The “Octavius” of Minucius Felix: a tool for modern day Christians in their defence of the gospel

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The “Octavius” of Minucius Felix: a tool for modern day Christians in their defence of the gospel

by

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DECLARATION

The current thesis is the result of several years in the making. There have been several times that I questioned whether or not I could actually complete this because there were so many hills and valleys to cross over a long period of time. I had proposed a few different topics, and nothing seemed to be working well until I realized that there are two areas of my interest that blended together quite well. For several years I have been interested in the Octavius of Minucius Felix. I was teaching apologetics courses at a small college in Florida, USA, and I started using the Octavius as one of the topics because I thought it would be interesting to introduce the students to something that they almost assuredly had never heard about. At the same time, I became more and more convinced of the need to study worldviews. Then it dawned on me how the Octavius addresses the very worldview questions I had been studying. These then fit together in a way that made this research and study a pleasure, even though there were many difficult periods.

I wish to acknowledge and thank those who have helped me along this particular path. Tienie Buys and Peg Evans have been involved from the beginning, and they have been a great encouragement to me even when I had suggested that maybe it was time to drop the process. They would have none of it, and I kept going largely because of their help. I also want to thank Professor Henk Stoker of North-West University for being patient and encouraging throughout. He has not been overbearing or difficult to work with at all, and that makes a major difference in the overall process that is already stressful and time-consuming. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my wife and family. Anytime someone does this type of school work, the family has to bear a load, and my wife does that so well. Since I first started into the program, I have changed jobs, moved to a different state, and have enjoyed the births of seven grandchildren. I look forward to having some freer time to spend with them all.

Most of all, I thank God for His grace and patience toward me. The purpose for writing a work like this is, ultimately, to glorify Him. Since the nature of this work is in the field of missions and apologetics, I pray that any use of this will glorify God as Christians strive to defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

ABSTRACT

The Octavius of Minucius Felix was written at around A.D. 200 by a little-known Latin apologist. While there are similarities to his contemporary Tertullian, the Octavius stands as an independent work that is easily overlooked in the sea of the Patristics. The Octavius is an apologetics dialogue with three people present. Caecilius is a pagan who bows to a Roman image and then defends what he does. Octavius is a Christian who challenges Caecilius, then patiently listens and answers. Minucius, the author, is a Christians who is listening in and providing the final analysis of the discussion. Caecilius makes several false charges against the Christians that Octavius feels the need to address and correct. In the process of the discussion, the prominent topics that arise are worldview issues: the nature of God, the nature of human beings, the nature of knowledge, the nature of morality, and, as part of these, the natures of Christianity and the Gospel, including the cross and the resurrection. Because of the issues addressed and the methods used, this thesis asserts that the Octavius is a tool for modern day Christians in their defence of the Gospel. While the specifics of what they need to defend changes, the foundational matters found in the Octavius make it an important resource for thinking about persuasion in evangelistic and apologetic applications for a modern world nearly two thousand years removed. The emphasis, then, is on the practical value of the Octavius.

Keywords: apologetics, Christianity, defence, Genesis, God, gospel, image of God, knowledge, man, Manucius Felix, morality, objections, Octavius, paganism, persuasion, reason, resurrection, worldviews

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Minucius Felix was a Christian who lived and wrote during the late second to mid-third centuries A.D. He is placed among the Latin apologists and was a contemporary of the more known Tertullian. His work, the Octavius, was written as a defence of Christianity against several false charges that were being made by those who rejected Jesus Christ. As a dialogue, the work is intriguing, but as an apologetic, the work appears to be underestimated and understudied. While there have been, according to Winden (1954:72), "acrimonious controversies," over the Octavius regarding its textual criticism, the gap in the current knowledge in this area is that it is difficult to find any comprehensive consideration of the arguments made against Christians, how they were answered, and how these arguments and answers can aid modern Christians in their defence of the gospel.

Very little appears to be written in English about the Octavius. This, it seems, is a valuable resource that has not been given enough attention among English-speaking students. More attention has been given to Tertullian, though the exact relationship between Tertullian and Minucius Felix is debated. Tertullian is by far the more prolific of the two writers who covers far more ground in his works. His influence extends beyond early apologetics and seeks to identify early heresies. Did Tertullian depend upon Minucius Felix for some of his arguments, or did Minucius Felix depend upon Tertullian (Kirby, 2017)? Questions for which answers have yet to appear include whether they knew each other or the other one's work, and if so which one had influence over the other. That debate is not settled as to who has primacy, and it may not be possible to settle it fully due to a lack of substantive information about it. However, this lack of information about who depended upon whom (if any) does not negate the purpose of this research, namely in what way the Octavius can be a valuable resource for modern Christians seeking to answer various charges made against their faith.

The Octavius of Minucius Felix presents a dialogue between a pagan named Caecilius, a Christian named Octavius, and Minucius (or Marcus) who narrates the entire episode. Minucius appears to have this single focus, which is to answer some specific false charges that were being made against Christians. If not for the Octavius, there is little else to know about Minucius. There are a couple of brief mentions by Lactantius (early third to fourth centuries) and Jerome (mid fourth to fifth centuries). Lactantius (Schaff, 2016: loc 473877) mentioned Minucius as being "of no ignoble rank among pleaders," and Jerome (Schaff, 2016: loc 350111) referenced him as a "distinguished advocate of Rome."

It can also be asked whether or not the events being described were part of an historical reality or whether Minucius created the story as a sort of narrated apologetic that captured a handful of faulty charges Christians at that time were facing. Not only does the Octavius address the issues and bad characterizations of Christianity in his replies to Caecilius, but Caecilius converts by the end, emphasizing the success of the apologetic task. Baylis (1928:9) argues that Minucius must have meant for Caecilius to stand in as representative for the "best of the Roman youth which was not in his view wholly irreconcilable in its attitude toward Christianity."

With what is available it seems to be impossible to settle on an answer as to whether the debate described were actual events or simply constructed for apologetic purposes. Minucius certainly places the events within a real time and place setting, but there appear to be no particular claims other than narrating what could well have been real discussions. Bouter (2010: loc 587) notes as he compares the Octavius with Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, that because the Octavius is a much smaller work than that of Cicero, it is reasonable to think that it represents some event that happened in Minucius' life. "But even if it is not, it gives a very good impression of similar discussions that must have taken place countless times. In this regard both works also provide good entertainment."

Both types of work (real and constructed) can be valuable in their place, and there is great value to the work Minucius Felix left behind. Though there is very little that people can know about the man or exactly when he lived, he wrote a work that can help modern apologists as they sort through the various charges that are made against Christians in a current climate of hostility against Christianity.

1.1 Background

Christianity continually finds itself in difficult and challenging times, with no reprieve in sight. For example, John Lennox (2011:9) writes of atheism being "noisily" on the march in the Western world. A concerted effort is being made "to marshal the atheist faithful, to encourage them not to be ashamed of their atheism but to stand up and fight as a united army. The enemy is God." Even among those who profess to be Christians, there are differences in how they view Jesus. For example, Morrow (2011:24) reports that a Pew Forum and Religious and Public Life study from 2009 showed that "57 percent of evangelical adults agreed with the statement 'Many religions can lead to eternal life.'" Religion in general has long come under fire from humanists who argue that the promises of salvation and damnation are, as Kurtz (1983:42) put it, "illusory and harmful." Exclusivists within Christianity come under fire from pluralists and universalists like John Hick (2007:607-17), who will accept the concept of personal spirituality but scoff at the notion that any one way of reaching toward God is the right or only way for everyone in every culture. Within

more traditional Christendom, adherents battle each other over a host of issues from how the Bible is to be interpreted to whether or not the Bible should have the final authority in worship and doctrine. The same Pew study cited (Morrow, 2011:24) also revealed that "53 percent of evangelicals affirmed the following statement: 'There is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of my religion.'" The language "more than one true way" shows that relativism concerning truth is alive and well among those who profess faith in Christ. Christians so uncertain about truth adds to the difficulties for sustaining orthodox positions relating to whether or not the Scriptures are giving accurate, historical information relative to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The reality of the challenges requires continual and renewed thought on how to approach answering the modern arguments with a sense of reason and respect while maintaining a high view of Scripture. One is left thinking that the defence of Scripture is a hopeless cause. However, many recent and scholarly works have been dedicated to the defence of Scripture. This gives hope that a reasonable case can be made for the truth of Jesus Christ in the midst of growing opposition, and one of the great resources for learning how to make the case is found among the ancient apologists, whose writings have received little attention.

The last several years have spawned renewed interest in apologetics. Several books have hit the shelves, many of them dealing with questions that impact this study. For example, Abdu Murray (2014) speaks to worldviews and the nature of God in considering differences between Christianity and Islam. Greg Koukl's Tactics (2009) and Os Guinness' Fools Talk (2015) are both helpful in showing how to work practically to persuade others. Given the importance that Christians place on the miraculous, particularly the resurrection of Jesus, sceptical scholars like Bart Ehrman (2008:240-44) have emphasized the "historical problem of miracle" with some success among a generation that is less inclined toward identifying with religion. The outspoken methods of sceptics have led to detailed responses by more conservative scholars in support of the historical reliability of the gospel message. For example, Eddy and Boyd's *The Jesus Legend* (2007) provides a comprehensive, scholarly defence of the reliability of the gospel accounts. While there are helpful works available, the proposition of this study is to consider how an ancient apologetic work, the Octavius of Minucius Felix, can help the modern Christian grapple with objections against Christianity and make a positive case for the truth of Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

Modern challenges from science, philosophy, and theology[1] continue to force Christians to re-evaluate how they deal with scepticism and answer counter arguments. At the same time when

[1] Scientists like Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Jerry Coyne are continually arguing against a Creator and free will. Philosophy has long been a battleground for questions like the problem of evil or the nature of God and man. Theological circles have seen skeptics like Eerhman, Borg, and Funk with his Jesus Seminar challenge the truth of Scripture.

many are losing their faith,[2] others like the late Antony Flew (2007:123) abandoned their adamant atheism through the work of Christian apologists and recognize "that there was no satisfactory naturalistic explanation" to account for the emergence of life. On the other side of the fence, outspoken atheists like Richard Dawkins (2006) have stepped up their attacks, questioning the intelligence of those who have religious faith. Christianity is founded upon the miraculous and supernatural, yet philosophical naturalism sees the miraculous as outdated and naïve, and those entering academic institutions are more and more exposed to the scepticism. Christians must be able and trained to provide reasonable cases for dealing with the questions and arguments of the debates they are sure to face. Once again, a return to the roots of ancient apologetics can provide insight into the how to answer and persuade.

Within theological circles, not all who call themselves Christians agree on the nature of God, Jesus, or Scripture.[3] This is significant because the lack of unity among professing Christians can erode the credibility of Christianity overall, which will damage the apologist's ability to persuade others about Jesus (e.g., Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-21). The face of theology has slowly and drastically changed over the last two hundred years, and not always for the good.[4] There are some (Shanks, 1997:52), among the sceptical, who argue that the Bible "must be treated seriously as a historical source," though not seen as inspired. The Scriptures no longer hold the sacred, valued position they once did, though, according to Charles Quarles[5] (2013:88), there are signs

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[2] Writing with respect to the American culture, Nancy Pearcy (2004:9), in her work Total Truth, writes, "Not only have we 'lost the culture,' but we continue losing even our own children. It's a familiar but tragic story that devout young people, raised in Christian homes, head off to college and abandon their faith. Why is this pattern so common? Largely because young believers have not been taught how to develop a biblical worldview."

[3] For example, Robert Reymond (1990:2-3) in *Jesus: Divine Messiah*, writes, "Today, one can find evidence virtually everywhere — on every continent, in both Protestant and Roman Catholic circles — that the theologically 'in thing' is to contend for a Jesus who was only a man by nature and for a Bible that is virtually silent regarding the classical incarnational Christology of a two natured Christ — true God and true man in the one person of Jesus Christ. It is very much in vogue to believe that the better case can be made for understanding Jesus as only a man — a very unusual man, of course, with a special mission from God — and to explain the biblical ascriptions of divine qualities to Him in other than ontological terms."

[4] An example of this comes from an article written by theologian Luke Timothy Johnson in 2007 (web). Coming out in favor of same-sex unions, he wrote, ""I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us. By so doing, we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements condemning homosexuality—namely, that it is a vice freely chosen, a symptom of human corruption, and disobedience to God's created order." The point here is not to get into the same-sex debate, but rather to show the movement away from Scripture in favor of "another authority" that is described as "the weight of our own experience." This is an explicit denial that Scripture has precedence over one's feelings.

[5] Charles L. Quarles surveys the effects of Higher Criticism in his essay *Higher Criticism: What has it shown?* He shows how higher criticism came about and how it has negatively impacted biblical studies because of anti-supernatural biases. However, he also shows how higher criticism can be helpful.

of “trends in higher criticism” that are “generally positive and encouraging.” For example, Quarles writes, “Scholars are more favourable to the authorship of certain Pauline letters.” Bart Ehrman (1998:293) is an example of a sceptic arguing that are there seven epistles that should be attributed to Paul.

How are Christians to respond to the challenges and questions that they face? How can they persuade others of the truth of Jesus Christ and Scripture? Has the rejection of the miraculous altogether destroyed the arguments that Christians once grasped and held tightly? Does the modern hostile environment even warrant the efforts to defend the faith? Scepticism feeds on itself and devours the confidence of those have tried to stay true to the word of God.[6] Thankfully, there are still tools available to help in the process of standing up for the truth. These tools are found first in the Scriptures themselves, and second in the historical writings of those who face challenges that are not unlike what Christians face today. This work will focus specifically on the ancient writing of Minucius Felix to see how difficulties and challenges faced back then can help inform Christians in the modern era who desire to answer faulty charges and put the conversation back on the right track.

1.2 Research questions

1.2.1 The question to which this thesis is dedicated is this: How does the Octavius of Minucius Felix help contemporary Christians in their efforts to persuade others of the truth of the Gospel?

1.2.2 Research questions stemming from this question and the problem statement include the following:

1 What was the role of apologetics in early Christianity?

2 What are some of the influences that can be seen in the Octavius?

3 What are the arguments made by Caecilius the pagan, and how does the Octavius respond to them?

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[6] Alistair McGrath (2012:27-39) provides an overview of apologetics and contemporary culture in his *Mere Apologetics*. He shows the effects of modernity and postmodernity, and how apologists have tried to respond to each in their own generations. He argues that one of the effects of rationalism (modernity) on Christian apologetics was the “downplaying of any aspects of Christian thought that were seen as “irrational” or “illogical,” such as the doctrine of the Trinity. Since apologetics is supposed to be about giving a defence of the faith, including Scriptural truths about God, then downplaying these will have negative effects on the faith of those who are listening.

4 How important is the subject matter shown in the Octavius and how effective can these subjects be in helping modern Christians in their apologetic endeavours?

5 What are specific applications that can be made from the Octavius that may help Christians respond to modern arguments made by unbelievers? Specifically, how can the persuasive tactics in the Octavius help Christians in their efforts to persuade others and how does the Octavius touch upon major worldview questions?

1.2.3 The purpose of this proposed research on Minucius Felix's Octavius is to consider the role of ancient apologetics in a way that provides insight for modern apologetics.

1.2.4 General aims include:

1 Seeking to understand more fully the role of apologetics in the ancient context of early Christianity as it is demonstrated in the Octavius.

2 Considering the rhetorical nature of the Octavius and how other works and philosophies may have impacted it.

3 Considering the arguments, the faulty charges, and the answers provided within the work.

4 Assessing the nature and effect of the Octavius as it impacts worldview questions like: Who is God? What is Man? What is the nature of knowledge? What is the nature of morality and Christianity? What is the nature of the Gospel?

5 Finding appropriate applications of the Octavius for a modern context and culture, including how the art of persuasion plays a role in apologetics. This includes dealing with objections and considering why arguments often fail.

1.2.5 The central theoretical argument may be thusly stated: The Octavius of Minucius Felix provides an understanding of ancient apologetics that will help modern Christians answer contemporary arguments made against Christianity.

1.2.6 This thesis is based on research and argumentation, and as such will utilize philosophical, theological, and hermeneutical tools in order to better understand and express the aims. In order to show how the aims will be met, the following will be employed:

1 An overview and survey of the Octavius of Minucius Felix will be conducted. Attention will be given to the relationship between the work of Minucius Felix and other ancient works like that of Cicero and Tertullian.

2 Attention will be given to the particular worldview issues raised in the Octavius with a view toward understanding how these can help modern Christians address the same issues.

3 The arguments provided in the Octavius by both Caecilius and Minucius will be noted, listed, and provided as a base line for showing how the arguments can used as tools for modern Christians.

4 The effectiveness of the persuasion tactics and the answers found in the Octavius will be considered in order to compare and contrast modern circumstances in which apologetics are required to answer faulty charges.

5 In conjunction with the previous point, appropriate applications will be sought and provided for modern apologetics. Modern persuasion tactics will be considered and compared to those found in the Octavius so that appropriate applications may be drawn and encouraged.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE FOCUSING ON MINUCIUS FELIX

When doing a literature study, not many works can be found that focus on the Octavius of Minucius Felix. Aside from a scattering of articles, few books have been dedicated to this work. The most comprehensive work in English written on Minucius Felix appears to come from a work published in 1928 by Harry James Baylis called *Minucius Felix and His Place among the Early Father of the Latin Church.* Baylis (1928:1) writes that the Octavius has the distinction of being the most ancient, extant Latin text written as a Christian dialogue. Baylis' work merits some consideration because he systematically goes through the Octavius and considers each of the arguments in detail. This book serves as somewhat of a commentary on the entire work of Minucius Felix and will be a profitable resource for greater insights into the work. This thesis will appeal to this work from time to time because of its comprehensive research. There appears to be little else in book form written in English since Baylis. Again, other works addressing Minucius Felix are found mainly in journals and on a handful of websites that will be briefly reviewed below.

2.1 Insight into available literature

2.1.1 Browne (1837) writes about the Octavius and, as others, shows how faulty charges were often made against the early Christians. "Misrepresented truths and pure fictions are, as usual, mixed up in these charges against the primitive Christians," he notes (Browne 1837:74-75). He further notes that, odd as it may be, there are good reports "strangely intermingled" that show respect for the primitive Christians. Perhaps modern Christians can learn from these very same issues today as mixed messages are often in the public square regarding Christianity.

2.1.2 A thesis-style work was written in 1911 by Lucille Starr Cravens, called The Octavius of Minucius Felix (Translation with Notes and Introduction). The first three pages (typewritten, not typeset) provide a brief introduction to the Octavius. Cravens (1911:1) argues that though the date of the Octavius is controversial, the Octavius has the distinction of being "the earliest extant work in Latin in defence of Christianity." She accepts the argument that Minucius wrote prior to Tertullian. The translation of the Octavius along with the notes is helpful for this thesis in comparing and obtaining more background information.

2.1.3 One of the most extensive books about the Octavius was written by Harry James Baylis (1928). This is called *Minucius Felix and His Place among the Early Fathers of the Latin*

> *Church.* Baylis shows immediately his belief that Minucius Felix was the first of the Latin church authors (1928:1), calling the Octavius a "choice little work" that "enjoys the distinction of being undoubtedly the most ancient Latin Christian dialogue extant, and also, if the deductions to be made later are correct, of being the first contribution to the literature of the Latin Church." As noted, there has been debate about who was first, and that debate is not really settled. Nevertheless, Baylis was certain.

