the Areopagus to discuss further "this new doctrine...of which [he spoke]" (19). What is this new doctrine? As v. 18 explains, Paul "preached to them Jesus and the resurrection." Thus, as with Lystra, the backdrop against which Paul makes his presentation to the Areopagus in 22-31, a display that indeed begins with general revelation and natural theology as a bridge to the doctrine of final judgment and the resurrection, is the gospel message. Paul started with the gospel, transitioned to general revelation on Mars Hill, and concluded with the gospel. It appears, then, that Paul follows the evidential method by beginning with the claims of Scripture, corroborating with natural theology as necessary, but staying focused on the gospel message.

⁵ In Acts 17:17, the word translated by the NKJV as "reasoned" is *dialegomai* in the Greek, meaning to present a reasonable and intelligent discourse; interestingly, a New Testament synonym for *dialegomai* is *apologeomai*, which derives from *apologia*. (Zodhiates 1992: 432-433.)

1.6.1.4. Presuppositional Apologetics

Presuppositional apologetics begins with the Bible as the self-attesting Word of God. It asserts claims regarding God's existence, the life, miracles, and resurrection of Jesus, and any other biblical claim. Key to the presuppositional approach is an insistence that, when assessed logically, the worldviews of non-Christian faiths are inherently inconsistent as far as they rely upon the Christian worldview (at the very least implicitly) as the epistemic basis for their deliberations, all the while seeking to argue against it. The method emphasizes the radical nature of human depravity and its attendant rebellion against God as the reasons man is unable and unwilling to interpret evidence supporting God's claims properly; the first task of the apologist, therefore, is the work of evangelism so that the person may have the proper spiritual disposition to receive divine revelation. Representative presuppositional apologists include Cornelius Van Til (1980) and John Frame (1994).

1.6.1.5. Presuppositionalism's Fundamental Distinction

Now for a brief investigation of how, from the presuppositional perspective, evidential apologetics (and classical, insofar as it relies upon an unregenerate person to evaluate evidence, be it from general revelation or consideration of the historical content of the gospel message) may be criticized for assuming that there is an epistemic middle ground between believers and unbelievers from which either side may reasonably and logically assess evidence for the Christian message. The gist of the presuppositional criticism is a theological concern over the effects of sin upon humanity.

To better understand this concern, consider the thought of Van Til, the father of modern presuppositional apologetics. Van Til's position is that the effects upon humanity wrought by the fall of Adam and Eve into sin unless remedied by the grace of God in regeneration leave all people unable to discern the intention of general revelation or the history of redemption in making God known. Van Til (2012) explains, "It is accordingly no easier for sinners to accept God's revelation in nature than to accept God's revelation in Scripture.... From the sinner's point of view, theism is as objectionable as is Christianity.... It is, therefore, the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the

Word...that alone effects the required Copernican revolution that makes us both Christians and theists” (Kindle loc. 203-210).

Although Van Til (1974) regards natural revelation as both authoritative and transparent in its revelation of God in a manner that makes it a counterpart (though not equal) to the Scriptures, this authority and revelation are impossible to discern apart from a person first being regenerated; without salvation, general and special revelation are only “sufficient to render [the unregenerate] without excuse” (Kindle loc. 152). For Van Til, general and special revelation does reveal God, but only those already Christians can receive the revelation; due to their willful depravity, everyone else cannot see the revelation remain only condemned unless they first become Christians. “The natural man,” according to Van Til, “is spiritually blind with respect to everything” (82).

In evaluating Van Til’s basic approach to an unsaved person’s response to general and special revelation, Turner (1981: 45-58) explains that Van Til did not deny that man has an innate knowledge of God or the ability to consider the claims of the historic Christian faith. Still, that fallen man does not and cannot utilize this knowledge without first being converted. Lewis and Demarest (1986) capture the essence of Van Til’s approach: “If a person wants to know anything about God, they must adopt the correct referent by presupposing the God revealed in authoritative Scripture. But sinful human beings...are incapable of drawing the right conclusions about God from nature or any other source.... Epistemologically, all the unsaved are atheists” (65).

Van Til’s approach and its implications for the role of reason and logic employed by the unbeliever in evaluating Christian evidence is insufficient, concludes the evidentialist or classicist, insofar as it is possible to affirm the radical depravity of humanity and the pervasiveness of the noetic and volitional effects of sin on all human faculties without concluding with Van Til that it is only through conversion that anyone may properly evaluate general or special revelation. How is this the case? Through the agency of God’s prevenient grace, whereby, as Paul explains in Acts 17:15-17, God “gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth and has determined their preappointed times and

the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” Paul clarifies in this passage that God has preveniently ordered the world in such a way that humanity is enabled by God’s ordering of human affairs to seek and find God despite the far-reaching effects of sin. This is prevenient grace.

As Cox (1969) explains, God’s “prevenient grace not only restrains sin in men but lifts all men to a salvable point. He can choose more grace leading on to salvation by this grace, or he may reject the grace. Thus, salvation is ‘by grace through faith,’ and the whole plan is the gift of God” (149). While prevenient grace does not guarantee any person’s salvation, that is something everyone must freely choose in response to the grace given them; it does enable all unbelievers to discern on a basic but essential level the general and special revelation of God; they indeed can discern enough in their lost condition to cry out to God and receive salvation.

This is the gist of Paul’s formal accusation on unbelievers in Rom. 1:18-23, about the clarity of God’s revelation in nature. Paul does not say that men cannot learn God’s existence and attributes from natural theology, but that, when they do, they refuse to accept the implications of such revelation. Oden’s (1998) commentary on Paul’s words is insightful, “The silent panoply of creation is plainly available to the most uneducated beholder through conscience and reason” (59). Prevenient grace extends to all humanity.

From a non-Reformed evangelical perspective (i.e., that of many, though certainly not all evidential and classical apologists), it appears that Van Til’s conception of the impact of total depravity on the mind of fallen man is greater than the Scriptures suggest. Yes, man is lost, and there are undoubtedly severe implications from that fall upon reason and will (see Rom. 8:6-8). Still, Van Til’s conclusion seems to the non-presuppositional apologist to give more power to depravity than grace in all its forms. At this point, Van Til and others may be guilty of allowing their systematic convictions to drive their biblical exegesis rather than drawing their systematics from biblical interpretation. Thus, for the classical and evidential apologists, there is an epistemic middle ground between believers and unbelievers whereby, through the agency of reasoned, logical

consideration, both general and special revelation may be evaluated, and all of this is enabled by God's prevenient grace, human depravity notwithstanding.

1.6.1.6. Reformed Epistemology

Reformed Epistemology, while not an apologetic method, per se, is critical to consider in an overview of apologetic methodologies insofar as its primary focus is not on presenting reasons for faith in God but on demonstrating why faith in God is an innate reality in all humans as a consequence of the *sensus divinitatis* (i.e., sense of the divine) that is concurrent with the image of God in humanity. Thus, apologetics is possible for adherents of Reformed Epistemology, but not a necessity, since belief in God is part of what it means to be human. Important Reformed Epistemologists are Alvin Plantinga (in Cowan 2000) and Kelly James Clark (in Cowan 2000).

1.6.1.7. Reformed Epistemology's Impact and Benefits

Before concluding this part of the discussion, it will help to thoroughly discuss the presuppositions of Reformed Epistemology and its impact on apologetic methodology. As already said, Reformed Epistemology (hereafter, RE) is not an apologetic method, per se, but an epistemological perspective that builds upon two presuppositions. RE defines religious knowledge as properly warranted belief. In this manner, RE focuses on the issues related to warrant (rather than justification) regarding whether they are proper and how adequate warrant impacts belief and, therefore, knowledge; this is key as far as epistemology concerns itself with knowing and believing.

Further, RE infers from the *sensus divinitatis* (i.e., the sense of the divine inherent in all humans, cf. Paul's discussion of God's self-disclosure in Rom. 1:18-20 and 2:11-16) that all people have, as a properly basic belief, a belief in God. What is meant by properly basic is that such belief is more axiomatically than discursively demonstrated. To be human is to believe in God a priori since human nature is created with God as one of its fundamental constitutive elements. This belief does not require proof or argument, only acknowledgment.

What is the impact of RE on the apologetic method? RE is more concerned to help reveal what is already known because of the *sensus divinitatis* and therefore seeks to apply whatever is most expedient in the apologetic process to remove obstacles to recognizing the properly fundamental belief in God one already has. This translates into a pragmatic and fluid approach to apologetics rather than following a set method. RE also serves to cultivate a deep and abiding assurance in the apologist who may be focused outwardly on showing the credibility of Christian convictions but already knows inwardly that there is a God with which they are in a relationship.

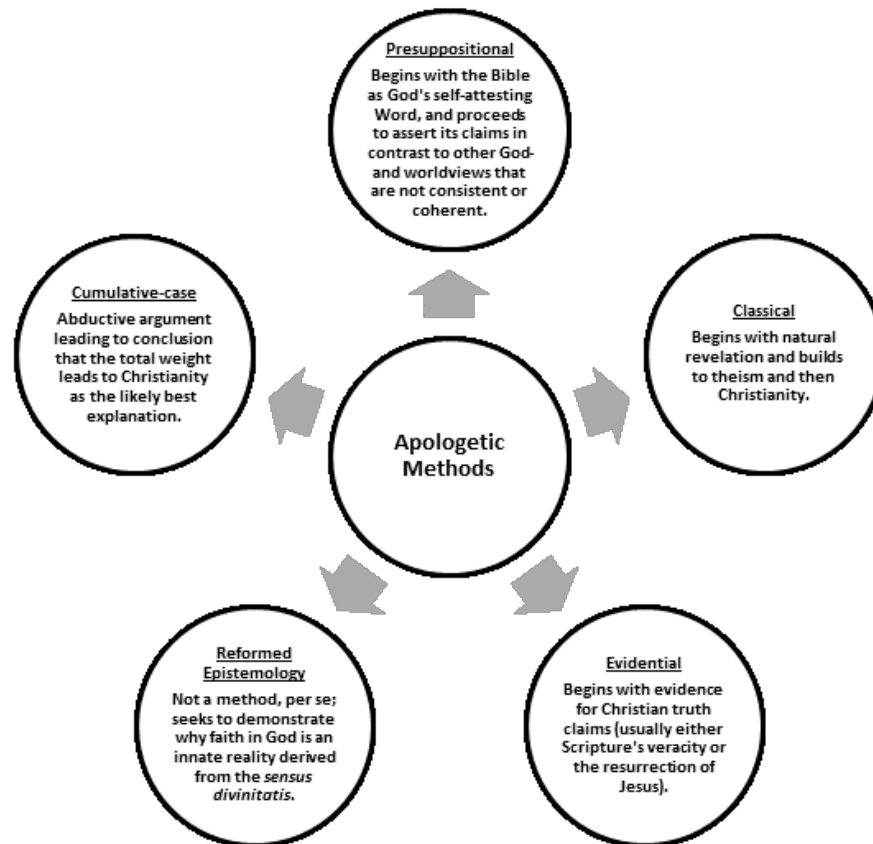
Since RE is an epistemological rather than methodological entity, apologists who embrace other methods are also free to embrace RE. Further, despite its title, RE is broadly Christian in its application. Those who practice apologetics while holding to RE presuppositions will enjoy the freedom to use a wide array of apologetic tactics and tools, from proofs for God's existence to arguments for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Or as is the case with some RE advocates, apologetics will not be practiced at all; instead, the truth claims of theism and Christianity will be asserted in a manner like presuppositionalism, leaving deniers of such claims to deal with the impact of contending against something they already know as properly basic. Why? As previously told, RE is not an apologetic method, per se, but an epistemic framework.

1.6.1.8. Cumulative-case Methodology

A cumulative-case methodology is an approach to apologetics that is abductive (Baggett & Walls 2011; 2016) and involves an attempt to provide a reasonable case for the truth of Christianity based on an accumulation of answers to fundamental questions relative to human experience (Cowan, 2000). As such, cumulative case apologetics "is a broad-based argument with many subjective and objective elements [that]...can be seen as reinforcing one another to strengthen the case for Christian theism.... that Christian theism gives the most plausible explanation of all the evidence" (Cowan 2000: 166). Moral apologetics is one element in the cumulative case presentation, albeit a foundational one in making the case of Christian theism. Influential cumulative-case

apologists are John Feinberg (Cowan 2000) and David Baggett (Baggett & Baggett 2018).

Figure 1. Apologetic Methods (based on Cowan 2000)



1.6.2. Argumentation

To make apologetic arguments is to engage in rational argumentation (section adapted from Gentry 2018). Groothuis makes a helpful observation related to this idea, saying that “apologetics means philosophical engagement, and philosophy trades in logic” (2011: chap. 3, par. 2). Though logic and argumentation may be complex for some Christians, apologetics without arguments reduces to assertions and becomes a denial of Peter’s command to “give a defense” (1 Pet. 3:15).

1.6.2.1. Deductive and Inductive Argumentation

Craig explains that “in a sound deductive argument, the conclusion follows inevitably from the premises...the premises [must] be true, and the logic [must] be valid” (2008: 52). For example, a deductive moral argument for God’s existence is as follows:

P1: If God does not exist, then objective moral values/duties do not exist.

P2: Objective moral values and duties do exist.

C: So, God exists (cf. Baggett & Walls 2016: chap. 2, par. 23).

Craig also explains that induction “is an argument of which the premises may be true and the logical inferences valid, but the conclusion still is false...the conclusion is quite likely true...but it is not inevitably true” (2008: 52-53). An example of an inductive argument for God’s existence based on joy or desire may be developed as follows (Lewis 1952: 113):

P1: Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists.

P2: A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex.

C: If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

Both deduction and induction are options for argumentation, and an apologist whose goal is to include apologetics in preaching will benefit from learning how and when to use these approaches. Sometimes the nature of the apologetic encounter or the context may require a level of specificity and logical precision found in deduction. Likewise, an inductive approach may help with arguments that tend toward a high degree of certainty but still leave room for disagreement with some topics. The apologist will decide whether deduction or induction is best in both instances. However, as will be considered now, abductive argumentation also benefits Christian apologists.

1.6.2.2. Abductive Argumentation

Abductive argumentation is like inductive argumentation, though abduction hopes to arrive at inference to the best explanation by suggesting that its premises are very likely true and that the weight of the evidence favors its proposed conclusion. In contrast, induction claims more certainty with less concern for inference to the best explanation. Both are dissimilar to deduction in terms of epistemic certainty since deduction claims to come to absolute certainty if the argument is valid and the premises are true.

Before considering in greater detail the benefits of abductive argumentation and an example of abduction from the Bible, Figure 2. supplies a side-by-side comparison of the essential elements of deductive, inductive, and abductive argumentation.

Figure 2. Approaches to Argumentation for a Creator (cf. Craig 2000)

Arguments for a Creator		
Deductive	Inductive	Abductive
• Whatever begins to exist has a cause. • The universe began to exist. • Therefore, the universe has a cause. This cause is God.	• Everything observed to have begun to exist seems to have a cause. • The universe seems to have begun to exist. • Therefore, the universe has a cause. This cause is God.	• Everything observed to have begun to exist seems to have a cause. • The universe seems to have begun to exist. • Therefore, it is likely the best explanation that the universe has a cause. The best candidate for this cause is God.

1.6.2.3. Benefits of Abduction

To appreciate the importance of abductive argumentation, consider the following benefits it offers in the service of apologetic dialogue, especially touching on matters of moral apologetics: it encourages epistemic humility in apologetic dialogue, and it helps

avoid the error of oversimplification more fully. Each of these reasons will now be discussed.

First, abduction encourages epistemic humility. Because it claims to come to an inference to the best explanation, abduction offers a manner of apologetic reasoning in preaching that is not unnecessarily dogmatic, nor without a sense of certainty and conviction appropriate to the gospel's claims on unbelievers and believers. As Baggett and Baggett explain, "the procedure of abduction goes like this: we come across something that needs to be explained, then we identify a range of possible explanations, and then we narrow the list down to the best one" (Baggett & Baggett 2018: 50). Some apologists might chafe at this approach, claiming that the apologetic enterprise should insist on certainty, and that apologetic dialogue with Mormons, especially, should prefer more than an inference to the best explanation as an outcome.

However, whereas deduction and induction (to a lesser degree) claim certainty if the premises of an argument are valid and seemingly irrefutable if the premises are true, there is a sense in which such claims (especially in deduction) to absolute certainty lack explanatory power when it comes to how faith forms around what is "hoped for...[and] unseen" (Heb. 11:1-2). Is the Christian worldview compelling? Absolutely. Is there evidence worthy of consideration? Of course. However, the ideas of certainty associated with argumentation are not something found in the pages of the Bible, but in the later developments of modern thought, which has a decided bias against the idea of biblical faith (Baggett & Baggett 2018). Abduction is a way to keep the apologist in check against the temptation to overconfidence in the power of his arguments and help him remember that there is more involved in coming to faith than syllogisms and rationality.

Second, abduction helps avoid oversimplification. There is a problem that some apologists fall into when they think a simple syllogism is all that is needed to make a case for some aspect of Christian truth—accepting that one cannot prove the existence of God and the reality of Christianity with absolute epistemic certainty, apologists may assume that their convictions are equivalent to philosophical standards of truth and certainty. They think that belief is simply a matter of following the premises to the logical

conclusion and expect that their hearers only need to follow the logic of an argument to believe in God or some other aspect of Christian truth. For example, it may be tempting to think that Craig's version of the cosmological argument for God's existence is an unassailable argument that, when delivered by the apologetic preacher, brings critics of Christianity to heel by silencing their arguments. Craig's argument is as follows (2008: 111):

P1: Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

P2: The universe began to exist.

C: Therefore, the universe has a cause.

When an apologist assumes this approach to argumentation to be a knockdown argument that requires the unbeliever to yield to the gospel, a fundamental element is missing. Conversion is ordinarily a process that takes time and possibly numerous conversations, and it is only the exception that finds a person coming to Christ after hearing only one argument. Instead, one of the benefits of abduction is that effective apologetic preaching takes time and a cumulative presentation that appeals to the best explanation of what is under discussion to see someone come to faith in Christ. Groothuis explains,

How does one present an argument for the Christian worldview as the best hypothesis? The answer: carefully, slowly, and piece by piece. First, the idea needs to be formulated clearly. For apologetics, this means paying close attention to the components and implications of the Christian worldview, with an eye for detecting false stereotypes and caricatures. Second, identify the worldviews that are potential rivals to Christianity. These will be the plausible worldviews...one that holds interest and appeal for a significant number of people at a particular time and place.... Plausibility should not be confused with credibility, which deals with whether or not any claim is valid and rational. The credibility of a worldview is determined by whether or not arguments marshaled in its favor are compelling and logically coherent (2011: chap 3. par. 14).

Among several impressions one might have from Groothuis's statement, it is not likely that anyone will conclude that what he describes is a quick or one-time process.

Apologetic argumentation takes time and patience, and the abductive approach lends itself to these things more than argumentation by deduction or induction. Whereas the latter two are intended to conclude a necessary outcome of the premises, abduction makes a solid case in appealing to the best explanation without forcing the conversation to a premature conclusion or impasse.

Like Paul in Athens sharing the gospel on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-34), the abductive argument in the hands of the apologist offers a reasonable explanation of the audience's circumstances while engaging their worldview and positively presenting the Christian worldview. Some may scoff, some may decide to hear more, and some may believe—whatever the outcome may be, the cumulative abductive case for faith has been made, Layer upon layer, its epistemic and affective weight is added to and interwoven in support of the Christian worldview's relevance to whatever may be the concerns of the hearers.

1.6.2.4. Abduction in Joshua 24

An example of abduction in apologetic preaching is now discussed, based on Joshua's farewell address to Israel. In Josh. 24:1-25, Joshua delivered his second farewell address to Israel. His first address was given in 1-16, and, as Howard (1998) explains, "both were given in the pastoral, hortatory style" (chap. 4, sect. 3, para. 1). The significance of Howard's description for the present consideration is that what Joshua did in these two addresses is preach a final message to those he had led since Moses's death. The first message focused on the leaders, and the second on the whole nation of Israel. In the following research, Joshua's message to the nation in 1-25 is considered in its demonstration of abduction in apologetical preaching (and, by extension, abduction in apologetics overall). As will be developed, Joshua's concern, his basic apologetic argument, and his invitation to the hearers supply a clear example of abduction in apologetics.⁶ Here, then, is the text of Josh. 24:1-25:

⁶ Commentaries consistent with the abductive approach taken here include A. Clarke. 1880. Commentary on Joshua [Kindle ed.]; D.M. Howard, Jr. 1998. Joshua [Kindle ed.]; C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. 1956. Commentary on Joshua. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; and R.D. Nelson. 1997. Joshua: a commentary. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.

¹Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God. ²And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. ³Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. ⁴To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. ⁵Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out. ⁶Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. ⁷So they cried out to the LORD; and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, brought the sea upon them, and covered them. And your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. Then you dwelt in the wilderness a long time. ⁸And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you. But I gave them into your hand, that you might possess their land, and I destroyed them from before you. ⁹Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose to make war against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. ¹⁰But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore, he continued to bless you. So, I delivered you out of his hand. ¹¹Then you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the men of Jericho fought against you—also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand. ¹²I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, also the two kings of the Amorites, but not with your sword or with your bow. ¹³I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.’ ¹⁴“Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the Gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! ¹⁵And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the Gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” ¹⁶So the people answered and said: “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; ¹⁷for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. ¹⁸And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will

serve the LORD, for He is our God.”¹⁹ But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.”²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign Gods, then He will turn, and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.”²¹ And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD!”²² So Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him.” And they said, “We are witnesses!”²³ “Now therefore,” he said, “put away the foreign Gods which are among you and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel.”²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!”²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

Consider, then, Joshua’s concern. Gathered at Shechem (1), Joshua began to speak to the nation about God’s faithfulness in the past (2-13). He did this to start a covenant renewal process, after which the people would make a vow to continue to follow God after Joshua’s departure (16-17, 21, 25). The structure of Joshua’s message resembles covenant treaties used in the Ancient Near East, such as suzerainty treaties between a lord and a vassal (Howard, 1998). By delivering his message in this manner, Joshua called his brethren to account for God’s work in their midst and challenged them to obedience as an expression of gratitude.

From an apologetic perspective, the message Joshua delivered was a type of preaching for discipleship, whereby the followers of God were given reasons to remain faithful. This concern would have been a matter of his legacy for Joshua since Israel’s future after his departure was anything but sure from the human perspective. While God’s faithfulness was never in doubt, the experience of Israel under Joshua’s leadership and before was marked by times of disobedience and failure, such as the sin of Achan and later defeat at Ai (Josh. 7). Sadly, the concerns about the generation after Joshua were realized in the repeated cycle of sin and judgment under the judges of Israel. Thus, Joshua’s problem was to present a final message based on the evidence of God’s faithfulness and the call to Israel to persevere.

Consider, also, Joshua’s apologetic argument, which followed a cumulative-case, abductive approach of layering evidence upon evidence. He began with a reminder of

God's deeds with Abraham (2-3), then recounting Jacob's descent into Egypt and Moses's leadership (4-5). He rehearsed several instances of God's provision for Israel after delivering them from Pharaoh (6-10), including how Canaan was conquered (11-13). God's goodness, explained Joshua, provided Israel with "a land for which [they] did not labor, and cities which [they] did not build" (13).

At this point in his message, Joshua's approach changed from recalling God's blessings to challenging Israel to "fear the LORD, [to] serve Him in sincerity and truth, and [to] put away the [false] Gods [their] fathers served" (14). He made his case based on God's acts, called the people to obedience and true worship, and then deliver the most memorable part of his message is. "Choose...this day whom you will serve," Joshua demanded, followed by, "as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (15).

Before examining the rationale for this demand and declaration by Joshua, recall that the purpose of his message was to set up the basis for Israel's renewal of their divinely initiated covenant. Joshua presented an apologetic in favor of Israel continuing to live in obedience to God, an argument leading to a conclusion. Considered in the form of a syllogism, Joshua's idea may be conceived as follows:

P1: God has been faithful from Abraham to Joshua.

P2: God will always be faithful to Israel.

P3: A proper response to God's faithfulness is to serve Him alone.

C: Therefore, Joshua will serve God, and so should Israel.

In this argument, the abductive structure is discernible, as the evidence accumulates and leads to the inference that it is logical to choose to serve God. The argument is not deductive or inductive, as far as the premises are not undeniable, especially since some in Israel did not necessarily agree that continuing to follow God was best, nor that He had always provided sufficiently. Though those who questioned God in this way were in disobedience, Joshua was not concerned to show that his

message was valid and seemingly irrefutable if the premises are true to justify his actions. He carefully weighed the evidence and made his choice, inviting others to do the same.

Finally, consider Joshua's invitation. Joshua invited people to serve God in v. 15, and they answered that they would not serve any God but the LORD (16). After doing this, the people gave their argument as to why they were making this choice, citing in a manner like Joshua how God had provided (17-18). Then, in what Nelson (1997) describes as "a deep paradox" (276), Joshua proceeded to tell the people that they were not able to do what they were committing to because God's holiness and jealousy would lead to their destruction in the event of disobedience (19-20). As the people responded in protest and restated their promises of obedience to God, Joshua finally called them to witness against themselves in the event of future failings, concluding with a command that the people "put away the foreign Gods which [were] among them, and [to] incline [their] heart to the LORD God of Israel" (23). The people responded that they would do so (24) and renewed the covenant (25).

Aside from Joshua's enigmatic response and challenge to the people's promises of obedience, this invitation reveals that Joshua would not force a conclusion upon his audience. He presented the evidence and left it to them to decide. Even his response to their decision shows his concern for carefully explaining the facts and expectations of his apologetic message. On a practical level, Joshua's example of moderation and refusal to accept what proved to be Israel's half-hearted response (cf. Judg. 1:27-2:6) reminds all apologists of the power of abductive argumentation—presenting an argument and appealing need not involve coercion or tolerance for what amounts to an emotional rush to judgment by the hearers. Urgency and passion are proper in apologetics; manipulation and hastiness are not.

Further, what Joshua represents in his farewell address relates to the present consideration of moral apologetical engagement with Mormonism in two ways that will be discussed further below. First, abduction as an appeal to ultimate beliefs concerning who God is and what He has done provides an insight into the way humans come to form beliefs and change existing beliefs, viz., by the cumulative weight of evidence (both

rational and affective) and how such weight strengthens an argument or unravels a misplaced or misguided line of evidence. Second, given Mormonism's penchant for seeking to coalesce diverse types of evidence when seeking converts (e.g., historical claims, emotional experiences, etc.), an abductive approach such as modeled by Joshua's abductively built case for continued trust in the God of Israel amid competing claims on the religious commitments of his hearers provides Christian apologists with a template of sorts to engage their Mormon interlocutors.

1.6.3. Doctrine of God

Sometimes referred to as Theology Proper (Dorman 2001), the doctrine of God tries to explain who God is in His essence and attributes. The relevance of this definition for the current discussion is its relationship to a fundamental question at stake in apologetic dialogue with Mormons: who is God, and what is He like? One's view of God is central to all other religious beliefs and especially pertinent to apologetics touching on the nature of the divine. For Christians, God is one essence in three eternal persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—immaterial and simple having omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omnibenevolence (Geisler 2011). For Mormons, there are many Gods, and the God of this current world was once a man, and all Mormon men may eventually reach their godhood (Martin 2016).

1.6.4. Metaethics

Metaethics is a foundational consideration in ethics, asking why ethical concerns attain in the realm of human affairs and what they reveal. As defined by Sayre-McCord (2014: 1):

Metaethics is the attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk, and practice...it counts within its domain a broad range of questions...including: Is morality more a matter of taste than truth? Are moral standards culturally relative? Are there moral facts? If there are moral facts, what is their origin? How is it that they set an appropriate standard for our behavior? How might moral facts be related to other facts?... And how do we learn about the moral facts if there are any?