Baylis (1928:1) also recognized that the Octavius is "strongly reminiscent" of Cicero. In the first part of his work, Baylis describes the Octavius and the dialogue that occurs with its attendant arguments. Of the dialogue, Baylis (1928:3-4) writes that one should admire the "art of this dialogue" because Minucius "knew his public well." Generally, apologetics from Christians were not "very attractive as a rule," but the nature of the Octavius is such that one could tell that he wanted it to be read and circulated. "He charms his readers with a romantic opening," and before long the readers are drawn into it so that they are "spectators of the grandest dramatic situation that can appear on the human stage, the conflict between two hypotheses of life founded upon diametrically opposite conceptions of God and the world." The style is not Socratic or conversational, but rather that of the "deep gravity of uninterrupted discourse after the school of Cicero." Baylis argues, however, that there is no reason to think that the Octavius is merely "the creation of literary adroitness or that the dialogue is fictitious and the personages symbolical." He argues that the intimate details of the prologue suggest that the whole discussion is a product of a "veritable discussion which took place on the mole at Ostia one late August day when the Christian Church was very young."

Baylis (1928:4) admits that it is a "marvel" that there are not more traces of the influence of the Octavius in early Latin Christian literature. That probably speaks to poor circulation of the work early on, but perhaps the issue is better explained by Tertullian's *Apologeticus* overshadowing the Octavius because it was more "energetic" and publicly appealing. Baylis shows that very few of the Fathers spoke about Minucius Felix, though the work is recognized by Lactantius (early fourth century) and Jerome (later fourth and early fifth centuries). Eucherius in the fifth century speak of Minucius, but (Baylis, 1928:5) "from the middle of the fifth century onwards until the sixteenth the Octavius of Minucius Felix received no further notice." Only after that will be found a little more attention given to the work. Still, one is hard pressed to find much literature dedicated to this unique work throughout history.

Baylis (1928:12-13) writes that there is little to be known about Minucius Felix himself. Minucius says very little about himself, and not much is known about the Octavius either except for what may be understood through the discourse. Where was he from? Baylis speaks of the "question of his nationality." Was he a Roman? Many think so (though some think the work is from Africa).

Baylis argues that Minucius Felix was “a Roman and supremely a Roman.” He sees in Minucius as deep attachment to Cicero and even Vergil and “to the ancestral glories of the Roman fatherland.” Minucius thereby differs from Tertullian who “was a Christian above all,” and knowing that Christ will triumph and the splendour of Rome will perish. Baylis recognizes, on the other hand, that regardless of a close relationship held between Minucius and classical culture, “considerations of style have been urged to show that he was a provincial and in fact a native of Africa.”

Baylis (1928:13) points out that Minucius uses few “Semitisms, Punisms, and Hebraisms,” and he does appear to insult the Roman culture more than a typical Roman might want to do. For example, in speaking about the beginnings of Rome, in chapter XXV, the Octavius intimates (Felix, 2016:44) that from the “very cradle of the growing empire,” the Romans were gathered together and fortified by crime. They grew because of their terror and fierceness. The people of Rome are said to be “assembled together as to an asylum.” These people were “abandoned, profligate, incestuous, assassins, traitors,” and “flocked together” so that Romulus who commanded and governed “might excel his people in guilt.” He was guilty of fratricide and introduced the first auspices of the state. The Octavius argued that they carried off women and violated them, whether virgin or betrothed, and thereby keeping women from marriage vows. They engaged in war with parents and shed blood of their relatives. “What more irreligious, what more audacious, what could be safer than the very confidence of crime?”

Baylis argues that this diatribe of Octavius is the view of Minucius himself. While the same type of diatribe may be found in Tertullian, the difference is that Tertullian rages against Carthage instead of Rome. This is all given in support of the idea that Minucius is an African writer. He is listed among other African writers by Jerome in his letter LXX.5, saying of Minucius (Schaff & Wace, 1893:151) that he was “a pleader in the Roman courts” who “has ransacked all heathen literature to adorn the pages of his Octavius….”

Baylis (1928:13) points out that the importance of the African writers is such that “Latin Christian Africa furnished the most important as well as the fullest contribution to the Latin Church.” He also gives some internal evidence of Minucius being from Africa (1928:14). Among these pieces of evidence are “direct allusions to local religious cults. Peculiarly African divinities, the Punic Juno or Tanit (Oct. xxv. 9) and the bloodthirsty Baal-Saturn 1 (xxx. 3), who, Minucius says, is worshipped in some parts of Africa by the sacrifice of infants, are cited.” Baylis speaks of another “remarkable cult” about which “all the historians are silent.” The point is that “Local knowledge must here have been the sole sources of Minucius’ information, as the apotheosis of Juba was an entirely local affair of no interest outside Africa.”

Baylis (1928:17) argues that Minucius was born a pagan who was “impressed by the behaviour of Christians in course of his practice in the courts.” It is also evidence “that the simple doctrines of Christ and the blameless lives of His followers were the final means of winning Minucius to the Faith, probably in the flower of his age and the maturity of his talent, as also was Tertullian.” He would be readily received by fellow Christians in Rome, but one might be “astonished” that he was able to “continue practice at the Roman bar at a time when Christianity was not a lawful religion.”

Baylis, in the first part of his book, considers the objective of Minucius Felix. What exactly did Minucius have in mind when he wrote the Octavius? The content of the work answers in large measure, but one must still grapple with the fact that (Baylis, 1928:145) Christianity, as represented in this dialogue “is so meagre that its fundamental and distinctive dogmas appear either very faintly or not at all, with the exception of the hope of a future life based upon the Crucified, who is not even named.” Baylis (1928:148) points out, however, that the two greatest points of stress are on God’s existence and the “expectations of a future life.” These two ideas can actually help the modern Christian in developing a strategy of persuasion for pointing people to Christ, which will be addressed later.

Baylis (1928:198) recognized that the main objections to Christianity in the Octavius “sprang from” the novelty of Christianity, so Minucius is dealing with questions that arose from this. From this point, Minucius sets out to demolish the heathen position, “which he sets forth in his dialogue by simply showing that however new Christianity may appear it is, in fact, and in essence, not new at all, but has been inherent in the results obtained by the most reverenced and ancient authorities. And this, for the present, is enough.”

In the second part of the book, Baylis pays more attention to the place of Minucius Felix among the ancient writers. He spends some time trying to put a context around the date of the work, recognizing the difficulty of establishing an absolute date. After going into great detail and comparing the Octavius with other Latin works, he concludes (Baylis, 1928:273) that the work was probably written before Tertullian, and thus “the title of ‘first Father of the Latin Church’ must pass from Tertullian and be awarded to Minucius Felix.” Whether or not such can truly be satisfactorily established is still up in the air today. However, Baylis does a thorough job in arguing the date. That is not the purpose of this present work because that will not matter for the basic purpose, but at least a general understanding of where Minucius fits historically is important for seeing the nature of his arguments.

2.1.4 Quispel (1949:122), writing from a perspective that Minucius wrote prior to Tertullian, argues that Minucius relied on an alleged Jewish source, referred to as pseudo-

Clementina (1949:114), that Tertullian likely knew nothing about. This journal piece is valuable because it contains parallels between this Jewish source and the Octavius. He recognizes (1949:113) that the "much disputed problem" over the primacy of the Octavius or Tertullian's *Apologeticum* remained unsolved. He believes that it is more likely that Tertullian followed Minucius Felix, and also accepted that there can be a Jewish source lying behind some of what Minucius wrote particularly as he presents what the wicked think about death. The Octavius (Felix, 2016:61) says that he is not ignorant that many, conscious of what they deserve, "rather desire than believe that they shall be nothing after death." People would prefer to be "altogether extinguished, rather than to be restored for the purpose of punishment." This is said to echo Jewish apologies. There is value in standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before, and this work helps to establish the case that ancient apologetics was important and influential.

2.1.5 Winden (1954) uses textual criticism in order to ascertain the correct reading of the Octavius. There are some issues relative to the correct readings, and certainly getting the correct text is vital for understanding what Minucius was trying to do. Since this is not the primary focus of this thesis, however, this journal article does not make a real practical application as to the use of the Octavius in a modern Christian context. This is strictly academic and in a different field, so there is little further value for the particular purpose of this thesis except the importance of a correct reading of the Octavius.

2.1.6 Waszink (1954:130) seems to think that Minucius borrowed more from Tertullian than vice versa and that the work is more rhetoric that seeks to prove that the ancient philosophers were monotheists. This is based upon the arguments of the Octavius for the unity of God. The value of this brief work for this research is in considering other perspectives (i.e., that Tertullian came first) and in noting a fallacy or two that could be more detrimental to Minucius' influence. While this thesis focuses more on practicality around evangelism and persuasion, it is important not to overstate a case and hinder the influence that Minucius brings to the table.

2.1.7 Wilkin (1970:441) points out that one of the problems among early Christians is that some "refused to deal with the difficult questions raised by their critics." While this is debatable, it is not a mistake made by Minucius, however, and this is not a mistake modern Christians should make either. Except for this serious consideration, not much else is of value for this particular thesis.

2.1.8 Theide (1980:79-80) approaches the Octavius through considering the "cosmic conflagration in 2 Peter 3" as his basis. He argues that Minucius Felix approached the

issue in a positive matter and uses a strong biblical emphasis to make his case. Theide connects the approach of the Octavius with that of Justin Martyr. In this work, Theide briefly considers how the Octavius answers Caecilius, and thus is beneficial as a reference for this thesis.

2.1.9 Von Albrecht (1987:158) argues that the Octavius is more of a philosophical dialogue rather than an actual recorded conversation in real life. This is an important consideration and one of the issues that lies in the background of this study. Was this a real event or is it more of a rhetorical dialogue set up in order to provide an apologetic against some of the false charges that were being propagated at the time? More recent works on the Octavius are found wanting, which leaves a gap and opens a door for considering the work fresh and providing a framework for a modern understanding of why and how to deal with faulty caricatures of Christianity. Ultimately, whether the Octavius reflects a real, personal experience for Minucius or whether it was intended as a rhetorical fiction, the purpose of the work remains the same in trying to show the folly of paganism and in answering the faulty charges that were current in that day against the Christians.

2.1.10 Bouter (2010) provides an important thesis for understanding the Octavius against the backdrop of Epicureanism and Stoicism. Bouter argues that the Octavius dates to around the turn of the third century A.D., recognizing both that the work shows affinities to Tertullian and likely originated in Africa. Bouter (2010: loc 43) argues that there are resemblances to Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, which was written some two hundred and fifty years year earlier. Both works represent a triad of speaking, opposing viewpoints, and presided over by a sort of judge. In Cicero, the opposing viewpoints are the Epicurean and Stoic philosophies, whereas in the Octavius, the opposing views are from paganism and Christianity. In Cicero, Epicureanism is given less time than Stoicism, whereas in the Octavius, paganism is given less time than Christianity. The reason for this may well be the biases of the authors and were thus more interested in the material for which they stood. Perhaps, Bouter says, it is because they had more material available for one over the other. It could be a combination of both reasons. Cicero argues that the Stoics were closest to the truth, and Minucius Felix sided with Octavius because they were both Christians. Bouter says (ibid) that the merit of these works is that they "give a bird's eye view of the two major streams of their day." Cicero provides an important and unique record of a "long tradition of debate within the sceptical Academy," whereas the Octavius provides an important "glimpse into the kind of debate which succeeded that of the pagan schools as Christianity came gradually into prominence."

Bouter argues that the Epicurean and Stoic background is important for understanding the work. These philosophical schools were well alive during the first century. Paul found such philosophers present when he taught the resurrection of Jesus in Athens (Acts 17). Epicureans have sometimes been cast as atheists, but Bouter (2010: loc 60) says that it is clear from their statements that they were really deists. “They, in turn, mocked the cherished beliefs of their opponents. Both schools were guilty of name-calling, slander, and all sorts of abuse.” Epicurus maintained that the gods existed based primarily upon “the universal agreement of humankind” (Bouter, 2010: loc 79), which is a way of saying that the gods were fabricated because society said so. The discussion from Cicero then has various points of similarity with Octavius, but Bouter emphasizes the misinterpretations of the disputants, which is indeed reminiscent of Caecilius’ straw-man misrepresentations of Christianity. In Cicero, Bouter (2010: loc 561) says that Cotta, the interlocutor, deliberately, if perhaps unwittingly, misinterpreted the Epicurean and Stoic argument, so his answers were couched in “mock reasoning.” He also adds argument from other traditions and then fights these as if they were the real issues. Again, that is a form of a straw man.

Bouter (2010: loc 723) argues, however, that the Octavius, while citing Epicurus a couple of times, draws more from Stoicism. He says there are many statements that are virtually Stoic, and they sound a good bit like that from *De Natura Deorum*. Bouter continues his comparison by arguing that Christianity “seems to have a certain capacity for integrating other points of view into its system.” This makes Christianity eclectic, and according to Bouter it has almost always done this wherever it has had an impact. Assimilation of ideas often means a degeneration that then become inconsistent with the most basic premises. According to Bouter, it is in this light that readers ought to see Octavius’ defence against Caecilius, “for he beats him with his own weapons, and on his own ground. First, he opposes the flaws and faults in his attack. This prepares the way for a barrage of Stoic fire. And then the door has been opened for a flow of Christian ideas that are backed up by a copious stream of quotations from a great variety of sources.”

Bouter (2010: loc 785) concludes his comparison by saying that both Cicero’s and Minucius Felix’ works “form important cogs in the wheel of the history of human thinking. The old questions of ‘where do we come from,’ ‘who are we,’ ‘for what purpose do we exist,’ and ‘where are we going’ have remained basically the same. It is the answers to these questions that vary from time to time, from continent to continent, and even from person to person.” The importance of what the quote speaks to for this research is that it touches upon the most significant worldview questions and in trying to persuade people with the gospel message. These are the types of worldview questions that will be considered in more depth. For apologetic and evangelistic purposes, these

are the types of questions that need to be considered and put before others. Herein lies one of the greatest values of the Octavius for modern Christians in their efforts to defend the truth of the gospel.

2.1.1 The primary source for the study is the Octavius itself. There may be many ambiguities as to why the work was specifically written, when it was written, and whether or not this was based on actual events. Nevertheless, as Vito (2010) says, Minucius Felix is "among the clearest and most original voices of Christian literature." The work addresses caricatures that were aimed at Christians in the late second and early third centuries A.D. It includes what the basis was for these types of arguments, and how the responses address those charges. The value of this study will be seen in the fact that first, little can be found about this work in English, which makes the field wide open for further studies, and second, the way that the faulty charges were addressed can serve the purpose of helping modern Christians deal with ever-increasing accusations and charges made against their faith in the modern context. Even if the charges made are not identical between then and now, the categories or types of arguments may still be understood and utilized in a helpful manner. With all of the various apologists and efforts to provide answers, the significance of this is that it ties back into the early roots of the church.

In the current version being used in this thesis, the anonymous editor places the work at around A.D. 210 and argues that "Minucius Felix gives to Christian thought its earliest clothing in Latinity (Felix, 2016:1). This is said (Felix, 2016:1) in contrast to the "harshness and provincialism, with Graecisms," of Tertullian, "but in Minucius we find, at the very fountain-head of Christian Latinity, a disciple of Cicero and a precursor of Lactantius in the graces of style." The editor believes that Minucius followed Tertullian, though he also believes that the matter is not very important in order to see the value in the work. However, he does note that in the passages there are similarities (Felix, 2016:3-4) between Tertullian and the Octavius, saying that if Minucius was after and borrowed from Tertullian, "he must have flourished in the commencement of the third century." Tertullian's *Apologeticus* was written about the year 198 A.D. On the other hand, it is possible that Tertullian borrowed from the Octavius, and, if so, then "the Octavius was written probably about 166, and Minucius flourished in the reign of Marcus Aurelius. The later date was adopted by earlier critics …"

Both Tertullian and Minucius Felix retain significant credit for showing "that believers were not all illiterate men, nor destitute of polite erudition, and the language of the Tusculan philosopher was not degraded by its new destination to the higher and holier service of the faith" (Felix, 2016:2). The editor further notes that, with Minucius Felix readers are still grappling with the "North-African school," and that Rome had little or nothing to do with the birth of Latin Christianity. Instead (Felix,

2016:2), “Africa holds the mastery of Christian thought alike in her schools of Alexandria and Carthage.”

The editor notes that there is some uncertainty and corruption in the text of the Octavius. Because of this, “many passages seem to us confused, and some hopelessly obscure.” This work certainly does not enjoy the same level of manuscript attestation that the New Testament has. However, what is available gives the reader enough to understand and cull out some important lessons. Textual criticism is not the focus of this thesis.

Aside from these, most of the sparse literature is in scattered articles. Once again, the lack of current works dealing with Minucius Felix shows the need to once again give attention to a significant work of ancient history and the church Fathers.

2.2 The Influences on the Octavius

To understand more of the rhetorical context in which Minucius Felix wrote, there are some influences, or at least suggested influences, that should be considered lying in the background of the Octavius. Even with the various and possible influences, the Octavius is unique. Though, as Quispel (1949:113) says, there is a much-disputed problem or question over the whether the Octavius was written before or after Tertullian’s *Apologeticum*, and that question has yet to be solved. Without further ancient information coming to the front, that will likely never be solved. Regarding the uniqueness of the Octavius, Angela Parkes (2012:2) argues that such uniqueness lies in its “comparatively conciliatory character,” especially given that the purpose seems to be to appeal to “traditional educated pagans” who would have been knowledgeable about the various philosophical traditions while, at the same time, having little to no interest in the apologetics of Christians that would have been around at that time. For example, the *Apologia* of Justin Martyr and, possibly, Tertullian’s *Apologeticum* (if written first) could have been accessible. Parkes argues that the Octavius owes much in both “content and form” to Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*, and she is convinced that Tertullian’s *Apologeticum* was influential. However, she recognizes that the Octavius is “far less strident” than the apologetic method of Tertullian. Again, however, it is nigh to impossible to know which came first. Aside from the assumptions about when it was written, there are similarities that can be adduced, not only with Tertullian, but other works as well. Following are some comparisons to works and influences that may well be in the background of the Octavius:

2.2.1 Tertullian

Tertullian’s *Apologeticum*, while often compared to Minucius Felix, does contain a little different approach, as noted above. The similarities are more in content than in method. Tertullian is

offering a defence against various charges being made against Christians, like Minucius Felix, but rather than having a personal discussion with an interlocutor like Caecilius, his defence is before a council of rulers, more like a trial, which is reminiscent of Socrates' apology. Tertullian (1885:27) speaks to the "Rulers of the Roman Empire" and invites them to investigate the claims of Christianity. He pleads with these rules by appealing to their supposed reason for being seated for the administration of justice on their "lofty tribunal, under the gaze of every eye, and occupying there all but the highest position in the state." He wanted them not to be afraid or ashamed to exercise their power to make a public inquiry, with the great care that is supposed to come with their position in the exercise of justice. Referring to Christians, then, Tertullian says, "if, finally, the extreme severities inflicted on our people in recently private judgments, stand in the way of our being permitted to defend ourselves before you, you cannot surely forbid the Truth to reach your ears by the secret pathway of a noiseless book." In other words, what should they be afraid of? If truth and justice are the goal, why should they hesitate to inquire of the truth of Christianity?

Tertullian (1885:19) chastises the rulers for charging Christians with being criminals, but then not treating them even as well as they treat the criminals. As in the Octavius, Christians are charged with being wicked men, but in this case Tertullian intimates that Christians are being treated worse than the common criminals. If Christians are criminals, should they not at least get the same treatment that others get? Instead, he says, people are blindly knocking their heads "against the hatred of the Christian name."

There is similarity here with Minucius Felix, for in both cases part of the problems with faulty charges stem from a failure to fully investigate the true nature of Christianity. Assumptions are made, insinuations are given, and charges are presented, but those doing so have little understanding of what they are saying in these matters. Tertullian (Tertullian, 1885:19) shows that even criminals, when charged, are given the opportunity to both speak themselves and to use hired lawyers ("pleaders") to prove their innocence. They have the ability to provide answers and even debate because it is against the law to condemn anyone "undefended and unheard." Tertullian writes, "Christians alone are forbidden to say anything in exculpation of themselves, in defence of the truth, to help the judge to a righteous decision; all that is cared about is having what the public hatred demands—the confession of the name, not examination of the charge." Not insignificant is the fact that this description fits the same time-frame in which Minucius Felix is writing, and it helps to show the vitriol that existed against Christians. The name alone brought much hatred. In this context, Caecilius' hatred against Christians can be understood because it was the normal reaction of the day.

Tertullian (1885:27) also, like the Octavius, dealt with the charge that Christians do not worship the pagan gods or offer sacrifices for the emperors. Tertullian argued that Christians do not offer

such sacrifices for others for the same reason they do not offer sacrifices for themselves—namely that the gods are not proper objects of worship. For this, Tertullian recognizes that Christians are accused of sacrilege and treason. That, he says, is the chief ground and charge against Christians and the reason why they are being arrested and put on trial. The problem, he says, is that those who make the inquiries into Christianity either have no idea about how to discover the truth or they simply rejected it at once without hearing it through. Even so, Tertullian (1885:27) makes the matter plain: “We do not worship your gods, because we know that there are no such beings.” This shows that Christians understood well that they could not worship the pagan gods and, at the same time, claim allegiance to the God of Scripture and Jesus Christ. Octavius makes this quite clear as well.

Investigation into the nature of Christianity, then, is a major theme for both Tertullian and Minucius Felix. Neither are wanting to merely make assertions, but both are wanting the objectors to investigate the claims, which is only fair to those who would say that they wanted to pursue the truth. Tertullian (1885:20) says it plainly. If those who brings the charges can make it clear that the Christian “sect” is a bad one along with its founder, that would be proof that the name was bad and deserves to be avoided both in the character of the religion and the author of it. Yet it is only fair that before they just automatically rejected it, it behoved them to consider “the sect in the author, or the author in the sect.”

Minucius was dealing with one man who represents the misunderstandings of the many, or so it would seem. Perhaps Caecilius was meant, rhetorically, to be representative of those in that society that rejected Christianity without duly giving it consideration. In all of these cases, there had been a lack of investigation. It would seem, then, that the invitation to investigate is a major concept that underlies ancient apologetics. Modern apologists also ought to welcome investigation. Even Luke 1:1-4 shows that investigation was a significant part of what the early Christians understood in establishing truth. If Christians wish to establish the “exact truth” about what happened among the early disciples, then they need to be open to the investigative process.

Interestingly, both Minucius Felix and Tertullian answer the faulty charge that Christians kill and eat infants. Minucius (Felix, 2016:17-18) refers to the story concerning the “initiation of young novices” as being “as much to be detested as it is well known.” The description is that of an infant covered with some kind of meal in order to deceive the novice. The baby is then placed before him “who is to be stained with their rites” and killed by the new convert, who has been urged by the others to strike the surface of the meal. Then, as Octavius describes the erroneous charge, “Thirstily—O horror!—they lick up its blood; eagerly they divide its limbs.” It would be difficult to imagine anything as horrible as this slander, yet apparently it was something that Christians had to contend with.

Tertullian (1885:24) makes the same essential point: “Monsters of wickedness, we are accused of observing a holy rite in which we kill a little child and then eat it.” He then describes a situation in which, after the feast, they practice incest, which Octavius also answers. Tertullian writes that Christians are charged with being pimps who shut off all the lights in order to get into the “shamelessness of darkness for our impious lusts.” This is what Christians are charged with, says Tertullian, and yet those who make the charges “take no pains” to find out whether or not there is any truth to the charges. Once again, there is much parallel with the Octavius on this matter.

All it would take is a little investigation into the matter to see that the charges are so perverted and erroneous that those who made such charges should be embarrassed. Yet here are two of the premier Latin apologists both dealing with issues like eating infants and incest among Christians. One does it in the form of dialogue; the other uses these issues to make a verbal defence in front of rulers in a council. Both seek to achieve the same ends to show the nature of the faulty charges. Both critique the nature of the pagan gods, and both point to the idea of eternal life found in Christ and the resurrection. This is why many think one is dependent upon the other. Yet again, which one came first is yet to be proved, and the way the arguments coincide, either way is a possibility.

Tertullian throws down the proverbial gauntlet, just as did Minucius Felix. They lay out the case, make their arguments, then call for a serious response. For example, Tertullian (1885:50-51), as he winds up his case, argues that he had sufficiently met the accusations of the “various crimes on the ground of which these fierce demands are made for Christian blood.” He lays out the case completely and demonstrates how Christians can prove their position, first from the “antiquity” of the sacred writings, then from the “confession” of the powers of spiritual wickedness, which essentially argues that the nature of the charges being so wicked show themselves to be fallacious. He begs that the accusers try to refute the position of the Christians, not simply with “skill of words,” but rather “on the basis of reality.”

Likewise, when Octavius finished the last of his speeches, Minucius, as a witness to the discussion, sums up the case (Felix, 2016:68-69). He says that for a time there was silence while their countenances were fixed in attention. Minucius was lost in the greatness of his admiration for how Octavius had handled the accusations against Christians so well, “both by arguments and by examples, and by authorities derived from reading.” He observes that Octavius had repelled the “malevolent objectors” with the same weapons used by the philosophers, showing that the truth was both “easy” and “agreeable.” That is, the truth believed by Christians was not something that was outlandish, but was agreeable by nature of reason and what can be seen in nature. Tertullian and Minucius Felix both deal with similar issues, the same faulty charges, and answer in similar ways, though Tertullian is demonstrably more aggressive in his approach.

2.2.2 Cicero

Cicero is certainly one of the most influential orators and politicians of the early Roman period and just prior to the birth of Christ. He died in 43 B.C., but his impact on the next few centuries was significant. He tended (Everitt, 2003:258) toward Stoic pantheism, which allowed him to be able to "celebrate the physical universe" by means of "poetic grandeur." Cicero (2014: loc 52571) spoke of the gods and was a critic of superstitions, dreams, portents, astrology, and like concepts, particularly in *De deorum natura*. In his *De deorum natura* and *De facto,* Cicero addresses "religious and theological themes" wherein "they ridicule the anthropomorphic conception of God, or the gods…" (Everitt, 2003:257). One can see some influence here in the speeches of Octavius, but perhaps more influence is rendered over the speeches of Caecilius as the pagan.

Baylis (1928:1) refers to the epilogue of the Octavius, in particular, as "Ciceronian and rhetorical rather than Platonic and conversational in form," though it still has the marks of "substantial reality." He argues that the way Octavius argues is strongly reminiscent of Cicero's *De Oratore*. Baylis (1928:20) also, in a footnote says that Cicero was the "chief model" for the Octavius, even though (1928:30) the age in which Minucius Felix wrote was not the same as that of Cicero. He says that Caecilius "more or less" (1928:58) follows Cicero in his general views about religion, which means that religion, whether true or not, is something to be followed by tradition. Baylis (1928:59) footnotes that it has been argued that "the speech of Caecilius is an imitation of Cicero for its philosophy." Caecilius gets his "formula" for his argument "from Cicero" (1928:78). Then, Baylis (1928:94) notes that the "indebtedness of Minucius to Cicero" is obvious to anyone with the exception of several of Octavius' citations (chapter XIX) in support of the unity of God, wherein Octavius "has welded his sources together with an original skill that is next to originality itself." This is part of what makes the Octavius unique.

Woolf (2014:158) points out about Cicero that many of Cicero's works are actually dramatized as dialogues, much like Plato's accounts of Socrates when he debates with students. At the same time, he presented the "Roman elite at their ethical and cultured best." If Minucius is following the basic structure of Cicero in this, it is possible that the dialogue presented in the Octavius was meant to be more rhetorical than historical. Likely, there was some real conversation between the characters that led to the conversion of the pagan Caecilius, but it is uncertain if this series of speeches was meant to be strictly historical. The format of the work allows for either. Even so, the dialogue of the Octavius is not so much a back and forth as much as two men who each take their turns in offering their arguments, then having Minucius make the final comments, which are decidedly in favour of the Christians. Caecilius does not attempt to answer Octavius, but instead indicates his repentance and conversion to what he had learned.

Cravens (1911:2-3) argues, also, that the “form of dialogue used in the Octavius” was meant to be an imitation of Cicero and even Tacitus. However, it was not so much the form of the dialogue being used, but rather the types of arguments used by Cicero in *De deorum natura*. Cravens also says that the reasoning of Caecilius follows, at least in part, that of Velleius the Epicurean and Cotta the Academic. When Octavius speaks, he follows more the Stoic philosophy. All of this, Cravens says, shows “an extensive knowledge of the Classics.” At the least, no one could claim that Minucius was uneducated. He was well versed in ancient philosophy and political rhetoric.

Von Albrecht (1987:157-160), who apparently accepts Tertullian over Minucius Felix in terms of chronology, writes of Minucius Felix that his use of the “Ciceronian style,” which was “typical of dialogue as a literary genre,” shows that the choice of philosophical dialogue as opposed to the format of Tertullian was different in that Christians prior to this were not using such philosophical proofs against paganism. Because Minucius Felix leaned heavily on Cicero for the dialogue style, “Minucius’ choice of texts exerts an important influence on the Christian understanding of Cicero.” For dialogue style, he is more like Cicero, but for content he and Tertullian certainly have much in common.

2.2.3 Stoicism

Minucius lived during a time when Stoicism was a major philosophical influence in the world, a time which covered from before Christ was born until about 200 A.D. when Minucius wrote the Octavius. According to Daley (2011: loc 165), the Stoics were a school of philosophy that identified “virtue as the sole good in life — more important than happiness, health, and wealth.” The Stoic beliefs in virtue and love are said to have influenced the teaching of the early Christians. He argues, “The true Stoic is happy despite poverty, peril, disgrace, sickness, or impending death.” In that way, Stoicism is a philosophy of giving in to fate, and the human duty is to “play the role in life that God gave us.” While that does not truly represent the biblical view of life, there are some similarities in that Christians believe that God is in charge and that there are more important matters than personal happiness. Virtue is greater than pleasure.

Stoics believed in what is often termed “natural law.” Natural law is seen as overarching moral laws to which all are amenable. Cowan and Spiegel (2009:381) write about the “natural law tradition” in which some more laws have a universal binding effect, which in turn serves as foundational to legal standards that are expected to be “upheld in any civil society.” They show that the “most ancient advocates” of this view were Stoics, and this included “Seneca (c. 4 BC–AD 65), Epictetus (c. AD 55–135), and Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180).” According to the Stoics, human beings everywhere are united by “our common share in universal reason,” also known as the “divine logos.” These are the rational grounds for both law and civil society.

That influence can be seen when Octavius (Felix, 2016:27) argued that things in the universe are so tied together and coherent that unless people diligently examine the nature of divinity, they will be ignorant of the nature of humanity. Much later, John Calvin began *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* with a similar idea: “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”

Octavius (Felix, 2016:27) also said that one cannot well perform his social duty unless he sees himself as part of that greater “community of the world which is common to all.” Because of that common reason, people are able to recognize, feel, and imitate God, and such reason means that there is no right to be “ignorant of the celestial glory which forms itself into our eyes and senses.” Christians recognize such common reason, which is partly why Paul could write in Romans 1:20 that those who do not believe in God are without excuse because God’s nature has been shown through what has been made.

Baylis speaks to the way that Minucius Felix relates to Stoicism, noting (1928:108) that Municius has been called the “Christian Seneca.” For Seneca (Daley, 2011: loc 180), the fleshly desires and worldly goods have no lasting value. Instead, as other Stoics, he argued that true happiness is to be found in virtue. Once again, it is far more important to be good than it is to be happy. Perhaps somewhat uniquely among philosophers, the Stoics believed “in the natural rights of man and that all men are created equal.” In a world that typically accepted a class system, slavery, and various injustices, this was indeed different, and in these areas in particular, Christians would have agreed with the Stoics.

The works of Seneca were (Baylis, 1928:113) “the constant companions of Minucius.” This is not to say that Minucius subscribed fully to what Seneca thought or believed, but rather there are general influences that can be seen in Minucius’ work, particularly as it pertains to the unity of God. Being a Stoic, according to Baylis (113), Seneca held to a “material and Pantheistic conception of God” as if God would a “subtle fire or breath or ether” or an element of matter that permeates everything else (pantheism). Some might have called this idea “Providence” or “Fate,” or at least seen as the orderliness and preservation of the world.

This influence is apparent when Octavius speaks about fate (63) as something not to take comfort from nor to apologize for what happens from fate. The mind can be free while recognizing the “disposition of fortune.” Because of this, it is “man’s doing, not his dignity,” that will be judged. Octavius defines fate as that which “God has spoken of each one of us,” given that God can foresee “our constitution” and determine what will happen “according to the deserts and the qualities of individuals.” He says, then, that men are not judged or punished according to the stars

under which they born (astrology), but are instead blamed for “the particular nature” of their disposition.

Octavius stresses virtue over circumstances when he shows that even poor Christians are happy and downplays the role of emotion in making the choices that lead to the kind of life God desires. He argues for God’s overarching providence and man’s need to be virtuous, regardless of one’s physical situation. Being poor is no vice, but lacking virtue is. Therefore, one should seek to develop character under God’s watchful eyes. With this, the Stoic philosophers should have had no trouble agreeing.

2.2.4 A Jewish Source?

Quispel (1949:114) argues that a Jewish source lies in the background of the Octavius. He reasons that some of the Octavius passages show that Minucius knew something of a Jewish apology, “large parts of which are preserved in the so-called pseudo-Clementina,” and “when used as a *tertium comparationis* this Jewish book may reveal that Minucius rendered the text of his source faithfully, whereas Tertullian misunderstood the text of the Octavius in the corresponding passage of the *Ad Nationes*.” If, as is affirmed by Quispel (1949:115) that Minucius himself indicates his familiarity with Jewish literature, then this is not out of the question, though it is not a universally accepted notion. Minucius may well have known the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX), and it seems that there was some Jewish influence over apologetic thought at the time. Quispel discusses various comparisons between Greek with Latin texts that have counterparts in the Octavius. The essential point he makes is that the Jewish source *Clementina* takes precedence in terms of influence.

2.2.5 Biblical References

There is not much in the way of specific biblical references in the Octavius. This seems to stand in contrast to how others among the Patristics often quoted from or alluded to Scripture. Minucius Felix does not specifically mention Jesus Christ by name, though there is some discussion about the cross and resurrection. It may be that the sparse use of Scripture is reflecting an attempt to appeal to a wider gentile or pagan audience, but that is nowhere stated and can only be conjecture. He certainly seemed to be more interested in concepts (cross, resurrection) than in persons (i.e., Jesus Christ). However, while the Octavius is not intended to be commentary on Scripture, there may be some allusions to consider that arise from the text of the Bible.

There appear to be some allusions to Genesis in chapter XIX (Felix, 2016:32-34). Octavius is recounting a number of ancient philosophers in order to demonstrate their agreement with the notion that God is the creator of all things. He references Mantuan Maro as saying, “In the

beginning … the spirit within nourishes, and the mind infused stirs the heaven and the earth, and the other members of the world. Thence arises the race of men and of cattle, and every other kind of animal." He references Thales as arguing that water was "the beginning of things, but that God was that mind which from water formed all things." This was to show that "the opinion of this original philosopher absolutely agrees with ours." There appear to be several allusions, though sometimes obscure, to parts of Scripture in chapters XXXII and XXXIII (2016:57-59).

Genesis is highlighted by referencing God as the "Architect of the sun" and "the very source of light." Exodus is recalled in his words, "as long as they obeyed His wholesome precepts, from a few became innumerable, from poor became rich, from being servants became kings; a few overwhelmed many; unarmed men overwhelmed armed ones as they fled from them, following them up by God's command, and with the elements striving on their behalf." Acts and Genesis are both echoed in his statement, "Not only do we act in Him, but also, I had almost said, we live with Him." One can detect elements of Isaiah in his contrasting of God with pagan concepts. Some of the Psalms do the same (see, for example, Isaiah 44-45; Psalm 96:1-6; 97:6-7).

Others (The Tertullian Project) have detected subtle elements or nods to other books like Job, Jeremiah, Luke, John, Romans, and the Corinthian epistles. While it is difficult to find direct statements or quotes, there is enough there to suppose that Minucius was well acquainted with Scripture. If he is knowledgeable of the ancient classics, and he is also a Christian, then this would make sense. As the author on the Tertullian Project website says, rather than any clear literary dependence, the allusions are part of the subject matter. "Therefore, one might just as well suppose that Minucius Felix is drawing from the common parlance of the Church rather than directly from the Bible." Since the Church was attempting to follow Scripture, and Minucius was part of that Church, it may be that some of his allusions are directly related to the practices of the Church. This is difficult to prove one way or another.

Again, though various philosophical influences can be detected within the Octavius, the work still stands as a unique testimony to the apologetic efforts of Minucius Felix in a time when some malicious charges were being framed against the Christians. He and Tertullian appear to be on the front lines of their day trying to root out the erroneous positions that were being laid at their feet. While there is influence especially coming from men like Cicero and Seneca, Minucius Felix has his own agenda in combatting faulty charges against Christianity. His work is important for giving a snapshot of the early era of Christianity as its adherents had to fight not only physical persecution, but also various slanderous charges. This, in turn, can be beneficial for a modern apologist facing similar problems from a world that is sceptical and cynical.

CHAPTER 3
THE ARGUMENTS OF CAECILIUS AND THE ARGUMENTS OF OCTAVIUS

The arguments of both Caecilius and Octavius are set within a dialogue context wherein each delivers his own series of uninterrupted arguments. Caecilius begins and Octavius responds. By the end, Minucius, as a third party, renders his personal judgment in favour of Octavius, and Caecilius finally agrees that he was in error and now in favour of Christianity, though admitting he had much to learn.

Minucius, in chapter I, puts himself into the role of the observer and narrator, attempting to describe what both Caecilius and Octavius argued in this discussion. Minucius refers to Octavius as his "excellent and most faithful companion" (Felix, 2016:6), one in whom he could fully confide and who had helped him through a deep and difficult time. One should not be surprised, then, that the Octavius is seen in the best light throughout the dialogue and that, in the end, Minucius commends in glowing terms what Octavius says throughout. The Octavius is clearly meant to be a defence of Christianity.

The setting for the discussion is Octavius coming to Rome (chapter II). Minucius and Octavius agree to go to Ostia together for health reasons. As they were traveling along the shore of the Tiber River, a third character, Caecilius, "observing an image of Serapis,[7] raised his hand to his mouth, as is the custom of the superstitious common people, and pressed a kiss on it with his lips" (Felix 2016:7). Octavius responded to this by objecting to that action as the "blindness of vulgar ignorance," "giving himself up to stones," and a "disgrace" that would discredit him (Felix 2016:8). As they travelled, Octavius told stories until they reached a point where some boys were playing in the sand with shells. There is an implied tension at this point.

Caecilius, apparently ruminating on the rebuke he received, then decided to launch into a series of arguments in defence of his own actions and in opposition to the way he understands Christians. He essentially charges Octavius with only being able to hold an argument with his own comrades,[8] but suggested he would have trouble engaging in "close conflict after the manner of

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[7] Also known by Sarapis or Sarapia, and apparently also an Egyptian god associated with Isis (Beard, North, and Price, 2001:135-136). In their History (2002:254), Beard, North, and Price write, "The cult of Sarapis at Rome was often associated with Egyptian Isis, with all its paraded mark of alien cult (Egyptian music, shaved heads, bizarre costumes…). At the same time a cult of Sarapis could be seen as more Greek than Egyptian, and hence much more easily brought into the sphere of Roman public cult."