As related to the discussion of Mormonism herein, the metaethical considerations reveal what will be described as the tension between Mormon ethical claims of a normative sense (what is right to do/wrong to do) and their metaethical derivative bases (or not) in the Mormon doctrine of God (cf. Beckwith *et al.* 2002). Concomitantly, Sayre-McCord (2014) explains, “Metaethics explores as well the connection between values, reasons for action, and human motivation, asking how it is that moral standards might provide us with reasons to do or refrain from doing as it demands, and it addresses many of the issues commonly bound up with the nature of freedom and its significance (or not) for moral responsibility” (39).

1.6.5. Moral Apologetics

The defense of the Christian faith by arguing for objective moral standards is a segue to arguing for the existence of a Moral Lawgiver (Baggett & Walls 2011). Moral apologetics may be approached via a Thomistic/Natural Law approach (Budziszewski 2009; Rice 1999), a Divine Command Theory (Walls & Baggett 2016), a Moral Knowledge/Awareness approach (cf. Kant and Lewis), a Human Dignity/Worth approach (cf. the personalism of Wojtyla), or a Practical approach (cf. Evans, 2018). The relevance of this definition for the present study relates to the overall strategy of argument that will be proposed for apologetic dialogue with Mormons; one that centers on the fundamental goodness of God vis-à-vis moral considerations and how such moral concerns both reveal who God is and indicate the nature of His being.

1.6.6. Moral Realism

Moral realism is an approach to metaethics that concludes that “moral properties are real and that these properties are in some sense independent from what people think, believe and judge” (Fisher 2011: 39). Within the broader construct of metaethics, moral realism is one expression of cognitivism and is the basis for such considerations as the correspondence theory of truth (i.e., that what is true is what is real, and that what is real is what is true) (cf. Geisler 2011: 84-85). Regarding the significance of moral realism for the present research, two points are especially relevant: 1) moral realism represents a shared commitment between Mormons and Christians, therein providing a common

ground for conversation; and 2) as will be shown below, the understanding of the source of moral realities differs significantly for Mormons and Christians, with the latter finding their origin in God and the former as something eternally existing outside of God and to which he must give his allegiance.

1.6.7. Passional Reason

The combined rational and affective capacity possessed by normally functioning humans, by which they can make decisions regarding religious beliefs that are based on both rationally assessed factual evidentiary content and affectively considered subjective content (cf. Wainwright 1995: 5). This definition of passional reason represents an attempt to bring together the rational and affective aspects of the human mind-heart unity that assess religious truth claims an individual's choice to form religious beliefs based on those truth claims. Passional reason relates to the present study as a significant point of common ground between Mormons and Christians, providing a point of origin in discussions concerning the affective elements of religious epistemology and whether such features are rationally defensible.

1.7. Overview of Presentation

This overview of the chapters presented hereafter summarizes the argument offered to help Christians provide a reasonable defense for the historical view of God contra the Mormon God. Each chapter contributes to the building, cumulative, abductive argument against Mormonism and Christianity.

1.7.1. Chapters 2-5: The DEUS Challenge

The DEUS (Latin for God) Challenge is the structure given to the four chapters represented by the DEUS across that convey the gist of the four-pronged apologetic to Mormons regarding the doctrine of God, moral realism, moral apologetics, and passional reason. Each chapter includes a question, response, evidence, and practical application.

1.7.1.1. Chapter 2: DEUS Challenge – D: The Deity Question

The Deity Question asks: Are the Christian and Mormon God the same? The response is: The Mormon God is not the Christian God. The evidence focuses on the doctrine of God in classical trinitarian theism contrasted with Mormon teaching. The practical application imagines a conversation with a Mormon about the doctrine of God.

1.7.1.2. Chapter 3: DEUS Challenge – E: The Ethics Question

The Ethics Question asks: What is the Mormon account of morality? The response is: Mormon morality derives from moral standards outside God. The evidence focuses on moral realism and its relationship to other metaethical paradigms and how orthodox trinitarianism differs in its approach to moral realism from the system of Mormonism. The practical application includes an imagined conversation with a Mormon missionary who affirms the same moral convictions as Christians.

1.7.1.3. Chapter 4: DEUS Challenge – U: The Uprightness Question

The Uprightness Question asks: Does Mormon morality conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God's existence? The response is: Mormon morality does not conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God's existence. The evidence considers moral apologetics about general revelation, its value to apologetics, a Thomistic and divine command theory approach to the moral argument for God's existence, and how orthodox trinitarianism rationally proceeds from morality to God's existence. However, Mormonism fails to do so based on its presuppositions. The practical application presents a conversation with a Mormon missionary centering on the moral argument for God's existence.

1.7.1.4. Chapter 5: DEUS Challenge – S: The Subjectivity Question

The Subjectivity Question asks: Is the "burning in the bosom" reliable evidence for Mormon claims? The response is: Mormon affective claims contradict rational claims for Mormon doctrine. The evidence explores a defense of passionate reason as having legitimate epistemic value, then looks to expose the self-contradictory nature of

Mormonism's affective and rational claims. The practical application works through a dialogue with a Mormon missionary who claims they know Mormonism is true based on their experience of the "burning in the bosom."

1.7.2. Chapter 6: Conclusion

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with an overview of the research findings, draws implications and recommendations and offers a final plea regarding the importance of ongoing engagement with Mormons based on the doctrine of God, moral realism, a moral argument for God's existence, and passion reason brings the work to its end.

1.8. Summary and Conclusion

The research presented here argues that Mormonism is a new religious movement that looks to supplant Christian teaching regarding, among other things, the doctrine of God. Christians in South Africa and worldwide should be aware that Mormonism is increasing, and many of its converts come from within Christian denominations. Thus, there is a need to engage in substantive academic research and practical ministry training to enable Christians to better respond to Mormon errors through a well-reasoned apologetic encounter. Further, given the importance of how one views God, Christians have a unique opportunity to use DEUS Challenge (the Deity Question: the doctrine of God; the Ethics Question: moral realism; the Uprightness Question: the moral argument for God's existence; and the Subjectivity Question: passion reason) in a stand-alone presentation or as part of cumulative-case apologetic methodology to respond to Mormon aberrations and as a segue to sharing the only hope of salvation in Jesus Christ. This introductory chapter has offered a justification for the research that follows based on these and related reasons, hoping to provide a helpful tool to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19) and keep Mormons from doing the same.

CHAPTER 2. DEUS CHALLENGE – D: THE DEITY QUESTION

In this chapter, the challenge to Mormonism begins with the “D” in the DEUS acrostic, the Deity Challenge. The question is: Are the Christian and Mormon Gods the same? The response is: The Mormon God is not the Christian God. The evidence for this response focuses on the doctrine of God, including a discussion of the God of classical theism in his philosophical and theological formulations; a discussion of the Gods of Mormonism in their classical polytheistic presentation as well the more contemporary development of monarchotheism. The chapter concludes with a summarization of the differences between the Christian and Mormon teachings about the doctrine of God.

2.1. Question: Are the Christian and Mormon Gods the Same?

Historically, the distinctions between the Christian and Mormon doctrine of God have provided much of the impetus in Mormonism’s zeal for restoring the true church and its teaching, i.e., Mormonism claims that the truth about God was corrupted and that the revelations to Joseph Smith and others have been in the interest of correcting the errors of the generations of believers that came before them (Beckwith *et al.* 2000; Fair Mormon 2020). However, there is sometimes confusion on the differences, even to the point of some Mormon missionaries claiming, and some Christians affirming that the Mormon teaching about God is the same as the Christian teaching; the language is the same—Father, Son, Spirit—and claims to the power and goodness sound similar. So, the argument sometimes is made that the differences between Mormonism and Christianity are more semantical than substantive and that Mormons are Christians (Ibid.). Thus, the question in this section is: Are the Christian and Mormon Gods the Same?

2.2. Response: The Mormon God is not the Christian God

Claims to the contrary aside, a careful examination of the philosophical and theological bases for the orthodox trinitarian teaching about God reveals significant differences between the Mormon and Christian doctrines of God. Further, even with Mormonism, there is less than unanimity between the official polytheistic teachings and a more philosophical nuance in contemporary Mormon scholarship called monarchotheism.

Thus, the question of the sameness between Mormon and Christian teaching about God is responded to in the negative: the Mormon God is not the Christian God.

2.3. Evidence: Doctrine of God

2.3.1. The God of Classical Theism

Geisler (2011: 16) explains that the God of classical theism “is the foundation of Christian theology. If the God of traditional Christian theism does not exist, logically, evangelical theology crumbles. Attempting to construct an evangelical theology without traditional theism's superstructure is like putting together a house without a frame. Theism is the metaphysical precondition for evangelical theology.” Given its seminal importance to all Christian (and Mormon) theology, how might the doctrine of the God of classical theism be developed? The answer is a mixture of philosophical and theological considerations.

2.3.1.1. Philosophical Considerations

Craig (2008: 94) explains that “ever since Plato, philosophers and theologians have tried to provide a rational basis for belief in God.” He then continues to consider what may be viewed as the traditional arguments used by those arguing for God’s existence from a philosophical (i.e., based on natural revelation) perspective. These arguments, what may be referred to as the major philosophical arguments for the existence of God in classical theism, are the ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments. Discursively considered, each of these may be presented as follows.

2.3.1.1.1. The Ontological Argument

As Evans and Manis (2009: 29) explain, “ontological arguments attempt to show that the very concept of God implies his reality: that is, that one’s being able to conceive of God somehow clearly implies that God exists.” Usually associated with Anselm (b. 1033 – d. 1109), the argument has two primary forms, the Perfect Being form, and the Necessary Being form. The ontological argument from Perfect Being is as follows (Evans & Manis 2009: 29):

P1: God is the greatest possible being.

P2: God exists at least in the mind.

P3: A being who exists only in the mind is not as great as a being who exists in reality and the mind.

P4: If God existed only in the mind, he would not be the greatest possible being.

C: Therefore, God must exist in reality and the mind.

2.3.1.1.2. The Cosmological Argument

Craig (2008: 96) states that “the cosmological argument assumes that something exists and argues from the existence of that thing to the existence of a First Cause or a Sufficient Reason of the cosmos.” Though there are variations of the cosmological argument, its primary expression may be described in syllogistic form as follow (Geisler 2011: 23):

P1: Everything that had a beginning had a cause.

P2: The universe had a beginning.

C: Therefore, the universe had a Cause. This Cause is God.

2.3.1.1.3. The Teleological Argument

Based on Paley’s (b. 1743 – d. 1805) analogy of a watchmaker, the teleological argument concludes that just “as every watch has a maker, and since the universe is exceedingly more complex in its operation than a watch, it follows that there must be a Universe Maker” (Geisler 2011: 26). Discursively, this argument may be explained as follows (Ibid.):

P1: All designs imply a designer.

P2: There is great design in the universe.

C: Therefore, there must be a Great Designer of the universe. This Great Designer is God.

2.3.1.1.4. The Moral Argument

Though discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, the basic moral argument—what Geisler (2011: 29) explains as having “roots...found in Rom. 2:12-15, where the apostle Paul speaks of humankind being without excuse because there is a law written on their hearts—is as follows (Evans 2018):

P1: Moral norms exist and have authority.

P2: Given the authority of moral norms, humans must have a reliable and consistent motivation to pursue such moral norms.

P3: A motivation to pursue moral norms is unlikely without an ultimate moral agent with all knowledge, power, and goodness.

C: An ultimate moral agent exists, and that agent is God.

2.3.1.1.5. Conclusion about God from Philosophical Considerations

What is to be adduced about the God of classical theism from these philosophical arguments, the ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral evidence presented here? While it is not necessarily so that these philosophical arguments lead to the Christian God, per se, they do provide what Geisler (2011: 16) describes as the “metaphysical precondition,” since “everything in evangelical theology is based on the metaphysical foundation of theism.” Parrish (in Beckwith *et al.* 2002: 188) explains:

It should be evident that the different properties of the classical God logically fit together.... This does not mean that there are no questions or problems that the classical theist must face. But it seems to be the case that the attributes fit together very well and often imply each other. If there are reasonable grounds for believing that any of these attributes correctly describes God, there will likely be good ground for saying that all of them do.

Thus, from this metaphysical precondition, i.e., the philosophical case for God in the various arguments discussed above, the following theses may be stated as a summary description of essential attributes of the God of classical theism, along with at least one of the philosophical arguments from which the attributes derive (adapted from Parrish in Beckwith *et al.* 2002: 187-188).

1. God is the greatest possible being based on the ontological argument.
2. God is personal and immaterial based on moral and cosmological arguments.
3. God is the sovereign creator and sustainer of all other beings, based on the cosmological and teleological arguments.
4. God is necessary and self-existent based on ontological and cosmological arguments.
5. God is unique, as based on the ontological argument.
6. God is omniscient based on teleological and moral arguments.
7. God is omnipresent, as based on the cosmological argument.
8. God is immutable, and eternal based on the ontological argument.
9. God is all good and benevolent, the source of moral value based on the moral argument.
10. God is infinite and transcendent, based on cosmological and ontological arguments.

The significance of this overview of classical theism's argument for God's existence and nature at this point in the discussion is two-fold: 1) the ten points given intend to demonstrate the coherence of the Christian approach to discerning and explaining God's existence; and 2) the particulars of the points, especially concerning the fundamentally good nature of God as inseparable from his unique divine attributes

provide a foundation for better understanding and critiquing the very different approach taken by Mormons.

2.3.1.2. Theological Formulation of the Doctrine of God

The theological considerations regarding the God of classical theism, as stated in their Christian form (i.e., as distinct from Jewish or Muslim monotheisms), may best be described as what Parrish (in Beckwith *et al.* 2002: 188) deems “the specifically Trinitarian version of classical monotheism [that] is unique to Christianity.” To better understand this Christian understanding of classical monotheism, the following areas of exploration will prove helpful: the doctrine of God in Scripture; the doctrine of God in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (representing ancient Christian thought); and the doctrine of God in the Belgic Confession (expressing Reformational Christian belief).

2.3.1.2.1. *In Scripture*

Regarding the role of Scripture in providing both the content and limits of a discussion of the doctrine of God, it is helpful to recall Paul’s words in 2 Tim. 3:16 regarding the purpose of Scripture in prescribing both doctrine and practice. Paul writes, *πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν πρὸς ἔλεγχον πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν πρὸς παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ*, which may be translated as, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”⁷ As a logical and implicit consequence of Scripture’s divine inspiration (θεόπνευστος), Paul explains that it “is profitable” (ὠφέλιμος) for prescribing both theological reasons (διδασκαλίαν πρὸς ἔλεγχον; *i.e.*, teaching true doctrine and reproofing false doctrine) and practical reasons (πανόρθωσιν πρὸς παιδείαν; *i.e.*, identifying unsound application and explaining correct living) reasons (cf. Zodhiates 1992). It is the former of these purposes of Scripture, its theological significance that bears most directly on the consideration of the orthodox doctrine of God contra the teaching of Mormonism.⁸ What, then, is the biblical teaching concerning the

⁷ All Greek renderings are taken from the Greek text as presented in Green (2005), and, unless otherwise noted, English translations of biblical texts are taken from the New King James Version.

⁸ This is not to say, however, that there are no practical reasons in Scripture that contribute to formulating a critique of Mormon theology; rather, only that the focus at this point in this research is primarily upon the

doctrine of God? Three related considerations will help answer this question: a discussion of the biblical names of God, the biblical attributes of God, and the biblical teaching concerning God as Trinity.⁹

The names of God given in the Bible reveal much about who he is and are, therefore, essential for considering how the Scriptures inform the Christian doctrine of God. Dorman (2001: 41) aptly explains the significance of the name of God for understanding the doctrine of God: “When we open the pages of Scripture...we enter a world where names often tell us something about the one who is named.... In like manner, the divine names found in Scripture give insight into God’s character or attributes. Any discussion of the Christian doctrine of God stands to benefit, therefore, from a survey of names by which God has revealed himself throughout redemptive history.” Here, then, is an overview of God’s biblical names.

From the Old Testament, critical names of God for consideration are El/Elohim (and associated El-compounds), Adonai, and Yahweh. Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) appears in the first verse of Genesis, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Bible, 1982).¹⁰ Dorman (2001: 41) explains that the Hebrew El (אֱלֹהִים) is a “basic word for deity found in various forms throughout ancient Semitic languages [and] may derive from a...root meaning ‘power’ or ‘preeminence’ [while] the plural Elohim is the word most frequently translated ‘God’ in the Old Testament [and is] sometimes termed the ‘plural of majesty’ to emphasize the supreme greatness of the one True God.” Additional uses of El in the Old Testament are as follows: El-Shaddai (אֱלֹהֵי שָׁדַי; Gen. 17:1), God Almighty;¹¹ El-Elyon (אֱלֹהֵי עֶלְיוֹן; Gen. 14:18-21), God Most High; and El-Olam (אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם; Gen. 21:33), the everlasting God.

theological considerations. Practical considerations that derive from the Mormon doctrine of God versus the Christian perspective are discussed, however, in the chapters 4 and 5 below.

⁹ This approach to the biblical doctrine of God through his names and attributes leading into a discussion of God as Trinity is based on chapter 3 in Dorman (2001: 41-52). See also Geisler (2011: 407-612) and Erickson (1998: 287-370).

¹⁰ All Hebrew renderings are taken from the Hebrew text as presented in Green (2005).

¹¹ Additional passages could be cited, but the intention here is not to provide an exhaustive treatment of each name of God.

Moving from the El and El-compound names for God in the Old Testament, two other Old Testament names are Adonai (אֲדֹנָי; 1 Kin. 2:26), Lord or Master; and Yahweh (יְהוָה; Ex. 1:13-14, God of the Covenant). Concerning Yahweh, Dorman (2001: 42) explains:

The name Yahweh is an educated guess of the original pronunciation for the Hebrew name YHWH.... It is sometimes transliterated as Jahveh or Jehovah. English translations often render it “the LORD” (as opposed to “Lord,” which is a title and not a proper name). Linguists generally agree that this name is connected with a form of the Hebrew verb “to be.” YHWH is thus variously rendered as “He who is,” “He who is what he is,” or “the self-existent one” [i.e., I AM].

Dorman (42) concludes that Yahweh is arguably “the most important Old Testament name for God.”

In the New Testament, the following names for God are significant: Theos, Kurios, and Pater. Theos (θεός; Matt. 4:7) is the “generic term for deity in the Greek language...most frequently used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew Elohim.... In the New Testament it is the most common name for God” (Dorman 2001: 43). Kurios (κύριος; Matt. 1:20) is “translated ‘Lord’ in English Bibles.... In the Septuagint, it is used to translate [Yahweh].... In the New Testament is sometimes used of God, though it is usually applied to the risen and ascended Jesus” (43-44). Finally, Pater (πατήρ; Matt. 6:6) is the “divine name [used] by Jesus [to address God] throughout his ministry” (44).

In addition to what the Scripture reveals about God through his names, the attributes of God describe much about him. Geisler (2011: 407) describes a divine attribute as any “characteristic that can be attributed to God’s nature—an essential trait of God.” God’s attributes in the Bible may be divided between incommunicable (i.e., unique to God alone) and communicable (i.e., shared analogously with humanity).

Scripture reveals God’s infinitude, independence, immutability, and indivisibility regarding his incommunicable attributes. Concerning God’s infinitude, Christian teaching is that God has no spatial or chronological limitations but is omnipresent, eternal, and transcendent (Ps. 90:2; 113:4-6; 139:7-10). God’s independence relates to his aseity (self-existence), emphasizing that he is uncaused, non-contingent, and immortal (Isa. 43:10; 1

Tim. 1:17). Immutability describes God's unchanging nature and character (Mal 3:6), and divine indivisibility relates to God's fundamental simplicity (rather than complexity) as an uncreated being (Deut. 6:4).

God's communicable attributes, those humanity shares with him in an analogical sense by being his image-bearers, include that God is personal, sovereign, holy, righteous, wise, good, and love. To speak of God as personal relates to his having a relationship both within himself among the Persons of the Godhead, marked by both intellectual and emotional capacities (Ex. 20:1-2). God's sovereignty relates to his freedom to do that which pleases him (Ps. 115:3) and his unmatched power and ability to do all consistent with his character (Luke 1:37; Tit.1:2; 2 Tim. 2:13). Holiness refers both to God's essential otherness (not something he shares with humanity) and his unchanging perfection and purity (Ps. 99:5; Matt. 6:9). Righteousness refers to God's internal moral perfections as the source and expression of all ethical goodness (Matt. 5:48; 1 John 1:5). God's wisdom is the perfect expression of all knowledge in a manner that reflects his holy and righteous character and attains to the highest means for expressing his character. Goodness relates to how God's mercy (i.e., his covenant faithfulness) is an expression of his impeccable character (Ps. 118:29). Finally, love is both the fundamental eternal disposition and motivation for all intrapersonal motivations between the Persons of the Godhead (i.e., the Father loves the Son and the Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father and the Son—together understood as the perichoretic or circumincessional love of God; John 17:24), and his perfect and persistent desire for the best for his creatures (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8).

The orthodox doctrine of God also declares that God is a community of three eternal Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—and yet one eternal divine essence; that God is a Trinity. Lewis and Demarest (1996: 306) explain that “the doctrine of the Trinity represents the heart of both Christian theology and the Christian life...profoundly bound up with what it means to be a Christian.” Though an in-depth treatment of this doctrine is beyond the present scope of inquiry, the essential biblical understanding of God's tri-unity may be expressed discursively as follows:

P1: There is one God (Deut. 6:4).

P2: This one God is simultaneously revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

P2a: At Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:16)

P2b: In Jesus' giving of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19)

P2c: In Paul's benediction (2 Cor. 13:14)

P2d: In Peter's description of salvation (1 Pet. 1:2)

C: God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a Trinity of distinct persons eternally existing as one divine essence, related by love (cf. 1 John 4:8).¹²

In response to those who allege that the doctrine of the Trinity “did not develop until after the New Testament was written, these and other texts show that the...Church did not ‘invent’ the Trinity. The Christian doctrine of the triune God is a product of biblical revelation, not philosophical speculation” (Dorman 2001: 52).

2.3.1.2.2. In the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

Moving from the biblical teaching concerning the doctrine of God, in this section, the focus is upon the ancient Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and what it presents as the teaching of the post-apostolic Church concerning their understanding of the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity. However, before continuing directly to discuss the relevant part of this creed, it is helpful to briefly discuss the role of creeds in the life of Christian theology.

¹² Beckwith (in Beckwith & Parrish 2000: 268) presents a similar syllogism as a logical explanation of the biblical teaching concerning God as Trinity. P1: There is only one God; P2: There are three Persons called God; C: Therefore, the three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are the one God. He makes a similar case for the divinity of Jesus using the following syllogism based on the juxtaposition of Isa. 44:24, “I, myself, Yahweh, made all things;” John 1:3, “Through [Christ] all things came to be;” and Col. 1:16, “In [Christ] were created all things in heaven and on earth.” P1: All persons that are Christ are universe creators; P2: All universe creators are Yahweh; C: Therefore, Christ is Yahweh (244).

Regarding their importance for Christian orthodoxy, Schaff (1983) explains both the doctrinal and pastoral significance of the ancient creeds (of which the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is the most significant and complete relative to classical theism). Pastorally, Schaff aptly states that through careful consideration of the creeds, believers across the Christian communion may “better...understand and love each other” (vi) and that “creeds will live as long as faith survives, with the duty to confess...faith before men” (viii).

Doctrinally, and this is especially pertinent to the consideration of the orthodox Christian doctrine of God vis-à-vis Mormonism, Schaff (1983: 4) recognizes that, insofar as these ancient creeds faithfully adhere to biblical teaching, they represent a “form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of belief, which the framers regard as necessary for salvation, or at least for the well-being of the Christian Church.... They embody the faith of generations and the most valuable results of religious controversies. They still shape and regulate the theological thinking and public teaching of the churches of Christendom.” Though their authority is derived from and subject to the Bible, Schaff (1983: 8-9) goes on to explain that “the value of creeds depends upon the measure of their agreement with the Scriptures,” they still serve a vital role in helping “to distinguish the Church from the world...orthodoxy from heresy.” Thus, the ancient creeds, referred to as the “ecumenical symbols of the ancient Catholic Church” (Schaff 1983: 10), offer brief, concise, and somewhat philosophical synthesis of “the orthodox doctrine of God and Christ.”

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (hereafter NPC) developed as an example of ancient creedal Christianity. After its original composition in the first ecumenical Church Council in Nicaea in 325, modifications were made to the creed. Its current form was completed at the second ecumenical council in Constantinople in 381 (Schaff 1983: 25). The context of the first drafting in Nicaea addressed Arian teachings regarding the nature of Jesus. The enlarged statement in Constantinople was precipitated by the errors of the Pneumatomachians and their denial of the deity of the Holy Spirit. While there has been no small amount of controversy between Eastern and Western Christians over the

discussion of the Holy Spirit in the creed, the NPC provides a strong statement of Trinitarian orthodoxy; for the present research, only parts 1, 2, and 8 are presented here.

1. I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made.

8. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the Prophets.

Relative to the doctrine of God, parts one, two, and eight of the NPC merit further comment, though their contents are intentionally (for the most part) in language that the original recipients would have understood, even though philosophical and unfamiliar to some Christians today.

Part one of the NPC describes God as Father, Almighty, and Maker. Part two describes God as the one of whom Jesus is the only begotten Son and of the same substance with Jesus. Part eight presents God sending forth the Holy Spirit and receiving worship along with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Regarding the NPC's trinitarian teaching, Lewis and Demarest (1996: 313) summarize its content as "upholding the Son's proper coeternity and consubstantiality with the Father. Christ was not created but was begotten by a timeless generation from the substance of the Father. The [NPC] completed its trinitarian confession by acknowledging the analogous reality of the Holy Spirit."

2.3.1.2.3. In the Belgic Confession

Building upon, though wholly consistent with the ancient creeds, the Protestant Reformation saw a flourishing in the writing of confessions (i.e., more developed statements of faith than a creed) as concomitant with the various communities that

developed in the wake of the break with Roman Catholicism by the Magisterial Reformers (i.e., Luther, Zwingli, Cranmer, Calvin). In this section, one of these confessions, the Belgic Confession of the Dutch Reformed churches (written in 1561), is discussed regarding its doctrine of God. (Though not discussed here, others that have similar language concerning the doctrine of God include the Thirty-nine Articles of Anglicanism, the Augsburg Confession of Lutheranism, Westminster Confession of Faith of the Presbyterians, the Second London Confession of the Calvinistic Baptists, and the Savoy Declaration of the Calvinistic Congregationalists.) The pertinent portions of the Belgic Confession are Articles 1 and 8 (see footnote 13). Their significance for the present research is two-fold: 1) concerning the claims regarding the divine nature that Christians make, the Articles demonstrate continuity with ancient and reformational formulations concerning the essential unity and tri-personal nature of God; and 2) what Mormonism teaches (as discussed further below) concerning the divine nature is contrary to both ancient and reformational formulations, Mormon claims to the “recovery” of biblical teachings in these areas notwithstanding.¹³

2.3.1.3. Summarizing the Christian Doctrine of God

Having taken account of the philosophical and theological bases for the Christian conception of the trinitarian doctrine of God, the following points may be adduced.

¹³ **Article 1: That there is One Only God.** We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good (Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2005: 23).

Article 8: That God is One in Essence, Yet Nevertheless Distinguished in Three Persons. According to this truth and this Word of God, we believe in one only God, who is the one single essence, in which are three persons, really, truly, and eternally distinct, according to their incommunicable properties: namely, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Father is the cause, origin and beginning of all things visible and invisible; the Son is the word, wisdom, and image of the Father; the Holy Ghost is the eternal power and might, proceeding from the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, God is not by this distinction divided into three, since the Holy Scriptures teach us, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, have each his personality, distinguished by their properties; but in such wise that these three persons are but one only God. Hence then, it is evident, that the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, and likewise the Holy Ghost is neither the Father nor the Son. Nevertheless, these persons thus distinguished are not divided, nor intermixed: for the Father hath not assumed the flesh, nor hath the Holy Ghost, but the Son only. The Father hath never been without his Son, or without his Holy Ghost. For they are all three co-eternal and co-essential. (Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2005: 28).