[8] The idea was that Octavius could only "preach to the choir," as might be said in a more modern idiom. There seems to be a question underlying much of what happens in the Octavius: can Christians go

the philosophers" (Felix 2016:9). They decided to sit down on some rocky barriers to rest and have a discussion over their differences. Minucius would serve as a moderator if so needed. In the actual work, Caecilius works through his various arguments without interruption. For the sake of clarity, this thesis shall proceed by overviewing the argument, followed by the reply given by Octavius, which occurs some pages later. In order to show the nature of the discussion, quotes will be provided from the source in order to see more clearly how they argue and respond.

3.1 The Arguments of Caecilius

Caecilius starts, in chapter V, arguing that Octavius' judgment was not fair because it came only from his own perceptions. Perhaps not realizing the irony of such a judgment, he suggests that Octavius is ignorant of the religion, that (Felix 2016:10) "all things in human affairs are doubtful, uncertain, and unsettled, and that all things are rather probable than true." He questions the knowledge of objective truth from the beginning. Caecilius intimates that Octavius had given in to the weariness of investigating truth and rashly succumbing to an opinion without giving due diligence in understanding. Without realizing that many Christians like Octavius had themselves been pagans in the same kind of situation as he, Caecilius extrapolates from Octavius to Christians generally, suggesting that they are "unskilled in learning, strangers to literature, without knowledge of the sordid arts" (2016:10). Consequently, Christians had no right to determine any kind of certainty concerning the ideas and practices of those who were not Christians. Such involves a "mediocrity of human intelligence." Since man cannot know with certainty about the nature of the divine, then he must first know himself. Even if pagans were to go too far in their actions toward the divine, as Octavius had indicated, and wandered away from the "limits proper to our humility," Christians should not further "entangle this error with vain and fearful opinions" (2016:10).

Caecilius tries to set the stage that no matter how far pagans go, Christians can only bring their own opinions to the table, so they should stay out of it. Consequently, Caecilius implies that the received religions they had grown up with should be accepted and the new religion like Christianity rejected because it would appear that no particular God governs the world by divine providence. All the problems in the world, including the natural disasters, were proof enough for Caecilius that no special God was in control of the affairs of the world. His view was that either uncertain truth was hidden for them and kept back for some reason, or (2016:12), "in these various and wayward chances, fortune, unrestrained by laws, is ruling over us." Therefore, he argues (2016:13), it is better "to cultivate the religions handed down to you, to adore the gods whom you were first

toe to toe with the pagans on the nature of God and can they properly defend their faith? Pagans did not appear to give Christians much respect in this.

trained by your parents to fear than to know with familiarity," By this he was indicating that one should believe the forefathers and not give any further opinion about the deities.[9]

Caecilius, in chapter VII, offers as proof of his assertions that the ancestors had been successful in the observance of the auguries, by consulting entrails, by sacred rites, and by the dedication of temples. He brings up what he considers to be several witnesses to demonstrate these matters. He saw impressive statues and august temples as proof that the gods were present. Interestingly, he pointed to the products of human hands as proof of the gods; whereas the apostle Paul, in Acts 17, pointed to the creation and said that God is not served by human hands. This makes a strong contrast between what pagans thought and what Christians taught. Whereas in pagan thought, human hands create the gods, in Christian thought, God makes the human hands. The beliefs of Christians were certainly not the same as the pagans on this matter.

Given what Caecilius believed were strong arguments in favour of the received pagan religions, he pointed out (2016:15) that it was "irreligious wisdom" to "strive to undermine or weaken" the ancient religion that is "so useful" and wholesome. Those who denied the gods and "took away all the fear by which humanity is ruled" with the ancient religion were termed "Atheist." Only those of a "reprobate, unlawful, and desperate faction" would rage against the gods. Here he continues to castigate Christians (2016:16) who gathered together from the "lowest dregs the more unskilled, and women, credulous and, by the facility of their sex, yielding, establish a herd of a profane conspiracy." Here he charges Christians with being "leagued together by nightly meetings, and solemn fasts and inhuman meats—not by any sacred rite, but by that which requires expiation—a people skulking and shunning the light, silent in public, but garrulous in corners." He says that they despise temples as dead-houses, reject the gods, and laugh at things that are meant to be sacred. Caecilius calls them wretched, half-naked, and despising "honours and purple robes." This he calls "wondrous folly and incredible audacity!" Further, he says, they despise their present torments, a statement that seems to indicate that they were not really afraid to be tormented for their faith. He argues (ibid.), "while they fear to die after death, they do not fear to die for the present: so does a deceitful hope soothe their fear with the solace of a revival." The hope that Christians have of eternal life is considered deceitful, a charge not uncommon to Christians in the modern world.

Caecilius gets even more pointed in his critique of Christians in chapter IX. He refers to their wicked deeds and abominable shrines that ought to be rooted out and execrated. He charges

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[9] He never delves into the question as to when these views first came about. At some point, new traditions question and take the place of older ones. If it is wrong to question the current traditions, why would it not have been wrong for the earlier ancestors to question the traditions they came from in order to begin the new conditions that their descendants would receive? Where does it end?

them with incestuous relationships, calling one another (2016:17) “promiscuously brothers and sisters,” loving one another before they even know one another, and glorying in crime. He, by hearsay, claims that Christians “adore the head of an ass,” that they “worship the virilia[10] of their pontiff and priest,” and adore nature as their common parent. He does say that he did not really know if these things are false, but he believed he was justified in being suspicious about them. In other words, whether the charges were true or not is irrelevant; the charges alone were sufficient to question the truth of Christianity.[11] Regarding Jesus, Caecilius argued that Christians worship what they deserve because they explain what they do on the basis of a man “punished by extreme suffering for his wickedness, and to the deadly wood of the cross, appropriates fitting altars for reprobate and wicked men.”[12]

Perhaps the most grotesque and vicious of the charges concerned how Christians initiated their young novices, something that is (2016:17) “as much to be detested as it is well known.” He then describes the practice of covering an infant with meal in order to deceive the unwary, then placing it before the novice. The novice then unwittingly slays the infant, and proceeds to lick up the blood, divide the limbs, and pledge to remain silent about what has been done. He describes their banqueting practices as being well known by all, and that they gather all together on a solemn day, wherein (2016:18) the “fervour of incestuous lust” grows hot, they turn out the lights, and engage in “the connections of abominable lust.”[13]

Caecilius next charges Christians with being too secretive, and that such discretion is proof of theirs being an obscure “vile religion” (2016:18-19). After all, why do they go to such pains “to conceal and to cloak whatever they worship”? Honourable things do not hide in shame but are happy with going public. Crimes are what men keep secret. Why do Christians not have altars, temples, or acknowledged images? What do they not openly speak? Why do they not gather together freely and openly? Is it because “what they adore and conceal is either worthy of punishment, or something to be ashamed of?”

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10 A reference to sexual organs. It is difficult to imagine where this charge came from, but it may be connected to their notion that Christians were engaged in incestuous relations. When a worldview, here seen through the eyes of paganism, sees sexual relations in most anything, they will charge others with the same.

11 An important note here is that people know it is inherently unfair to charge others with something whether true or not. Yet Christians were continually subjected to such. The answer is not simply to cry, “unfair!” but to reasonably show what Christians actually believe and practice.

12 His charge coincides with 1 Corinthians 1:18ff where gentiles see the preaching of the cross as foolishness. Crucifixion involved humiliation, shame, and reproach, and if Christians follow a crucified man, then they must also be full of such shame. This was indeed a hurdle for Christians to overcome.

13 Apparently, what was “well known by all” was not as well known in truth as thought. The difference between perception and reality is well illustrated throughout.

In chapter X, Caecilius assumes that since much of what Christians do involve circumstances that are not out in the open that they must be ashamed. He does not give thought to the reasons that might require Christians to do this, especially from the very government to which Caecilius is supposed to be faithful. Instead, he assumes the worst and charges Christians with the worst of offenses. Part of this assumption revolves around the nature of God once again. Since the Christians do not have a representation of their God, then this God must be a monstrosity, one (2016:19) “whom they can neither show nor behold” and who wanders about everywhere unable to pay attention to particular matters.

Next, Caecilius gets more specific, in chapter XI, about the Christian belief in the end-time resurrection, calling it a wild opinion and associating it with old women’s fables. It is (2016:20) “a double evil” and “twofold madness” to speak about the destruction of heaven and stars while promising eternity to themselves. “Deceived by this error, they promise to themselves, as being good, a blessed and perpetual life after their death; to others, as being unrighteous, eternal punishment.” He essentially ridicules the concept of the resurrection by questioning how resurrection can work with bodies. Will they be the same, renewed, or without? How can it be the present body since it will have been destroyed? How can it be without a body since that would mean no mind, soul, or life? If it is a new body, then it will have to be a new and different person who is born. He says (2016:21), “All such figments of an unhealthy belief, and vain sources of comfort, with which deceiving poets have trifled in the sweetness of their verse, have been disgracefully remoulded by you, believing undoubtingly on your God.” Since he cannot understand how it works, then it must be rejected.

One of the interesting fallouts of this is that unbelievers in the modern world have often charged Christians with mimicking the religions of the ancient world. However, passages like this demonstrate that one of the core beliefs of Christianity—the resurrection from the dead—is not like that found in pagan religion. This correlates with the response given to Paul in Athens in Acts 17:32. Resurrection was met with suspicion, and this demonstrates that the Christian view of resurrection differed from ancient, pagan beliefs about the afterlife.

As further proof of this caricatured, unhealthy belief of Christians in chapter XII, Caecilius points to the present state of most Christians as being poor and destitute. God lets them suffer, labour hard, and hunger, unwilling to help his people in this life. This means that God is either weak or inequitable. How can God help Christians when they come to life again if he cannot help them when in their present life? He concludes that Christians will not be rewarded in another life and really have no life in the present. His solution is to get Christians to stay more focused on the world instead of always looking to the heavens. This argument is a form of the problem of evil

argument, often made by unbelievers throughout the centuries. It is based upon a misconception of the nature of God.

Caecilius points to Socrates for wisdom and an example of one who shunned celestial matters. The height of wisdom is (2016:23) the “confession of ignorance.” Therefore, Christians should leave alone what they cannot know. Matters should be left as they are, for, so he argues, “either a childish superstition should be introduced, or all religion should be overthrown.”

Caecilius wonders what kind of reply could be given, and at this point Minucius Felix steps in as the mediator and warns that the quest must be for truth instead of persuasion by eloquence and deception. He points out that there is another side to the issues raised, and all would do well to listen in order to ascertain what is right. Caecilius doubts that Octavius can refute the arguments made, but he is about to learn otherwise.

3.2 The arguments of Octavius

Beginning in chapter XVI, Octavius replies to various parts of this first argument in detail. Octavius first argues that the source of Caecilius’ information about Christians must have been confused or mistaken. As a result, he was being cast about by the tide (2016:26), “tossed hither and thither among things contrary and repugnant to one another.” Octavius points to an irony wherein Caecilius, on the one hand, referred to the “illiterate, poor, unskilled people” who would “dispute about heavenly things,” yet give credence to philosophers who themselves were often “untaught, half-naked.” The rich, attached to their means, gave more weight to gold than to heaven (2016:27), “while our sort of people, though poor, have both discovered wisdom, and have delivered their teaching to others.” It is by the “formation of the mind” to which intelligence is given, not by wealth. However, what really matters is not one’s background, “not the authority of the arguer, but the truth of the argument itself: and even the more unskilled the discourse, the more evident the reasoning, since it is not coloured by the pomp of eloquence and grace; but as it is, it is sustained by the rule of right.”

One is reminded of the Apostle Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5 in which he says that he was with the brethren “in weakness and in fear and much trembling,” and that his speech and message “were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” The purpose of it being that way was so that “your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” The power of the argument is not in the speaker, but in the message itself. Even in the modern world, one is tempted to try to win debates by sophistry and worldly wisdom, but this is not the display of God’s wisdom, which, to the world, will often appear weak at first.

Octavius argues in chapter XVII that man ought to know himself,[14] in agreement with Caecilius. However, knowing himself necessarily brings him to God, for (2016:28) "unless you diligently examine into the nature of divinity, you must be ignorant of that of humanity." Man is different from beasts and looks to heaven, and so has no right or reason to be ignorant of what is obvious to the senses. Octavius could see no sense in denying the governance of God and to see there is some Deity of "most excellent intelligence by whom all nature is inspired, is moved, is governed" (ibid.). By looking into the heavens, one may be drawn to God and his divine providence. Here Octavius essentially argues similarly to modern apologists who provide cosmological and teleological reasons for believing in God. He uses them as evidence that God does in fact govern the world. However, Octavius is not giving a significantly detailed argument, but is arguing more along the lines that pondering on the heavens should be enough to convince anyone. To this one might compare Paul's point in Romans 1:20 that God's nature is clearly seen even in what is not visible.

Octavius further argues in chapter XVIII that God not only governs the universe as a whole, but also the individual parts of it. God, the "Parent of all" and who has "neither beginning nor end" orders everything. Yet Octavius cautions (2016:31) that people are too limited to fully understand God, "and therefore we are then worthily estimating Him when we say that He is beyond estimation." It is here that one of the memorable statements in the work is made by Octavius: "He who thinks that he knows the magnitude of God, is diminishing it; he who desires not to lessen it, knows it not." This will be appealed to later in thinking more about the nature of God.

Octavius draws further strength in his position showing that the poets of their day had recognized that there is only one Creator God, and that even the most excellent of philosophers have agreed with that concept. He is trying to show that the Christian's position about God is not all that odd, but that many have agreed, at least in principle. He tries to find some common ground with philosophers like Thales, Anaximenes, Diogenes, Anaxagoras, Pythagoras, and others. While it certain that such philosophers did not believe in the biblical God as do Christians, there were still some common ideas that can be shared relative to God's unity and power. "The same almost are the opinions also which are ours" (2016:34), Octavius says. That may be capitulating a bit much to pagan views, but his desire to draw from common ground was a sound technique.

Here one might also be reminded of Paul's use of the ancient philosophers. In Acts 17:28, Paul likely referenced the philosopher Epimenedes when he said, "'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'" Early

[14] One immediately recognizes the Socratic nod in the idea of knowing self. "Know Thyself" was inscribed at the temple at Delphi, but the idea was not limited only to pagan temples and reasoning.

Christians did not shy away from using other sources when they correctly assessed the truth of something. All truth is, indeed, God's truth, so one should expect to find some common ground in basic principles.

The contrast between God's providence and pagan creation myths is made in chapter XX. Though the world is governed by the providence of one God, people should not be carried away by the fables of those who invented such accounts. There is a certain folly to the way the world worships what it creates, which, again, is part of Paul's point in Romans 1. These beliefs are careless and to be avoided. There is an implicit contrast here between the pagans with the way Christians worship.

In chapter XXI, the folly of pagan worship is further shown in that, according to pagan views, men became gods. The appearances of these gods were (2016:38-43) "contemptible and disgraceful." Through these fables, which were taught by ignorant parents, minds of children have been corrupted (40). These gods are both created and die (41). Consequently, they are not truly divine and the images made of them cause people to fear only material stuff that has been formed and adorned, and which men decided should then be called a god (42). While animals will trample on the idols, men clean them and then choose to worship what they do not know. The rites of these gods are laughable and pitiable. As Octavius says (43), "Here the defence of the general madness is the multitude of the mad people."

Next, Octavius addresses the question of how the Romans came to power (chapter XXV). He argues that the Romans did not rise in power due to their religious beliefs, which is what Caecilius tried to say, but rather because they were fierce, and full of terror and crime (2016:44-45). They were, in fact, irreligious and sacrilegious with impunity. Their temples were built from the "spoils of violence," the "ruins of cities," the "spoils of the gods," and the "murder of priests." The pagan conceptions of the gods, religion, and the state were not harmless.

In chapter XXVI, Octavius shows how the decisions made by auspices and auguries have often been wrong. The errors of these efforts, spawned by demons according to Octavius, are contrasted with the one, true God and his heavenly ministers. Octavius argues that the source of errors from the oracles and idolatry do indeed come from the demons. The prophets of the demons are like madmen and "raging maniacs." The result of the lies that come from demonic sources are described in this way (2016:49-50): "they fly from Christians when near at hand, whom at a distance they harassed by your means in their assemblies. And thus, introduced into the minds of the ignorant, they secretly sow there a hatred of us by means of fear." Christians are hated before they are even known, and demons are the cause of this chaos.

One is reminded of Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 4:1, that some will give attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. Paul also argued in 1 Corinthians 10:20 that what pagans offer to idols, they are really offering to demons. One cannot know for certain that Octavius had these passages in mind, but they appear to support the point Octavius was making.

Further, this hatred against Christians leads to charges of horrid crimes (chapter XXVIII). Octavius argues that Caecilius, with those who buy into paganism, make unjust judgments based upon their own ignorance (2016:50-51): "to wit, that the Christians worshipped monsters, devoured infants, mingled in incestuous banquets." Such reports of what Christians did were "fed by the scattering of falsehoods," and then "wasted away when the truth is brought to light." Many Christians were former pagans and had believed the same things about Christians. Yet the truth persuaded them otherwise. Meanwhile, the pagans charged Christians with what they themselves had been doing, and Caecilius had failed to see the irony of this.

As to the charge that Christians worship a criminal who died on a cross, Octavius counters simply by showing that Jesus Christ was not a criminal. In fact, with good reason, Christians believe Jesus is God (2016:52-53). They do not worship crosses, nor desire them. In contrast, the pagans worship gods of their own making, and so they do actually worship wood and crosses.

This section speaks to the nature of the Gospel and more attention will be given to it because it is a vital aspect of reaching out to a world that is confused and in great need.

Earlier, Caecilius had repeated the lie that Christians drank the blood of murdered infants, and Octavius responds to this in chapter XXX. His answer is brief and to the point (2016:54): "No one can believe this, except one who can dare to do it." In fact, the pagans are the ones who expose their children to beasts and birds, crushing them "with a miserable kind of death." As an ancient form of abortion, some women drink medicines that extinguish the life of the infant in the womb. He says (2016:54), "To us it is not lawful either to see or to hear of homicide; and so much do we shrink from human blood that we do not use the blood even of eatable animals in our food."

Next, in chapter XXXI, Octavius answers the charges of incest made against Christians (2016:55). "And of the incestuous banqueting, the plotting of demons has falsely devised an enormous fable against us, to stain the glory of our modesty, by the loathing excited by an outrageous infamy, that before inquiring into the truth it might turn men away from us by the terror of an abominable charge." Rather than actually producing evidence, the charges were alleged and scattered. In reality, Octavius argues, the pagans are the ones who are guilty of incestuous relations. "Your records and your tragedies, which you both read and hear with pleasure, glory in incests: thus also you worship incestuous gods, who have intercourse with mothers, with daughters, with

sisters." The obvious point is that the pagans are charging others with sins of which they themselves are guilty. Christians, in contrast to pagans, "abide by the bond of a single marriage; in the desire of procreating, we know either one wife or none at all." Octavius argues that though Christians share in meals, they do not indulge in entertainments or prolong feasts with wine. A distinguishing mark of Christians is the love they have for one another, but this love is also marked by decency. This fits what Jesus taught his disciples in John 13:34-35. They are to love one another even as Jesus loved them. This is the mark of all true Christians even in the modern world, and therefore this point will always be important to the nature of authentic Christianity.

Octavius then delves into the nature of God and worship in chapter XXXIII. Christians were charged with concealing worship because they did not have temples and altars. The greater image of God, however, is (2016:57) "man himself," which is pulled from Genesis 1:26-27. Since the whole world is fashioned by God, how can anyone think to "shut up the might of so great a majesty within one little building?" It is far better to dedicate the mind and consecrate the heart. The true sacrifices made by Christians are when they cultivate innocence and justice, abstain from fraudulent practices, and snatches a man from danger. Christians do not see or show the God whom they worship, yet he is found in the movements of the world, his power is present in thunder and lightning, and in the wind and the sun. By this argument Octavius shows that the worship of the true God is not bound up in material things. The true nature of God transcends such a carnal view. In fact, when the Jews of former years failed to worship God properly, they suffered for it.

Octavius next turned to the argument Caecilius made about Christians believing in an end-time judgment in chapter XXXIV. Regarding (2016:60-61) the "burning up of the world, it is a vulgar error not to believe either that fire will fall upon it in an unforeseen way, or that the world will be destroyed by it." The reason he gives is that "all things which have had a beginning perish." He points out that philosophers like Plato and the Epicureans accepted the "shadow of the corrupted truth." Further, accepting an end-time resurrection is not a problem when one accepts that man was first formed by God.

One might compare Paul's point to Agrippa in Acts 26:8. Why should it be thought incredible that God raises the dead? Indeed, according to Octavius, "all nature suggests a future resurrection," for the sun sinks and rises, the stars pass away and return, and flowers die and revive again. Attending judgment is the fact that unrighteous men will be visited with eternal punishment, while the righteous will fare far better in eternity (discussed in chapter XXXV). The resurrection will be considered later as one of the greatest strengths of the Christian's witness.

Octavius discusses the idea of fate in chapter XXXVI and the status of many Christians in society, given that one's position was often thought to be a matter of fate. Since the mind is free, then it is man's doing that is judged, not the time at which the man was born. Fate would mean that everything is already determined. However, the fact that many Christians were poor was not a matter of being born under the wrong star. Rather, they did not crave riches, and so being poor is (2016:63) "not our disgrace, but our glory." The real poor one is he who has much while desiring more. People are far happier when they do not labour under the burden of riches. Christians (2016:64) "prefer being good to being prodigal." Infirmities and calamity only serve to strengthen. The point is that Christians in this condition are not evidence that God cannot help them but is evidence of a completely different mind-set from the world. Scripture testifies to this very point in passages like James 1-2. The worldview of Christians aids them through their trials.

What, then, of Christians who suffer the tortures of persecution? Is that evidence that God cannot save them? Octavius shows that is not the case (2016:65). "God's soldier is neither forsaken in suffering, nor is brought to an end by death. Thus, the Christian may seem to be miserable; he cannot really found to be so." God enables Christians to endure the tortures. They know something far better is coming. In contrast, those in the world may be rich, but they cannot ultimately be happy without God. The power, riches, and fame will end, and all men are born "with one lot" (2016:66), and that is death. One of the reasons that people become Christians is the recognition of this truth, and they know that the only hope they have will be found in Jesus Christ.

Concerning idols, Octavius argues that Christians abstain from whatever might be connected to idol sacrifices. None should think that Christians are (2016:67) "submitting to demons" in offering up various sacrifices. Christians do not even crown their heads or the heads of the dead with garlands of flowers like the pagans. Rather than focusing on such practices (2016:68), "we wear one living with eternal flowers from God." Christians wish to bear wisdom not in dress, but in mind, not merely to speak great things, but to live them. These will preserve true religion.

At this point, Octavius ended his rebuttal and kept silent for a time. Minucius' assessment of Octavius' speech (2016:69) was that "he had repelled the malevolent objectors with the very weapons of the philosophers with which they are armed and had moreover shown the truth not only as easy, but also as agreeable." He clearly favoured Octavius, but this should not be a surprise since he, too, was a Christian.

After the silence, Caecilius admitted that he was conquered by Octavius, then decided that he, also, would yield to God (chapter XXIL). He recognized that he still had questions, but this was not in order to resist truth. Rather these would be necessary to more perfect training. As the encounter ends, all departed satisfied with the results, and especially with Caecilius now being a

believer. The particulars of the arguments will be drawn out more by subject matter, but this overview shows the overall flow of the discussion.

3.3 The relevance of the Octavius for a modern context

The underlying premise of this thesis is that there are practical applications to be made from the Octavius. How can the Octavius of Minucius Felix be a tool for helping modern Christians defend their faith? Foundationally, it can help Christians understand that the current culture is not the first to question the historicity and truth of Jesus Christ. Today's is not the first culture to make false charges or carelessly caricature Christianity. The battle is centuries old, but the material is still needed. The relevance of the subject matter will be fleshed out in the remainder of the thesis as various topics discussed in the Octavius will be sorted out and discussed.

A work like the Octavius was meant to be persuasive. A pagan is challenged for his beliefs, then tries to defend them by contrasting paganism with Christianity. Then the Christian answers by skewering the heart of paganism and showing the folly of idolatry, defending the unity of God, and showing why it is more reasonable to believe in a crucified saviour who was raised from the dead than it is to deny resurrection. In the end, the third party who is reporting this (Minucius) praises the efforts of the Christian (Octavius) and the pagan (Caecilius) sees the folly of his views and is willing to convert to Christianity. This is a story that is meant to attack, defend, inform, and persuade.

Apologetics is the discipline that teaches Christians how they can defend their hope in and, as Cowan (2000: loc 90) puts it, make a case for "the truth of the Christian faith." Cowan continues (ibid.), "It is an intellectual discipline that is usually said to serve at least two purposes: (1) to bolster the faith of Christian believers, and (2) to aid in the task of evangelism." Peter uses the term for "apology" in 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV): "but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." The word "defence" is the term, and it is to be done with respect and honour. This discipline is multifaceted in nature. There are at least three activities involved in what apologetics is meant to accomplish, and these can be seen by showing that Jesus himself engaged in these:

1 Apologetics is meant to offer some form of positive argumentation and evidence for its claims. Groothuis (2011: loc 503-504) calls this "constructive apologetics" that involves building "a case for Christian theism by arguing that Christianity best fits the appropriate criteria for worldview assessment." Scripture never indicates that people should just believe without any evidence at all. God never asks his people to be gullible. In fact, Jesus

presented various forms of evidence for his own claims. For example, in John 5, Jesus appealed to John the Immerser, his own works, the Father, Scripture, and Moses. When John sent disciples to Jesus to ask if he was the expected one in Matthew 11, Jesus told them (vv. 4-6), “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” This was an appeal to positive evidence.

Octavius does, in fact, appeal to positive evidence, which will be explored later. For example (Felix, 2016:61), he argues that all nature suggests a future resurrection. He points to the way that the sun sinks and rises, the stars passing away and returning, and the flowers dying and reviving. Shrubs resume their leaves and seeds die and then flourish again. The body, then, will lie in the sepulchre, but will one day rise. “We must wait also for the spring-time of the body.” The persuasiveness of such evidence may or may not be effective, depending on the person, but the effort is clearly to offer some evidence as to why believing in resurrection is reasonable and expected.

2 Apologetics is meant to defend against attacks from the opposition. Jesus did this as well. For example, Matthew 22 presents a day of challenge for Jesus, in which several groups of opponents came to him in order to test and trap him. He not only responded to the tests, but essentially silenced his opposition. He defended himself with a well-reasoned approach, asking basic questions meant to cause his opponents to think through what they were doing and why they were doing it. They were the hypocrites, not Jesus. They were the ones who failed to understand the Scriptures and the power of God, not Jesus. Jesus did not just make these charges, but he showed his critics where they were in error.

Likewise, Octavius spends times defending against attacks from Caecilius. He defends against the charges of incest, of making new converts kill and eat babies, and of worshipping a God that is worthless due to not having temples and statues. Some of the charges against Christians were all but ludicrous, but they still needed to be met with a defence in order to stop the spread of the slanders. Modern Christians have a similar task of responding to attacks on their faith and showing the nature of the truth.

3 Apologetics, at times, is intended to go on the offense to show the folly of opposing views. Bahnsen (2011: loc 441) argues that “part of the Christian’s reasoned defence of the faith will be an aggressive offense.” Oliphant (2013:49) says, “Just as an unbeliever will stand on his own chosen ground in order to debate and discuss, so also will we.” Once again, Jesus did this. For example, in Matthew 22:41-46 Jesus challenged his opponents by

asking, “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They answered, “The son of David,” to which Jesus replied, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet’?” Then Jesus hit them with the problem: “If David calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” They could not answer. By going on the offensive, Jesus demonstrated that his opponents’ views about the Messiah were inconsistent and untenable. They had not thought through their position.

Octavius, as well, goes on the offensive against Caecilius. He attacks the nature of paganism and shows the folly of idolatry for what it is. He points out their hypocrisy in making such malicious charges against Christians while they themselves are fully immersed in the very same practices. For example (2016:45), “And where are adulteries better arranged by the priests than among the very altars and shrines? where are more panderings debated, or more acts of violence concerted? Finally, burning lust is more frequently gratified in the little chambers of the keepers of the temple, than in the brothels themselves.” By showing the folly of paganism, and distancing Christianity from such actions, the Christian helps build the case for accepting the truth about Jesus Christ.

These three areas of apologetics are important for modern Christians, and the Octavius sheds some light on how to do this, particularly in the subject matter addressed. This is not to say that Octavius was flawless, but the general methodology of apologetic purposes are there and they can become tools for Christians of all times to help them in defending the gospel.

As it pertains to that subject matter raised in the Octavius, the following will be considered in more detail. The Octavius will serve as the starting point, and the discussion will proceed by showing how these same matters are important for modern Christians in their defence of the gospel. Attention will be given to persuasion and dealing with objections, but there will be considerable discussion on the nature of God, the nature of man, the nature of knowledge, the nature of morality and Christianity, and the nature of the Gospel itself, including the resurrection. These are the primary areas covered by the Octavius, and so will serve as the paradigm for introducing and discussing them in greater detail.

It is no coincidence that these very issues discussed in the Octavius are what are now considered to be the heart of worldview matters. “Who is God?” and “What is Man?” are perhaps the most basic worldview questions to ask, and every worldview has some kind of answer to these questions. The fact that these questions are still at the forefront of modern discussions show that what Minucius Felix addressed are important issues that are timeless and vital. They are more than philosophical; they are theological. Yet they are also practical. How Christians approach

these matters can make all the difference for the unbelievers who may, like Caecilius, be persuaded if they take the time to examine the truth.

The relevance of Minucius Felix' work, then, is seen in both methodology and in subject matters addressed. While many do not care for confrontation, Christians still need to prepare themselves in apologetic work for at least one basic reason: apologetics is a subset of evangelism and will be necessary when attempting to teach people who do not hold to the same worldview. When the Gospel is taught, Christians will likely get some form of resistance, as did Jesus himself. At this point, Christians need to be ready to make a defence by offering evidence. If they get pushback, they need to go on the defence in order remove stumbling blocks. Occasionally they will need to go on the offense in order to show the folly of opposing views. That third area can be a problem because, as Proverbs 26:4-5 shows, while answering a fool according to his folly can show why one must not be wise in his own eyes, carelessness in this area can also have the effect of making fools of everyone. The Christian, of course, ought to know that speaking with grace is always in order (Colossians 4:5-6).

CHAPTER 4
PERSUASION AND THE CHRISTIAN

The art of persuasion can be difficult for those who do not see it as natural to their personalities. Persuasion, as used here, can be defined, according to Verderber (1991:4) as "the art of forming oral arguments and adapting them to specific audiences in a way that is designed to affect their beliefs and/or move them to action." There is something purposeful about trying to persuade another to change a viewpoint or act differently. Verderber (ibid.) exhorts persuasive speakers to "think carefully about exactly what response they want from their audience." This is certainly true when it comes to a Christian trying to persuade a non-Christian to believe in and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Christians ought to know exactly what they are trying to achieve and the type of response they are hoping to receive. Specifically, they want to persuade others of the truth of Jesus Christ so that the recipients, too, might share in the blessings of forgiveness and the promises of God.

The basic idea of persuading is that of convincing and, as Groothuis (2011: loc 232-233) says, seeking "to make known the Christian message so that others may hear it, believe it and live it out." When people seek to convince others of the truth of some concept or proposition, they are trying to urge and influence them to change their minds about the matter and come to a particular point of view so they can change how they live, not through coercion, but through reason. The persuasion can be based on emotion, reason, or both. There are several examples of this in Scripture.

When Jesus was on trial and Pilate gave the choice of releasing Barabbas or Jesus in Matthew 27:20, "the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus." When Paul and Barnabas were preaching in the city of Lystra in Acts 14:19, some "Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead." Persuasion was the common mode of operation, it would seem, among the early Christians. This was a vital part of evangelism.

These are examples of crowds being persuaded to act in opposition to Jesus and the disciples. Yet the disciples of Jesus are themselves engaged in trying to convince others of the truth about Jesus and what He did in going to the cross. When Paul was in Thessalonica, he went into the synagogue and reasoned with the people from the Scriptures. Even though there was a negative reaction by some of the Jews there who sought to persecute Paul, others were convinced by Paul in Acts 17:3-4, "explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." The text continues,

“And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.” Notice that the method of persuasion from Paul’s part was that of reasoning, explaining, and proving. These are ideas that will be explored in more detail in order to better understand the persuasion process.

When Paul was in Corinth, once again, in Acts 18:4, “he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.” In Acts 18:12-13, some of the Jews there “made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, ‘This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.’” Paul would spend a year and a half there “teaching the word of God among them” (v. 11). Because Paul was so persuasive, then, he gained that much more opposition. People oppose what they fear will convince many others.

Acts 19:8 shows Paul at Ephesus engaged in the same process: “And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.” The teaching of the kingdom of God created quite an uproar at Ephesus, and some the businesses were affected because they were engaged in the making of silver shrines of Artemis, the pagan goddess. They argued (vv. 25-26), “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.” This testified to the fact that Christians were persuading and convincing others that idolatry was wrong, which is something that Octavius was trying to do, as well.

Later, as Paul stood before Agrippa II and made his case in Acts 26, Agrippa responded to Paul (v. 28), “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” Whether or not Agrippa was being honest or facetious is up for discussion. Was he seriously about to be persuaded, or was he being sarcastic? Either way, it still shows a recognition that persuasion is at the heart of accepting the gospel message. The evangelists were clearly in the business of persuasion as a major concern in their efforts to teach the gospel. Since Christians do not have coercion as a legitimate option, they need to learn how to persuade with reasoned discourse and defence.

This desire is seen in the apostles. Particularly, Paul spoke of persuasion in 2 Corinthians 5. Paul made the point that he was able to endure persecutions as light afflictions because he was able to focus, not on what can be seen, which is temporal, but on what cannot be seen, which is eternal (4:17-18). He was showing the perspective that a child of God, especially under persecution, ought to have in looking not at what is seen but at what is not seen, “For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). He then points to the fact that in Christ there is the hope of a new “tent” or body from God in the resurrection as Christians look to the eternal life God gives. What the Christians longs for is not death, but the life

that is to be found when they put on their “heavenly dwelling” (5:2). This kind of attitude is possible because, Paul says, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (v. 7) and Christians know that one day they will be with the Lord (v. 8). Christians need to take courage, then, knowing that they will be at home with the Lord one day. This knowledge, in turn, is a motivating factor (2 Corinthians 5:9): “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.” One day there will be a day in which all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (v. 10). All of that sets up the point being made about persuasion in verse 11: “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.”

Christians realize the importance of seeking to persuade and convince others of the truth of the gospel message. They are eager to tell others what Christ has done for them and are not satisfied to sit back and watch the world die without at least the opportunity to know the Lord. The gospel is meant to be spread, and this will require efforts to convince and influence others of its truth. In the same chapter, Paul speaks of having a “ministry of reconciliation” through whom God makes an appeal (vv. 18-20). This demonstrates that persuasion is an important part of ministry, and it must be approached properly so as to appropriately represent Christ to the world. Love for the souls of others demands nothing less.

Yet to seek to persuade others is not an easy task. Persuasion requires from Christians knowledge of the truth, commitment to the task, and the ability to grasp what others need to hear by starting where they are in the process. In other words, Christians need to be preparing themselves to engage in the process of persuasion because everyone will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Persuasion can be based in both facts and emotional appeal. Indeed, without any emotional appeal, one may not be persuaded strictly by facts. There is a risk in this, however, if one were to allow the emotional to override the factual. They need to go hand in hand. The emotion needs to follow the truth, not the other way around. This will be explored further.

One of the significant features of persuasion in the ancient apologetics context of both Minucius Felix and Tertullian is that of being open to investigation. There is an invitation to investigate on the part of the apologists. Tertullian (Alexander and Donaldson, 1885:20) says that one who makes charges against another needs “to consider the sect in the author, or the author in the sect.” Octavius (Felix, 2016:27), in his opening argument, indicates that it is nothing to be angry or grieved about when people inquire, think, and utter their views about God “since what is wanted is not the authority of the arguer, but the truth of the argument itself: and even the more unskilled the discourse, the more evident the reasoning, since it is not coloured by the pomp of eloquence and grace; but as it is, it is sustained by the rule of right.” The main concern in discourse should

be what is true and right, not how eloquent one is. While persuasion involves some methodical consideration, Christians are really trying to convince others of the truth itself rather than win the day on their rhetorical abilities.

The concern, then, was with the truth of the argument, not the mere words or the authority of those making the faulty claims. In order to be persuaded, Caecilius had to open himself up to the real possibility that he was in error and that Christianity was true. He had to overcome his own presuppositions, his misunderstandings, and his bad argumentation in order to accept the truth presented to him by Octavius. This is no easy task. Caecilius considered Christianity to be rather silly at this point. He caricatured Christianity (Felix, 2016:17) as that of adoring the head of an ass, of worshipping the virilia of their priests, and of adoring nature as if it were their creator. He indicated that he did not know for sure the truth of this, but suspicion was enough. He also caricatured Jesus as a criminal and Christians as worshipping what is vile. Caecilius was not friendly to Christians at this stage. Convincing one like Caecilius, who is so set in his views about Christianity, would be a great challenge. Yet it could be done.

Caecilius argued on the basis of an anti-Christian assumption. Though he admittedly did not know the truth about what Christians really did, he was willing to cast suspicion on their rites anyway. He believed that any of their suffering was due to their own “silly persuasion.” Yet, by the end of the trip, Octavius would persuade Caecilius of the truth of the Christian’s faith. Minucius Felix writes (Felix, 2016:69) that while he was pondering the discussion in silence, Caecilius spoke, offering congratulations to Octavius and rendering his own decision as to the outcome of the discussion. Caecilius was, in fact, listening with an open mind and considered himself “triumphant over error” by believing and accepting the truth. He confessed that it was the sovereignty and providence of God that brought him to this discussion, and, he said, “and I agree concerning the sincerity of the way of life which is now mine.” He indicated that he had further questions, not because he was in doubt about the truth, but because he needed more perfect training.

How Caecilius was brought to this point is interesting, and just prior to this Minucius Felix (2016:68-69) said that they were “struck into silence” and waited in admiration because Octavius “had so adorned those things which it is easier to feel than to say, both by arguments and by examples, and by authorities derived from reading; and that he had repelled the malevolent objectors with the very weapons of the philosophers with which they are armed, and had moreover shown the truth not only as easy, but also as agreeable.” Two main points stand out in the persuasiveness of Octavius, as stated in this quote from Minucius. First, Octavius had the ability to deal with objections to the faith by using the philosophers’ own methods, and second, he showed that the truth was both easy and agreeable. To be persuaded, one must be able to overcome objections and stumbling blocks, and one must also think that the claims being made

are reasonable. To better appreciate how a work like the Octavius can be a modern tool for Christians in their defence of the gospel, several facets of persuasion will be considered.[15]

4.1 Persuasion and Reasoning

Since Christians need to be prepared to engage in the art of persuasion as they seek to teach others the gospel, understanding something about the reasoning process can be beneficial. Remember, as demonstrated, that this was the Apostle Paul's normal mode of operation as he went from place to place preaching the kingdom of Christ.