1. There are philosophical arguments based on ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral grounds for the existence of a necessary, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, omnibenevolent God.
2. The Bible teaches, through its presentation of the names and attributes of God, as well as the descriptions of his actions, that God is One, simultaneously existing as Father, Son, and Spirit.
3. The ancient creedal and Reformational confessional formulations show a historical understanding of the philosophical and biblical teaching of the classical doctrine of God, and specifically of trinitarian monotheism.

Now, the discussion turns to a brief consideration of the Mormon doctrine of God.

2.3.2. The Gods of Mormonism

Some conclude that Mormonism has changed—even concerning its doctrine of God—and it is not sure where it will eventually develop as it continues to bear the influence of dialogue with and challenges from classical Christian orthodoxy in philosophical and theological matters. As Mormon scholar Millet (Mouw & Millet 2015) exclaims regarding his perspective on engagement between Evangelicals and Mormons in the years 2000 to 2014, “the...dialogue was a distinctive and memorable experience, one that has changed us, for the better” (10). Evangelical scholar Blomberg (in Mouw & Millet 2015) goes so far toward rapprochement between Mormons and Evangelicals to claim,

When one moves beyond Nicaea and recognizes the diversity within the teaching of Joseph Smith and the difference between what [Mormons] have officially canonized and what is...widely accepted, more options for legitimate evangelical and legitimate Mormon belief emerge. Occasionally, that pushes the two faith communities farther apart; more often...closer together (123).

However, current or future developments brought on by discussion with orthodox Christianity notwithstanding, when assessing current official Mormon teaching regarding

the doctrine of God, there are two related though divergent approaches found within Mormonism—classical Mormon polytheism and Mormon monarchotheism.

2.3.2.1. Classical Mormon Polytheism

Classical Mormon polytheism reflects the standard teaching of Mormonism's canon. Consider its answer to the following: Who is God? What about the Trinity?

2.3.2.1.1. *Who is God?*

Perhaps no better source for the Mormon doctrine of God is to be found than in the words of Joseph Smith. In 1844 he delivered his seminal “The King Follett Sermon” where he explained the following concerning God:

I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of a being God is. What sort of a being was God in the beginning? Open your ears and hear, all ye ends of the earth, for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible, and to tell you the designs of God in relation to the human race, and why He interferes with the affairs of man. God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make himself visible—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with Him, as one man talks and communes with another (Roberts 1912: 302-317).

Amplifying this teaching by Smith is the official Mormon *Bible Dictionary* (2013: s.v. God), which defines God as follows:

[God is] the supreme Governor of the universe and the Father of mankind. We learn from the revelations that have been given that there are three separate persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. From latter-day revelation, we learn that the Father and the Son have tangible bodies of flesh and bone and that the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit without flesh and bone (D&C 130:22–23).

When one speaks of God, it is generally the Father who is referred to; that is, Elohim. All mankind are His children. The personage known as Jehovah in Old Testament times, and who is usually identified in the Old Testament as LORD (in small capitals), is the Son, known as Jesus Christ, and who is also a God. Jesus

works under the direction of the Father and is in complete harmony with Him. All mankind are His brethren and sisters, He being the eldest of the spirit children of Elohim. Many of the things that the scripture says were done by God were actually done by the LORD (Jesus). Thus, the scripture says that “God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), but we know that it was actually the LORD (Jesus) who was the creator (John 1:3, 10), or as Paul said, God created all things by Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:9). The Holy Ghost is also a God and is variously called the Holy Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit of God, etc.

Although God created all things and is the ruler of the universe, being omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent (through His Spirit), mankind has a special relationship to Him that differentiates man from all other created things: man is literally God’s offspring, made in His image, whereas all other things are but the work of His hands (Acts 17:28–29).

The God of the scriptures is a holy being. Man is commanded to be holy because God is holy (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2). God can be known only by revelation. He must be revealed or remain forever unknown (Mosiah 4:9). God first revealed Himself to Adam (Moses 5–6) and has repeatedly made Himself known by revelation to chosen patriarchs and prophets since that time. The present translation of John 1:18 and 1 Jn. 4:12 is misleading, for these say that no man has ever seen God. However, the scriptures state that there have been many who have seen Him. The [Joseph Smith Translation or JST] corrects these items to show that no one has seen God except through faith and also that Jesus Christ is the only Way to God (JST John 1:19; JST 1 Jn. 4:12). God the Father and His Son have been manifested by voice, sight, or otherwise at various times, as at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16–17), the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–8), to Stephen (Acts 7:55–56), and to the Nephites (3 Ne. 11:7). The Father and the Son personally visited Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove in the spring of 1820 near Manchester, New York (JS—H 1:11–20).

2.3.2.1.2. What about the Trinity?

Although the word Trinity is not used in the following definition, Mormons use the term Godhead to speak of what orthodox Christian teaching recognizes as the plurality of Persons sharing the one divine essence:

There are three separate personages in the Godhead: God, the Eternal Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost. The Father and the Son have tangible, glorified bodies of flesh and bone, and the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit (see D&C 130:22–23).

Joseph Smith’s teaching in “The King Follett Sermon” again offers the basis of this Mormon view of the divine godhead:

Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God anyhow— three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization. 'Father, I pray not for the world, but I pray for them which thou hast given me.' 'Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.' All are to be crammed into one God, according to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God— he would be a giant or a monster (Roberts 1912: 302-317).

Specific to Jesus Christ, Son of God and second person of the Trinity, foundational Mormon leader Brigham Young taught that Jesus was “begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers” (Young 1861:115), which is to say that Jesus was procreated through sexual intercourse between the Father and Mary. However, the current Mormon hierarchy’s teaching on the incarnation of Jesus does not offer an official position on the matter and has tried to deny Young’s position was an official teaching of the Mormons.

2.3.2.2. Contemporary Mormon Monarchotheism

A recent development within Mormonism is what may be called monarchotheism, which is a more philosophically nuanced approach to the teaching and is also closer (at least in theory) to orthodoxy. Parrish (in Beckwith *et al.* 2002) explains that “it is a trend within contemporary Mormon theology that tends to view God, not merely as the God of this world...but as the ruler of the entire universe. It does not deny that there are other Gods of the same kind as God, but it maintains that God is not subordinate to any gods. He is the ‘Eternal God of all other gods’ (D&C 121:32) and rules over them” (Kindle loc. 3831). This development appears, in part, to be an attempt by Mormon philosophers of religion to better articulate the Mormon God vis-à-vis the problem of evil. For example, R. Dennis Potter’s understanding is that God (though finite) is still making the best decisions he can in a world beset with natural and moral evil since he is the God in charge of the known world and consequently its monarch (Potter 2000). Consider, then, how monarchotheistic views answer the following questions: Who is God? What about the Trinity?

2.3.2.2.1. *Who is God?*

A monarchotheistic Mormon understanding of God is that he is personal and embodied, the organizer of the world, contingent, and dependent, the highest God among many Gods, an exalted man possessed of omniscience and omnipotence, both finite and infinite, immanent but not transcendent, and all good while subject to eternal moral principles outside himself (Beckwith *et al.* 2002: Kindle loc. 3831-3888).

2.3.2.2.2. *What about the Trinity?*

Parrish (in Beckwith *et al.* 2002) explains the following concerning the idea of Trinity in monarchotheistic Mormon teaching:

In monarchotheistic Mormonism, there are many Gods but one ruling Godhead. The Godhead is comprised of three separate “personages”: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Among these three, God the Father is the head...the Father, Son, and Holy spirit are not only distinct persons...but separate beings. The [Mormon] “Trinity” is a form of tritheism: there are three gods—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are one Godhead in virtue of their shared purpose, power, and knowledge...one of these Gods, Jesus, took on a body and then, after his death, was resurrected (Kindle loc. 3888-3917).

2.3.2.3. Distinguishing Mormon Polytheism and Monarchotheism

What comes to the fore when examining the monarchotheistic Mormon perspective compared to the classical Mormon view is not necessarily a different understanding of the doctrine of God between the two, but an emphasis in monarchotheism highlighting that the classical Mormon God is not just a God, but the lead God among the gods. Of note is that the language emphasizes greatness attributed to the Mormon Godhead that places it above, though still as one of the numbers of other Gods of Mormonism. To be sure, the monarchotheistic Mormon Godhead is a matter of highest divine authority, though not exclusive divinity. Both views are still technically polytheistic, but the monarchotheistic development emphasizes the uniqueness and

greatness of the being thought of as God (at least as the Father in Mormonism) compared to other possible divine beings.¹⁴

This may be why select Evangelicals (e.g., Mouw and Blomberg) claim a greater affinity is developing between Mormonism and classical Christian trinitarianism. However, appearance and substance in these matters are not necessarily the same, and in the next section, the research will not only present how the classical Mormon polytheism/monarchotheism differ from orthodox Christian teaching but also how even the most generous assessment of Mormon monarchotheism still requires the recognition that Mormonism denies the central tenet of the Trinity—God is one essence and three eternal Persons. Mormons have three (and more) Gods, while Christianity has one God in three Persons.

2.3.3. The Differences between Christian and Mormon Doctrines of God

Figure 3. summarizes the differences in understanding of the doctrine of God between orthodox trinitarianism and Mormonism (bringing together the essential sameness of its classical polytheism and recent monarchotheism).

¹⁴ For more on this discussion concerning monarchotheism and how it may relate to Ps. 82 and a divine council of the Elohim, see Smoot (2014) for a Mormon approach to the discussion, and Heiser (2015: 23-36) for an orthodox trinitarian perspective and implicit critic of Mormon polytheism.

Figure 3. Christian and Mormon Doctrines of God (adapted from Rhodes 2001)

Christian	Mormon
One God	Many Gods
God exists eternally as a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.	The Father is the highest among the Gods (he was previously a man), the Son is a God, and the Holy Spirit is a God.
God is spirit, immaterial, uncreated, infinite.	The Father and the Son are flesh and bone; the Holy Spirit is spirit.
The second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, became a man at his Incarnation.	Jesus Christ is not eternally God; he is the created first spirit child of the Father.

What becomes readily apparent in this side-by-side comparison is that the fundamental difference between orthodox trinitarianism and Mormonism is the difference between monotheism and polytheism. Additionally, the material composition of the Mormon Father and Son is markedly different from the immaterial, uncreated essence of the Christian Godhead. The most apparent difference between the two is their explanations of Jesus Christ, the difference between a creature and an uncreated being.

2.4. Practically Applying the Deity Question

At this point (and in the final portions of each of the following three chapters), it will help to consider what it might be like to practically apply the different questions associated with the DEUS Challenge in an imagined conversation with a Mormon missionary coming to one's front door. In each instance, the Christian relies upon a helpful dialogue of questions and answers with the Mormon. In each instance, the Christian is taking the initiative in asking the questions. Of course, in an entire dialogue with a Mormon missionary, it would be apropos to let them ask questions, as well. Still,

for the sake of conciseness, the examples here are one-sided, albeit realistic based on the researcher's own experiences with such conversations.

One last caveat is in order before looking at the first practical application—the reader will notice that the goal is to keep the conversation going, so each will end with an invitation to continue the dialogue after further thought; such is the nature of the cumulative-case approach to discussions with Mormons. Time is necessary for truth to sink in, and the Christian apologist need not fear taking their time in the process of working through the Mormon web with someone that they hope to see come out of Mormonism and to the truth of orthodox trinitarian Christianity.

Here, then, is an imaginary conversation based on the Deity Question:

Christian: Hello, there. May I help you?

Mormon: Yes. Hello. I would like to talk to you about my experience with God.

Christian: Certainly, but on one condition.

Mormon: Okay.

Christian: I am a Christian, and I would like to also talk to you about my faith.

Mormon: Sounds excellent! We have the same fundamental beliefs, so this will be a time of sharing the truth!

Christian: Do you think Mormons and Christians have the same God?

Mormon: Well, aside from a few matters, we are talking about the same Christian truth. I offer simply “the rest of the story” about the God we share.

Christian: Well, friend, I am intrigued. So, let me ask you something for starters.

Mormon: Okay. Go ahead.

Christian: Do you believe that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Mormon: Of course! The Father is a God, and so is the Son, and so is the Spirit.

Christian: That is not exactly what I asked. Let me clarify my question. Do you believe there are more Gods than one?

Mormon: Well, I believe the Father is the greatest of the Gods and that Jesus is his most perfect creation.

Christian: So, you believe in many Gods, correct?

Mormon: Well, when you put it that way, I guess so. It is what the Bible teaches.

Christian: Hold on a minute. Before you go there, let us think through this from a little different perspective.

Mormon: Okay, but I am not sure what you mean. Is not revelation our guide?

Christian: We will get to that, but here is a little different approach.

Mormon: Okay, go ahead.

Christian: Do you believe your God is the greatest being possible?

Mormon: I believe he is great, for sure!

Christian: But do you believe he is THE GREATEST being, that there are none greater than or equal to him?

Mormon: I do.

Christian: But if that is so, then how can there be more than one God if to be divine is to be the greatest being?

Mormon: I guess I mean that my God is...well...great, for sure.

Christian: But not the greatest being, or even the only god. Correct?

Mormon: Technically, that is correct. But why does this matter?

Christian: Well, you said we have the same view of God, but we do not. Our thoughts are quite different.

Mormon: How would you summarize the differences?

Christian: For starters, I believe in one God who exists as three eternal persons, and you believe in many gods. Also, I believe God is the greatest possible being, and you think that your God is great, but not the greatest conceivable being. Those are just a few of the differences, but I suppose you agree that they are significant differences.

Mormon: True. Those are differences. But let us look at the Book of Mormon for clarification on this.

Christian: Friend, I tell you what. You set another time to come back, and I will listen to your talk about the Book of Mormon. I promise. And then I want to talk some more about other things we might have in common, at least on the surface.

Mormon: You have my interest. I will be back next week.

2.5. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has considered the first part of the DEUS Challenge to Mormonism, focusing on the “D” in the DEUS acrostic, i.e., the Deity Question. The question: Are the Christian and Mormon Gods the same? The response: The Mormon God is not the Christian God. The evidence focused on the doctrine of God, which supplies the foundational elements necessary to understand the differences between orthodox trinitarianism and Mormonism. The God of classical Christian theism is philosophically defensible from ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral explorations. The theological formulations from Scripture, creedal, and confessional orthodoxy support and nuance the philosophical findings. The Christian God is one God, eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, the Mormon doctrine of God—in both its classical polytheistic and recent monarchotheistic expressions—does not lead to the Christian understanding of God. Instead, Mormonism presents a God who is one among many (even if he is the greatest among others), whose Son is a created being, and whose Spirit is a personage but not a Person—and all three in the Mormon Godhead are separate gods. Mormonism is polytheistic, to be specific, and its Gods are related to the

subject of morality and right and wrong in a fundamentally different way than orthodox trinitarian metaethical considerations. The next chapter turns to these considerations—the ethical and moral—as the topic of moral realism is explained and applied to the discussion between Christians and Mormons. Then, to the second part of the DEUS Challenge, the Ethics Question.

CHAPTER 3. DEUS CHALLENGE – E: THE ETHICS QUESTION

In this chapter, the challenge to Mormonism continues with the “E” in the DEUS acrostic, the Ethics Question. The question is: What is the Mormon account of morality? The response is: Mormon Morality derives from moral standards outside of God. The evidence for the response is moral realism. The significance of this question is two-fold: 1) given the shared commitment to moral realism between Mormons and Christians, looking to the source of the Mormon’s moral commitments begins/sustains the apologetic dialogue on common ground, thereby seeking to delimit the obstacles to engagement; and 2) as will be shown, Mormonism’s account of morality raises the challenge of not whether God is moral but why is he moral—questions to which Christians offer a markedly different answer than Mormons.

3.1. Question: What is the Mormon Account of Morality?

In many instances, Christians and Mormons are cobelligerents on the moral battlefield, both standing against the tide of radical ethical relativism and the pernicious nihilistic tendencies it reveals. Mormons and Christians are pro-family, pro-traditional marriage, and pro-life (Geisler 2011). This leads some to conclude that morality is a shared commitment between Mormons and Christians for the same metaethical reasons – that both groups are building the same moral house on the same moral foundation. To this query, the challenge now turns with the question in this section: Thus, the question in this section is: What is the Mormon account of morality?

3.2. Response: Mormon Morality Derives from Moral Standards Outside of God

Notwithstanding the shared applied ethical commitments between Mormons and Christians, the metaethical basis of their moral realist practices is radically different. The Mormon God is subject to eternal ethical principles outside of him and not derivative of or inherent within him as far as he learned them and matured into them through a process of perfection. The Christian God is the source of ethical principles as their author. Thus, the response to the Mormon account of morality is that Mormon morality derives from moral standards outside of God.

3.3. Evidence: Moral Realism

In challenging the presuppositions of the Mormon account of morality, several lines of evidence are considered. Competing metaethical paradigms are discussed initially, including non-cognitivism and cognitivism; a critique of moral error theory is provided, and fundamental aspects of a cognitivist understanding of moral realism are presented. Next, the distinctions between orthodox trinitarianism's understanding of moral realism and Mormonism's understanding of the same are highlighted in preparation for the discussion in chapter 4 concerning moral arguments for the existence of God. As anticipated above, the findings of the evidence will show that Mormonism, while affirming moral realism, arrives at its conclusions for moral facts differently from classical Christian theism.

3.3.1. Competing Metaethical Paradigms

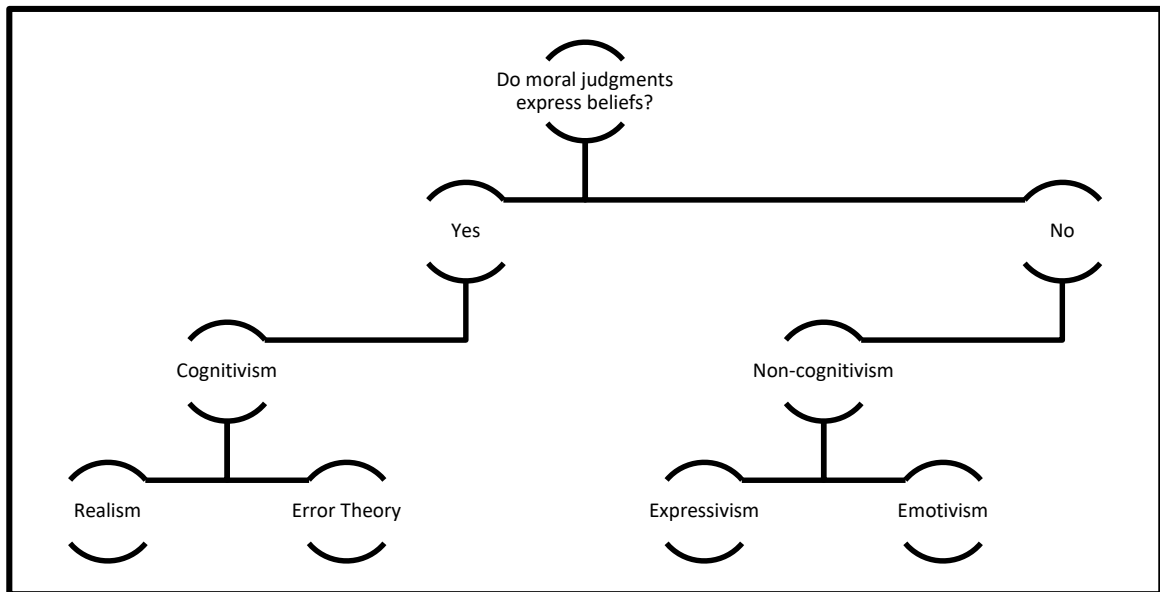
A starting point for the discussion here is to review Sayre-McCord's (2012:1) definition of metaethics presented in chapter 1:

Metaethics is the attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk, and practice.... How might moral facts be related to other points?... And how do we learn about the moral facts if there are any?

The focus, then, of metaethics is to explore how moral matters (e.g., thoughts, speech, actions) should be understood and, expressly, whether moral issues are real/factual. The apologetic importance of this focus lay in the value of working from commonly held ethical commitments between Mormons and Christians while also highlighting the fundamental differences that provide the foundations for such shared obligations.

Two primary questions of metaethics are: Do moral judgments express beliefs? Are moral judgments truth-apt? As portrayed by Figure 4., answers to these questions vary, and that variance makes up the metaethical spectrum. As this portrayal reveals, the metaethical spectrum is delimited to cognitive and non-cognitivist perspectives for purposes of present consideration.

Figure 4. Metaethical Spectrum (adapted from Fisher 2011)



3.3.1.1. Non-cognitivism

According to Fisher (2011), non-cognitivism is “the view that moral judgments express non-cognitive states such as desires, emotions, prescriptions and norm of acceptance...moral judgments are often thought not to be truth-apt” (179). Truth-aptness refers to whether a moral “judgment...is capable of being true or false. The judgment that it is raining is truth-apt, whereas the exclamation ‘Ow!’ is not” (Fisher 2011: 180). Two forms of non-cognitivism are expressivism and emotivism.

Expressivism entails that “moral features are not part of the world.... [When making moral judgments] we are trying...to express our emotions, or to describe a course of actions for others, or to evince a commitment to norms regulating guilt and anger” (Shafer-Landau & Cuneo 2007: 2). Emotivism, while related to expressivism in the sense that it precedes the latter as development of non-cognitivism (and some expressivists see themselves as simply building upon/developing the foundation provided by emotivism; cf. Shafer-Landau & Cuneo 2007), concludes that moral judgments are merely “grammatically assertive utterances [that] function primarily to express emotion and perhaps also elicit similar emotions in others” (van Roojen 2018). Thus, in terms of their juxtaposition with one another, it may be said that expressivism entails emotivism but is

more than emotivism—yet both are non-cognitivist in their conclusions about moral judgments.

3.3.1.2. Cognitivism: Error theory

Contra non-cognitivism, the metaethical construct of cognitivism, is “the view that moral judgments express beliefs which describe some sector of reality. It is a consequence of this that moral judgments are truth-apt” (Fisher 2011: 177). Two prominent cognitivist approaches are error theory and moral realism. Fisher (2011) explains that “error theorists are cognitivists but not realists. They argue that moral judgments describe the world as having objective value but that the world does not have any objective value. Consequently, all moral judgments are systematically and uniformly false” (177). As discussed below in a detailed critique of error theory, the challenge it poses is its penchant toward nihilistic conclusions about moral properties as anything more than a mistaken conclusion with no basis. Thus, before considering the other cognitivist perspective—moral realism—a deeper dive into error theory is in order.

Moral error theory may be one of the most influential non-realist forms of cognitivism among metaethical paradigms, especially in an increasingly post-Christian, hyper-subjectivist, neo-nihilistic milieu which often leaves discussions of moral facts relegated to the claim that advocates of differing views are simply mistaken and in error regarding what they claim versus what is. Though there are numerous proponents of moral error theory, the focus here is upon the perspective of Richard Joyce, professor of philosophy at Victoria University of Wellington (Joyce 2006). Joyce’s view will be explained within the broader metaethical theories and critiqued from various angles, including contemporary metaethical reactions, a Kantian perspective, and a Thomistic perspective.

Moral error theory builds upon the following presuppositions: anti-realism and moral skepticism. Anti-realism is “the denial of the thesis that moral properties—or facts, objects, relations, events, etc. (whatever one is willing to countenance)—exist mind-independently” (Joyce 2016). Moral skepticism represents “a diverse collection of views that deny or raise doubts about various roles of reason in morality. Different versions of

moral skepticism deny or doubt moral knowledge, justified moral beliefs, moral truth, moral facts or properties, and reasons to be moral” (Sinnott-Armstrong 2015).

Accordingly, these presuppositions lead the error theorists to conclude that “there is some ineliminable mistake that lies at the heart of moral thought and discourse” (Shafer-Landau & Cuneo 2007: 9). Syllogistically, moral error theory may be explained as follows:

P1: Moral judgments aim to represent moral facts.

P2: There are no moral facts.

C: Therefore, no moral judgments are true (Ibid.).

However, several caveats are in order, lest the presuppositions of anti-realism and moral skepticism lead to a caricature of error theorists. For example, moral error theory is not an attempt to “revamp morality from within” (Shafer-Landau & Cuneo 2007: 9).

Further, it is not an attack *per se* on moral theories. Likewise, it should be noted that some if not most error theorists urge “retaining moral thought and talk while regarding it as a beneficial fiction...[since] belief in morality has done a great deal to enforce altruism and social cohesion throughout the ages” (Ibid.).

Specific to Joyce’s moral error theory is his conviction that there is a “queerness” to morality (i.e., something that makes it different than anything in the universe), which is related to its claim to “be rationally authoritative...to supply us with excellent reasons for obedience, no matter what our likes and commitments might be” (Shafer-Landau & Cuneo 2007: 11). However, Joyce denies any truth in these authoritative claims to moral oughtness, seeing them, instead, as some type of evolutionary supervenience with merely reproductive justification. He explains,

Natural selection...is a process that has made us sociable, able to enter into cooperative exchanges, capable of love, empathy, and altruism—granting us the capacity to take a direct interest in the welfare of others with no thought of reciprocation—and has designed us to think of our relationships in moral terms. Why has Mother Nature granted us this bounty? Not for any laudable purpose (so

[let us] not sing her praises too loudly), but simply because being nice helped our ancestors make more babies (Joyce 2006: 222).

Joyce (in Shafer-Landau & Cuneo 2007) argues for his understanding of error theory according to two steps. First, he seeks to “ascertain...what a [moral] term means... [and to explore its] non-negotiability” (25). For example, the pre-Lavoisier scientist’s use of “phlogiston” to explain the combustibility of matter, something later science disproved, is analogous to a moral term that, though widely accepted, is non-negotiable (i.e., does not transcend cultures) (Ibid.: 23-25). According to Joyce, this first step of argumentation is “conceptual” (Ibid.: 25). In the second step, Joyce seeks to prove that whatever moral “fact” is under consideration is non-existent in an “ontological or substantive” manner (Ibid.: 25). Thus, in the example of phlogiston, not only is there a lack of negotiability (i.e., a conceptual error), there is also an ontic lack (i.e., a factual error) since phlogiston does not exist (Ibid.: 25). Tully (2014) attempts to summarize Joyce’s conceptual and ontological theses as follows:

The [conceptual thesis] states that moral statements attempt to make reference to the existence of certain kinds of properties or facts in the world. When we use moral language, we are not merely expressing our attitude towards certain things; we are attempting to describe facts about reality. The [ontological or substantive thesis] states that there are no such properties or facts. Therefore, all moral statements are false, attempting to predicate properties or describe facts that do not exist.

Tully continues, illustrating Joyce’s conceptual and ontological theses with a comparison:

Compare moral language with “witch” language. When we make statements about witches, our statements are clearly descriptive. When the people of Salem, MA named certain individuals as witches, they were attributing to them certain features – magical powers, say – constitutive of witchhood. Yet there are no individuals with such powers. So, all witch-talk fails to refer; anytime someone names someone else a witch, what that person says is false.

Proceeding from Tully’s explanation and illustration to a summary of Joyce’s argument, consider the following syllogism adapted to a moral consideration related to marriage:

P1: If [John] morally ought to [keep his marriage vows], then [John] ought to [keep his marriage vows] regardless of whether he cares to, irrespective of whether [keeping his marriage vows] satisfies any of his desires or furthers his interests.

P2: If [John] morally ought to [keep his marriage vows], then [John] has a reason for [keeping his marriage vows].

P3: If [John] morally ought to [keep his marriage vows], then [John] has a reason for [keeping his marriage vows] regardless of whether [keeping his marriage vows] serves his desires or furthers his interests.

P4: But there is no sense to be made of such reasons.

C: Therefore, [John] is never under a moral obligation [to keep his marriage vows] (Joyce 2006: 26).

Is Joyce correct in his error theory? Are claims to moral oughtness conceptually and ontologically flawed? To those who would disagree with his conclusions, Joyce (2006) offers that “the only hope for the opponent of moral error theory [is] to defend the thesis that practical rationality delivers categorical imperatives, and then to forge a connection between the imperatives of practical rationality, and those of rationality” (28). In what follows, an attempt is made to do just that, though with a nuance that also looks to show that moral error theory—Joyce’s and others’—is both philosophically flawed and existentially insufficient.

In response to the conceptual concern, Joyce raises, consider the following. Rather than assuming that all moral reasons must be categorical, that is, representative of real situations, what if they are all hypothetical but still speak of genuine moral realities? As Finlay (2010) argues, the challenge to the error theorist is “that moral statements (a) could be...and (b) in fact plausibly are, merely [culturally conditioned imperatives]; oughts applying or ascribed to agents independently of their desires, but with normative authority that is relative to and contingent upon those agents’ desires.” The gist of this argument is that even if moral considerations are hypothetical, that which they

hypothesize about owns a transcultural reality upon which they rest. If this is the case, error theory's conceptual thesis is undone. Syllogistically, this may be considered as such:

P1: It is conceivable that secret and forced sexual relations with another man's wife are destructive to families in any culture.

P2: Though each culture may ascribe diverse levels of moral concern for such acts, all known cultures find them destructive.

C: Therefore, though only conceptually considered and not specific to any culture, secret and forced sexual relations with another man's wife are destructive in all cultures.

Likewise, in response to Joyce's ontological objection to moral facts, the following argument is offered. Instead of conceding Joyce's assertion regarding moral oughts as only conceptual and theoretical, all moral reasons may be considered categorical. Arguing through analogy, Tully explains that "other sorts of reasons are also categorical, namely epistemic reasons...such as the fact that the Earth orbits the Sun, [which provides] a reason for anyone, regardless of her desires, interests, or inclinations, to believe in the heliocentric theory of the solar system. [Thus,] if there can be categorical epistemic reasons, why can't there be categorical moral reasons" (Tully 2014)? This approach relies upon an analogy between epistemic and ontological concerns, concluding that the former exists regardless of cultural conditioning or personal desire, which means that the latter, at least in principle, exist. If this is the case, error theory's ontological thesis is potentially defeated. A syllogistic example of this response to error theory may be conceived as follows:

P1: Epistemic facts exist independent of actors, supplying an ought for which all actors should believe some things.

P2: Epistemic facts are analogous to moral facts in their existence as actor-independent oughts.

C: Therefore, just as there are objective epistemic facts, there are objective moral facts.

Adding to these two contemporary arguments against Joyce's error theory, consider the following possible responses from Thomistic and Kantian perspectives. The Thomistic response presented here may be described as a co-opting and adapting of Joyce's conceptual and ontological theses in service of a Christian eudaemonist ethic. As already discussed, Joyce's conceptual thesis holds that claims of morality are based on false conceptions borne of and limited to cultures, serving only to provide adherents of such moral claims with a helpful but erroneous approach to ethics. In response, a Thomistic argument could be that, indeed, there is a conceptual, culturally derived, and limited aspect to specific moral considerations. However, even if they are based, in part, upon error, such concerns reflect a desire for eudaimonia within such cultures, which is found in all cultures. Thus, the underlying motivation for culturally derived and limited ethical claims is a universal desire for something else, i.e., eudaimonia, which, though variously defined, is a desire for some type of moral good.

Further, when considering Joyce's ontological thesis that moral facts do not exist (i.e., have no being), a Thomistic response might include the following. The ontological aspects of ethical considerations need not rest upon a moral fact, per se, but upon a moral desire, such as eudaimonia. If one finds, as one does, an inherent epistemic commitment to eudaemonist matters (i.e., all persons believe, on some level, that they should have some type of goodness and happiness in their lives), and yet there is no ontic basis for such desires and their attendant moral goods, then whence the epistemic commitment? At this point, the error theorist, Joyce included, will resort to an appeal to moral facts as a "useful fiction" for stability in society, but this is mere assertoric positioning, lacking any argumentative thrust. While the Thomist response overall, especially considering the ontological consideration vis-à-vis error theory, lends itself to a more-or-less abductive appeal to the most reasonable answer based on the evidence, it does so not based on assertion but upon argument with existential explanatory power.

What about a Kantian response to Joyce and the moral error theorists? While certainly not a comprehensive consideration of the topic from the perspective of Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy, the following points offer an answer. Initially, a Kantian response centers upon error theory's failure to recognize the a priori existence of morality. By limiting ethical consideration to a posteriori discovery, which is, according to the error theorist conceptually and ontologically false, error theory is contrary to reason. As Kant (2011b) explains, "reason of itself, independent of all experience, ordains what ought to take place, that accordingly actions of which perhaps the world has hitherto never given an example, the feasibility even of which might be very much doubted by one who founds everything on experience, are nevertheless inflexibly commanded by reason" (book I.).

Considering Kant's (2011a) statement that, "I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become universal law" (chap. I.I.), a Kantian critique of error theory claims that error theorists misunderstand or ignore the universalizability of morality. Especially in their attempt to claim that morality is a colloquial, culturally limited phenomenon, the error theorist like Joyce engages in a myopic assessment of what is, however one might explain it, a transcultural and transtemporal concern for moral matters. Why is this the case? A Kantian response is that error theorists fundamentally misunderstand the purpose of morality, reducing it to an evolutionary concomitant that supervenes upon humanity for the sake of propagating the species. Not so, Kant (2011b) explains, "morality is...how we may make ourselves worthy of happiness" (book I.II.V.). Recognizing the potential nuance required between Thomists and Kantians at this point, the necessity of finding morality's telos in some expression of eudaimonia/happiness nevertheless raises the specter for the error theorist that without an objective commitment to morality, even the "good" goal of procreation rests on crumbling ethical foundations.

Note that moral error theory proponents deny the existence of objective moral facts, concluding that those who claim that such exist are in error. Through a critique of Joyce's conceptual and ontological theses on error theory using arguments from contemporary philosophers, as well as a Thomistic and Kantian approach to moral

philosophy, findings suggest that error theory is, itself, in error about moral facts. Rather than supplying a justification for rejecting the existence of moral facts, error theory appears to lack both philosophical and existential warrant. Despite its current cultural cache and affinity with post-modern nihilistic preferences and radical subjectivism, moral error theory, it certainly appears, errs concerning morality.

3.3.1.3. Cognitivism: Moral Realism

What about moral realism, the other main cognitivist metaethical approach to moral judgments? For the present consideration, moral realism is assumed as the best explanation of moral judgments and as represented in both classical trinitarian and Mormon teaching—though in diverse ways vis-à-vis the doctrine of God. Though much has already been said about it in the critique of moral error theory above, it is needful here to at least address the basic content of moral realism by reviewing its definition, considering its explanatory power, and explaining further its fundamental distinctives.

Moral realism is a form of metaethical cognitivism that “argues that moral properties and/or facts exist and are in some way independent from people’s judgments” (Fisher 2011: 180). To quote Shafer-Landau and Cuneo (2007), for the moral realist, “things are morally right or wrong, good or bad, regardless of how they are viewed by actual or even idealized human beings” (3). Hernandez (2019) explains that moral realism’s appeal is based on its being the “best explanation of three features of reality: 1) convergence of moral judgments; 2) justified intervention; 3) moral progress” (46-63).

The idea of converging moral judgments is that, even when matters of specific application or secondary issues are different, there appears across cultures and history an agreement regarding moral oughts and ought nots—e.g., one ought to provide for his family and one ought not to take a life without justification. The idea of justified intervention is that “we are aware when it is justified not to intervene; we are aware of when our judgments are merely subjective and it would be inappropriate to impose them on others, but we also seem aware of when it would be appropriate, and indeed our duty, to intervene; this requires that our judgment is objectively true” (Hernandez 2019: 56).

The idea of moral progress is that “in moral matters [e.g., abolishing slavery or ending racial discrimination] progress implies moving from a morally worse state of affairs to a morally better one; [such] progress makes sense only if there is an objective criterion for determining progress” (Hernandez 2019: 58-61). Taken as a three-part whole, the convergence of moral judgment, the recognition of justified intervention, and moral progress reveal a world that is based on real morality—on moral realism and its attendant considerations.

Finally, it will help to name the fundamental distinctives of moral realism as discussed going forward, especially since these are distinctives about which Christians and Mormons agree (at least in principle). Thus, the distinctives of moral realism important for this study are that moral knowledge is possible, moral facts are mind-independent, and moral facts are true.

3.3.1.3.1. Moral Knowledge is Possible

Though there are different explanations of how moral knowledge—the knowledge of moral facts—is known, all moral realists affirm that such knowledge is possible (Shafer-Landau & Cuneo 2007). Broadly, and from a theistic conception, the possibility of moral knowledge derives from three areas (cf. Geisler 2011). (There are non-theistic approaches to moral realism, the concern here is for the theistic perspective since the goal of discussing moral knowledge is in relation to the discussion of Mormon theology.) First, moral knowledge is possible because of natural revelation. As discussed above in the examination of Pauline uses of natural revelation in apologetic engagement, there is within the natural world an innate knowledge of right and wrong, most especially expressed in the human conscience and judicial sentiment. Second, moral knowledge is possible because of divine revelation, in the commands and other demonstrations relating morality (e.g., historical narratives, wisdom literature) to the readers of Scripture. Third, moral knowledge is possible when reflecting upon the classical theistic arguments for God and what they reveal about the character of God, such as his omnibenevolence, omniscience, omnisapientia, and omnipotence.

3.3.1.3.2. Moral Facts are Mind-independent

In addition to the possibility of attaining moral knowledge—be it through natural revelation, Scripture, or awareness of God’s characteristics—the theistic moral realist affirms that all moral facts are mind-independent (Shafer-Landau & Cuneo 2007). This is not to say that they are mindless or do not entail cognitive recognition and deliberation, as such, only that the one perceiving the moral fact is not essential to the fact’s existence (i.e., even if no one existed in each place or time, moral facts such as murder is wrong, or love is good would still exist). Shafer-Landau (2003) explains that by mind-independent, moral realists accept the “stance-independence of moral reality. Realists believe that there are moral truths that obtain independently of any preferred perspective, in the sense that the moral standards that fix the moral facts are not made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given or actual hypothetical perspective. That a person takes a particular attitude toward a putative moral standard is not what makes the standard correct” (Kindle loc. 215). From a theistic perspective, especially one that adopts a divine-command approach to what moral facts are (i.e., that they come from commands given by God as a reflection of his character [cf. Baggett & Walls 2011]), moral facts are extrinsic in derivation though implicit in humanity.

3.3.1.3.3. Moral Facts are True

Regarding the way in which moral facts are true, realism calls upon three theses: the semantic thesis, the alethic thesis, and the metaphysical thesis (Pekka 2005). The semantic thesis is that “moral predicates (such as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’) ...refer to moral properties (such as rightness and wrongness), so that moral statements (such as ‘honesty is good’ and ‘slavery is unjust’) purport to represent moral facts, and express proposition that are true or false” (Ibid.). Following from the semantic thesis, the alethic (from *aletheias*, a transliteration of the Greek for ‘truth’) thesis is that some of the moral propositions derived from the semantic considerations of moral statements are “in fact true” (Ibid.). The metaphysical thesis, speaking to the nature of the moral facts delivered by the semantic and alethic theses, is that “moral propositions are true when actions and other objects of moral assessment have the relevant moral properties (so that the relevant

moral facts obtain), where these facts and properties are robust: their metaphysical status, whatever it is, is not relevantly different from that of (certain types of) ordinary non-moral facts and properties [e.g., mathematical axioms or scientific laws]” (Ibid.). From this epistemic claim, the discussion now turns to the relationship between moral realism, orthodox trinitarianism, and Mormonism.

3.3.2. Orthodox Trinitarianism, Mormonism, and Moral Realism

As already said, both orthodox trinitarian theists and Mormons embrace moral realism. As Beckwith (in Beckwith *et al.* 2002) explains,

When it comes to ethical and social issues, there is widespread agreement between classical Christians and [Mormons].... At the more fundamental level, Mormons and classical Christians agree that moral relativism is a mistaken view.... Both groups believe that their largely shared moral values are objective, that that are based on a moral law that exists apart from what people or their society may prefer or think, and that these standards are the ones against which the standards of every person and society should be evaluated (Kindle loc. 4232).

Shared commitments aside, the bases from which Christians and Mormons proceed in their discussion of morals in relationship to God are quite different.

3.3.2.1. Orthodox Trinitarianism’s Understanding of Moral Realism

Classical theism as expressed in its trinitarian form avers that there is a concomitant relationship (even causal in some sense) between God’s existence and moral realism. The tenets are that moral facts exist because God exists, and moral facts are personal because God is personal.

3.3.2.1.1. Moral Facts Exist because God Exists

Geisler (2011) explains that God’s righteousness is “grounded in His morality and immutability: God is metaphysically absolute and morally perfect. The reasoning goes like this:

P1: God is a moral Being.

P2: God is a perfect Being.

C: Hence, God is a morally perfect Being. One characteristic of being moral is being righteous; therefore, God is a perfectly righteous Being” (570).

When speaking of moral facts in relationship to God, then, there is an if/then description possible: if moral facts exist, then it is because God exists; without God (who is morally perfect and the source of all perfections), then moral facts (i.e., moral perfections) would not exist. However, moral facts do exist, and this is because God exists. This is what may be called the theistic foundation of moral facts, and it is a reasonable starting point for discussion of moral realism for theists, especially orthodox trinitarians who philosophically and theologically conclude that the perfectly moral God is the God of the Bible. It is important to emphasize, for clarity, that what is being ascribed to moral facts vis-à-vis God’s existence is that these moral facts are not something to which God subjects himself as though they were outside of him and a standard over him. On the contrary, as Baggett (in Baggett & Walls 2011) explains, “if God is the ultimate Good, such that necessary moral truths are reflective of an aspect of God, then indeed [it] is right that to apprehend such truths is to catch a glimpse of God himself” (92). Baggett’s point is apropos for the consideration of moral facts dependent on God’s existence; God is goodness and goodness is dependent upon and its locus exists in God as expressive of his character.

3.3.2.1.2. Moral Facts are Personal because God is Personal

As Beckwith and Parrish (1997) state, “Moral laws are necessarily personal...that is, they relate to persons” (86). To speak of moral facts (i.e., essential components of moral laws), therefore, is to speak of moral acts, and to speak of moral acts is to speak of moral actors – persons who either conform to or contradict the moral oughts (laws) associated with moral facts. Moral actions do not happen in an impersonal vacuum of abstract theoretical nationality devoid of personal actors; rather, moral actions are the domain of persons. From whence, then, does this essential personalness of moral facts come? If God is the source of moral facts, i.e., if moral facts exist because God exists, and if God is personal and expresses himself through his actions (which entail his moral

goodness), then the personal aspect of moral facts derives from God's being a personal being.

3.3.2.2. Mormonism and Moral Realism

To reiterate, Mormons are certainly moral realists; their moral commitments are identical to those of orthodox trinitarian theists. However, it is at the point of presuppositions that the Mormon approach to moral realism diverges from the Christian understanding, and specifically in the following ways. In Mormon thought, moral facts exist eternally and independent from God, and, thus, God is not their source.

3.3.2.2.1. Moral Facts Exist Eternally and Independent from God

According to Joseph Smith, "Every principle proceeding from god is eternal and any principle which is not eternal is of the devil... The first step in the salvation of man is the laws of eternal and self-existent principles" (Smith 1976: 181). Smith also explained in the Doctrine and Covenants, "there is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundation of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated... when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated" (D&C 130: 20-21). Mormon scholar McMurrin (1959) explains that "in the matter of values, particularly moral values, Mormon philosophy assumes an absolutistic character.... Truth and goodness in the Mormon view are fixed eternally in the universe and their reality and status do not depend on what men actually think or do" (24). While the last portion of this statement reveals the shared commitment to mind-independence of moral facts between Christians and Mormons, the remainder of McMurrin's explanation is different from the orthodox trinitarian understanding that moral facts owe their existence to God's existence. Rather, for the Mormon, God's existence is separate from moral facts—which are "fixed eternally in the universe" (Ibid.). Let alone the implications of this statement for the Mormon idea of an eternal universe and how this is not consistent with the orthodox trinitarian doctrine of creation ex nihilo, there is clearly a divergence between Christians and Mormons concerning the source of moral facts. Mormonism does not find moral facts in God, but subjects God to them and treats them as eternal and independent from God. Indeed, as Mormon scholar Paulsen (1975) explains, the Mormon God "is

perfectly just, loving, kind, compassionate, veracious, no respecter of persons.... But his perfections are not eternal but were acquired by means of developmental process” (79). Thus, God grew into his moral perfection by pursuing a moral existence based upon the eternal moral facts.

3.3.2.2.2. God is Not the Source of Moral Facts

Given that moral facts are eternal for Mormons, it follows that God is not the source of moral facts. While the Mormon God may provide an example of moral perfections that accord with the moral facts, he is not—cannot be according to the foundations of Mormon doctrine of God, which reveals a God who became divine—the source of moral facts. What does this imply? In terms of God’s personalness (which both Mormons and Christians teach), the Mormon God demonstrates a personal expression of moral facts, but are those facts necessarily personal if they exist as “fixed eternally in the universe” (McMurrin 1959: 24)? If Mormon’s think that moral facts are both independent of God and personal, then are the moral facts Gods themselves? Whence their personalness? The point here is not that Mormons necessarily assert a divinized form of eternal moral facts independent of God, but that there are serious theological implications if God is not the source of, but a subject of moral facts.

3.4. Practically Applying the Ethics Question

To apply the Ethics Question might look as follows in a conversation with a Mormon missionary.

Christian: Hello, again, friend. Glad you stopped by. Before you ask me your questions, I have one for you.

Mormon: Okay. What is it?

Christian: Do you agree with me that there are moral absolutes, definite right and wrong that apply to all people?

Mormon: Pardon the pun, but I absolutely believe in moral absolutes! This is something we hold in common, for sure.

Christian: I agree. We do hold moral absolutes in common. However, my next question is how do we explain the existence of such moral absolutes?

Mormon: Not sure at what you are getting. Moral absolutes just...exist.

Christian: So, you do not believe they have a source?

Mormon: Well, I guess I would say they are their own source. You know, morals come from morality, and morality is something that just exists.

Christian: Interesting, but I have a little different approach to explaining the existence of moral facts.

Mormon: Go on, tell me.

Christian: Well, like you I agree that moral knowledge is possible, that people can know right and wrong. I also, like you, believe that the facts of morality exist even if someone wants to claim they do not—this is what philosophers describe as being mind-independent.

Mormon: Sounds deep, but I am tracking with you. Go on.

Christian: I also think that these moral facts are true.

Mormon: I follow, and I agree. So, what is the difference between us?

Christian: I guess I would say it like this. Moral facts exist because God exists, and they are knowable and personal because God is knowable and personal. Briefly, moral facts entail God's existence.

Mormon: I agree with that.

Christian: But you said you believe that moral facts just exist, independent of anything but themselves.

Mormon: I did, didn't I?

Christian: Yes, you did. And that leads me to this question. If there is something higher than our outside of your God, is that a problem?

Mormon: Probably but I am not sure what you mean, exactly.

Christian: Your idea about moral facts—while in agreement with mine concerning the aspects of their existence—is vastly different from mine when it comes to how moral facts relate to God. I believe they exist because God exists; moral facts are based in who God is, and his commands about right and wrong are based in him.

Mormon: So, your God is the source of moral facts?

Christian: Yes, but yours is not. Your God is subject to the moral facts. I guess you would say they are above him and he submits to them.

Mormon: Wow. That is a lot to take in. I am not sure I can agree with that, but I will take some time to think about it.

Christian: Sounds good, friend. Let us talk again.

3.5. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter considered the second part of the DEUS Challenge to Mormonism, focusing on the “E” in the DEUS acrostic, i.e., the Ethics Question. The question: What is the Mormon account of morality? The response: Mormon morality derives from moral standards outside God. The evidence presented drew upon moral realism in several ways. Moral realism’s place within the scope of metaethical paradigms was explored, with special attention given to the distinction between non-cognitive and cognitive approaches to the question of moral judgments. Further, a critique of the increasingly influential moral error theory of certain cognitivists was offered, as well as an argument in favor of moral realism. Orthodox trinitarian and Mormon approaches to their shared commitment to moral realism were discussed, highlighting that the orthodox perspective is that moral facts exist because God exists, and they are personal because God is personal. The Mormon position differs from this, concluding that moral facts exist eternally and independent from God, and, therefore, God is not the source of moral facts but subject to

them. This leads to another consideration related to Mormonism and matters of morality with special consideration for making a moral argument for God's existence. Thus, in the next chapter the third part of the DEUS Challenge is developed; the Uprightness Question.

CHAPTER 4. DEUS CHALLENGE – U: THE UPRIGHTNESS QUESTION

In this chapter the challenge to Mormonism continues with the “U” in the DEUS acrostic, the Uprightness Question. The question is: Does Mormon morality conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God’s existence? The response is: Mormon morality does not conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God’s existence. The evidence for the response is moral apologetics.

4.1. Question: Does Mormon Morality Conduce to a Moral Argument for the Mormon God’s Existence?

Just as one may wrongly conclude that shared moral convictions between orthodox Christians and Mormons entail the same understanding of moral facts in relationship to who God is, so it may be that one could assume that it is possible for Mormons to make a moral argument for God’s existence in the same manner as Christians. However, this, too, would be a mistaken conclusion. As this chapter looks to show, when starting with a Mormon account of morality the moral apologist faces a serious obstacle. Thus, the question in this section is: Does Mormon morality conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God’s existence?

4.2. Response: Mormon Morality Does Not Conduce to a Moral Argument for the Mormon God’s Existence

Because the Mormon God is subject to moral facts that exist independent from and outside the divine existence, making a moral argument for the existence of the Mormon God becomes nigh impossible—at least in the sense that moral facts imply a divine moral lawgiver. The God of Mormonism is not the divine moral lawgiver. Christian teaching about God and morality, however, does lead to such a conclusion, since the God of Christianity is the divine moral lawgiver, whether by explicit commands or as in the imprimatur of his good character on the created order. Therefore, the response developed here to the question of whether Mormon morality conduces to a moral argument for God’s existence is that Mormon morality does not conduce to a moral argument for the existence of the Mormon God. To clarify, the claim here is not that

Mormonism does not offer an argument for the existence of objective moral fact (i.e., Mormons are moral realists), only that Mormon metaethical conclusions do not lead to God's existence as the necessary source of morality. Rather, the Mormon God is an exemplar of morality as one who is subject to an eternal moral law that is outside of and authoritative over him.

4.3. Evidence: Moral Apologetics

As clarified above, moral apologetics is the defense of the Christian faith by means of arguing for the existence of objective moral standards as a segue to arguing for the existence of a Moral Lawgiver (Baggett & Walls 2011). Evans and Mains (2009) explain that “the heart of the moral argument, then, is the intuition that there would be something very odd about the existence of moral obligations in a naturalistic universe”, and then they proceed to ask “how, in a world which is ultimately the product of time, chance and material particles, did there come to be such things as moral obligations” (chap. 3)? Such matters come into the realm of moral apologetics and making arguments for God based on moral facts. Christians have and do offer varied explanations to this question of the existence of moral obligations, though in each instance now discussed the answer is that God is, one way or another, the source of moral obligations.

Moral apologetics may be approached via a Thomistic/natural law approach (Budziszewski 2009; Rice 1999), a divine command theory (Walls & Baggett 2016), a moral knowledge/awareness approach (cf. Kant and Lewis), a human dignity/worth approach (cf. the personalism of Wojtyla), or a practical approach (cf. Evans, 2018 and his discussion of Kant). In this chapter the focus is upon the first two approaches—Thomistic/natural law and divine command theory—as well as how it is possible to argue from morality to God's existence and why Mormonism fails in making this apologetic connection. However, before discussing these matters, a bit more foundation regarding moral apologetics will help thicken the arguments offered, including why general revelation (especially in its Pauline expression) is an ally to moral apologetics, and the overall value of moral apologetics.

4.3.1. General Revelation as Foundational to Moral Apologetics

How does God make himself known? This question lay at the heart of a moral argument for God's existence (every approach to apologetics, but especially moral apologetics). Thus, it will help establish the proper basicity of appeals to moral knowledge/awareness if there is first a clear understanding on the role of general revelation (in man and nature) that is found in Scripture, especially its Pauline expression. General revelation, it will show, is the moral Apologists key ally in the discussion of moral awareness and its relationship to God. So, again, the question is: How does God make himself known?

Christians answer this by referring to revelation, distinguishing between the classifications of "general" and "special" revelation. What these classifications mean, and how general revelation relates to apologetics and evangelism is a matter of considerable debate among Christians. Aspects of this debate center on the teaching and preaching of Paul the apostle, including: 1) Paul's teaching regarding general revelation in Rom. 1:18-23; and 2) Paul's use of general revelation in his preaching at Athens in Acts 17:22-34. Before considering these two Pauline matters, it will help to briefly explore the meaning of general revelation.

In Ps. 19:1-4, the psalmist acclaims, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." The psalmist describes in vivid language the heavens as having a voice that declares God's glory to the entire earth, day and night. This declaration by the heavens is what may be referred to as one aspect of general revelation (i.e., the aspect of God's revelation in physical nature). There are other aspects of general revelation, as will be discussed; however, before seeking a further definition of general revelation it is important to consider what general revelation is not.

Simply said, general revelation is not special revelation, which is, primarily, God's revelation of himself in the Scriptures and in the redemptive Person and work of

Jesus Christ in history (Erickson 1998: 200). As Grudem (1994) explains, special revelation “includes all the words of Scripture but is not limited to the words of Scripture” (123). Lewis and Demarest (1996) elaborate further, describing special revelation as both “God’s Word in [t]ime,” and “God’s Word Incarnate” (110). In this way they succinctly describe the essence of special revelation’s emphasis on what God has said and done in the Bible and Jesus Christ (cf. Erickson 1998: 201).

The focus of special revelation is two-fold: 1) on redemption, on the purpose and process of God in bringing salvation to the world cosmically and persons individually (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 1:1-3); and 2) on the divine-human relationship that brings all glory to God across the metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. Further, special revelation is targeted to a specific audience as far as the Bible, while certainly having application to the world, is specifically given to the people of God in all ages. Erickson (1998) explains, “By special revelation we mean God’s manifestation of himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him” (201).

So, if general revelation is not special revelation, then what is it? Distinct from God’s special revelation, general revelation is mediated through the created order (including the cosmos and the makeup of human beings), and human history, and provides a broad (in terms of content and audience) revelation of God. Likewise, Geisler (2011) states, “General revelation refers to God’s revelation in nature, as opposed to His revelation in Scripture. More specifically, general revelation is manifest in several areas: for example, physical nature, human nature, and history. In each case God has disclosed something specific about Himself and His relationship to His creation” (50). Finally, Oden (1992) identifies general revelation as “manifestations of God to humanity through reason, conscience, and history...not primarily in imparting of information but rather the self-giving and self-evidencing of God” (16-18).

Drawing from these definitions, general revelation may be defined as follows: God’s revelation of himself outside of Scripture and the historical Person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ, in both a general sense (i.e., the message that he exists and

something of what he is like), and to a general audience (i.e., the world); this revelation is known through the natural world, human nature (including reason and conscience), and the nuances of history (i.e., God's providential working in the course of human affairs and through human cultures). Due to its general nature, general revelation does not supply specifics about the Christian way of salvation. Rather, as Oden (1992: 18) describes, "general revelation performs the negative function of leaving humanity without excuse if any should ever claim that they never knew God existed," but, while revealing the Creator it does not directly reveal the Savior.