Paul would go into the synagogue and reason with the Jews (Acts 17:3-4), "explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'" In Corinth (Acts 18:4), "he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). At Ephesus (Acts 19:8), "he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God." Then, as some of the Jews at Ephesus were opposing Paul (vv. 9-10), they were "speaking evil of the way" and Paul "withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

When Paul was in custody after being arrested, he still had the opportunity to teach and preach before those who were ruling. For instance, when he stood before Felix, the governor of the region in Palestine, he tried to persuade (Acts 24:25): "And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, 'Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.'" Felix appears to be almost convinced, but, sadly, he put it off. While Christians want to persuade others, they will always have the choice of listening and responding or not. The common connection is that of using reason to persuade. Reasoning, then, is critical to the process of persuasion, and disciples of Christ do well to learn how to reason properly both in personal thinking and in discussions with others.

Reason is the use of the mind to understand, put information together, and use logic to draw warranted conclusions. Gilson (Gilson & Weitnauer, 2012: loc 133) points out that reason is "the ability to draw proper deductive inferences from premises, or proper inductive inferences from evidences, or properly credible explanations of observations and phenomena. It is the ability to proceed from evidences and/or premises to an appropriate conclusion." In this light, argumentation, which, according to Philip (2015: loc 40) builds "upward or outward from a solid

[15] The primary source for this section on persuasion is Scripture. I want to show that Scripture itself speaks to persuasion in a meaningful and substantial way.

foundation, with each step (called a premise) connected to another," is needed and good. Argumentation does not mean simply to disagree with people and engage in a verbal fight with raised voices.

A proposition is a statement that can be considered true or false,[16] and Christianity is based upon propositional facts. Take, for example, what the apostle Paul calls "of first importance" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The resurrection of Jesus is an historical reality that undergirds the Christian's faith. The proposition is true or false and simply stated: Jesus was raised from the dead. Either the resurrection of Jesus happened or it did not. If it did not happen, if that proposition is false, then Paul shows a series of consequences that result (1 Corinthians 15:14-18). If Christ is not raised, then the Christian's faith is in vain. Those who preached the risen Christ would then be found to be liars who misrepresented God. If there is no resurrection at all, then not even Christ was raised, and if that is the case, faith is futile and everyone would be still be in sin. Further, those who had already died would have just perished. "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." What is at stake is eternally significant.

Bad consequences do not in themselves prove a proposition to be true or false, but it is important to understand what is at stake in arguing for the resurrection of Jesus.[17] To argue for the resurrection is to present reasons why one should accept that the resurrection happened in history. This is based primarily upon documentation and eye-witness testimony. The resurrection is an historical argument, as Luke demonstrates in the first four verses of his gospel account. An historical argument can be investigated. People can weigh the evidence and draw conclusions from the given data. Proper argument seeks to persuade others by presenting the facts first, then considering what those facts mean.

Reason is a Christian's friend, not an enemy, for (Caner & Hindson, 2008: loc 1128-1129) "faith and reason are allies in the quest for truth." According to Pascal (1958:52), "religion is not contrary to reason." Some may try to put reason at odds with faith, but faith and reason work hand in hand. Christians do need to remember is that the goal is to save souls, not to just win arguments, as

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16 Kreeft (2008:138) says, "Propositions are most clearly and sharply distinguished from both terms and arguments by the fact that only propositions can be either true or false. Terms are only clear or unclear, whether these terms stand by themselves or form parts of propositions. Propositions are either true or false, whether they stand by themselves or form parts of arguments. Arguments as a whole are neither true nor false; each proposition within an argument is either true or false. Arguments as a whole are either logically valid or logically invalid, depending on whether or not the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises."

17 Blaise Pascal (n.d.:67-69) is known for issuing his "wager," the essence of which is to present the options of wagering there is no God and wagering there is (assuming one cannot provide proof). As he put it, "If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing." This is not a proof, but it is meant to put on the table of discussion the importance of what is at stake. Serious students would want to explore the truth further if they are aware of what hangs in the balance.

Paul indicated in 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (ESV): “And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”

4.2 Persuasion and Explaining

In Acts 17:2-3, Paul, in Thessalonica went to the synagogue and “reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.” The source from which he reasoned was Scripture, but in the process of discussing he needed to do some explaining. This is true in any era of time.

Christians must reason with people, but this is not just giving raw facts without providing a context and meaning. The process of reasoning also includes the idea of explaining. The purpose of explaining anything is to help the hearer understand exactly what is meant. For example, when Ezra addressed those who had returned from captivity, he taught and explained. Nehemiah 8:8 says, “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.” The process indicated here was that they read from the book clearly, then they gave the sense, interpreting and explaining so that the people understood the meaning of what they had heard. The text needed some explanation.

When the Ethiopian eunuch, in Acts 8:26-40, was returning from worshipping in Jerusalem, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip the evangelist was sent to help the eunuch. Philip heard him reading and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The eunuch responded, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” Philip then sat with him and explained how that passage from Isaiah spoke about Christ. He explained what was being read so that the eunuch understood and then responded appropriately. Without first understanding, there could not have been a proper response. To be convinced of truth means that the truth itself is understood the way it was intended. Otherwise, what one is convinced about may well be erroneous.

This process of explaining and understanding is sometimes more difficult than it may appear at first. This is so because people “bring to the table” any number of ideas and previous understandings and conceptions about a host of topics. This includes the words that people hear. The communicator may use a word that he understands in his own context, but that same context may not be shared by the other persons who are listening. This, by itself, is not the fault of any particular party. People are, in many ways, the products of their own environments. One growing up in the United States, for example, will have a very different frame of reference than one who

grows up in South America or Africa. They can learn to understand each other, but to do so requires translation and information that helps explain their given contexts.

When twenty-first century people read the Bible, they are essentially entering into another country in a different context. This can be a barrier to understanding because people will invariably read from their own modern context rather than trying to understand from the context in which the biblical authors wrote. The problem is not insurmountable, but it does take great care to make sure they are not using modern concepts to project back into the biblical world. In biblical interpretation, seeing the context is, according to Fee and Stuart (2003: loc 533) "the crucial task in exegesis." Words have meaning, and meaning is tied to usage in the context of its own time. For example, when Paul used the word translated "power" in Romans 1:16, he used the word from which the English "dynamite" comes. However, he was not saying that the Gospel is God's dynamite. That would be projecting a modern term and concept back into the Scriptures. The same goes for the term from which "apology" comes in 1 Peter 3:15. Peter was not saying that Christians need to be sorry for their hope; he was saying they needed to be ready to give a verbal defence. Words and ideas change over time, so one must take great care to understand terms in context.

Persuasion and explanation go together for the simple reason that people cannot be rightly persuaded of something if they do not understand it. If, for example, people are talking about God, but they do not understand by the use of the term what is really meant, then how can legitimate persuasion occur in any positive sense? If a term like "love" has a broad semantic range of meanings (one can love food, love a dog, and love a spouse), then it stands to reason that a little explanation for the sake of understanding will go a long way to people coming to terms with one another.[18] This is why definition is so important.

Of course, explanation and interpretation can be fraught with fallacies. One can give a bad explanation or interpret in a way that leads to faulty conclusions. This, in turn, can lead others astray. Explanation and interpretation are necessary, but just as necessary are the efforts to take great care that truth is actually taught. On the other side of the coin, the listener needs to take care to check out what is being taught to make sure is correct. 1 John 4:1 teaches, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." This attitude of searching the Scripture and making sure of the truth is called "noble-minded" in Acts 17:11. Even when Paul taught, there was an expectation that

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[18] See Adler and Van Doren (1972:96-100) where they explain the importance of "coming to terms" with an author. Terms, which can be a word or group of words with a particular meaning, must be understood clearly by both parties in a discussion. Coming to an understanding is viewed as coming to terms.

hearers would make sure that they were being taught the truth. While persuasion from the communicator requires explanation, the listener must never be entirely passive in the process. The listener must seek to understand and test the teaching in order to be convinced that he really does accept what is true.

4.3 Persuasion and Proving

The apostle Paul not only reasoned and explained in his teaching of the Gospel, he also offered proof. Acts 17:2-3 says that “he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.” He reasoned, explained, and proved as part of the process of persuasion. The text then says in verse 4, “And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.” Not everyone was persuaded, however, and this helps demonstrate the relationship between proof and persuasion. Offering proof is not a guarantee that people will be persuaded, as proof is often dependent on what else a person already accepts as true.

Groothuis (2011: loc 1852-1853) writes, “The term proof can mean an argument in which the premises deductively entail a conclusion such that the conclusion is secured beyond any doubt.” People do not always accept the evidence or are convinced that something is true, and in that sense, they do not think the case has been proved. Persuasion seeks to bridge the gap so that the evidence given will be sufficient to convince people to accept and believe what is being argued. Since many are not wanting to believe, the challenge for Christians is, as Guinness (2015:26) says, to help unbelievers see “despite themselves.” Even so, just because evidence and proof has been presented does not mean that everyone will accept it or be persuaded. Not everyone who saw Jesus believed. Proof and persuasion, then, are not identical.

Christians ought to know that simply making claims is not sufficient evidence of truth. Anyone can claim anything, and no one should expect that just because a claim is made others must accept the claim without evidence. While the world often misunderstands faith as believing in spite of or without evidence, Christians know they ought to believe what they do because (Turek & Geisler, 2004:70) “they have evidence to support those beliefs, and because beliefs have consequences.” God does not want people to be gullible (see 1 John 4:1). Christians, therefore, seek to make the case for Christ, persuading, explaining, and proving that Jesus is the Saviour who is needed by all people everywhere.

How was Paul offering proof that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead? In this case, the proof was found in the Scriptures that the listeners claimed to accept. This was

not a scientific case, but a Scriptural case that assumed that everyone hearing accepted the same Scriptures as authoritative. For those who believe, the scriptural case ought to be sufficient. Even so, not everyone was persuaded, even if they claimed to believe the Scriptures.

Not even Jesus in the flesh persuaded every person of the truth of His identity, though he offered significant and irrefutable proof in the flesh (see Acts 1:1-3). Several encounters that Jesus had with His opponents demonstrate this. For example, Jesus offered a series of proofs in John 5, including the testimony of Scripture. He chastised the unbelieving Jews who claimed faith in what Scripture taught (vv. 39-40): “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” Time and again Jesus offered proof for His identity only to be rejected. For some, all the proof in the world will not persuade them. This is because they had already decided that they would not accept Jesus. This ties back in to the problem of presuppositions that, unless checked and understood, will predetermine the outcome of what one believes.

In the case of Christians trying to persuade unbelievers, the issue to be grappled with is the fact while the Bible offers the most significant proof for the resurrection of Jesus, the unbelievers do not believe that the Bible is true. Does this make the case hopeless? How, then, can the case be made?

This is where the importance of distinguishing between the case for inspiration and the case for history comes into play. While Christians accept Scripture as inspired and coming from God, Scripture also is a book that records historical events and they should be considered on their own historical merits. In talking with an unbeliever, the stress simply needs to be on the historical record first. After all, people cannot understand what the resurrection means until they first know that it actually happened. When Luke began his gospel account, he stressed that the truth of what happened relied on eyewitness testimony to make the case (Luke 1:1-4). In dealing with an unbeliever, the issue of inspiration need not be the stumbling block, and it need not be proved before moving on. Inspiration is a theological conclusion based on the historical realities, but those historical realities must first be considered. The foremost question with which to grapple is what really happened. For that, the historical record speaks.

The proof being offered for the resurrection is not scientific proof, but historical proof. The question at issue is simply whether or not, after Jesus died, he was seen alive again. That is an historical question, and the record shows that it happened. That does not mean that people will be persuaded by this record. Many are not. Persuasion, again, seeks to bridge that gap between the offering of the proof and the mind that is trying to make sense of that evidence. Just presenting facts alone may not persuade, so now the question goes to why someone ought to accept those

facts. What are the stumbling blocks present in the mind of those who are not so persuaded? Why is there a disconnect between the evidence and the acceptance? These are questions that require further exploration, but the bottom line is, once again, that people have presupposition about reality that they bring to the table. Knowing this up front is very important.

4.4 Persuasion and Needs

Persuasion requires some fundamental building blocks before it can go very far. The book of Acts shows the apostle Paul reasoning, explaining, and proving that Jesus was raised from the dead and is the Christ (Acts 17:2-4). He engaged in the art of persuasion (Acts 18:4; 19:8). Yet engaging in persuasion does not mean that everyone will, in fact, be persuaded. Paul was able to persuade many people, but not everyone accepted and believed the arguments he put forth. Reasoning, explaining, and proving do not convince everyone, and, again, people even rejected Jesus in the flesh after they saw some of the signs and miracles he performed. What made the apostle Paul successful, however, were several factors, and Christians do well to imitate these insofar as they are able.

First, knowledge of what one is reasoning about is vital. One of the problems that Caecilius had coming from his perspective was that he truly was ignorant of real Christianity. He was doomed to fail from the beginning because he was making charges that Octavius knew were false. On the other hand, Octavius knew what he was talking about, both in terms of Christianity and in terms of paganism, having been involved in that himself. Having knowledge means having some credibility.

It does little good to try to persuade others of the truth of something when the one making the case has little knowledge about the matter. How can facts be presented and tied together properly when there is not enough knowledge to do so? For example, when Paul was held in custody awaiting trial, he had the opportunity to speak and reason with Felix, the Roman governor or procurator of Judea. Acts 24:25 says, “And as he (Paul) reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, ‘Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.’” Paul reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come. Felix was not immediately persuaded (or perhaps never), but this may in part be due to his ulterior motives of wanting Paul to pay him some money as a bribe (v. 26). Yet the point is that Paul was able to converse well on the subjects addressed, and this is necessary if any persuasion will occur. Christians need to immerse themselves in the knowledge of God, of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit, and of Scripture. Only then will they be able to communicate effectively the message of God.

Second, commitment to the task is needed. Paul's commitment is clearly evident in his attitude and effort. When held in custody, and ultimately held to be put to death, Paul did not waver. In this, he was mirroring the example of Jesus Christ who would not compromise the truth about who he was in order to forego the suffering and death. People can see how committed Christians really are, and this goes a long way to helping convince them that Christians are serious about what they are doing. Peter made the point in 1 Peter 2:12, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." Without commitment to the task, unbelievers will think that since Christians do not really mean what they say, what is the point of listening further? This is why Jesus would say in Matthew 5:14, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Paul was so successful in his work because his commitment was obvious. In an interesting twist in Acts 21:7-14, after it became known by prophecy that Paul would be bound in chains in Jerusalem if he went there, his traveling companions were trying to persuade him not to go. His commitment to the Lord meant that he would not be persuaded by them. "I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus," he said. He took this commitment to his death, as is shown in his last letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:6-8). That kind of strong commitment itself has a persuasive power to it because others see it and are intrigued as to why one would be so committed.

Third, Christians need to nurture the ability to grasp where others are in order to address what they need to hear. Octavius demonstrated this by starting where Caecilius was, and this made all the difference. Grasping where people are in their thinking ties into the matter of presuppositions. If Christians are talking to atheists, for example, it would do little good to ignore that fact and jump into a discussion that assumes they believe Scripture. Such a discussion will not get off the ground because there is nothing held in common there. When Paul went into Athens in Acts 17:16-34, he was fully aware of his surroundings and could see what he needed to address. They accepted a multitude of gods, and Paul seized upon the inscription on one of their altars that said, "To the unknown god." He used this as an opportunity to talk to them about the God of Scripture and the resurrection of Jesus. Paul was a master at seizing the opportunities that he saw around him.

Scepticism of biblical claims is on the rise.[19] There are a variety of worldviews and ideas in competition with the biblical worldview. Christians need to be aware of what is going on around them so that they can be better prepared to speak up for Christ. As Paul in Athens, Christians may find themselves surrounded by a pagan culture that does not know the true and living God

[19] See the discussion of how this is happening in Bock and Wallace (2007:16-26).

of the Bible. It may well be, then, that the starting point now is similar to then. “Let us talk about the God you do not know.” To do this well, Christians need knowledge of Scripture and the topic under view, commitment to the task through a commitment to Jesus, and an understanding of where people are for a proper starting point.

4.5 Persuasion and Emotions

Persuasion is never just about dry facts. One can list all the facts of a case and yet not really engage in true persuasion. Persuasion must make the connections and seek to get, as Guinness (2015:41) indicates, not only into the mind but “must also address the human heart.” Being a Christian is more than the acceptance of raw facts. It is a commitment that encompasses every aspect of one’s being (Luke 9:23). Emotions must be brought under subjection to Christ as much as the intellect. When Caecilius accepted the truth of the Gospel, he was able to make both the factual and emotional step of yielding to God in the sincerity of the new life he was accepting.

There is an emotional component to persuasion, and rightly so. Intellectually, the head needs to understand and put facts together, but emotionally, the heart must also concede and submit to that truth. Without this, one might mentally know that something is right, but emotionally be unwilling to let what they know change how they act. The emotional component is one reason why many do not accept the truth about Jesus. Much of what Jesus teaches and says is, indeed, difficult. For example, one might think about Jesus’ teaching in John 6 about his being the bread of life come down from heaven. Jesus taught (v. 53), “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” People misunderstood Jesus, saying, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” They then turned and walked away (v. 66). They could not grasp the real point Jesus was making, and it was easier to walk away than to try to understand.

Likewise, Jesus’ teaching about marriage was difficult, as shown by the response to it (Matt 19:9-11). Jesus said that God made male and female in the beginning and joined them in marriage, and man had no right to separate those who are joined by God. Jesus then said (v. 9), “whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” This was a hard saying, and the disciples said, ““If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” Jesus acknowledged it was hard, even indicating that not everyone can accept it. That does not mean they are justified in not accepting the truth; it means that some were not prepared emotionally to accept it.

Some reject the gospel message for emotional reasons. For them, the issue is not so much an intellectual rejection, for they have no real counter-arguments to make. Emotionally, however, the

nature of the gospel challenges them in such a way that they simply do not want to make the necessary changes and commitment that they know are required.

Interestingly, unbelievers often charge Christians with being guilty of “wish fulfilment.” They say Christians just want Christianity to be true, so they believe it is true despite evidence to the contrary. James Sire, in his work *Why Good Arguments Often Fail* (2006:50), makes the point that “if belief in God is a product of wish fulfilment for those who believe, atheism (utter non-belief in any supernatural) is just as likely to be product of the same kind.” Why would he say this? Because, Sire writes (ibid.), “The Christian God is not a God anyone would at first wish for, not because of his vindictive character but he demands total surrender.” No one can completely surrender without involving an emotional component.

Coming to the Lord is free on the one hand, but also comes at a high cost, and emotionally this can be difficult to swallow. Jesus spoke very plainly in Luke 9:23-25: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”

Emotionally, some will not want to give themselves up to Christ. Some will not want to comply with the hardship and difficulties that choosing Christ will bring. Christians must be prepared physically, mentally, and emotionally to endure the opposition that is sure to come their way. For many, the emotional burden is more than they are willing to bear. Scripture addresses this very problem in detail in books like Hebrews, where some Jewish Christians were tempted to return to their old way in order to avoid the persecutions that were coming. Emotionally, bearing reproach for Christ is never what anyone would want. The commitment of the heart must be on board with the intellectual acceptance of the truth.

Persuasion, then, is more than presenting facts. Christians also appeal to the emotions, not in order to make purely emotional arguments (which can be fallacious if not careful), but to make sure that others know that being Christians is a commitment of the whole person, which includes their emotions. They must count the cost in order to be with Christ (Luke 14:25-33). At the same time, they need to count the cost of remaining in sin and rejecting Jesus. The decisions they make can and will be emotional, but they also need to understand that emotions should properly follow the truth rather than determine the truth. Emotions are good followers but can be terrible leaders. Nevertheless, Christians must not ignore the emotional component in seeking to persuade others of the truth.

4.6 Persuasion and Error

Once again, Paul spent time seeking to persuade others of the truth about Jesus Christ (Acts 18:4; 19:8). Persuasion, however, is not a one-way street. People will also try to persuade others of what is wrong. In fact, error itself can sound very persuasive, especially to those who have not been well-grounded in their faith in Christ. Paul warned about this problem in the letter to the Ephesians (4:11-16), writing that the teaching done is for equipping saints to serve, building up the body of Christ, and promoting the unity of the faith. In this process, Christians should grow to maturity so that they are no longer children (vv. 14-15), "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." Error can be just as persuasive, if not more so in some cases, as the truth. This should concern Christians.

There is "human cunning" and "craftiness in deceitful schemes" that can be persuasive. Many have lost their faith as a result of such teaching. Further warning is given to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:1-2, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared." 2 Peter 2:1-3 also warns of false teachers "who will secretly bring in destructive heresies." He continues, "And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words." Christians can be susceptible to the errors that can take them away from Christ, but this should not surprise anyone. Persuasive teachers who are not convicted by the truth can exploit others and persuade them to follow the error.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians in part because of concerns about what they were believing and doing. In 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, Paul warned them that they could be in danger of being "led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough." He was forced to defend his apostleship against those who were making faulty claims and leading Christians astray. He says of these men in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds." Error has persuasive force to it because it caters to the emotional desires that people have. It just sounds good.

If Satan can come across as “an angel of light” and his servants as “servants of righteousness,” then Christians know that what such teachers are peddling will be persuasive even though it is not true. The point is that just because something is persuasive does not in itself make the teaching true. On the other hand, just because someone is not persuaded does not mean that the teaching is false. Persuasion as an art is independent of truth, even though it is a vital part of what Christians try to do in teaching that truth.

The only real way to combat the error is with the truth. The Holy Spirit revealed God’s mind, and this resulting word of God is itself referred to in Ephesians 6:17 as the “sword of the Spirit.” This is in conjunction with putting on the full armour of God (v. 10), “that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” Christians are told to be sober-minded and watchful because, according to 1 Peter 5:8-9, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.” Christians who are well-trained in the word of God and committed to the will of God will be able to resist and combat the advances of the devil, no matter how persuasive he will try to be. It is clear that Octavius was not swayed by the argumentation of Caecilius because he was well-versed in the truth.

All of this highlights the great need for Christians staying true to the Scriptures. Christians need to teach truth carefully, making sure that they are advancing truth in an honourable way and not trying to win an argument through carnal means. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, noted how important it was not to proclaim God’s message “with lofty speech or wisdom” so that faith may rest, not in the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Preaching Christ and Him crucified means relying on the message as God has given it. That message itself, when presented with godly wisdom and seasoned with grace and salt (Col 4:6), will be persuasive to those of open hearts. There is no need to embellish and add to it.

Any concern for persuading others to come to Christ must also be a concern for properly handling and teaching truth. Christians also must guard against being persuaded to depart from that truth, holding fast and determined to remain faithful (Philippians 2:14-16; Hebrews 10:36, 39).

4.7 Persuasion and Poor Reasoning

That reasoning is part of the process of persuading others for Christ is well established in Scripture. The apostle Paul made a practice of going into synagogues in various cities in order to reason with the Jews and to try to persuade them that Jesus was raised from the dead (Acts 17:2-3; 18:4; 19:8). The presentation of the gospel of Christ requires reason and an honourable, gracious manner (Colossians 4:2-6). God’s people are not to be quarrelsome, “but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2

Timothy 2:24-25). By doing this, some may be persuaded to give up their worldly ways and come to Jesus for forgiveness and a new life. This is no guarantee, but Christians want to provide the best reasons for doing what is right.

Not all reasoning, however, is equal. There are, in fact, bad ways to engage in the reasoning process.[20] This in itself need not be out of an effort to teach something that is erroneous. Using bad reasoning is something to which anyone can fall prey. The problem is that this can result in losing credibility for making the case for Christ. No Christian should want to win people over by using poor reasoning, for this will only serve to backfire once that process is revealed for what it is. For example, arguing that the Bible is inspired because it says it is inspired would be circular, fallacious reasoning that hurts the overall case for inspiration.

Since the reasoning under discussion involves using Scripture, then poor reasoning will be manifested in poor interpretation of the Scriptures. Christians are taught that they are to be engaged in "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). When Christians mishandle the Scriptures, they set themselves up for failure.

This point is true even if the conclusion reached is the same as that reached through proper reasoning. While Christians are concerned for reaching the proper conclusions, they realize that it is not just about the conclusions, but about integrity in reaching those conclusions as well.[21] Christians want people to be persuaded of the truth, but that does not mean they ought to be willing to use bad interpretations just because they think they can make it work. God's word deserves more honour and respect than to use it as a manipulation tool.

For example, committing word study fallacies is fairly common and easy (see Carson, 2008:27-64). While words are, of course, important, and Christians should try to understand what words mean, there are a number of ways to misuse words. One might think that a word can just be dissected to get to its meaning, but that is not always the case. Think of words like "pineapple" or "butterfly." The meaning of these cannot be understood by looking at the component parts, unless

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[20] Multiple textbooks are available on logic and reasoning. Many of these will contains chapters on logical fallacies, and there are many ways to go wrong in an argument. I have tried to be a diligent student of logic and reasoning. My personal favorite is Peter Kreeft's *Socratic Logic* (2008). Other resources include Philip's *Logic and Apologetics* (2015), Moreland and Craig's *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (2003), James Sire's *Why Good Arguments Often Fail* (2006), and Geisler and Brooks *Come Let Us Reason* (1990).

[21] Honesty is one of the first key issues in hermeneutics. Luke 10:25-37 shows that honesty is key. When the lawyer tested Jesus and then answered his own question, Jesus said, "Do this and you will live." Then the man tried to justify himself by asking, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan based on that question. The point was to demonstrate the need to be honest with what people know the text teaches. Reaching a proper conclusion is important, but it must be done honestly.

anyone has seen butter fly lately. Words in Scripture often have a wide semantic range of meanings, just like words used in modern English or most other languages (e.g., “love”). The meaning is tied to its usage, which requires looking at the text to see exactly how that word is used. Terms often discussed like *phileo* and *agape* (both terms for love) can be seen to be virtually interchangeable in many places. The term translated “church” (*ekklesia*) simply refers to a group or assembly. How the terms are used shows their meaning.

The point is that great care needs to be taken in handling the words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs of Scripture. As Carson (2008:17) says about the nature of arguments in interpretation, “But if critical exegesis offers sound reasons, it must learn to reject unsound reasons. That is why this study is important. By exposing our exegetical fallacies, we may become better practitioners of critical exegesis.” The interpretation process is demanding and requires careful attention, for there are many ways to misinterpret and thereby damage the case that one is trying to make. In fact, bad interpretation can do great harm to the cause of Christ because it can backfire. If people realize that the reasoning that brought them to Christ was erroneous, they might end up walking back into the world.

As another example of how poor reasoning hurts, consider the biblical example of Job and his friends. Job lost everything but his wife who was no support to him at all through his ordeal. When his friends came to comfort him, they sat speechless for seven days. However, when they began to speak, they betrayed a concept about God and suffering that caused even more emotional suffering for Job. They did not speak what is right about God (Job 42:8). By the third round of speeches, they were accusing Job of specific sins. What was their view? Job’s suffering must have been due to specific sins he had committed and for which he refused to repent. They made persuasive speeches, and often mingled in their words some very good thoughts. However, their overall theology was wrong,[22] and that made matters worse for Job. God ended up chastising them, and Job himself repented of speaking in ways he regretted. Bad theology creates a bad interpretation of events, and this will compound problems.

Poor reasoning and interpretation do not help matters when Christians are trying to reach the lost. Rather, such will only make matters worse, and even if these succeed in persuading someone to reach a good conclusion, once the reasoning process for getting there is exposed for what it is, then the person will begin to doubt it all.

Because there are so many ways for the reasoning process to go wrong, Christians should be encouraged to think through deeply what they are accepting and rejecting as truth. Then, they

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[22] Not everything they said was wrong, of course. However, the friends made a general principle (we reap what we sow) into an absolute, and this spelled disaster for the discussion.

need to make sure that when they share the gospel with others, they are properly reasoning with them. In this way, the persuasion can stand on solid ground, and the conclusions drawn will be secure.

CHAPTER 5
THE ROLE OF PRESUPPOSITIONS AND WORLDVIEWS

People are not blank slates. People have biases and presuppositions that they bring to the table of any discussion, and, according to Nash (1999:27-28), "they often determine the method and goal of theoretical thought…. One's axioms determine one's theorems." What is a presupposition? A break-down of the word gives the idea: this is what is pre-supposed or accepted as true before further discussion ever takes place, and these presuppositions likely have more of an impact on conclusions people draw than what might be normally recognized. Nash (1992:21) says that these are what people "accept without support from other beliefs or arguments or evidence," and are things people simply take for granted. Understanding where people are is critical to any efforts to persuade them about Jesus Christ, but even then, overcoming presuppositions can be a monumental task when trying to convince someone of a position.

Since people have presuppositions prior to discussions, admitting these is important to the integrity of a discussion because, as Roberts (2007:19) argues, they "have to do with how we evaluate the data." It would not be correct for Christians to say that they do not have any biases or that they are neutral in the discussions; claiming to be Christians necessarily means that they are not neutral, that they accept Jesus as the only way to salvation, and that Jesus is Lord of their lives (Bahnsen, 2007:6-7). Christians have already gone through the process of looking at the evidence and being persuaded so that now when they talk to others, they are presupposing the truth about Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:16-21). Christians ought to be upfront and honest about their starting points. Paul did not go into the various cities to preach claiming to be neutral. His goal was to teach "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). In doing this, he directly challenged others with the evidence and sought to persuade them that this was the truth. Some were persuaded and some were not. There is no sure-fire way to make everyone believe (cf. John 5:39-40).

Likewise, unbelievers have certain "givens" or starting points in their minds that Groothuis (2011: loc 3813) calls "Godless presuppositions." They must be persuaded that the evidence for Christ is such that they ought to change their entire worldview in order to accept that truth (e.g., Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:8-11). This is no small task, for changing a worldview is a monumental, overarching shift in that person's life. Abdu Murray (2014:239) writes, "We can come to intellectual conclusions, but embracing those conclusions and shifting our worldview is an entirely different matter." No one does this easily, and Christians should not expect others to change easily just because claims have been made that differ from theirs. This is, again, why proof is needed. This

is also why patience is needed, for anyone who undergoes a worldview shift is usually going to do so painfully and slowly (see Nash, 1992:26).

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul made the point that the message of the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (1:18-31). To the typical Jew, the idea of a Messiah who was crucified on a Roman cross must have seemed, as Hengel (1977: loc 276) says, a "contradiction in terms." According to Deuteronomy 21:23, this meant that Jesus was a curse, so how could he possibly be the promised Messiah? The idea seemed absurd. Likewise, to the Gentiles, the idea of having to accept a Jewish peasant from Galilee, whom they had crucified, as their Lord and Saviour seemed completely foolish. How could they be expected to understand and accept this? More will be said about this, but it is brought up here to acknowledge that changing minds for those who think this way will be difficult. Evangelism is often an uphill battle. The apostles could testify to that.

Christians need to know that when they present Christ to the world, they will likely get the same types of reactions that the apostles received in the first century. Groothuis (2011: loc 331) writes, "With Paul as our model, we should be disturbed at the unbelief in our midst." Many will stumble over what Christians believe and others will see it as foolishness. Many will not even want to consider the evidence because their presuppositions against Christ and Christians are already set. Christians can try to share the good news and remove as many of those barriers as they can, but no one can say this is an easy task. People can be very stubborn when it comes to letting go of what they have already imbibed and accepted as truth (see Isaiah 6:9-10).

The fact of presuppositions is why simply stating facts often does not persuade others. It is (Guinness, 2015:45) "more than facts and information." It is also why one person might not understand why another person cannot accept what is being said. What seems so plain to one person might be obscure to another. People will see those facts through skewed worldview lenses, and these facts may not make sense to them. Persuasion is an effort to help make the facts make sense within a biblically coherent worldview, which is, as Moreland and Craig (2003:26) put it, "the penetration of culture with a Christian worldview." To do this, however, often requires getting to those underlying presuppositions and bringing them to the forefront.

While biases and presuppositions are inevitable, people can share (Moreland and Craig, 2003:15) "honesty with data" and "an openness to criticism." Christians should be honest about where they are coming and what they believe. Others should be encouraged to do the same. This process can help the discussion move along so that the participants are grappling with the issues that really do separate them. If the unbeliever, for example, admits that he cannot accept the resurrection because he believes that science automatically rules it out then other, more

fundamental issues might first need to be considered. There is biblical precedent for starting with the fundamentals about God, as Paul shows in Acts 17.

Paul (Saul) is a prime example of an unbeliever who had to come face to face with his own presuppositions. He openly opposed Christ. As he says of himself in Galatians 1:13, he "persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it." His conversion is well known. Acts 9 shows that Christ appeared to him and directly challenged why Paul was acting the way he did. Paul was confronted with the proof that overturned his previous convictions and he became the apostle Paul who reasoned, explained, and proved that Jesus is the Christ. His worldview shift changed the lay of the land as far as Christians are concerned. Christians must not underestimate the power that presuppositions can have over how people receive evidence. Guinness (2015:111-112) says that apologetics "starts where the unbeliever is and focuses on what the unbeliever believes, but only because that is what is obscuring the good news of Jesus. Only when the inadequacies of that unbelief have been exposed is the unbeliever in a place to see and hear the good news for what it is."

Presuppositions make or break a view and determine what a person will accept or not accept about reality. Wallace (2013:28) observes that the question is not whether people have ideas, opinions, or pre-existing points of view, "the question is whether or not we will allow these perspectives to prevent us from examining the evidence objectively. It's possible to have a prior opinion yet leave this presupposition at the door in order to examine the evidence fairly. We ask jurors to do this all the time."

David Hume's argument against miracles illustrates the problem of how presuppositions determine a conclusion. He argued (Hume, 1992:68-69) that miracles by definition are a "violation of the laws of nature," so anything that might occur in the "common course of nature" cannot be considered miraculous. A man rising from the dead would be a miracle, but, Hume argues (ibid.), "that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation." Why is this type of reasoning a problem? Hume completely discounted any possible miracle by not allowing any eyewitnesses who could counter his claim to have any say on the matter. He argued that it would be more likely for them to have been wrong or deluded than that they were describing what really happened. Eyewitnesses are simply taken off the table of consideration. Further, he defined a miracle in such a way that if an event did really occur, then nothing miraculous happened because it must have been part of nature. This was a fallacy of stacking the deck. He defined the terms of the issue so that he could not lose. This happens because there is an underlying presupposition of naturalism that funnels into a predetermined conclusion.

Many cultural differences are grounded in the worldviews that stem from both naturalism and supernaturalism. As Sire (2004:13) says, there are foundational commitments to the metaphysical "really real." When that foundational commitment is contradicted, the adherents will react decisively against it, and this is true of both theistic and atheistic adherents. Issues involving ultimate truth are emotional in nature, and people do not want to give these up easily. In fact, they should not easily do so. Sceptics react negatively toward a miracle-working Jesus who died and rose from the dead because the worldview grounded in naturalism cannot consider resurrection to be a legitimate possibility.[23] Therefore, anyone who believes in miracles or resurrection must be deluded or naïve. For example, Gerd Ludemann sceptically said of the resurrection (Copan & Tacelli, 2000:45), "I think that is nonsense." Why it is "nonsense"? The reason is not due to bad history or lacking evidence; rather, the basic assumptions about the nature of reality get in the way of thinking beyond nature. Even in biblical studies, in many places, the modern historical-critical method, like the modern scientific method (Eddy and Boyd, 2007:42), "operates on the basis of methodological naturalism" so that "the *a priori* rejection of the supernatural is built into its methodology." Because of these *a priori* assumptions, conclusions are predetermined, and this ends up committing the fallacy of circular reasoning.

Presuppositions against Jesus are not just found in the current climate. In fact, this is seen in the Octavius. Even in mischaracterizing the beliefs and practices of Christians, Caecilius (Felix, 2016:17) refers to their "silly persuasion" and then mocks the notion of worshipping a crucified man. Due to Caecilius' misunderstandings of the purposes of the cross, coupled with his presuppositions against Jesus, he misrepresented the nature of Christianity and rejected what he thought Christianity was about. This is why any attempts at persuasion for the Christian today must include a plea for an open view of history. Since presuppositions impact what people accept as ultimately real, it is reasonable to hold an open view of history and reality that allows for the possibility that the supernatural is real and can affect the natural. A closed view would shut off any possibility before investigating the truth-claims. However, if there is a supernatural reality, as Christians accept, then only an open view of history and reality can discover its truth.

Eddy and Boyd (2007:55) argue for an open view of history, saying, "The problem is that the unequivocal commitment of historical-critical scholars to a naturalistic presupposition is such that it rules out at the start the possibility of genuine supernatural occurrences in actual history." An open view toward history and reality allows one to consider the possibility, if not the probability, that supernatural events have occurred or can occur. It is possible that there is a God who has

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[23] The Jesus Seminar is a good example of how presuppositions shape the nature of the conclusions. In *The Acts of Jesus* (1998:59), the Seminar argued that they "had difficulty in finding stories it believed to be reports of actual cures." They were not willing to put miracles on the table of possibilities.

stepped into history and acted on behalf of the creatures whom he has created. If the events really have happened, discovery is possible only with an open view. Philosophical naturalism, however, cannot discover any events that may actual have been tied to a supernatural occurrence because of the commitment to naturalistic explanations. In the Octavius, part of the discussion centred on the question of whether or not God was sovereign over all the particulars of the universe. While Caecilius accepted the pagan gods, his view was more deistic than anything else. He did not accept that there was a single God who was in charge over all of creation. Octavius spent time countering that position.

A closed view of reality operates within a system that assumes a knowledge greater than what a human can possibly know. Koukl (2017:31) wrote that "there are lots of things we know, and we know that we know them." This is axiomatic. However, people do not know that reality ends with material naturalism. In this view, reality is walled-in, and anything outside of the walls cannot be accepted as part of a logical or reasonable conclusion. However, unless people know the totality of reality, they cannot reasonably discount the reality of the supernatural, or of a God who is sovereign over creation. This is why Lennox, speaking of God and Steven Hawking (2011:37) wrote, "God does not conflict or compete with the laws of physics as an explanation. God is actually the ground of all explanation, in the sense that he is the cause in the first place of there being a world for the laws of physics to describe. Offering people the choice between God and science is therefore illogical." Keeping an open view will allow people to discover what they might not otherwise be able to understand. It allows people to follow the evidence where it leads without deciding ahead of time that something cannot be. If people are to be persuaded of the truth of Christianity, then they must allow for the possibility of all that Christianity claims.