In addition to defining general revelation, it is helpful to briefly consider the relationship between general revelation and natural theology. General revelation is to natural theology what ingredients are to a recipe. While the ingredients to make an apple pie are different from the apple pie, even though they are essential to making the pie, so the content of general revelation is not natural theology, but it is essential to developing a natural theology. Further, natural theology is the formulation of the content of general revelation in a manner that seeks, based upon the categories of general revelation (i.e., the natural world, human nature, and the nuances of history), to articulate something regarding God's existence and works as known apart from special revelation.

Consistent with this understanding, McGrath (2016) defines natural theology as "a process of reflection on the religious entailments of the natural world, rather than a specific set of doctrines" (Kindle loc. 374-381). Finally, the biblical witness presents what is *prima facie* evidence of natural theology in its use of general revelation in such passages as Acts 14:8-20; 17:22-34. This point, which is discussed and defended below, reflects an historic evangelical consensus on the biblical basis for natural theology. Lewis and Demarest (1996) agree: "General revelation is God's activity of making known to people his eternal existence, and natural theology...is the people's activity of perceiving this truth.... The reality of natural theology, though devalued or denied in some Barthian and Reformed thinking, is explicitly and repeatedly taught in Scripture" (75).

In Rom. 1:18-23, Paul transitions from his seminal statement of the gospel and the righteousness of God in 1:16-17, to an in-depth polemic against those he describes as

“futile in their thoughts,” and whose “foolish hearts were darkened” (1:21). For the sake of the discussion that follows, Rom. 1:18-23 is supplied here.

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Regarding the passage’s informational flow, Paul begins in v. 18 with a transition from stating in 16-17 that the gospel is for all people (i.e., “the Jew first and also the Greek”) to a declaration that God’s wrath is made known against all those who suppress the God’s truth. In v. 19, Paul explains that the truth he speaks of as being suppressed is related to God’s self-revelation, and in v. 20, this divine self-revelation is described as revealed through creation, revealing the divine power and Godhead, and leaving those who suppress the truth (18) in an inexcusable state. Paul goes on in 21-22 to reveal that, despite their knowledge of God, these people refuse to worship God, and are fools and idol worshippers.

Regarding the logic of the Paul’s teaching in this passage, Nelson (2014) explains Rom. 1:21-22 in syllogistic form as follows (Kindle loc. 1320-1326):

P1: All people can perceive God.

P2: All who can perceive God (even His eternal power and godhead) are obligated to glorify Him as God and be thankful.

P3: All who are obligated to glorify him as God and be thankful are non-worshippers instead. (They are idol and creation worshippers.)

P4: All non-worshippers reject what they know to be true. (They suppress the truth in unrighteousness.)

P5: All who reject what they know to be true are without excuse.

C: Therefore, all people are without excuse.

In terms of both its informational and logical flow, this passage makes several relevant points related to general revelation. There is a clear emphasis on the universality of the knowledge of God under discussion by Paul. There is a clear statement that this universal knowledge of God is revealed through nature. There is a clear description of this knowledge of God in terms of the limited and focused information it reveals about God. As for the relevance of this information to the discussion of general revelation, Paul matter-of-factly says that God is revealed in nature, and that all people know of this revelation. It is hard to envision a clearer statement of general revelation.

Consider, also, Paul's words in this passage in terms of their contextual exegesis. Moo (1996: 90-94) argues that Paul's broader concern in this passage is to demonstrate that just as all (i.e., Jews and Gentiles) may be saved by believing the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17), so all are condemned by the revealed and rejected knowledge of God, and in need of the gospel; the crescendo of the Pauline argument begun here is the stunning indictment in Rom. 3:23 that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Throughout the passage, the universal nature of the topic is emphasized as Paul reveals his missionary heart in declaring the gospel to all people, since all people know there is a God and need to be put to right with him. Schreiner (1998), in his comments on this passage, explains that Paul's point is to demonstrate that "God has stitched into the fabric of the human mind his existence and power, so that they are instinctively recognized when one views the created world...all people possess knowledge of God, even though it has been repressed and is not saving" (Kindle loc. 2033). As representative voices of the historic evangelical understanding of general revelation, both Moo and Schreiner conclude that what Paul provides in Rom. 1:18-23 is an explicit recognition that all people are guilty before God for their rejection of the universally available and discernible revelation of

God's existence and worthiness of worship. General revelation leaves all without excuse before their creator.

One more question is worth discussing as far as it relates to Paul's use of general revelation in Rom. 1:18-23: Why did Paul use general revelation as part of his argument? He is writing to Christians who already have a right relationship with Jesus (see Rom. 1:7), so why bother with this polemic regarding those who "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18)? As briefly discussed above, Paul is making a parallel between the universality of the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17), and the universality of man's need of the gospel (climaxing in 3:23-25). Thus, Paul explains to the Roman Christians the nature of their salvation in the context of the severity of their need; this would remind them of the greatness of God's grace, while at the same time demonstrating for them an example of apostolic evangelism that includes an appropriate use of general revelation to help raise an awareness of culpability with those to whom the gospel goes forth. Moffatt (1931) comments, "Only those who are prepared to acknowledge that they are unworthy can put faith in the God of grace" (92). Moo (1996) further explains, "only if Jews as much as Gentiles [in the totality of Paul's argument in Rom. 1:16—3:25] are understood to be subject to this imprisoning effect of sin will it become clear that all people need to experience this righteousness of God" (92). In Paul's teaching to the Roman Christians, he uses general revelation as part of his gospel apologetic, arguing as he does for humankind's culpability before God, who alone can save them through his Son.

In Acts 17, beginning in verse v. 15, Paul arrives in Athens and begins his usual ministry of going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (see Rom. 1:16-17). After a time of interaction with the Jews in the synagogue and the Gentiles in the marketplace (17), Paul is invited to appear before the Areopagus to explain the message he was proclaiming in the marketplace, a "new doctrine" that brought "strange things to [their] ears" (19-20). The audience he faced in the Areopagus was composed of at least "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" (18), as well as other "Athenians" and "foreigners" who "spent their time in nothing else but to tell or to hear some new thing" (21). Into this context steps Paul, who proclaims a message that yields one of three responses (32, 34):

1) some mocked him, 2) some expressed interest in hearing more later, and 3) some joined with Paul and believed.

What was it that Paul preached? In the last part of his message (30-31), Paul makes explicit claims to the coming judgment through Jesus Christ, which judgment God assured by raising Jesus from the dead. This part of the message is explicitly Christian in its content and would qualify as special revelation. However, most of the message Paul preaches in Athens is not special revelation. Out of ten verses in Paul's message (totaling 269 words), eight deal with themes from general revelation (218 of the 269 words); by this reckoning, the vast majority of Paul's evangelistic message in Athens draws from general revelation.¹⁵ What, exactly, does Paul say about general revelation? Here is a list of the topics, by verse, that Paul addresses. While there may be difference in how each verse/topic is identified, the general revelatory gist is clear throughout the passage, as demonstrated in these ten instances.¹⁶

1. The human sense of the divine (*sensus divinitatis*): "in all things you are very religious" (22-23).
2. God is creator: "who made the world" (24).
3. God is sovereign: "Lord of heaven and earth" (24).
4. God is not an idol: "does not dwell in temples," is not "worshiped with men's hands" (24-25).
5. God is the source of all life: "gives to all life, breath, and all things" (25).

¹⁵ It is certainly possible that Paul's message included other words that were not recorded by Luke, but the portion that made it into the text of Acts is clearly weighted in the direction of general revelation. It appears from the flow of the text that Paul's mention of the resurrection brought such a reaction that his message was interrupted. However, there was still evangelistic fruit. While the text does not clearly explain the conversions, it is reasonable to conclude that those who converted upon hearing Paul on Mars Hill had already heard some of his teaching in the marketplace, since the Mars Hill message did not include the complete gospel.

¹⁶ This list is original to this author, as he is unaware of any other examples attempting to isolate/identify the general revelatory elements in Paul's message. This is not to say, however, that such a list does not exist elsewhere. Further, this author recognizes that there may be other ways to classify the general revelatory components of Paul's message; what is given here is only one possibility.

6. God is the origin of all people/nations: “made from one blood every nation” (26).
7. God is personal/directs history: “has determined their preappointed times” (26).
8. God is immanent: “not far from each one of us” (27).
9. God is the source and sustainer of all life: “in Him we live and move and have our being,” and “we are also His offspring” (28).
10. God is not an idol: “we ought not to think the Divine Nature is like...something shaped by art and man’s devising” (29).

Not once in these ten instances does Paul say anything that is overtly Christian or that is beyond the scope of general revelation. Paul’s message up to verse v. 30 is what might be described as general revelation through a gospel lens. To paraphrase, Paul’s message from general revelation is that who the Athenians seek in worship is the God who created and is the Lord of the world and all in it, but who is not worshiped in a temple like an idol; rather, he desires a relationship with all, and has directed human affairs in such a way that all who seek him will find him. It is only after Paul lays this general groundwork that he moves into special revelation, calling attention to the judgment and the resurrection of Jesus.

While Paul uses general revelation in this message to the Athenians, some do not believe Paul was intending to build from general revelation to a natural theology that would segue to the gospel. Polhill (1992: 369-370), for example, argues that Paul’s language in the first eight verses of the message is primarily drawn from the Old Testament, rather than general revelation. There are two problems with Polhill’s approach. First, the Old Testament does not include the quotations Paul makes from pagan poets in verse v. 28; therefore, even if Paul did rely on some Old Testament material he certainly did not rely exclusively on the Old Testament. Second, even Polhill acknowledges that Paul, in his attempt to reach the Athenians, has a clear “ring of Greek philosophy” (370) in his words. To borrow from the pagans and to sound like the pagans leads to a reasonable conclusion that Paul was intentionally borrowing from and

appealing to a common knowledge among the pagans. No doubt he had an influence from the Old Testament, as his mind was steeped in its content, but that is different from saying that his message was drawn from the Old Testament and not general revelation.

Paul's preaching in Athens was a strong blend of general and special revelation, with the general content preceding the special. What is the significance of Paul's approach? Bock (2013) describes Paul's approach in Acts 17:22-34 as follows: "Here we see a keyway to introduce the Christian message for an audience that is unfamiliar with the story of God's activity as revealed in the Scripture. Most people believe in the existence of God and grant that we are accountable to him, providing a starting point for Christian proclamation" (Kindle loc. 19336). This assessment is in keeping with the discussion above regarding Paul's reason for using general revelation in Rom. 1:18-23; Paul was a missionary at heart, and his intention was to find a way to connect with his hearers to provide the greatest opportunity for the gospel to be heard and believed. When speaking with the Jews, Paul's approach meant reasoning from the Old Testament to the Messiah. When speaking to the Gentiles, Paul began with general revelation and moved to the gospel, delivering a message interwoven with rich apologetic substance and methods. It appears reasonable to conclude, and consistent with Pauline example, that general revelation is an important avenue of approach for moral apologists, especially when using the moral knowledge/awareness approach to a moral argument for God's existence.

Now, before looking into approaches to the moral argument, another foundational matter to consider is a couple of aspects that highlight the overall value of moral apologetics, including the emphasis on the moral nature of God and humanity, and the centering of evangelism on sin, righteousness, and redemption

4.3.2. The Value of Moral Apologetics

Given that there are certainly other arguments for the existence of God (e.g., the ontological argument or the cosmological argument), it seems reasonable to ask what makes moral apologetics special, especially considering the concern of this research to aid in engaging Mormons regarding their doctrine of God and its implications for

morality? Here are reasons to consider for giving a principal place in apologetic engagement to moral apologetics: it highlights the moral nature of God and humanity; and it centers evangelism on sin, righteousness, and redemption (adapted from Gentry 2018).

4.3.2.1. Emphasizing the Moral Nature of God and Humanity

When using moral apologetics an emphasis upon the objectivity of moral facts can provide tremendous benefit in helping unbelievers consider the role of morality in pointing them to God (Baggett & Baggett 2018). Such moral facts include moral goodness, moral obligations, moral knowledge, moral transformation, and a sense of moral providence. As Baggett and Baggett (2018) explain: moral goodness relates to the existence of things that are genuinely good, as contrasted to those that are genuinely evil; moral obligations relate to the sense of oughtness associated with morality and moral goodness; moral knowledge relates to the man's ability to know that there are genuine moral goodness exists; moral transformation relates to the awareness and experience of genuine change in a person's moral acts and abilities; and moral providence relates to man's highest good being found in a right moral relationship with God and others.

Consider, for example, moral obligations as a part of apologetic evangelistic encounter with a Mormon. It is not difficult to imagine how an apologist could speak of every person's innate sense of moral obligation as a means of revealing both God as the moral standard, and each person's imperfection in keeping his or her moral obligations. From there (and more on this will be discussed in a later chapter), the apologist could move to a consideration of whether the Mormon doctrine of God points to such moral obligations, or if there is a disconnect between Mormon theology and morality. This could be the opening for a discussion of the Christian God and his implications for morality. Even if the apologetic conversation eventually tends toward a different direction, it is a straightforward move to include moral obligations. These can help highlight humanity's problem with sin and the need of a perfect moral Savior. Further, the universal innate sense of moral obligation provides a helpful segue to point others to trust not in their own imperfect righteous deeds, but in the perfect righteousness of

Jesus.¹⁷ Indeed, the moral nature of God and humanity provide opportunities for apologetics that includes a moral apologetic component.

4.3.2.2. Centering Evangelism on Sin, Righteousness, and Redemption

Related to the reason just discussed, the moral center of the gospel regarding sin, righteousness, and redemption also reveals a helpful role for moral apologetics. Consider this point related to the categories of moral facts discussed by Baggett and Baggett (2018): goodness, obligations, knowledge, transformation, and providence. Can the gospel be shared without speaking of moral goodness, since “no one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18)? No. Can the gospel be defended without speaking of moral obligations, since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23)? No. Can the gospel be taught without speaking of moral knowledge, since “what may be known of God is manifest in [all persons] ...His invisible attributes...even His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom.1:18-20)? No. Can the gospel be discussed without speaking of moral transformation, since the gospel reveals that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17)? No. Can the gospel be proclaimed without speaking of moral providence, since the gospel reveals that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16), even though “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19)? No. There is a sense in which to share the gospel—especially in an apologetic encounter—is to share information about moral goodness, moral obligations, moral knowledge, moral transformation, and moral providence. Of course, it is possible that someone could try to convey the gospel without these moral facts, but what gospel would that be? It is also possible to confuse moral facts vis-à-vis the gospel without erring into

¹⁷ In the researcher’s own discipleship, he extensively uses a teaching structure designed to emphasize the concomitance between Moral Apologetics (in the broader sense of arguing morally based on God’s existence) and transformation. The method, developed by the researcher during his DMin studies in 2012-2015, is based on the acrostic COACH: Connect to a genuine need for transformation in the believer’s life, Orient the discussion of the need to the Word of God, Apply the challenge and importance of the needed transformation to specific life instances, Cultivate the proper “I can’t” tension by emphasizing that the believer must look to Christ for her righteousness and moral transformation, and Heal with the gospel as applied to believers with the goal of seeing them renew their resolve to live holy while trusting wholly in Christ for their righteousness before God. This type of sermon structure may be adapted for evangelism or discipleship.

salvation by moralism. Thus, anyone who takes seriously the Bible and the evangelical faith revealed there will recognize that to offer the gospel requires discussions about moral facts.

4.3.3. Approaches to Moral Apologetics

From this foundation of the significance of general revelation for making moral arguments as well as the value of moral apologetics in emphasizing the moral nature of God and humanity and in centering evangelism on sin, righteousness, and redemption, the discussion builds to a consideration of approaches to moral apologetics. Though there are several avenues upon which to proceed in making a moral argument for God's existence, herein the Thomistic approach based on Aquinas's fourth way (i.e., the argument from gradation of perfection or gradation of being) is considered, as well as the divine command theory approach so ably represented by Baggett and Walls (2011).

4.3.3.1. A Thomistic Approach

In the *Summa Theologiae*, a work prepared to aid with instructing new theological students, Aquinas offers a discussion of the existence of God. Beginning with the assertion that, "the chief aim of sacred doctrine is to teach the knowledge of God, not only as He is in Himself, but also as He is the beginning of things and their last end, and especially of rational creatures" (2019b: I.q.2.a.1.), Aquinas establishes the basis upon which to consider whether God exists. After dealing with various objections to God's existence, Aquinas states, "It is said in the person of God: 'I am Who am' (Ex. 3:14)" and then offers that, "the existence of God can be proved in five ways" (2019b: I.q.2.a.3.).

It is helpful to consider the insights of McInerny (1982: 158-160) on the fundamental concern and approach Aquinas takes in defending the existence of God from reason. McInerny concludes that Aquinas is not intending to argue for the existence of God from reason (i.e., as a preamble to faith), only to conclude that the God of faith is not the same God. Rather, and contrary to Pascal's contention that the God of the philosophers is not the God of Abraham, Aquinas's purpose in presenting the five ways is to establish that God's existence may be discerned through a reasonable engagement with

nature and, when God is more fully known through special revelation and faith, what is known of God through reason alone is consistent with, albeit less complete, than the fuller revelation.

If this were not so—and this is the inherent problem with Pascal’s contention—then nature and reason cannot be trusted to give evidence of God, and one is left with only a special revelation which, given its own testimony of the revelation of God in nature and discernible by reason, is now subject to claims of contradiction and confusion (i.e., “The heavens declare the glory of God” [Ps. 19:1], or “since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made” [Rom. 1:20]). Rather, and in keeping with Aquinas’s intention, the five ways reveal the existence of a God of whom reason may naturally discern something, but not everything.

Aquinas’s fourth way deduces from the observation that “among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like,” that “therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God” (2019b: I.q.2.a.3.). Aquinas makes his argument for the fourth way beginning with the natural process of heat transference, explaining that the nearer a thing is to the source of heat, the hotter it will be, and the farther from the source, the cooler it becomes. “More and less,” Aquinas argues, “are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest” (2019b: I.q.2.a.3.).

Stated as an argument in syllogistic form, the fourth way can be summarized as follows:

P1: Some things are more or less perfect.

P2: More or less perfection can be known only by comparison with what is most perfect.

P3: But the maximum of a kind is the cause of the rest of that kind.

C: Therefore, there must be a Most Perfect Cause (Geisler 2013: Kindle loc. 2510-2520).

As Geisler explains, the argument's second statement stands on the axiom that it is impossible to know when something is below standard without knowing a standard (Kindle loc. 2520). Further, the third statement emphasize that goodness in things is relative to the things' participation in whatever goodness is by nature, viz. there is a transcendent appeal to goodness in comparing good things to goodness (Ibid.). "Thus," Geisler states, "Aquinas concludes that there must be something that is the cause of being, goodness, and every other perfection—God" (Ibid.).

To develop Aquinas's thought further, consider how his fourth way argument moves from heat to truth, nobility, and being, applying the same "more and less" argument, and concluding that to be more and less true and noble requires a highest truth and nobility that is found only in highest/maximal being. "There is something which is truest," Aquinas aptly states, "something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being" (2019b: I.q.2.a.3.). Via his segue from heat to truth, nobility, and being, Aquinas fortifies his fourth way with a two-fold strength: 1) He uses the platform of a common-sensical phenomenological account of heat transference to harness the implicit connection the human mind already (ordinarily) makes between more and less (this is not to affirm, though, that Aquinas is scientifically accurate regarding fire, but the general consideration still attains); and 2) He applies the more and less connection to truth and nobility in the human realm as a means to reinforce his own commitment regarding the existence of a necessary being who not only necessarily exists, but is necessarily true, noble, and good as a concomitant of pure existence (Fradd & Delfino 2018: Kindle loc. 1991).

Commenting on Aquinas's fourth way, Kreeft and Tacelli (1994) observe that all of humanity can

apprehend at a deep (but not always conscious) level that being is the source and condition of all value...that a being able to give and receive love is better than

one that cannot; that [human] being is better, richer and fuller than that of a stone, a flower, an earthworm, an ant, or even a baby seal. But if these degrees of perfection pertain to being and being is *caused* in infinite creatures, then there must exist a 'best,' a source and a real standard of all the perfections that we recognize belong to us *as beings* (Kindle loc. 528-535).

Thus, Aquinas's fourth way offers a deeply human and existential consideration of how reason vis-à-vis goodness leads to a discovery of God's existence, opting for the visceral example of fire and arriving at the necessary being of God. Geisler (2013) concludes that the force of Aquinas's fourth way is its relations to a bigger whole, viz. that the argument from gradation of perfection is an example of the basic metaphysical argument for God. He explains that the fourth way simply restates in specific terms related to truth, nobility, and being, the following:

Whatever belongs to a thing is caused either by the principles of its own nature or else by something extrinsic to it.... But being cannot cause itself...self-caused being is impossible. Therefore, every being whose essence is not to exist must be caused by another.... Therefore, a Necessary Being exists as the cause of every other being that exists but need not exist (Kindle loc. 2553).

Aquinas's fourth way's emphasis on participating in goodness supplies an opportunity for the Christian apologist to segue from its oblique form of moral argument to a more direct discussion of ultimate morality and its relationship to human morality. One finds in Aquinas's fourth way an appeal to moral goodness concomitant with the existence of God, which is simply a variation of the Aquinas's fourth way applied to morality. For example, as human goodness is a gradation of greater goodness, so the existence of goodness points beyond itself to perfect goodness, which implies perfect morality as a corollary of goodness. Thus, the fourth way dovetails and helps nuance an argument from morality to God's existence as the maximally good and moral Being.

4.3.3.2. A Divine Command Theory Approach

Divine command theory approaches the argument from God's existence in a straightforward manner, based on the idea that all morality issues from God's good nature, and that it is his good nature expressed in his commands that points his creatures

toward goodness. God is the source of moral facts, and his commands reveal them to humanity. As Baggett and Walls (2011) state,

Now then, God has supreme power, knowledge, and goodness, and all of these underwrite his moral authority. He created us and this world and stamped us with his image and has the power to hold us fully accountable for our actions. Since he has perfect knowledge of us, he understands perfectly what is good for us and our flourishing. Moreover, since he is perfectly good, he desires our well-being and does everything short of overriding our freedom to promote it. In view of his nature as a perfect being, there are no good grounds for doubting his authority. There can be no blindsidedness, no bias, no imperfect understanding, no possibility of misuse of power, or having obtained it wrongly. If all rational withholdings are blocked, we ought to accept God as an authority. And part of what is involved in that is accepting his commands, unless we have good reason to do otherwise; but again, with a perfect being, there [cannot] possibly be good reasons to do otherwise. In short, we think the issue of authority is a matter of power, knowledge, and character, all of which add up to moral authority (122).

An example of abduction in arguing for God's existence based on morality and derived from this divine command theory approach could be presented as follows:

P1: Moral goodness and evil are realities in the human experience.

P2: The human experience of moral realities raises the oughtness that each person feels concerning moral obligations.

P3: Humans are aware that they experience moral realities and moral oughtness, and, therefore, humans can and do have moral knowledge.

P4: Considering the moral experience of humans—moral realities, moral oughtness, moral knowledge—there is also an experience of moral transformation that humans know intuitively and experientially.

P5: The experience of moral transformation—especially with the experience of moral realities, moral oughtness, and moral transformation—raises the possibility that there is a moral providence, a highest moral good.

P6: That God exists and is the source (via his commands as revealing his moral character) of these moral facts (1-5) is a reasonable, probable conclusion.

P7: This Christian description of God is consistent with these moral facts.

C: It is, therefore, a reasonable inference drawn from morality—the best inference based on the evidence—that the Christian God exists.¹⁸

Another, less detailed syllogistic form of the divine command theory approach to the moral argument is as follows (also in an abductive form):

P1: There are objective moral obligations.

P2: God provides the best explanation of the existence of such obligations.

C: Therefore, to conclude the because of the existence of objective moral obligations that God exist is a reasonable conclusion (cf. Evans 2018).

One of the overall strengths of a divine command theory approach to making a moral argument for God's existence is its resilience in the face of the Euthyphro objection put forth as a defeater for divine command theorists. The basic idea in the Euthyphro objection (or dilemma) "arises in an early dialogue of Socrates entitle, appropriately enough, *Euthyphro*.... [The] dialogue features Socrates questioning young Euthyphro about the true standard of morality. As a devout polytheist, Euthyphro attempts to explicate the nature and authority of morality in terms of the loves and hatreds of the gods.... If they all support a practice, [it is] an act of piety; if they all denounce a practice, it's an act of impiety" (Baggett & Walls 2011: 31).

How this relates to the divine command theory lay in the question of why is something considered good? Is it because God wills it, and therefore whatever God wills is good, or does God only will that which is good, meaning that a standard of goodness is outside of God (and makes the rule the master of the divine)? Advocates the Euthyphro

¹⁸ This is the researcher's attempt at a cumulative presentation the moral argument based on a synthesis of its articulation by Baggett & Walls (2016; 2018), and Baggett & Baggett (2018).

objection conclude that if what is good is simply whatever God wills, then goodness is reducible to a charge of arbitrariness (i.e., what if God commands something terrible, and it is therefore considered good simply because it originated in a command of God?); and if goodness is outside of God, then why must goodness and God be associated, other than that God is subject to goodness (which raises questions of God's autonomy and potentially renders him irrelevant since he would not be necessary for goodness)? For these reasons, some have dismissed divine command theory and its presupposition that what is good (i.e., what is moral) is based on a command of God. However, there is a certain resilience in divine command theory that helps it overcome the arbitrariness charge as well as the God is subject to something outside himself charge.

In answering the Euthyphro objection's two-pronged challenge to divine command theory, Baggett and Walls (2011) ask, "Is there a way to understand morality in a way that neither makes it arbitrary nor makes God irrelevant? If the moral argument is to work, there must be. Fortunately, there is" (46). So, what is the third possibility for explaining Euthyphro's dilemma that avoids both arbitrariness and irrelevance? Beckwith (in Beckwith *et al.* 2000), even though he leans more Thomistic in his approach to questions of morality and the existence of God, takes the basic tact of Baggett and Walls (though in a less developed form) by concluding:

The moral law does depend on God, not because God issues moral commands and is the all-powerful Creator of the universe. Rather, it is because God's nature (or character) is such that it is eternally and perfectly good. That is, God's commands are good not because God commands them, but because God is good. Thus, God is not subject to a moral order outside of himself, and neither are God's moral commands arbitrary. God's commands are issued by a being who is the source of all goodness (Kindle loc. 4990).

In this manner, divine command theory grounds the divine commands in the divine character, thereby entailing that to have a command from God is to have a good command because God is good. The commands of God cannot be other than his character. God is good, so God gives good commands.

4.3.4. Moving from Morality to God's Existence

Building upon the discussion of approaches to making a moral argument for God, in this section the focus turns to how a movement—made in three parts—can transition from moral realism to the source of moral facts in God. As will be shown, this movement from morality to God is possible for orthodox trinitarian theology, but to make the same movement from morality to the Mormon God is not possible unless morality undergoes a change in describing its facts that leads in a more impersonal, Platonic direction than in the direction of classical theism (cf. Beckwith *et al.* 2000). This failing of Mormonism is the subject of the next section, but first, a movement from morality to God's existence in three parts—beginning, middle, and concluding. (NB: In this and the next section the existence of moral facts is assumed, not argued for, since the argument for moral realism has already been made in a previous chapter.)

4.3.4.1. Beginning Movement: There Exist Objective, Personal, Transcendent Moral Laws

Moving from morality to God begins by observing the nature of moral laws, specifically that they are objective, personal, and transcendent. Concerning objectivity, moral concerns are independent of the individual perceiving them, even if such facts are seen subjectively, i.e., by an individual subject or group of subjects. For example, it is an objective moral consideration that all cultures recognize some level of the sanctity of life—there may be different allowances for the taking of a life in this culture versus that one, but all recognize that life on some level is to be protected and not taken without justification. This is an objective moral fact that points beyond the subject to which it applies and holds moral gravity independently of approach or perspective.

Likewise, moral laws are personal, which is to say that they relate to persons in such a way to reveal the personal nature of morality. When speaking of murder, for example, the moral consideration is the murder of a person by another person. One may consider it tragic that a bear attacks and kills a hiker on a mountain trail, but the language used to describe the actions of the bear is not that of “this bear murdered the hiker” but more along the lines of “it is tragic that the hiker died from a bear attack.” There is no

moral culpability assigned to the bear, as such. Rather, moral laws are about persons and the actions of person (be they perceived as individuals or collectively, as in the moral actions of a community or state).

Finally, moral laws are transcendent, which is to emphasize that they reveal something about more than merely physical, material matters—moral laws reveal something about a metaphysical concern inherent in the worlds. When a man is murdered there is more than a concern about the cessation of biological life; what is deeper in such an instance is the loss of a person who has worth and dignity that goes beyond—transcends—the material existence. It is not simply the loss of a biological life, but the unauthorized, illicit taking of a son, father, husband, and friend from those who loved him and with whom he shared more than simply biological connections. Thus, the violation of the moral law associated with the murder of this man points to a transcendent consideration. Moral laws, then, are objective, personal, and transcendent. This is the first movement.

4.3.4.2. Middle Movement: Objective, Personal, Transcendent Moral Laws Require an Objective, Personal, Transcendent Moral Lawgiver

From whence come objective, personal, and transcendent moral laws? The middle movement in moving from morality to God's existence answers that the source of such objective, personal, and transcendent moral laws is also objective, personal, and transcendent. Specifically, a moral lawgiver is the source of such moral laws, else from whence would they come? If a moral law is objective and mind-independent, then must not its source also be objective and mind-independent? If a moral law is personal, then must not its source also be personal? If a moral law is transcendent, then must not its source be transcendent? The cumulative case of the moral apologist layers the answers to these questions one upon another, building the weight of the case for a moral lawgiver who is objective, personal, and transcendent upon the nature of moral laws. Where, then, does this middle movement lead in going from morality to God's existence? It leads to the concluding movement, the God of classical theism.

4.3.4.3. Concluding Movement: The God of Classical Theism is the Objective, Personal, Transcendent Moral Lawgiver

Having started with moral facts that are objective, personal, and transcendent, it is reasonable—the best-case scenario to conclude—that there is an objective, personal, and transcendent source from which moral facts derive. There is an objective, personal, and transcendent moral lawgiver. When considering who this lawgiver might be based on the rational process beginning with moral facts and arriving at a source of moral facts, classical theism—even Christian trinitarianism as the full development of classical theism—identifies the source of moral facts as none other than the objective, personal, and transcendent God of the philosophers whose fullest expression comes when faith meets with reason and ascends to the God of orthodox trinitarianism (cf. Geisler 2011). Thus, to begin with moral facts is to move to a moral lawgiver and to arrive at the God of orthodox theism in its trinitarian construction.

Why this last caveat, that moral facts do not simply lead to the God of classical theism but to the triune Christian God? It has to do with the personal nature of moral laws since a moral lawgiver who gives moral laws is necessarily personal—which implies relational—and the God of Christianity is eternally related to himself in the agape-centric expression of life between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Such perichoresis or circumincession (cf. Dorman 2001), is fundamental to the Christian God, and expressive of the personal nature of moral facts. A Christian's moral argument for God's existence need not, therefore, simply develop to the point of the God of classical theism and no farther. Rather, the intricacies of moral facts—especially their personal nature—lead to a discussion of the personal nature of the giver of the moral facts; to a discussion of the personal God of orthodox trinitarianism. However, is it possible that Mormons can make the same journey from moral facts to their God? As the next section will discuss, it is not possible unless there is an equivocation of words in the discussion of the personal nature of moral laws (or at least a limitation that focuses on the actual moral actor rather than the moral source). This is the point of the next discussion—that Mormonism fails in its moral apologetic for the existence of God.

4.3.5. The Moral Apologetic Failure of Mormonism

There are three basic movements for the Mormon in making a moral argument, movements that they tend to assume are the same as the ones made by their Christian interlocutors in their moral arguments. However, while the beginning movement between Mormons and Christians may be the same, the middle and concluding movements are not.

4.3.5.1. Same Beginning Movement: There Exist Objective, Personal, Transcendent Moral Laws

Mormon claims of morality are the same as Christian claims. Mormons are moral realists, affirming the objective, personal, and transcendent nature of moral laws. Mormons and Christians both affirm that moral laws are facts that are mind-independent and objective, regardless of person or culture. Likewise, Mormons and Christians agree that there is an inherent personalness to moral laws—morality deals with persons and interpersonal issues and grievances. Both also agree that morality is transcendent, pointing beyond the facts of morality to the greater something-ness they reveal about moral actors and the origin of moral laws. So far, so good; Christians and Mormons share the same beginning movement in making a moral argument for God’s existence—there do exist objective, personal, transcendent moral laws. As it now demonstrated, the shared movements between Christians and Mormons diverge when moving beyond moral facts to their source.

4.3.5.2. Failed Middle Movement: Objective, Personal, Transcendent Moral Laws do not Require an Objective, Personal, Transcendent Moral Lawgiver

Whereas Christians make their moral argument for God’s existence by moving from objective, personal, and transcendent moral laws to a moral lawgiver who is also objective, personal, and transcendent, Mormonism falters at this point. Because Mormons affirm that moral facts exist independent of and outside of their God, eternal principles to which the Mormon God is subject. This is a form of moral Platonism, wherein “moral laws are free-floating, Platonic-like forms that are in no mind whatsoever” (Beckwith in

Beckwith *et al.* 2000: Kindle loc. 4432). The problem with this conception is that while objectivity and transcendence can be affirmed as descriptive of the source of moral laws for Mormons, what Mormons cannot claim is that their moral laws come from a personal source.

The same critique that might be made of a Platonist approach to eternal-form-like moral laws applies to Mormonism's impersonal source of moral laws. 1) Without a personal source for the moral laws how one account for "the guilt and shame one feels when one violates the moral law...[since] it is persons, not rules or principles, that elicit...feelings of guilt and shame" (Ibid.). 2) "[E]xperience indicates that moral obligation, though resting on abstract principles, is deeply connected to...obligations toward other persons" (Ibid.), illustrated and explained by Beckwith (in Beckwith *et al.* 2000).

For example, "One ought not to take another person's life without justification" is as much a moral principle as "One ought to do what is morally right for its own sake even when no human person will ever know, and no human person will ever be harmed if one would disobey." For both LDS and classical Christians, the second moral principle is a second-order principle that serves as the basis by which we should obey the first moral principle and other first-order principles. It is obvious to whom we owe our moral obligation with the first principle (i.e., other human beings), but to whom do we owe our moral obligation with the second principle? Clearly, not to other human beings, for they will not know and will not be harmed if we disobey. Perhaps to oneself? But if that were the case, one would not be doing the moral act for its own sake but for oneself. Perhaps we are obligated to act consistently with the second principle because of the commands of a higher finite intelligence like the Mormon God. But that will not do, because one would, again, not be doing the moral act for its own sake. There seems to be really only one option: our obligation to obey the second principle is bound up with a person, but only the sort of person whose nature is such that he is the source of moral principles that are to be obeyed for their own sake. That is, he is both a person and the Good. That is why we feel shame and guilt for disobeying what ought to have been done for its own sake. We have let him down, for we have transgressed the Good. This person is more like the God of classical theism than the God of Mormonism (Kindle loc. 4432-4461).

3) The Mormon understanding of Platonic-like moral facts raises the question of whether derives the “purposing agent or mind behind” (Ibid.: Kindle loc. 4461) moral facts that “can in some purposeful way anticipate the existence of agents...who can apprehend, appropriate, and employ these principles” (Ibid.)? For these reasons the Mormon who affirms on the one hand the existence of objective, personal, transcendent moral facts cannot insist that such requires an objective, personal, and transcendent moral lawgiver; the best a Mormon metaethics entails is some type of impersonal Platonic moral form. This a moral argument for God’s existence does not make, and it is no surprise that, therefore, the Mormon movement from moral facts to the Mormon God also deviates from the Christian approach in its concluding movement.

4.3.5.3. Failed Concluding Movement: The God of Mormonism is not the Objective, Personal, Transcendent Moral Lawgiver

Based on the flow of argument from objective, personal, and transcendent moral facts to a moral lawgiver of the same qualities, the Christian moral argument concludes that the God of classical trinitarianism is the giver of the moral lawgiver. Mormonism, however, without being able to affirm a personal aspect to its source of moral laws is not able to conclude that moral facts supply the basis for a moral argument for the existence of their god. Rather, the Mormon God is a contingent being who has learned to be moral (at least on the polytheistic understanding of the Mormon doctrine of God). “For, like all Mormon Gods, he was once a man on an earth somewhere, and there perhaps committed sins. The Mormon God is supposed to have worked his way up to godhood and attained moral perfection; he did not begin with it” (Beckwith & Parrish 1997: 104). This raise the deeper problem for any attempt to make a moral argument for the existence of the Mormon God— “if the [Mormon] Gods became good, they cannot be the basis of good” (Ibid.). Thus, the God of Mormonism is not and cannot be the objective, personal, transcendent moral lawgiver. He may be morality’s exemplar, but he is not its source.

4.4. Practically Applying the Uprightness Question

What, then, might a brief conversation with a Mormon missionary be like when applying the Uprightness Question? Here is how such a conversation might unfold.

Christian: So, tell me, friend, have you ever heard of the moral argument for God's existence?

Mormon: I do not believe I have. What is it?

Christian: It is a straightforward way to move from discussion of morality to the existence of God. It goes like this: there are moral laws that all people know intuitively; if there are moral laws, there must be a moral lawgiver; thus, the existence of moral laws reveals a moral lawgiver, and this moral lawgiver is God; he is the source of all morality.

Mormon: Sounds right to me? I think you and I may agree here.

Christian: Are we, though? It is less likely than you might think.

Mormon: How so?

Christian: Well, let me start with a question. Where do moral laws come from, according to Mormon teaching?

Mormon: They have always existed. I would say moral laws are eternal.

Christian: So, these eternal moral laws do not come from your god?

Mormon: Wait, they do. God is good and moral.

Christian: That is not the point I am making. You may conclude that your God is good and moral, but is he the source of moral laws?

Mormon: I guess not. I had not really considered this before now.

Christian: So, you cannot conclude that your God exists based on the existence of moral laws, can you?

Mormon: Wait. I am not sure I follow.

Christian: Maybe this will help. Like you, I know that moral laws exist, that objective, personal, and transcendent moral facts exist in the world all people experience and know them at some level. For example, everyone know that it is wrong to murder or steal, at least generally speaking.

Mormon: Yes, that makes sense.

Christian: However, unlike your teaching about the Mormon God, I believe that the source of the objective, personal, and transcendent moral facts is the God of the Christian faith, the trinitarian God. He is the source of morality, so I can begin with morality and get to God, in a manner of speaking.

Mormon: So, can I. I believe in the same type of moral facts, and they come from God...wait, they do not come from God, do they?

Christian: No. That is the point I am making. Your God is subject to moral laws that are outside of him and exist even before him. And this raises the question of how those eternal laws can also be personal since they are not coming from a person. Are you not, by implication, giving the highest authority to morality and making your God subject to its demands?

Mormon: I had not thought of that before. Sounds like we have more talk about next time I stop by.

Christian: Agreed. Let us talk more next time.

4.5. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter considered the “U” in the DEUS acrostic, what has been described as the Uprightness Question. The question: Does Mormon morality conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon god’s existence? The response: Mormon morality does not conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon’s god’s existence. The evidence focused on moral apologetics: including the role of general revelation as foundation to moral apologetics; the value of moral apologetics for emphasizing the moral nature of God and humanity and for centering evangelism on sin, righteousness, and redemption; the

Thomistic and divine command theory approaches to moral apologetics; and a consideration of how one might move from morality to God's existence and make the moral argument from a Christian perspective, though it is not the case that Mormon's can make a moral argument for the existence of their God in the same manner, since their fundamental approach to moral facts is essentially Platonic. In the next chapter the final letter of the DEUS acrostic is considered, the Subjectivity Question based on the Mormon claims that the inner testimony, i.e., the "burning in the bosom" is evidence for the truth of Mormon teaching.

CHAPTER 5. DEUS CHALLENGE – S: THE SUBJECTIVITY QUESTION

In this chapter the challenge to Mormonism concludes with the “S” in the DEUS acrostic, the Subjectivity Question. The question is: Is the “burning in the bosom” reliable evidence for Mormon claims? The response is: Mormon affective claims contradict rational claims for Mormon doctrine. The evidence for the response is passionate reason. The significance of this question and answer for engaging Mormons is two-fold: 1) Mormon truth claims (as will be shown) give significant evidential and explanatory weight to an inner, subjective experience; and 2) while Christians are not averse to the weight of the inner and subjective, there is (as will also be shown) a conviction by Christians that what is affective must correspond with what is rational and objective if the affective is to be considered true.

5.1. Question: Is the “Burning in the Bosom” Reliable Evidence for Mormon Claims?

One of the ways Mormons attest to the truthfulness of their claims is the experience of an inner sense of truth—a burning in the bosom—for the one who is coming to know that Mormon teaching is true. As Mormon apologists with the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research explain, “Moreover, one is entitled to and should receive a spiritual witness from the Holy Ghost about the truthfulness of the scriptures (including the Book of Mormon) before they accept them as true. This is frequently referred to by some as a burning in the bosom.... Again, the united witness of intellect and heart are essential. If either does not agree, then revelation has not confirmed the matter under consideration” (Fair Mormon 2020). Hazen (in Beckwith *et al.* 2000) explains that, historically speaking, the importance of an affective experience corroborating Mormon claims is nothing new, explaining that as Mormonism spread in its earliest days, “the reports are...clear that it was not at all uncommon for a variety of external evidence to lead a seeker to the point of conversion. Some thoughtful people on the frontier, looking for a blend of the ‘revelatory and the empirical,’ found what they were looking for in the [Mormon] movement” (Kindle loc. 804). Thus, considering this emphasis in Mormonism on such subjective and affective claims as contributing to

evidence for the truth of Mormonism, the following question will be explored: Is the “burning in the bosom” reliable evidence for Mormon claims?

5.2. Response: Mormon Affective Claims Contradict Rational Claims for Mormon Doctrine

Although there is a certain legitimacy concerning the epistemic value of approaching matters of evidence in religious matters from a combined rational and affective perspective—and this will be considered at length—in the matter of Mormon claims that the “burning in the bosom” is corroborative and reliable evidence for their doctrine, the response presented herein is that Mormon affective claims contradict rational claims for Mormon doctrine. The evidence for this aspect of a critique of Mormon teaching centers on the tenets of passional reason, wherein the matter of evidentiary weight in truth claims is given to both objective and subjective elements. More on that topic, now, beginning with a basic overview of passional reason and its value to apologetics.

5.3. Evidence: Passional Reason

Apologists are often stereotyped, and sometimes deservedly so, as logic choppers whose primary engagement with other people and ideas is focused exclusively on the cerebral and rational. To summarize a remark from one of the researcher’s parishioners during a discussion following an apologetic conference a few years ago, it is plain apologists have a head, but not always plain that they have a heart. Is this a caricature? Certainly, but a caricature is a likeness to something real, albeit an exaggerated likeness. Therefore, it is important to remember that when apologetics is primarily cerebral and rational it is out of balance and even unbiblical.

Consider how it might be unbiblical for apologetics to become primarily cerebral and rational. In Peter’s words, the purpose of apologetics is to “give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). This passage reveals, among numerous other things, that apologetics is tied to hope, the hope abiding

in a Christian even in the most difficult circumstances.¹⁹ Such hope certainly contains a rational component, but it is more than a logical process that generates and sustains hope—hope involves the whole person’s mind, will, and emotions in trusting God and knowing that He will take care of His children. Thus, to engage in apologetics is to engage in more than a cerebral consideration of premises and conclusions. Further, if apologetics is only engaged in the rational components of fact and argumentation it is out of balance, since to be balanced in apologetics requires the passional and affective elements of a person that are associated with hope and confidence in God. Balanced apologetics engages the whole person, appealing to what Wainwright (1995) describes as passional reason, “the possession of the appropriate moral and spiritual temperament” as concomitant to reason in “track[ing] truth” (5).

What Wainwright and others (*e.g.*, Pascal) recognize is that there is a necessary relationship between a person’s rational and affective abilities that come together in forming faith. An example of Pascal’s appeal to what Wainwright describes as passional reason with a moral apologetic bent appears in quotes like this one from Pascal’s *Pensées*, “Men despise religion. They hate it, fear it is true. To remedy this, we must begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason; that it is venerable, to inspire respect for it; then we must make it lovable, to make good men hope it is true; finally, we must prove it is true. Venerable, because it has perfect knowledge of man; lovable because it promises the true good” (2017: 49).²⁰

Thus, given the significance of passional reason for a fully orbed apologetic engagement and its concomitance to epistemic formation, it is needful to consider from both the vantage point of why it is defensible for apologists to emphasize passional reason, and how Mormon claims based on passional reason run contrary to its basic tenets of the concurrence of the rational and affective in establishing truth claims.

¹⁹ For a helpful consideration of the broader context of Peter’s words concerning apologetics and how they relate to the whole person and the centrality of hope in the gospel message, see Schreiner (2006: 168-179).

²⁰ One can readily see there is also a moral component to Pascal’s thought of the gospel (what he calls religion), as he speak of the fear men have regarding its truth (with moral implications), and the possibility that good men will want it to be true, and that believers should show its truth (a reference to living as much as argumentation), because it reveals who man is (moral implications) and what is the true good (moral implications).

5.3.1. In Defense of Passional Reason

As prelude to the consideration of the evidence supporting the conclusion that Mormon affective claims contradict rational claims for Mormon doctrine, passional reason will be discussed in four general areas: a nuanced definition; examples from Aquinas, Barth, and Wainwright; a response to the criticism that passional reason leads to religious relativism; and a consideration of how passional reason relates to apologetic methodology (adapted from Gentry 2019).

5.3.1.1. Defining Passional Reason

Passional reason may be defined as the combined rational and affective capacity possessed by normally functioning humans, by which they can make decisions regarding religious beliefs that are based on both rationally assessed factual evidentiary content, and affectively assessed subjective content. This definition of passional reason represents an attempt to bring together the rational and affective aspects of the human mind-heart unity that participate in assessing religious truth claims an individual's choice to form religious beliefs based on those truth claims.²¹ To better understand this definition, consider its elements.

First, passional reason involves the rational ability by which humans evaluate evidentiary claims, when evidentiary is defined as that which is historically and empirically verified. For example, it is an evidentiary claim to state that Jesus Christ existed as an historical person two thousand years ago; such a claim may be assessed according to historical methods based on conclusions drawn from archaeological and other historical data. In this instance, a person's rational capacity engages in assessing

²¹ While this researcher does not know of a specific instance where passional reason is so defined, the definition suggested here does, as will be argued below, have its basis in discussions of various aspects passional reason in philosophy and theology. A more popular-level definition, based on this researcher's discussion of passional reason in the context of his pastoral ministry, is as follows: Passional reason is reason whose "head" is filled with discursively derived objective evidence and whose "heart" is touched with affective-passional-subjective evidence, all to the end of cultivating faith for conversion and in the believer.

whether, objectively speaking, the historical truth claim (i.e., Jesus Christ lived two thousand years ago) is true.

Second, *passional reason* involves the affective capacity by which humans assess subjective claims and experiences about matters that may or may not be of an evidentiary nature. Consider the following examples: the truth claim that Jesus Christ actually existed as an historical person, while it may be assessed via a person's rational capacity, also engages the affective capacity insofar as a person may simultaneously consider the historical aspect of Jesus and the claims to divinity he allegedly made during his lifetime; one may rationally conclude Jesus existed historically and affectively conclude that Jesus is Savior and God, insofar as one desires saving and chooses to believe in God. In this instance the affective is tied to the rational capacity; the truth claim that the Holy Spirit fills each believer in Jesus Christ, bringing them comfort when they are lonely, counsel when they are confused, and conviction when they make immoral choices. In this instance the evidentiary basis for the claim, when evidence is narrowly conceived as historical or empirical, may be impossible to sustain. However, given the affective role of evaluating such a religious truth claim, one may conclude that there is an inner assurance and a "peace that passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7) that confirms the belief in the Spirit's personal manifestation in this manner.

Third, the definition of *passional reason* includes the caveat that the rational and affective components forming *passional reason* are engaged by a normally functioning human. What is meant by "normally functioning" is someone who does not have rational or affective maladies such as a brain injury or congenital malformations related thereto. If someone is cognitively impaired by a frontal-lobe brain injury, for example, then he or she may not have full command of the rational and/or affective components of the mind-heart unity. In such instances it may not be possible to evaluate evidentiary matters, or it may not be possible to fully engage the affective dimension regarding claims of the salvific work of God in forgiving sins through Jesus Christ's atoning death on the cross. This is not to say that such individuals do not nor cannot have genuine religious faith,

only that the ordinary process by which the rational and affective come together to form passional reason is impaired.²²

Fourth, passional reason considers evidence more broadly than a rationalist or empiricist would, by attributing evidentiary weight to affective matters. While recognizing the role of rationally evaluated evidence relative to religious truth claims and faith formation, passional reason does not limit evidence to only the rational; the affectively evaluated matters involved in religious truth and faith are also evidence, though of a passional sort. Thus, according to the definition of passional reason proposed herein and nuanced further in the discussion below, the subjective, affective component provides evidence to support religious belief that is equal in significance to the evidentiary contribution of the rational component.

To end this consideration of the constitutive elements of the proposed definition of passional reason, it is presented again, here. *Passional reason is the combined rational and affective capacity possessed by normally functioning humans, by which they can make decisions regarding religious beliefs that are based on both rationally assessed factual evidentiary content, and affectively assessed subjective evidentiary content.* Now to a discussion of the philosophical and theological voices of Aquinas and Barth related to passional reason.

5.3.1.2. Voices of Passional Reason

Varied emphases related to part or all the proposed definition of passional reason may be found in the writings of Aquinas, Barth, and Wainwright. In considering their contributions to the current discussion, a portion of the relevant thought of Aquinas and Barth are presented and evaluated in terms of both the rational and affective components of passional reason, and Wainwright's discussion of passional reason focuses on his emphasis on the proper disposition required to evaluate evidence, as well as his cautions

²² Though beyond the scope of this discussion, Christian theology has historically allowed for such instances by speaking of the necessity of genuine culpability before God, as based on intellectual, moral, and (in a limited sense) physical viability, for anyone to necessarily engage passional reason as an aspect of saving faith. For example, aside from extreme predestinarian views, all persons without normally functioning rational and affective capacities are deemed the recipients of God's special and redeeming grace *ipso facto*. See Lightner (2000).

regarding passional reason. Taken together, the insights Aquinas, Barth, and Wainwright offer will help substantiate the discussion thus far.

5.3.1.2.1. Aquinas's Voice

Regarding the rational aspect of passional reason, it is helpful to remember that Thomas Aquinas maintained that certain truths regarding the Christian faith are accessible by all persons through the ordinary use of unaided reason, apart from special revelation in Scripture, Christ, or the Roman Catholic Magisterium. Aquinas's use of "unaided reasons" does not mean, however, that God is not involved in a person's capacity vis-à-vis unaided reason; this is for two reasons.

1) Aquinas's approach to philosophy is in the classical, pre-enlightenment milieu, and it assumes that there are objectively derived metaphysical realities providing the basis for any philosophical investigation; for Aquinas even the category of physical science is within the broader rubric of philosophical study (e.g., physical science was originally called natural philosophy, a telling example of its pre-enlightenment perspective). Understanding this metaphysical mooring for philosophy helps explain Aquinas's approach in arguing from the appearance of design in the world, as assessed by the physical sciences (natural philosophy) to a Designer (certainly a metaphysical conclusion); again, Aquinas knows nothing of the later divide between metaphysical and physical considerations *a la* Kant et al. Aquinas's philosophical compass is clearly oriented toward the metaphysical objectivity derived from classical philosophical enquiry.

2) In addition to his metaphysical commitments (more likely as an extension of them), Aquinas understood that the nature of man, considering man's creation in the image of God, is necessarily capable, by use of unaided reason, of deriving certain religious truths through rational means. Aquinas writes that,

Man is said to be made to the image of God insofar as by image is meant intellectual, free in judgment and capable of autonomous action. Thus, after the discussion of the Exemplar, that is, of God, and of those things which his power voluntarily produces according to him image, we now go

on to discuss his image, that is, man, insofar as he is the principle of his own activity because he has free will and the power over his own deeds (2019b: I.a.II.a.e.).

Notice the description used by Aquinas of man as “intellectual” and “capable of autonomous action;” therein he provides a glimpse into his understanding that man, in his unaided rational capacity given by virtue of the image of God in which he is made, is intellectually capable and morally free to act and engage and draw conclusions, quite independent of special revelation. For Aquinas, this aspect of man’s creation, when coupled with the related metaphysical basis underlying the physical realm, supplies the impetus for his conclusion about the human ability to rationally derive certain religious truths.

Aquinas further explains his thought regarding man’s capacity for ascertaining religious truths in an unaided manner, stating that “some things which are true of God exceed in every way the capacity of human reason to understand, for example that God is three and one. Some truths are such that they can be attained by natural reason, such as, that God exists, that he is one, and the like, which even philosophers have demonstratively proved of God, led by the light of natural reason” (Aquinas 2019a: I.3.). These truths that he concludes are discernible by unaided reason are the preambles of faith (*praeambula fidei*), what McInerny (1982) describes as “truths about God which can be *known* by men relying on their natural powers alone” (153). It is upon these preambles of faith that Aquinas builds his various arguments for the existence of God (e.g., his cosmological and teleological arguments), therein appealing to rationality as the means to recognize and affirm the divine. Thus, compared to the discussion of passional reason, Aquinas’s thought has the basis for a person’s rational ability to evaluate evidence and draw religious conclusions in a logical, discursive manner.

What about the passional, subjective ability within man; what does Aquinas offer in this area? Ironically, due to what this researcher concludes is an uninformed lack of appreciation for the breadth and depth of Thomistic thought amidst modern, contemporary, and post-modern philosophical considerations, the discussion of Aquinas’s contribution to the passional aspects of religious belief is ordinarily the starting point,

while his contribution to the rational elements is forgotten or ignored. Nonetheless, (and considering his contribution to the rational aspects of the discussion) what Aquinas offers about the subjective elements of passionate reason is significant. Before considering two reasons for its significance, consider what Aquinas teaches about the subjective role in religious truth and belief.

In answer to the question, “Whether faith is infused into man by God?” Aquinas discusses the role of an internal, divinely based principle of action that is required for man to move from the rational assessment of religious truth to a subjective, personal faith in the object of those truths (i.e., in God). According to Aquinas,

[Of] man's assent to the things which are of faith, we may observe a twofold cause, one of external inducement, such as seeing a miracle, or being persuaded by someone to embrace the faith: neither of which is a sufficient cause, since of those who see the same miracle, or who hear the same sermon, some believe, and some do not. Hence, we must assert another internal cause, which moves man inwardly to assent to matters of faith...this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly; and this is God. Therefore faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace (2019b: II.II.6.I.).

What Aquinas argues is that contra the Pelagian claim that man does not need God's inducement to come to faith, but only needs an example (viz. Christ), coming to faith does require both external and internal inducement. Externally, faith is formed by a rational assessment of, for example, the miraculous, or an argument from someone who already believes; these two, however, are an insufficient cause in themselves, as evidenced by the refusal of some to believe even when the external inducements are present.

What Aquinas recognizes is that a second, internal inducement is needed; this is the subjective experience of the divine which moves a person inwardly, in tandem with the external inducement, to believe. Notice that Aquinas does not say that the supernatural principle moving inwardly compels or forces belief, but that it graciously enables a person's assent. In keeping with Aquinas's broader theological perspective

regarding God's gracious desire for all to believe, this is an instance of grace "perfecting" nature, as far as the divine internal inducement makes it possible for all to believe by following the external inducements to the place of assent.²³

Given his understanding of the role of the internally induced divine movement that graciously enables and invites belief, what is its significance for Aquinas's contribution to the subjective part of passional reason? As said above, for two reasons Aquinas's thought in this area is significant. 1) Aquinas shows that, without the internal, subjective component, religious truth cannot be fully and accurately assessed and acted upon; human reason and its interaction with external, objective evidence is part, but not whole in forming faith. Wisely, Aquinas neither dismisses the role of the rational, nor enshrines it as enough. 2) Aquinas shows that the internal, affectively derived and evaluated aspect of assessing religious truth and forming faith is also insufficient; it, too, requires the contribution of another area (viz. the rational). The internal and subjective components are not enough for Aquinas; rationality and subjectivity must come together with their evidence to cultivate an environment where the will may assent to believe. By insisting on the union of the two, Aquinas proves he is neither a fideist nor a strict rationalist; he is an advocate of passional reason.

Moving from Aquinas's emphasis on the external and internal inducements involved in faith assent, which presuppose the metaphysical connection to the physical world and the ability of man's unaided reason to ascertain certain aspects of religious truth, the conversation now turns to additional contributors to the discussion of passional reason. Barth is the next for consideration. Even though Barth's role in understanding passional reason is an area of further research, the following will suggest that the Swiss theologian of neo-orthodox fame (or infamy, depending on the audience), does offer something to the discussion of passional reason.

²³ In this regard, Aquinas speaks of God's antecedent will, by which he truly desires to save all, and his consequent will, by which he allows those who refuse his offer of salvation to perish (Aquinas (2019b: I.19.).

5.3.1.2.2. Barth's Voice

The discussion of Barth that follows draws primarily from his *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, originally presented, in part, as a series of lectures delivered at the end of his formal academic career and later published in book form in 1963. This work was chosen for two reasons. First, it supplies the thought of a mature and pastoral Barth in the post-war years, discussing as it does the fundamental headings of theological discourse in a conversational manner that is not overly technical but still substantive. Second, Barth's succinct discussion of how faith is formed offers a rich summary of Barth's broader work on such topics in his *Church Dogmatics*.

However, before beginning the consideration of Barth's contribution to passionate reason, it is helpful to review Barth's more foundational thoughts about faith. Consider the following concern raised about tendencies within Protestantism related to faith.

[It is] never a desirable tendency to exalt faith into an ontic and central concept, displacing the real object of theology, as though faith were the theme and the true event of salvation. This is what has happened to a wide extent in modern Protestantism, which excessively emphasizes the desire to understand and pursue theology as *pisteology*, the science and doctrine of Christian faith.... As if man were called to believe and confess, not God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but the faith of the Church which expresses itself first in these high-flown words, and finally in his very own faith! . . . Faith is the *conditio sine qua non*, the indispensable condition of theological science, but not its object and theme (Barth 1979: 99-100).

One will notice in this quote that Barth seeks to deemphasize faith as an end in itself, and to emphasize (or reemphasize, since Barth's concern, he claims, is a recovery of ancient Christian practices) that faith is essential relative to Someone beyond itself; faith is directed to the Triune God, and it is he, not faith, per se, which is the focus of theological enquiry. This point relates to the present consideration of passionate reason as far as Barth presupposes that faith involves much more than facts and rationality but is directed to a personal relationship with the Persons of the Godhead. Without dismissing rationality entirely, Barth puts rationality in check with his emphasis on the relational, subjective dimension of faith extended toward its Triune object.

From this starting point, it is now possible to consider what Barth offers on the rational-objective part involved in passionate reason. Barth (1979) explains that man “believes, receives, and follows God and his Word as a man, by the enlistment and use of his normal understanding” (101). Notice that Barth appeals to the “use of...normal understanding” in assessing and accepting the Christian message. He also states that “this act [of engaging religious truth] is genuinely and freely man’s own. The one who affirms, trust, and obeys is not, as it were, God in him, but he himself” (101). This seems like Aquinas’s emphasis on the external inducements by which man engages certain elements of religious truth with his unaided rational abilities which he has vis-à-vis the image of God in which man is created. Like Aquinas, Barth emphasizes the very humanness of the assessment of religious truth via human understanding.

Barth goes on to discuss the role of historical events in forming faith, noting that the events, in themselves, are not the sum of the faith, they are, nevertheless, central to its formation. In the following quote Barth envisions the theologian who might think belief is not about the historical facts of the Christian message, or about the implications such facts bring to bear on a theologian; Barth clearly emphasizes that there is a role of the rational, objective component in faith formation.

Faith might, indeed, include the insight, let us say, that the theologian would do well not to throw up his hands in disgust and hurriedly pass over to demythologizing procedures when he is confronted, for instance, by affirmations regarding Jesus’ birth from a virgin and his descent into hell, or by the resurrection of the flesh and the report of the empty tomb, or by the Trinitarian dogma of Nicaea and the Christological dogma of Chalcedon, and perhaps also by the incorporation of the Church into the profession of faith in the Holy Spirit. The theologian might, instead, do well to ask himself seriously whether he really believes—as he supposes he does—in the God of the Gospel when he thinks he can overlook, delete, or reinterpret these and similar points. It might be quite another God in whom he would then actually believe (1979: 103).

Contrary to those who claim that Barth dismisses the role of historical evidence and the need for a rationally-formed faith founded in fact, this quote demonstrates that Barth, at least in his later years, understood that faith necessarily had an objective, rational

component if it were to be legitimately described as Christian faith.²⁴ Moving from the Barthian thought on the rational and objective in faith, the next question asks what does Barth's thought reveal about the affective and subjective elements of passion reason?

Consider the following two emphases in Barth's thought on the role of the affective-subjective in faith formation. 1) As discussed above, but important to review for this part of the argument, Barth does not limit faith to its rational components. As far as the rational components help serve faith's trajectory toward establishing a personal belief in God, they are fine; however, Barth reminds that a "willingness to believe all those and similar points is not yet faith. Faith is no *credere quot*, but a *credere in*, according to the unmistakable formulation of the Apostle's Creed; it is not a belief 'that...' but a faith 'in...'—in God himself, the God of the Gospel who is Father, Son, and Spirit (1979: 103). Barth's emphasis on the personal trust placed in the Persons of the Godhead reveals the affective, subjective element of faith formation. He encapsulates this concern in the following words: "Christian faith occurs in the encounter of the believer with him in whom he believes. It consists in...communion with him" (99).

2) Barth's explanation of the nature of doubt gives insight into the affective and subjective part of faith. Before considering a quote from his discussion of doubt that specifically relates to passion reason, understand that there are two types of doubt Barth addresses in *Evangelical Theology*. The first type is what he describes as the necessary doubt engendered by the theological task of questioning and probing to better understand and explain the Christian message; doubt of this nature is to be expected and embraced, as it poses no existential threat to Christian faith, per se, but only seeks to refine its articulation (Barth 1979: 121-123). The second type of doubt Barth discusses is more pernicious, and of a species that portends to destroy faith at its foundation (123-132). Regarding such doubt Barth sees that what is brought into confusion are not issues of theology, but the whole theological enterprise. This type of doubt conjoins with Satan in the Garden as he tempts Eve with the insidious "Has God indeed said...?" (Gen. 3:1). In

²⁴ This is not an attempt by the researcher, however, to ignore Barth's problematic teachings regarding what constitutes the Word of God (i.e., it is the encounter with the Spirit, therein, rather than the actual text of Scripture; see Barth (1979: 15-24), only to emphasize that the later Barth placed a strong emphasis on the rational, objective component of faith formation. He certainly said more, but he did at least say this much.

concluding his thoughts on this type of doubt, Barth states that “there is certainly a justification for the doubter [since no person has perfect knowledge] But there is certainly no justification for doubt itself.... No one, therefore, should account himself particularly truthful, deep, fine, and elegant because of his doubt. No one should flirt with his unbelief or with his doubt. The theologian should only be sincerely *ashamed* of it” (131).

It is in the discussion of this second type of doubt that Barth reveals more of his understanding of the affective and subjective aspects of faith. He asks:

[Is] the object of theology, even the history of Immanuel, its revelation and human knowledge of it, a real, solid, reliable basis upon which to build? Is there really a foundation, deeper than all pious emotions and their corresponding self-assurance, and stronger than the many more-or-less useful apologetic arguments, that can be fashioned from historical, psychological, or speculative considerations? Does God really exist, work, and speak in the history of Immanuel, of Israel, of the church, of theology? Is there something like the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, by which we are assured of God’s existence, activity, and speech in that history (1979: 123-124)?

Barth’s questions on doubt show that he understands that faith formation involves an affective and subjective part, including pious emotions, self-assurance, and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. This latter aspect, he warns, exposes the greatest area of vulnerability for theologians; if the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is muted, then Barth fears that all faith will be lost. These aspects are certainly of the subjective and affective realm which, when joined with the objective and rational elements discussed above, provide not only the basis upon which to form Christian faith, but are also, considering Barth’s concern for certain expressions of doubt, central to shoring up the foundation of Christian faith against the pernicious attacks of Satanic-inspired instances of doubt.

To summarize Barth, consider what has been discovered in his work regarding faith. 1) Barth carefully emphasizes that faith is not the object of the Christian’s pursuit, but the means; the object is the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 2) Barth explains that faith involves the use of ordinary human reason in assessing religious truth

claims; the implication is that rationality, as far as it is part of ordinary human reason, is involved. 3) Barth highlights the importance of historical, evidence-based claims associated with the Christian faith, and the significant role such claims play in forming faith; rather than blind fideism without any evidence, Barth's approach is an eyes-wide-open assessment of the factual claims of the Christian message. 4) Barth's emphasis on the telos of faith as a relationship with the Persons of the Godhead reveals his affective and subjective emphasis coming alongside his rational and objective emphasis. 5) In addressing doubt, specifically doubt of the legitimacy of Christian faith, Barth emphasizes the affective and subjective role of piety, self-assurance, and, most importantly, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

Taken together, these five discoveries reveal that Barth understands that it takes both the rational-objective and the affective-subjective to develop a holistic Christian faith. Such is the essence of passionate reason, and precisely why Barth helps clarify how passionate reason relates to faith formation.

5.3.1.2.3. Wainwright's Voice

Wainwright also makes a helpful contribution to the discussion of passionate reason. In *Reason and the Heart*, Wainwright (1995) presents his discussion of passionate reason initially in summary form, then as found in the works of Edwards, Newman, and James, and finally considering the common objections raised against it. Rather than engaging his work in terms of the role of the objective and rational, and then in terms of the subjective and affective in forming passionate reason, this interaction focuses on two different areas. First, what is Wainwright's definition of passionate reason and what is the emphasis he gives to a proper affective disposition when assessing rational evidence? Second, what are Wainwright's concerns related to passionate reason, and are they justified?

Wainwright (1995) seeks to determine if there is a middle-ground between reason and religious subjectivity, and he concludes such a middle-ground does exist, explaining that "mature religious belief can, and perhaps should, be based on evidence but that the evidence can be accurately assessed only by men and women who possess the proper

moral and spiritual qualifications” (3). He then continues to distinguish between the rational consideration of evidence and the “proper moral and spiritual qualification” necessary to assess such evidence (Ibid.). In this way he differs from Aquinas and Barth, as far as Wainwright concludes that the evidence, as objectively and rationally evaluated, provides the basis for proper belief, and it is the rightly ordered affective component of a person that allows her to properly appreciate such evidence.

Notice the distinction; whereas Aquinas and Barth conclude that both the rational and objective components come together with the affective and subjective to form passionable reason, which then leads to the proper formation of faith, Wainwright concludes that the affective and subjective must first become properly disposed and then the evidence may be evaluated. Without the proper affective and subjective disposition, evidence will not be evaluated in a manner that results in Christian faith, resulting in Wainwright’s conclusion that passionable reason does not produce a conversion, but results from a conversion. Wainwright (1995) explains this ordering in the following statement, “Religious belief seems to depend more directly on the state of one’s heart or moral temperament than on evidence” (3). Belief follows the heart’s transformation since the heart must first reach a proper disposition if it is to accurately assess evidence for faith. Evidence is not discounted, but the heart becomes primary.

Wainwright (1995) further asks, “How else explain why two equally intelligent and informed inquirers can arrive at such different assessments of the same evidence” (2)? This is only possible, according to Wainwright, if the heart is first changed, since it is the lens by which the evidence is evaluated. Not only is this the properly ordered epistemic process (i.e., heart then evidence), but Wainwright also argues that “this view was once a Christian commonplace; reason is capable of knowing God based on evidence—but only when one’s cognitive faculties are rightly disposed.... It places a high value on proofs, arguments, and inferences yet also believes that a properly disposed heart is needed to see their force” (3). At this point Wainwright defers from explaining his own views as to why this order is correct, or how the heart is changed to evaluate, rather than because of the evidence. He does, however, offer the views of Edwards, Newman, and James as examples of how one might draw his conclusion.

According to Wainwright (1995), what Edwards, Newman, and James have in common are three commitments: 1) all agree that there is strong evidence for religious truth; 2) all agree “that proper epistemic functioning depends on the possession of the appropriate moral or spiritual temperament” (5); and 3) all agree that “when properly disciplined, [the] passional nature tracks the truth... ‘passional reason’ is reliable” (5). Wainwright goes on to explain that, for Edwards, the properly ordered affective and subjective perspective needed to rightly evaluate the evidence for Christianity comes from the work of the Holy Spirit regenerating the elect, who are then able, as a result of receiving the gift of faith, to assess the claims of faith rightly; without regeneration there is still a recognition of some evidence for God’s existence and claims, but until the heart is changed the force of these claims is indiscernible to a person.

Newman and James, distinct from Edwards, do not necessarily associate the attainment of a proper disposition, affectively and subjectively speaking, with the converting work of the Holy Spirit, though they do affirm the importance of the passional nature in assessing truth claims—not just religious claims, but all truth claims. Their positions rest, to a greater degree in Newman and to a lesser in James, on some variation of a theistic metaphysic; however, and this is the key distinction from Edwards, neither of their views carries with it the presupposition of Edwards’s high Calvinistic soteriology. Newman operates from within a Roman Catholic, Thomistic approach (much in line with the discussion of Aquinas, above) and James approaches the discussion from the perspective of psychology and the pervasiveness of religious experience among human beings (Wainwright 1995: 55-107). These distinctions are why one does not find in the explanations of Newman and James the same emphasis on the impossibility, apart from a work of the Holy Spirit, for men to assess rational and objective evidentiary claims.

What is one to think of Wainwright’s claims vis-à-vis Edwards, Newman, and James? Wainwright shows that an evaluation of evidence for religious claims entails affective and subjective concerns. If what constitutes a person includes both mind and heart, and religious truth makes claims that are both rational and affective, then such claims, if countenanced and evaluated by a normally functioning human being, will be viewed through the lens of passional reason as an expression of the whole person.

Likewise, the state of one's affective and subjective capacity will influence how evidence is evaluated, as far as the meaning associated with evidence (e.g., whether it is moral or metaphysical) will vary with a person's level of one's affective capacity (e.g., a four-year-old will experience evidence differently from a seventy-year-old). Thus, Wainwright does offer insight into both the totality of the human person involved in assessing religious truth claims and forming beliefs, and in the valuation of the evidentiary elements of such claims by different affective conditions. In these areas Wainwright is helpful.

However, Wainwright's emphasis on the proper requisite affective and subjective disposition necessary to rightly assess religious truth faces two problems. First, who is correct in their assessment of how this happens? Is it Edwards with his predestinarian monergism? Newman with his implicit faith and illative sense? James with his appreciation for the commonality of religious experience and its psychological implications? Or is it someone different? Wainwright does not offer an answer of any specificity to his own question, and it is likely that he cannot, given the significant differences (seeming irreconcilable beyond a basic level of commonality) between the views of those he considers as adhering to his perspective.

Why? This researcher suggests that Wainwright is incorrect to set up a priority of heart and then head in evidence evaluation via passional reason. Rather than making the discussion about how the affective and subjective disposition must first change, and that only those who have such a change can properly evaluate religious truth claims, why not emphasize the parity of the two aspects of passional reason by nuancing the discussion within a theological construct emphasizing the role of God's prevenient grace in enabling all persons with the ability to (at least regarding the initial, basic experience of salvation) assess evidence from a rational and affective perspective?

As it is explained now, does not Wainwright's ordering lead to a certain epistemic elitism, since not all have the proper disposition, with the outcome that only those who do can recognize it in those who do not? This approach may hold within the narrow epistemic construct of an Edwardsian soteriology, but outside of such high-Calvinistic

leanings it lacks enough explanatory power. However, the possibility of prevenient grace discussed above (echoed in Aquinas and Barth, though in diverse ways) does provide the explanatory power for both the importance of passional reason, and why the heart does not necessarily require conversion prior to having an influence on the evaluation of religious truth claims.

What about the cautions Wainwright presents regarding passional reason? In the epilogue of *Reason and the Heart*, he offers “that certain affections are needed to perceive the truth of religious claims is not as outré or as ad hoc as one might think.... Affectivity and our cognition of value may be closely related” (Wainwright 1995: 149). Even with the disagreements discussed above, it is possible to appreciate the gist of Wainwright’s position expressed here; the affective impacts the rational, and vice-versa. However, is it that passional reason only applies to matters of theological claims entailing certain value claims? This is the possibility Wainwright suggests relative to when passional reasoning is legitimate, saying that “Some (all?) theological claims entail value claims. The nature of the latter may determine the nature of the affections needed to grasp the former” (152).

Yes and no. Yes, the nature of a theological claim’s value claim is relevant when considering theological claims through the lens of passional reason. This is the point of the entire discussion thus far. No, however, to his idea that it is possible that theological claims may be value-free or at least some value claims differ so such a degree that, at least by implication from his own argumentation, they are not necessarily evaluated via passional reason. It is not entirely clear how any theological claim is free of values, though that may be debatable, nor is it clear how one chooses when to use and not to use passional reason; if passional reason assumes the whole person is involved in assessing truth claims, especially of a religious nature, then how would one engage only half of their person? Would it not involve an affective and subjective judgment to do so, making it impossible to ever function without the use of passional reason?

What may be concluded is that passional reason is not an option; it is concomitant with how normal well-adjusted people function. The whole person is always engaged in

assessing evidence for truth claims, and the whole person—rational and affective— informs every evaluation of truth and the concomitant choice to believe. Some instances may involve more rationality than affectivity, such as in determining whether or not a book that is alleged to belong in the biblical canon meets certain historical standards; and some instances may involve more affectivity than rationality, such as when determining whether God is leading a pastor to consider a new calling; both instances, however, engage both aspects of passionate reason.

For the sake of discussion, and in support of Wainwright's basic idea that there are instances when theological value judgments may influence the affective aspect of passionate reason differently, consider these two examples from the New Testament. 1) When Peter preaches to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, he concludes his message with the following: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). This closing claim comes after Peter addressed the significance of the disciples' speaking in tongues (2:1-4) considering Joel's prophecy of the last days (2:14-21), followed by a proclamation of Jesus' Davidic lineage and fulfillment of Davidic prophecy (2:22-35). What was the response to this profoundly pointed and value-laden message? Luke records the response in 2:37, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" Is this not a clear example of passionate reason's role in evaluating religious truth claims? Peter offers the rational and objective/evidentiary components related to Jesus, precipitating a rationally formed but affectively expressed response. The minds and the hearts of that Jewish audience were fully engaged on that day, and passionate reason led them to choose to believe in Jesus as their Messiah (2:40-47).

2) In Jude 23, Jude admonishes that the call to confront false teachers and correct erring brethren requires the believers to take drastic measures with significant epistemic implications. Jude writes, "Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." Given the broader context of Jude's statement, which includes a charge to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints," (3) and a command in 21 to "keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for

the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,” Jude appears to fully engage the passionate reason of his readers. The facts are clear for Jude; there are false teachers propagating damnable heresies (11-13), and the believers are to stay pure and do all they can to save some through fear, which is a reference to preaching and teaching about the terrors of the Final Judgment and eternal separation from God in hell. Not only is Jude engaging his reader’s passionate reason—he is also urging them to reason passionately for the truth of the Christian message.

These two examples from the New Testament represent what, in a qualified sense, Wainwright seems to suggest when discussing the role of passionate reason in theological value statements. To that end, his insights are helpful about the way passionate reason relates to different situations, depending on the significance of the matters being evaluated. And, lest it appear that Wainwright is being evaluated too critically, his final statement in *Reason and the Heart* demonstrates that Wainwright’s general epistemic humility regarding the exploration of passionate reason is laudable; Wainwright (1995) concludes, “To settle these matters, though, is beyond the scope of this book. Its purpose has been to convince the reader that (under the right conditions) passion, sentiment, and affection may be necessary conditions of using our cognitive faculties correctly” (154). It is hard to disagree, either rationally or affectively. Not all, however, agree (either rationally or affectively (!)) concerning passionate reason. The primary criticism leveled is that it leads to religious relativism, which, if true, makes it the enemy rather than the ally of sound epistemic formation (154). Thus, this charge of relativism bears consideration.

5.3.1.3. Responding to Criticisms of Passional Reason

Those who object to passionate reason for fear of religious relativism are raising what may be called a practical objection, rather than a purely epistemic one. Although there are certainly epistemic concerns involved in the objection, as far as the affective and subjective aspects related in passionate reason do impact one’s evaluation of religious claims and belief choices, the objection regarding relativism deals more directly with the outcome of passionate reason, rather than the process by which it “works.” However, as the response to the charge of relativism reveals, to alleviate the concern about religious

relativism it is helpful to consider evidentiary matters, as well. To engage the objection, begin with the question: What is it that the charge of religious relativism claims?

According to Wainwright (1995), at issue is that

Christians and other sincere theists typically contend that their new dispositions and feelings place them in a superior epistemic position with respect to certain questions...nontheists make similar claims. So too do historians, philosophers, critics, and others who are confident of opinions established by informal reasoning in matter of fundamental dispute. There appear to be no neutral criteria that can be used successfully to adjudicate these conflicting claims of epistemic superiority (124).

Based on this concern, Wainwright's implication about epistemic superiority as a necessary part of passionate reason aside, the charge of religious relativism may be thought of propositionally as follows:

1. There are adherents of every religion that claim their beliefs are true.
2. The affective and subjective aspects of passionate reason supply the justification upon which these adherents make their claims.
3. Therefore, passionate reason leads to religious relativism.

What is the answer to this objection? Consider the following.

The fact of diverse religious beliefs and the role of passionate reason in forming those beliefs do not necessarily require that passionate reason leads to religious relativism, since the constituent components of passionate reason are both the rational and objective, and the affective and subjective. Both components of passionate reason are required to accurately assess and form beliefs. If the affective and subjective take part in determining the truth or falsity of Muslim claims, for instance, this does not entail that the rational and objective are not involved. When weighing the evidentiary claims about the reliability of the *Koran* or the historical character of Mohammed according to the accepted practices of historical scholarship, there is legitimate reason to reject the claims of Islam.

This rational and objective side of the discussion necessarily effects the affective and subjective, leading either to blind fideistic acceptance despite the evidentiary concern, or to a decision to reject Islam. If Islam is rejected, then passionate reason is working properly as the affective and subjective work in tandem with the rational and objective; however, if Islam is accepted, it is despite the evidence, and passionate reason is not working properly as far as the affective and subjective refuse to be properly informed by the rational and objective. Passionate reason is different from anti-evidentialism or fideism. The issue is not passionate reason, per se, but the person who refuses to give place to half of the passionate reason equation.

Wainwright (1995) concludes that, rather than providing the impetus for religious relativism, passionate reason, with its emphasis on the holistic evaluation of religious truth claims and belief formation, “can even help defuse relativism” (146). How? By supplying an epistemic middle ground upon which to check a tendency to make all matters simply affective and subjective, on the one hand, or rational and objective on the other hand. As Wainwright goes on to state, “Not only does [passionate reason] . . . not *support* relativism; it may be the only means of avoiding it” (147). To solidify the value of passionate reason in combating, rather than supporting, relativism (and uninformed religious zeal of varied types), consider one more propositional explanation.

1. Religious truth claims, and belief formation involve the rational and objective evaluation of evidence according to accepted evidentiary practices.
2. Religious truth claims, and belief formation also involve the affective and subjective evaluation of evidence according to passionate means.
3. Passionate reason requires that the evaluation of religious truth claims, and belief formation involve both the rational and objective, as well as the affective and subjective, and never only one or the other.
4. Therefore, passionate reason is a safeguard against religious relativism, which dismisses the role of the rational and objective entirely or subjugates it to the affective and subjective.

These propositions intend to show that passional reason, far from leading to religious relativism, safeguard against it. Only when the whole person is engaged, both rationally and affectively, can religious truth claims, and belief formation properly occur. This, as now discussed, is especially relevant for matters related to Christian apologetics.

5.3.1.4. Passional Reason and Apologetic Methodology

Does passional reason have an impact on apologetic method? Given passional reason's engagement of the whole person—rational-objective and affective-subjective—it is difficult to imagine how it could not have an impact on apologetic method. However, for the sake of clearly showing the relationship between apologetics and passional reason, briefly consider the following.

First, it is likely that passional reason is implied in the command in 1 Pet. 3:15 to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.” This passage involves two commands: 1) sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; 2) be ready to give a defense. These commands are interrelated, as far as the first speaks to the affective and subjective disposition that is to be cultivated in the apologist's heart, and the second speaks to the rational and objective disposition that is to be cultivated in the apologist's mind as she maintains a readiness to defend the reasonableness of the hope found in the Christian message. In this one passage the heart and the mind are called upon relative to the apologist. McKnight (1996) comments that Peter's words here speak “to one's mental or spiritual attitudes,” as well as an “exhortation to holy living” when engaged in the defense of the faith (Kindle loc. 4329). This is a description of the whole of an apologist's life—mental, spiritual, and moral—all take part in the defense of the faith. However, this raises the question of whether what Peter is concerned to address is more than the disposition of the apologist, but does it affect how the apologist presents the Christian message?

This raises the second aspect of the relationship between passional reason and apologetic method. It is more than the apologist's disposition that involves heart and mind, it is also the message. Peter explains in 3:15 that the defense (*apologian*; Zodiates 1992: 770) is related to an unbeliever's query regarding “a reason for the hope that is in

[the Christian].” Notice that the unbeliever is seeking something rational (i.e., “a reason”) relative to something affective (i.e., “the hope”); this combination has the marking of passionate reason, does it not? Further, the rational and the affective provide the basis of the unbeliever’s engagement, which is, based on the broader context of Peter’s words (cf. 3:8-17), motivated by the believer’s ability to remain faithful to Jesus amid suffering. This type of curiosity drives the unbeliever to want to understand both the rational and affective aspects of the Christian message, as he looks to understand hope.

Lewis understood this basic juxtaposition between hope and rationality, especially clear in his argument from joy for the existence of God. It is presented here as an example of the biblically derived approach to apologetics that is borne of passionate reason. Lewis (1952) argues that (to quote what was discussed in a previous chapter of this work), “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world” (136-137). Notice how Lewis interweaves one’s affective desire for something other-worldly with a rational conclusion that this longing supplies a justification for believing that one is created for another world. Kreeft (2019) gives Lewis’s argument in syllogistic form, making it still clearer how the affective and rational meet as an appeal to passionate reason.

P1: Every natural, innate desire in us corresponds to some real object that can satisfy that desire.

P2: But there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature can satisfy.

C: Therefore, there must exist something more than time, earth, and creatures, which can satisfy this desire.

As presented in this hurried discussion of Lewis, preceded by Peter’s admonition about the believer’s conduct of apologetics, there certainly appears to be a relationship between

passional reason and the method of Christian apologetics. The mind and the heart are engaged in the defense of the faith, both in the apologist and in the one to whom witness is given. As is shown now, this concern for mind and heart is germane to the discussion of the validity of Mormonism's claims concerning the inner testimony of the Spirit by converts to Mormon belief.

5.3.2. Passional Reason and Mormonism

A *prima facie* consideration of Mormon epistemology reveals a soundness of approach to faith formation—both the rational and the affective bear evidentiary weight in a manner reflective of the basic structure of passional reason already discussed. However, passional reason is more than simply a construct; what is paramount to its effectiveness in forming legitimate beliefs based on what is true and accurate is how the rational and affective complement and corroborate each other as concomitants to truth. If appeals to passional reason make, for example, affective claims that are contradicted by rational claims then passional reason is not properly serving its epistemic function. One cannot ordinarily be in error rationally and still grant valid credence to a corresponding affective sense. To use an example from mathematics, no matter how strongly one may affectively sense that $2+2=5$, the objective, rational evidence is to the contrary; $2+2=4$. Thus, if passional reason is to work properly, there must be integrity between the rational and affective components, or one or both is in error. Consider another example in the opposite direction. If someone is able to rationally argue it is legitimate to adopt a racist approach to ethnicity, even arguing with a valid syllogism that black and white populations are fundamentally inferior and superior, respectively, the innate and affective resistance to such deliberations must be heeded and the conclusion drawn that even if a rational case is possible in merely logical terms, the subjective evidence cannot be discounted, and not amount of racist-tinged logic can supplant the evidence of the moral compass expressed in a person's heart. Either way—be it an error of rationality or affectivity—for passional reason to serve its legitimate epistemic function there must be some correspondence to truth at both the objective and subjective level for the weight of passionately reasoned deliberations to hold. Therein is the problem with Mormonism: while there are certainly affective claims made, the rational aspects create a contradiction

that reveal the error of the entire enterprise of those who claim to have passionately reasoned their way to the legitimacy of Mormonism.

5.3.2.1. Mormonism's Affective Claims

As discussed already, advocates of Mormonism make affective claims concerning diverse types of what may be considered an inner testimony or conviction that subjectively substantiates their commitments to the rationality of Mormon teaching. This may be described broadly as the “burning in the bosom,” a phrase based on both the account in Luke’s gospel (24:13-32) of the two walking to Emmaus who encounter the risen Jesus and, after his departure, explain that their hearts were burning within them as he spoke to them; and upon an instance described in the Mormon canon as follows:

In the early day of the [Mormon] Church, Oliver Cowdery received the following revelation through Joseph Smith: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart that you might know concerning the truth of these things. Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have from God? (D&C 6:22-23).” Notice the information is spoken to the “mind,” and the feeling of peace accompanies the intellectual gift (Fair Mormon 2020a).

Thus, the idea of an affective corroboration of the truth of divine revelation in Mormonism. But what, specifically, is being described here?

Oaks (Fair Mormon 2020a) explains, “Surely, the word ‘burning’ in this scripture [i.e., both Luke 24 and D&C 6] signifies a feeling of comfort and serenity. That is the witness many receive. That is the way revelation works.” The alleged revelation given to Cowdery offers a similar explanation, “But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right, I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right” (Fair Mormon 2020a). Here, Cowdery combines the rational and affective components—passional reason—as coming together to confirm Mormon revelation. Thus, the affective claims of Mormonism may be—and it is important to recognize that not all Mormons claim to have had this experience of the “burning in the bosom,” though many have—understood as the inner sense of peace and comfort that confirms what one finds in Mormon teaching.

This is the affective side of epistemic weight in Mormonism, so now to a brief consideration of the rational claims that Mormons make in completing their passionately reasoned approach. For the sake of focus only alleged contradictions in the Mormon canon are considered, thereby looking to show whether the book is internally consistent or not. Other areas of rational consideration could be provided, but the point here is simply to investigate claims that there is a rational and affective concomitance in Mormonism. This can then be considered as either contradictory or not, thus either confirming or undermining the claims to the evidentiary weight of passion made by Mormons as part of their testimony.

5.3.2.2. Mormonism's Rational Claims

Consider the claim Mormons make of the historical reliability of the Book of Mormon's accounts of the Nephite and Lamanite nations. However, before examining the relevant claim, it is important to note the authority given to the Book of Mormon by Orson Pratt, a member of the original Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of Mormonism and a key Mormon theologian and writer (Ludlow 1992: 924-928). Regarding the importance of the Book of Mormon, Pratt declared in 1851,

This book must be either true or false. If true, it is one of the most important messages ever sent from God. If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever palmed upon the world... if, after a rigid examination, it be found imposition, it should be extensively published to the world as such; the evidences and arguments on which the imposture was detected, should be clearly and logically stated, that those who have been sincerely yet unfortunately deceived, may perceive the nature of deception, and to be reclaimed, and that those who continue to publish the delusion may be exposed and silenced... by strong and powerful arguments, by evidences adduced from Scripture and reason (Pratt 1851: 1-2).

With this statement in mind, consider the Book of Mormon's claim (through Joseph Smith) in 6:9-15 that the Nephite and Lamanite nations "waged large-scale wars with each other for hundreds of years, culminating in a conflict in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed in A.D. 385 near Hill Cumorah in present day New York State" (Rhodes 2001: Kindle loc. 1103). It is reasonable to conclude that claims of this scale would enjoy archaeological support. However, as Mesoamerican archaeologist Coe

(1973) explains, “The bare facts of the matter are that nothing, absolutely nothing, has ever shown up in any New World excavation which would suggest to a dispassionate observer that the Book of Mormon, as claimed by Joseph Smith, is a historical document relating to the history of early immigrants to our hemisphere.”

Likewise, the Mormon scholar Johnson (1992) concludes that “Many scholars see no support for the Book of Mormon in the archaeological record, since no one has found inscriptional evidence for, or material remains that can be tied to any persons, places, or things mentioned in the book” (62). Is it rational, then, to conclude that Smith’s revelation is divine, given that if it is divine then what God revealed is lacking any corroborating historical or archaeological evidence? Making the claim is one thing but proving that it is rational to attest to its veracity requires more than assertion. While it may be objected that given time the revelation will be corroborated by archaeological evidence, such an instance would be to commit the logical fallacy of special pleading by deliberately ignoring unfavorable evidence for the Book of Mormon.

Consider another challenge to the rational acceptance of Mormonism based on a logical critique of classical polytheistic Mormon claims that there are an infinite number of gods. As Smith explains, “God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father...He had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father. And where was there ever a father without first being a son” (cited by Beckwith *et al.* 2000: 194). This statement presupposes the idea of infinite regress, which is philosophically flawed for the following reasons: “the apparent scientific fact that the universe had a beginning in time and that an actual infinite regress is impossible” (Ibid.). Of the significant problems posed by an infinite regress, one that is especially germane for apologetic engagement with Mormons is that the possibility of an infinite regress is philosophically impossible, and leaves open the claim that the Mormon doctrine of God is intractably irrational.

While it is true that monarchotheistic Mormons recognize the problems with this idea of infinite Gods and the infinite regress it entails, the teaching is still considered—by statement and implication—to be orthodox Mormon doctrine. One understands from a logical perspective why Slick (2020) would conclude regarding the Mormon teaching of

infinite regress, “There cannot be an infinite regress of causes, i.e., a God that exalted someone to godhood, who exalted someone to godhood, ad infinitum. This is logically impossible...you cannot cross an infinity.... Therefore, the Mormon system of infinite regressions of exaltations to godhood is impossible.”

5.3.2.3. Mormonism’s Self-contradictory Passional Reason

How does this discussion of historical and archaeological problems with the Book of Mormon, and the logical impossibility of the Mormon teaching about an infinite regress of Gods relate to passional reason? Simply as follows: Mormon claims that the internal witness of the Spirit corroborates the rational consideration of the objective evidence regarding Mormon teaching about the veracity of the Book of Mormon or the necessity of infinite regression violates the basic tenets of how passional reason—the concomitance of objective and subjective, rational and affective evidence—works in contributing to belief formation and epistemic confidence regarding the truthfulness of religious claims. If something is legitimately affectively corroborated (i.e., if the “burning in the bosom” is true) then it will also be rationally corroborated. Yet, what Mormons claim on the affective level about the inspiration of the Book of Mormon is contradicted by the rational consideration of its historical and archaeological errors. Likewise, what Mormons claim about the subjective conviction of the Mormon teaching about who their God is meets contradictory logical evidence at the level of the impossibility of an infinite regression.

The problem is not passional reason, per se, only that Mormon claims to the nexus of the rational and the affective in forming their faith convictions do not hold up under the weight of epistemic scrutiny. As has already been argued, passional reason is a legitimate epistemic consideration in belief formation, since the rational and affective are both important in helping individuals come to believe and know anything. Yet, as the refutation of the charge that some make of passional reason leading to relativism was also argued above, it is precisely because passional reason insists that for its proper epistemic outcome to be realized the person must have a legitimate basis for accepting both the rational and the affective—not one or the other, but both, and when one is absent the

other is justifiably suspect. Therefore, concerning Mormon claims, if the heart is truly to rejoice in truth, it must be truth that the mind can accept as rational and logical—and this is the shortcoming of the Book of Mormon’s claims to veracity and the philosophical error of infinite regression of godhood. The Mormon heart, as far as it takes part in the passionately reasoned approach to truth, cannot actually and without contradiction receive with peace and serenity what the Mormon mind necessarily rejects based on reason and logic. Thus, the Mormon claims of subjective certainty based on “burning of the bosom” fall short of the standards of passional reason.

5.4. Practically Applying the Uprightness Question

Of all the practical applications of the DEUS Challenge, the Uprightness Question is likely to evoke the most engagement on the personal level since the conversation will necessarily turn on one’s feelings and innermost convictions. It can be a bit unnerving to have your convictions challenged, but when used along with the other aspects of the DEUS Challenge, the cumulative effect on the Mormon interlocutor may prove weighty enough to begin an important and necessary avalanche of doubt leading to more openness to the Christian message as distinct from the Mormon message. Here, then, is a practical application of the Uprightness Question, following the same conversational approach used in earlier chapters.

Christian: Good to see you again, friend. What is the topic today?

Mormon: I would like to give you my personal experience with Mormonism and talk about the way in which God has confirmed in my heart the Mormon truth.

Christian: Sounds very personal...and interesting. Please continue.

Mormon: Well, as I began to consider the teachings of the Book of Mormon and in other Mormon writings, I did initially have some doubts. However, at the recommendation of my spiritual mentor I continued to study, and then began to ask God to give me a “burning in the bosom” so that I might know.

Christian: So, you were looking for some way for your emotions to align with what you were learning in your head?

Mormon: Yes, something like that. What happened was amazing. I found myself at peace with the Mormon teachings, even if I could not make sense of some of them. Once I felt that peace, I accepted the teaching and found my conviction growing stronger and stronger. I believe if you will give your heart a chance to accept what I have been telling you, your experience will be the same.

Christian: Interesting. So, let me get this right. You found yourself feeling peace and a warming in your heart even though you had great challenges in your head about some of the teaching and that warming led you to accept the teaching?

Mormon: I suppose so.

Christian: Actually, I am so glad you brought this to my attention. You see, I do believe we need both the rational and objective facts as well as the affective and subjective conviction if we are to fully form our beliefs about anything, especially something as important as ultimate truth and God.

Mormon: Yes! That is my point, exactly.

Christian: So, here is my struggle, both in my head and in my heart. I believe that the heart should not rejoice or take comfort in something that my mind rejects, and I also believe that my mind should be able to accept what my heart takes comfort in. Does that make sense.

Mormon: I think so. Head and heart go together. Is that what you are saying?

Christian: Precisely! Establishing a belief takes evidence that is both logical and rational, as well as emotive and affective. Both head and heart. So, when it comes to your claims about the “burning in the bosom” I have some concerns.

Mormon: How so?

Christian: Well, as we have discussed, the teaching of Mormonism is that God is one of an infinite number of Gods, that before this God there was another and so on into eternity.

Mormon: It is a mystery, for sure.

Christian: Actually, and I do not mean to offend, it is not a mystery, it is a contradiction. The idea of an infinite regress is logically impossible. Take it out of the realm of faith and religion, and just consider it in philosophical terms.

Mormon: Okay. I see that, an infinite regress is technically a logical error.

Christian: Exactly.

Mormon: But we are not talking about logic. We are talking about God.

Christian: The two go together. I am sure you agree that there is no error in God.

Mormon: Absolutely.

Christian: Then you have a problem with your belief in infinite regress when it comes to the Mormon god. The idea is logically false, so would it make sense that it would be something revealed by your god?

Mormon: I am getting a bit confused.

Christian: I want you to think about this. If you are truly experiencing confirmation from God that a teaching is true by the “burning in the bosom,” then the teaching should be logically true, as well. If it is error, can it be from God?

Mormon: Wow. I will have to give that one some time to sink in.

Christian: Sounds good. I want you to know I respect you and your convictions. I just want you to make sure they are based in truth as you think they are.

5.5. Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter the final letter in the DEUS acrostic was developed, the “S”, which focused on the Subjectivity Question. The question for discussion: Is the “burning in the bosom” reliable evidence for Mormon claims? The response: Mormon affective claims contradict rational claims for Mormon doctrine. The evidence focused on passional reason, first offering a defense of its legitimacy in epistemic concerns and apologetic matters, and then considering whether Mormons effectively use passional reason. The conclusion was that there are historical and archaeological problems with the Book of Mormon, and logical contradictions in the Mormon teaching of an infinite regress of gods; such problems mean that when Mormons claim to have affective evidence for these beliefs but cannot produce rational evidence for the same, then their claims to the legitimacy of the “burning in the bosom” are legitimately suspect. Head and heart must align for passional reason to properly function in supplying epistemic evidence. Mormonism falls short in this area, just as it has been challenged and shown to fall short in the other areas of the DEUS Challenge, concerning Deity, Ethics, and Uprightness. Thus, the DEUS Challenge and its attendant sub-challenges offer a four-pronged apologetic approach to Mormonism that touches on the doctrine of God, moral realism, moral apologetics, and passional reason. In the next chapter this four-pronged approach is summarized as an overview of the research, and findings and recommendations are presented.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Mormon doctrine of God represents a departure from the core teaching of orthodox Christianity, and that a cumulative case apologetic approach based in moral realism, moral apologetics, and passionate reason. The value of such an argument includes that it offers a viable means to engage Mormons in defense of Christian understanding of God, moral realism, moral apologetics, and passionate reason rooted in an appeal to shared moral conviction that derive from dissimilar bases. The Christian argues from an orthodox doctrine of God and the Mormon from a polytheistic and/or monarchotheistic doctrine of God. In this closing chapter, the focus turns to an overview of the research, key research findings and recommendation, and a final plea directed to both Christians engaged with Mormons in apologetic dialogue and to Mormons who are willing to consider and challenge their own presuppositions about God, morality, and how their beliefs are formed.

6.1. Research Overview

6.1.1. Regarding the Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research has been to answer the following question: How should one evaluate and engage the theological teachings of Mormons—specifically regarding the doctrine of God and its implications for moral facts and a moral argument for God’s existence, as well as the affective claims of Mormon’s concerning their epistemic convictions? To that end, the research method involved literature analyses of key biblical, theological, philosophical, and historical texts related to orthodox trinitarian and Mormon teaching. To aid in the presentation of the research findings, the DEUS Challenge was presented as a four-prong engagement with Mormon teaching, with each area summarized in a question and answer related to the areas of, respectively, the doctrine of God, moral realism, moral apologetics, and passionate reason.

Figure 5. DEUS Challenge

<u>Deity</u>	<u>Ethics</u>	<u>Uprightness</u>	<u>Subjectivity</u>
Question: Are the Christian and Mormon Gods the same?	Question: What is the Mormon account of morality?	Question: Does Mormon morality conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God's existence?	Question: Is the "burning in the bosom" reliable evidence for Mormon claims?
Response: The Mormon God is not the Christian God.	Response: Mormon morality derives from moral standards outside God.	Response: Mormon morality does not conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God's existence.	Response: Mormon affective claims contradict rational claims for Mormon doctrine.
Evidence: Doctrine of God	Evidence: Moral Realism	Evidence: Moral Apologetics	Evidence: Passional Reason

6.1.2. Regarding the Doctrine of God

The DEUS Challenge began with the doctrine of God, which offers and explanation of who God is in his essence and attributes. For Christians, God is one essence in three eternal persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—immaterial and simple, having omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omnibenevolence. For Mormons, there are many Gods, and the God of this current world was once a man, and all Mormon men may eventually attain their own godhood. In considering the doctrine of God, the Deity Question was asked: Are the Christian and Mormon Gods the same? The response: The Mormon God is not the Christian God, and evidence presented included a discussion of the God of classical theism from philosophical and theological perspectives, and the

God of Mormonism from classical polytheistic and contemporary monarchotheistic perspectives.

6.1.3. Regarding Moral Realism

The DEUS Challenge continued with moral realism, an approach to metaethics that concludes that “moral properties are real and that these properties are in some sense independent from what people think, believe and judge” (Fisher 2011: 39). Within the broader construct of metaethics, moral realism is one expression of cognitivism, and is the basis for such considerations as the correspondence theory of truth (i.e., that what is true is what is real, and that what is real is what is true). In discussing moral realism, the Ethics Question was posed: What is the Mormon account of morality? The response: Mormon morality derives from moral standards outside God, and evidence considered competing metaethical paradigms, the distinctives of moral realism, and how orthodox trinitarianism differs from Mormonism in making a case for moral facts.

6.1.4. Regarding Moral Apologetics

The DEUS Challenge includes a discussion of moral apologetics, which entails a defense of the Christian faith by arguing for the existence of objective moral standards as a segue to arguing for the existence of a Moral Lawgiver. Moral apologetics may be approached via a Thomistic approach, a divine command theory approach, a moral knowledge/awareness approach, a human dignity approach, and a practical approach. The exploration of moral apologetics raised the Uprightness Question: Does Mormon morality conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God’s existence? The response: Mormon morality does not conduce to a moral argument for the Mormon God’s existence, and evidence included the role of general revelation in moral apologetics, the value of moral apologetics, a focus on Thomistic and divine command theory moral arguments, and a contrast between how trinitarian orthodoxy moves from morality to God’s existence and how Mormonism is unable to make the same type of transition from morality to the Mormon God.

6.1.5. Regarding Passional Reason

The DEUS Challenge concluded with an investigation of passional reason, which involves the combined rational and affective capacity possessed by normally functioning humans, by which they can make decisions regarding religious beliefs that are based on both rationally assessed factual evidentiary content, and affectively assessed subjective content. This definition of passional reason represents an attempt to bring together the rational and affective aspects of the human mind-heart unity that engage in assessing religious truth claims an individual's choice to form religious beliefs based on those truth claims. To address passional reason, the Subjectivity Question was asked: Is the "burning in the bosom" reliable evidence for Mormon claims? The response: Mormon affective claims contradict rational claims for Mormon doctrine, with evidence about a defense of passional reason and how there are irresolvable differences between the affective and rational claims of Mormons.

6.2. Research Findings

6.2.1. Christians and Mormons have Different Gods

In light of the discussion of the doctrine of God from the orthodox trinitarian and Mormon perspectives, any similarities between the Christian and Mormon Gods are superficial, at best. Thus, in apologetic dialogue where such claims are made to the contrary, Christians must be clear that what they intend by discussion of God is philosophically and theologically different—very different—from the outcome of a consistent application of Mormon doctrine to the question of who is God. There are real and profound differences that must be ephasized.

6.2.2. Christian Theism and Mormon Theism Adduce to Different Explanations of Moral Realism

Even though Christians and Mormons hold to many of the same tenets of moral realism and practice the same applied ethics, the theological bases for explaining the existence of objective, mind-independent, knowable moral facts is not the same. The Christian God is the one that conduces to the personal aspect of moral facts, whereas the

Mormon God—himself subject to eternally-existing moral facts that are outside of him—does not. Rather than being an expression of divine character, the Mormon God may exemplify moral actions on some level, but they do not derive from his essence. This is only true of the Christian God.

6.2.3. Christian Morality and Mormon Morality Adduce to the Existence of the God of Classical Theism

The shared moral expressions of Christians and Mormons adduce to the existence of the orthodox trinitarian God. Objective, personal, and transcendent moral facts reveal an objective, personal, transcendent God who, by virtue of his personableness, is reasonably concluded to be constituted of interpersonal relations expressed by the circumincession of the Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, shared morality between Mormons and Christians supports the Christian God specifically.

6.2.4. Neither Christian Morality nor Mormon Morality Adduce to the Existence of the Mormon God

While it is true that Mormon and Christian morality adduce to the existence of the Christian God, it is also true that the converse holds. Because moral facts are objective, personal, and transcendent—especially because they are personal—it philosophically inconsistent to arrive at impersonal, Platonic moral forms as the basis for morality (i.e., the Mormon situation). Rather, personal morality entails a personal source and, though Mormons may claim their God is personal, he is still not the source of personal morality. Given the options of Mormonism or Christianity, only the Christian God meets that qualification, so, regardless of their shared practical moral commitments, neither Christians nor Mormons will arrive at the Mormon God by beginning with moral practices based on personal moral facts.

6.2.5. Using Shared Morality as a Starting Point is a Reasonable Strategy for Engaging Mormons in Apologetic Dialogue

Though often overlooked as a potential starting point for apologetic dialogue between Christians and Mormons, shared commitments to moral realism and moral

practices do offer significant common ground between the two groups. Thus, Christians are encouraged to begin with what they have in common with Mormons and build a bridge of continuing and ever-deepening dialogue using the DEUS Challenge as a means to move from shared morality to divergent theology and the implications for personal faith and practice. Proceeding along such common ground as morality offers provides a certain gravitas to the engagement, since morality is at the heart of personal interaction in numerous ways.

6.2.6. Passional Reasons Provides a Means to Engage Mormons at the Affective Level

Rather than dismissing Mormon claim concerning the evidentiary weight of the “burning in the bosom” that so many attest to when accepting Mormon teaching, Christians should affirm the value of passional reason. Passional reason offers tremendous explanatory power with Mormons, especially when its nuance is explained by Christians committed to its concomitance between rationality and subjectivity. It is true that belief entails the whole person—both rational and affective, objective and subjective—so passional reason (like shared morality) provides a common ground of discussion. Christians must understand, however, that appeals to either side of the passional reason dialectic requires soundness and legitimacy of evidence and argumentation, and this is something that Mormonism lacks at various points (e.g., the veracity of the Book of Mormon or the philosophical dilemma of infinite regress).

6.3. Practical Recommendations

6.3.1. Learn the Fundamentals of Orthodox Trinitarianism

The first practical recommendation borne of this research is for Christians to learn invest in learning the nuances of the basic tenets of orthodox trinitarianism. It is likely that in encountering Mormons or any others promoting an aberrant theological perspective, the doctrine of God is either directly or indirectly related. The Christian understanding of God as one eternal essence and three eternal Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—lay at the foundation of all other Christian teaching and engagement with

errors compared to that teaching. Know who God is, philosophically and theologically, and be ready and willing to use trinitarian orthodoxy as a litmus test for doctrinal truth.

6.3.2. Learn the Fundamentals of Moral Realism

As has been shown, Christians and Mormons share much in common about moral commitments, including the objective, personal, and transcendent characteristics of moral facts. However, what is not appreciated is the unique contribution Christians can offer to the understanding of why a moral realist metaethical construct supplies such explanatory power. Thus, the second practical recommendation of this research is for Christians to become conversant with the fundamentals of moral realism, including what moral facts are, why metaethical perspectives based on different approaches are problematic—moral error theory and its nihilistic and relativistic implications in particular—and lack sufficient explanatory power relative to ethical experiences, and how the orthodox trinitarian understanding of God is a helpful presupposition to explaining morality at both the theoretical and practical levels.

6.3.3. Learn the Fundamentals of Moral Apologetics

Concomitant with the importance of moral realism, the third practical recommendation from this research is for Christians to learn the fundamentals of moral apologetics. Why be good? Why is there goodness? What does goodness reveal about a source of goodness? These questions and others provide much common ground in dialogue with Mormons and others, all based on the universal experience of morality. Thus, learning to make a straightforward moral apologetic that moves from moral facts to the God's existence as the source and exemplar of those moral facts is apropos across the apologetic spectrum, but especially when engaging groups that share common moral commitments even without the Christian understanding of the orthodox theistic underpinnings of those commitments.

6.3.4. Learn the Fundamentals of Passional Reason

Passional reason offers both explanatory power for how Christians come to know and believe on ever-deepening levels the matters of their faith, as well as how the whole

person—rational and affectivity capacities in tandem—can best be approached in matters of evangelism and apologetics. Thus, the fourth practical recommendation drawn from this research is that Christians learn and appropriate the fundamentals of passionate reason. As shown above, the nexus of passionate reason and apologetics readily appears when Mormons appeal to the inner testimony, the peace and serenity, the “burning in the bosom” that serve as confirmatory in epistemic matters. Although the Christians should rightly challenge the accuracy of the Mormon’s use of passionate reason, the reality of passionate reason is implicit within the human experience and aids in understanding faith at its formative and expressive levels.

6.3.5. Use the DEUS Challenge as a Starting Point for Engaging Mormons in Dialogue

The simple structure of the DEUS Challenge with its four questions provides a means to affect a cumulative case argument in favor of Christianity and appropriately critical of Mormon claims about the doctrine of God, moral realism, moral apologetics, and passionate reason. What Christians often need in engaging cultists is a tool that is both substantive enough to supply a thoughtful challenge and accessible enough to be learned by even a new believer. The DEUS Challenge is intended to do so, and thus provides the fifth practical application of this research—learn and use the DEUS Challenge in dialogue with Mormons. When considering the value of the DEUS Challenge as a guide, also consider its learnability—even without depth of theological training it is possible to learn the fundamentals of the dialogue in this manner.

6.3.6. Develop Apologetic Educational Materials Focused on the DEUS Challenge for Engaging Mormons and other Cultists

In addition to learning the DEUS Challenge for engaging Mormons, it is also practical, and the final practical recommendation drawn from this research, to consider what types of apologetic educational materials might be developed based on the components of DEUS and its four questions. What material might be crafted from the Deity Question, the Ethics Question, the Uprightness Question, and the Subjectivity Question? Further, how might the DEUS Challenge be adapted to other new religious movements? Given the way in which the concerns about the doctrine of God, moral

realism, moral apologetics, and passionate reason relate to all theological systems and groups, the DEUS Challenge stands as a departure for more than just Mormon apologetics.

6.4. A Final Plea

In closing, a final plea is offered to two groups. To Christians, the plea is to take seriously the claims of Mormons; learn their theology and be ready to engage Mormons with a warm and winsome answer and challenge. Remember, Joseph Smith was looking for answers when he was led into Mormon thought; his followers are still looking for answers, and the orthodox trinitarian faith is the truest answer of all. Please, Christian, learn the DEUS Challenge, ask the attendant questions, engage in love and with fervent zeal those Mormons and others who look for answers that only come in Christian truth.

To Mormons and others involved in groups like the Mormons, at least consider the DEUS Challenge and its questions about God, moral realism, moral apologetics, and passionate reason. The table is set for the conversation, and your presence is welcome and appreciated. Without pretense of agreement based on equivocation of terms, it is true to say that there can be an inner testimony to the reception of divine truth, that God has revealed himself, that morality matters, and that those who are willing to question will also be most likely to find answers. Orthodox Christian truth invites your questions and offers answers borne of a commitment to truth and a sincere interest in you and your concerns.

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