For some, the paradigm of knowledge begins with naturalism, which, according to Plantinga (2001: loc 89) is a worldview "playing many of the same roles as a religion" and gives answers to "the great human questions." This affects the way that people think about the evidence and arguments for God. The presupposition of naturalism unnecessarily boxes in what can or cannot be known even before the evidence is considered. William James (1948:107) wrote that "a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule." It is possible for a philosophical position to get in the way of discovering something that may be true. If a presupposition impacts what one accepts as real, then it is more reasonable to hold an open view that allows for supernatural possibilities than it is to hold a closed view that shuts off possibilities before the investigation even begins. If the supernatural really does exist, then only the open view can discover its truth. As Eddy and Boyd (2007:55) put it, "The problem is that the unequivocal commitment of historical-critical scholars to a naturalistic presupposition is such that it rules out

at the start the possibility of genuine supernatural occurrences in actual history." The presupposition problem is why, as Eddy and Boyd argue (ibid.), it is far more reasonable to hold to an "open historical-critical method." The open view toward history allows one, at the least, to consider the possibility, or even the probability, that supernatural events have occurred. If such events really have happened, discovery is possible only with this open view. Philosophical naturalism, however, cannot discover any events that may actually have been tied to a supernatural occurrence because of the commitment to naturalistic explanations.

Philosophical naturalism or materialism is (Cowan & Spiegel, 2009:8) "the view that ultimate reality is matter. All that exists, according to the atheist, is the physical universe." This view is a closed system of reality that excludes anything spiritual or immaterial. However, unless materialists know all of reality, they cannot provide the proper basis for discounting the supernatural. Epistemologically, the philosophy of naturalism is in no position to judge all of reality because it is part of the closed box that it is supposed to be judging. As such, it becomes a large case of circular reasoning that cannot escape its own limitations. Since naturalism is not in a position to discover the potential for the supernatural, then the principle stated by William James (1948:107) suggests that naturalism is not the most reasonable starting point for inquiry.

Naturalism cannot be scientifically or historically confirmed,[24] which means that it cannot hold up to its own evidentialist standards. This also means that naturalism is just as much accepted on the basis of faith as any theistic view.[25] In spite of the problems, naturalism is still largely considered the default academic view. Eddy and Boyd (2007:44) point out that, in the current culture, one is considered "a 'critical' scholar only if one presupposes that history is a closed continuum of natural causes and effects." However, there is no compelling reason why anyone should accept the closed door of materialism as the academic view. The philosophy is simply assumed, and it shuts down the avenues of discussion and research.

An open view, on the other hand, allows scholars to discover more than what they may otherwise presume to find. They can follow the evidence without first discounting it. In all matters, follow the evidence, as Lennox says (2019: loc 684): "The principle of following evidence where it leads is extremely important. It may mean that we have to go beyond narrowly defined scientific

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[24] What is meant by this is that if the scientific method requires testing, observation, and repeatability based on a naturalistic method, then naturalism itself becomes only self-referential. No test or observation will show that naturalism is the only reality at work. If God exists, then there is no naturalistic method that can detect his existence. Yet if nature alone is all there is, there is no way to properly test it without first assuming it to be true. See Cowan and Spiegel's chapter three (2009:101-143) for a good discussion of the limitations of science.

[25] See, for example, how John Lennox explains this in the third chapter of his book, Can Science Explain Everything? The title of the chapter is "Mythbusters I: Religion Depends on Faith but Science Doesn't."

explanations in terms of natural processes, but it need not lead us beyond rational explanation. It might even lead us to the right explanation!"

What does this have to do with persuasion? Persuasion requires a level of understanding about where people are coming from. Guinness (2015:235) argues for the need to listen to people in order to understand "where the treasure of their heart lies, what their burning question is, what direction they looking for the answer, and then consider how we can best help them to move forward in their search." If Christians can understand the starting points of unbelievers in the modern world, then they will be in a better position to address the underlying issues and, consequently, be more persuasive in making the overall case for Christianity. This is the example shown by the apostle Paul in Acts 17 as he addressed the people of Athens. This is also the example followed by Minucius Felix in laying out clearly where Caecilius was coming from so that he could address that position in greater detail.

5.1 The Nature of Worldviews

The effort to persuade others of the truth about Jesus Christ also means having to grapple with issues that are related to worldviews. This is interconnected to the topic of presuppositions. For people to accept the truth about Jesus, they will need to undergo what Guinness (2015:42) a "paradigm shift" in thinking, and often that means a complete change in the way everything else is perceived. There are several hoops through which one must jump to move from an unbeliever to a believer in God first, then to a believer in Jesus Christ as the Son of God with the full acceptance of his resurrection.

What is a worldview? James Sire (2004:16-17) illustrates a worldview with the story of a boy who came home from school one day and told his father that he learned about the earth as a globe in space. The boy was puzzled and asked what was holding up the world? The father answered with a child's answer by saying that a camel held up the world. The boy was initially satisfied but then asked the next day what held up the camel. The father told him a kangaroo held up the camel. Soon the boy asked what held that up, and the father, getting exasperated and thinking of the largest animal he could come up with, said an elephant held it all up. The boy wouldn't give up. What held up the elephant? The father finally said that it was an elephant "all the way down."

In this illustration, the father is pushed to his logical limits, and out of frustration has to claim that something goes all the way down. If it takes something to hold up the world, then there has to be a "first holder," something that itself does not require to be upheld by something greater. This would be a prime foundation for everything else. The father finally had to commit to something that could not go back any deeper or further. In this illustration, however, the father's first holder,

an elephant, was not sufficient since it was still a material entity. Even so, he committed to some final foundation because he could see, as the son could see, the folly of having no ultimate foundation (infinite regress). Something has to “go all the way down.” Something has to be there to uphold everything else. There has to be a “first holder.” That is the worldview foundation.

A worldview has a total set of beliefs that are interconnected, like a web of ideas and thoughts that all work to make sense of everything. Koukl (2009:142) says, “worldviews are like maps. They are someone’s idea of what the world is like. The individual ideas making up a worldview are like highways leading to different destinations.” All understanding is grounded on the worldview foundation. This is the paradigm through which people make sense of the world and reality.

The beliefs within a worldview are generally coherent with each other in such a way that they help form an arrangement of ideas that make sense. Cowan and Spiegel (2009:7) write, “A worldview is a conceptual scheme or intellectual framework by which a person organizes and interprets experience. More specifically, a worldview is a set of beliefs, values, and presuppositions concerning life's most fundamental issues.” The more people are aware of their framework for interpreting everything else, the stronger their faith can be and the better they will be able to help themselves and others improve understanding of the most important issues they will ever face in life. The discussion between Caecilius and Octavius is a worldview discussion. At the heart of it they are talking about the first holder, who God is, what man is, and what the nature of reality is. This is why Minucius Felix helps provide tools for modern Christians who will go out into the world and have similar discussions about worldviews.

The apostle Paul understood this worldview matter well. Paul made the point in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 that Jesus died for all so that “those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” Those who live for Christ have completely changed their allegiances and understanding of reality. Paul continues to show that this view about living for God changes how everyone else is to be considered, also. In 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, he shows how everything has changed for the person who is in Christ: “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” In Christ, everything changes from how one views God, Christ, other people, and personal loyalties.

Worldviews are about perspective. One’s perspective changes, and while that is easy enough to understand in theory, asking people to consider changing their perspective or worldview is difficult because there is so much attached to it. People must be persuaded to change their perspective

on reality, and this comes at a cost (Luke 14:25-33). If people cannot see that the cost is worthwhile, they will not entertain such a significant change. There are a number of issues that every worldview must address. Fundamentally, these can be categorized into five categories[26], all of which are addressed in some fashion in the Octavius. These are also scripturally significant. These areas include:

1 How people view God.

According to Cowan and Spiegel (2009:7), "Every worldview includes beliefs about God." All worldviews have some understanding of who God is, including those who do not believe in God's existence. This is arguably the most important of the worldview issues, for how one views God will affect how one views every other worldview category. Nash (1992:26) points to these questions: "Does God even exist? What is the nature of God? Is there only one true God? Is God a personal being, that is, is God the kind of being who can know, love, and act? Or is God an impersonal force or power?" These are the types of questions that a worldview seeks to answer.

2 How people view other human beings.

Cowan and Spiegel (2009:8) write, "Christian theists hold that human beings were created by God and endowed by Him with dignity and purpose." The psalmist (Psalm 8:3-4) asked, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" Who are human beings and why are they important? Are they created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), or are they products of a mindless evolutionary process that had no particular purpose (purpose implies a mind)? Why should other human beings treat one another with respect? Why do people have rights? Why is racism morally evil? What is God's relationship to humanity? These are questions impacted by other worldview issues.

3 How people view knowledge.

Scripture teaches in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," and, in Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." Cowan and Spiegel (2009:8) point out, "Every worldview makes claims in the area of epistemology, claims about whether or not human beings can achieve knowledge and what

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[26] Nash (1992:26-30) speaks of these basic categories, though here I am expanding the idea to incorporate how a worldview sees the gospel message. Others may categorize these a little differently, but they typically represent the same basic issues that all worldviews must face. Cowan and Spiegel (2009:7-10) provide a similar set of categories in their introduction. James Sire (2004:52) covers the same basic categories.

kind of knowledge we can have." How do people know what they know? How is knowing anything possible at all? What gives people the ability to think? Is thinking the result of being created by God or the result of mindless, purposeless, accidental processes? Imagine the worldview shift from thinking that everything came from mindless processes to accepting that minds are the result of an all-knowing, all-wise God who made humankind in His image!

4 How people view morality.

Nash (1992:30) points out that morality or ethics "as a worldview factor is more concerned with the question of why that action is wrong." Why are human beings moral? What is responsible for their moral nature? Does this come from mindless, amoral processes or from a personal Creator whose moral nature is the standard? Why is sin a problem? Morality sets human beings apart from all other creatures, so being able to answer these questions has a significant impact on how people choose to live. This includes how people connect morality to religious foundations. In this case, many objections to Christianity are based on moral objections. In the Octavius (Felix, 2016:17), Caecilius' rejection of Christianity is stated in moral terms, calling Christians wicked, accusing them of incest, and killing and eating babies.

5 How people view the message of the Gospel.

This cannot be ignored because the gospel message has permeated the world for two thousand years.[27] Various worldviews will have been touched by it somehow, and how people see it is largely determined by their presuppositions and worldview commitments. One may recall Paul saying in 2 Corinthians 5:16 that Christians now "regard no one according to the flesh," and this includes how they viewed Jesus Christ. What makes a Christian able to view other human beings, and even Christ, not according to the flesh? There is a worldview shift that changes one's perspective on God, knowledge, morality, and human beings. Once people see who God is, they can begin to understand the problem of sin and appreciate how God responds to it through Christ. God has given human beings minds to think and a moral nature for which they are accountable. Being persuaded of these changes everything else.

Nash (1992:32) writes, "Whether we know it or not—whether we like it or not—each of us has a worldview." No one can legitimately say, "I don't have a Worldview." To think that way is to fail to understand fundamentally what a worldview is. People may not understand what it is or think about why they hold to their particular views, but they have some version of a worldview. It may

[27] While most discussions of worldviews do not include this as a category, I have added it because it is fundamental to how Christians view the world and how they would approach others.

be in an immature state needing to grow and develop, but the foundations are still there in some form. The challenge is to identify this foundation and then understand what that means practically.

A worldview is the commitment to a foundation for ultimate reality, and (Cowan & Spiegel, 2009:8), "Every person has metaphysical beliefs about the nature of reality." Someone might think, "I am making no such commitment. I am leaving it open." This misses the point. No matter what they might think intellectually or on the surface, they are living their lives in a way that demonstrates a commitment to some kind of ultimate reality. This includes both theists and atheists. It includes Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Darwinists, indeed every single possible way of thinking one can imagine. It includes both Caecilius and Octavius. It includes everyone in the modern world. This is why it is so important to be aware of what foundations are under one's beliefs.

Biblically, God is the foundation for everything else. "In the beginning God created…" (Gen 1:1) is fundamental to understanding who God is, who humans are, and why anyone ought to be concerned about doing God's will. "In the beginning was the Word…" (John 1:1) is a fundamental statement for understanding who Jesus is as Lord and why anyone ought to be concerned about what he was doing in this world. People cannot separate God as Creator or Jesus as Lord from everything else they think or do. They cannot remove the power of the Spirit from the reality of creation.

In contrast, for the atheist, God has no part in any decisions or actions. Naturalism is the philosophical starting point from which unbelievers interpret reality. Consequently, the decision-making paradigm for the unbeliever will be very different than for the believer. This is why, when addressing a variety of issues, people make a mistake by focusing on the superficial aspects of a problem that run much deeper to the level of a worldview commitment. Discussing the rightness or wrongness of a particular action can fall into the trap of a dispute over personal preferences until they understand that there are more foundational reasons for taking a position.

The foundation on which people stand, whether consciously understood or not, will affect everything else that they do and think. Once they get this, other matters will begin to fall into place. Reality (what is) will begin to make more sense when people are asking, "Why do they say that? Why do they believe that? How did they reach that conclusion?" Their foundation is integral to the conclusions they will reach. This is why, as Koukl (2011:38) says, "A better approach is to start with the basic, foundational concepts and build on them." With an understanding of foundations, one may get to the heart of why there are disagreements. Some will not like to talk about worldviews. Others know that to talk about worldviews is to talk about what is universally true or false, right or wrong, and this can be a severe difficulty for a worldview that does not have a

foundation that allows for real discussions of right and wrong.[28] Many reject Christ and Scripture not just because of one or two isolated matters or apparent contradictions, but because of a total system, or, as Nash (1988:26) says, an "anti-Christian conceptual scheme" that "leads them to reject information and arguments that for believers provide support" for their worldview.

5.2 Asking the Right Questions

Phillip E. Johnson (2002:27) writes about the importance of asking the right questions in public discourse. Though the context of his writing is more focused on issues in science and public policy, the principles remain the same for religious discussion. He says that, in his lifetime experience, the best way to approach any type of problem is to first make sure that one has all the right questions in order. One cannot say much about ultimate answers before knowing the right questions. It is even possible to overlook some important preliminary questions by failing to reflect on why they are important or perhaps assuming carelessly that the questions must have already been answered. The right questions are important for helping uncover presuppositions and worldview foundations.

Why is asking the right questions so important in persuading others to consider Christ? The answer is that if others will be persuaded, then they must first know that they are not being side-tracked into issues that are irrelevant for finding the ultimate answers. By asking the right questions, Christians might get others to move their thoughts into the proper channels where the right answers will begin to become clearer.

This method was the way that Jesus himself dealt with his objectors. Geisler and Zukeran (2009:186) point out that Jesus "was a master at beginning where people were and then taking them to where he wanted them to go." His method involved asking questions sometimes, making affirmations at other times, and, at all times, careful argumentation. They then make the point that Jesus often used (ibid.) "the so-called Socratic method of asking questions to draw out the answer he desires from his opponents." Examples of his doing this include the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-23, responding to those who challenged his authority in Matthew 21:23-27, and responding to the lawyer prior to telling the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-28. It was a common method for Jesus to ask the right questions in order to get the hearers to focus upon the right

[28] An example of this this would be Richard Dawkins (1994:155) statement, "The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference." If, at bottom, there is only pitiless indifference with no right or wrong, then discussing matters of ultimate right or wrong would be pointless. There is no point.

avenues for answering those questions. The questions helped to direct the path of the discussion and led to the answers Jesus wanted the people to see.

In a powerful book called *Tactics*, Gregory Koukl shows the importance of using persuasion properly and learning to ask the right questions in order to focus a discussion where it needs to go. He argues (2009:24-25) that there are three vital skills needed in representing Christ. First is knowledge. Christians must know the "central message of God's kingdom and something about how to respond to the obstacles they'll encounter on their diplomatic mission." Verderber (1981:5) makes the point regarding persuasion, "Your competence includes your qualifications and your knowledge of the subject area." While Christians are not all called upon to obtain advanced academic degrees, they are all called upon to know Christ, know his word, and hold fast to that word in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Philippians 2:14-16).

The second skill in effectively reaching others, according to Koukl (2009:24) is that of learning to use wisdom. He writes that knowledge must be tempered "with the kind of wisdom that makes our message clear and persuasive. This requires the tools of a diplomat, not the weapons of a warrior, tactical skills rather than brute force." In Matthew 10:16, Jesus said to his disciples as he sent them out, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Wisdom is one of God's characteristics and he desires that his people show wisdom as they go out into the world. Proverbs 11:30 states (NASB), "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls." Paul displayed such a wise spirit as he considered how best to approach others with the gospel message in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. This included becoming all things to all people "that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." Further, Paul was so concerned about his wise approach that he wrote in Colossians 4:2-6 that Christians needed to continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful with thanksgiving, and praying that "God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ." Paul wanted to make the message clear and speak appropriately. He wanted Christians be wise with outsiders, use their time well, and to speak with grace. Wisdom is vital in learning how to approach and persuade others with the gospel message.

The third skill suggested by Koukl (2009:25) that is vital for the Christian's effectiveness in persuasion is that of character. He writes that character "can make or break our mission. Knowledge and wisdom are packaged in a person, so to speak. If that person does not embody the virtues of the kingdom he serves, he will undermine his message and handicap his efforts." Verderber (1981:5) places this in the category of being trustworthy. People are more likely to trust and believe someone whom they "perceive as honest, industrious, dependable, strong, and

steadfast. Audiences often overlook what are otherwise regarded as shortcomings if a person shows character."

This type of character is displayed by Jesus to the greatest degree, and this is one of the reasons why he ought to be heard. As Geisler and Zukeran point out (2009:147), "the evidence of Jesus' impeccable life demonstrates that his testimony is true." They show (2009:159-161) that his character, which Christians can learn to imitate, included his humility, as seen in Philippians 2:5-8, his innocent suffering, his willingness to die even for enemies, and his great compassion. Jesus' character was above reproach.

With these character traits in place, Koukl shows the importance of asking questions (2009:47). First, he writes, "sincere questions are friendly and flattering." They engage the person and indicate that the querist is genuinely interested in what the other person thinks. Second, says Koukl (2009:48), "you'll get an education. You'll leave a conversation knowing more than when you arrived." This is important for learning what the other person actually believes. If a response is needed, then it helps to ensure that their view is not being misrepresented. Third, Koukl writes (2009:49), "carefully placed questions put you in the driver's seat." This helps to guide a conversation where it needs to go and help to avoid it becoming an endless and meaningless argument that attempts to run in a dozen different directions. This, Koukl calls the "Columbo Tactic" after the detective show in which Columbo would often fumble around for answers, and in the process, ended up asking the questions that led to solving the problem.

From this point, Koukl shows that there are two very important questions that anyone can learn to ask (2009:49) and that will accomplish the goal of the discussions. The first question is "What do you mean by that?" This question can come in multiple forms, but the idea is to clarify and gather important information. As Koukl (2009:50) says, "You don't want to misunderstand him, and you don't want to misrepresent him." If people are confused about what they are hearing or don't fully understand something, then asking for clarification only makes sense. One might be reminded of Philip's discussion with the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading from Isaiah in Acts 8:30-31. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading," and the eunuch answered, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" Questions can help focus on the need and gain appropriate information so that the response will be what is actually needed. Clarity is vital in persuasion.

The second important question that Koukl discusses (2009:61) is, "How did you come to that conclusion?" This, too, may be asked in different ways. It is essentially the "why" question. Why does someone hold to a particular view? The question narrows down the discussion and enables better understanding by seeing the reasoning process of the one who differs. Koukl (2009:62)

writes, “The question, ‘Now, how did you come to that conclusion?’ accomplishes something vitally important. It forces persons you are in conversation with to give an account for their own beliefs. Christians should not be the only ones who have to defend their views.” Once they give reasons for their views, the apologist can then assess the need, give it proper thought, and respond intentionally.

Another helpful work in understanding persuasion comes from Os Guinness, and it is called *Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*. Guinness (2015:18) writes of his purpose that the urgent need of today is to “reunite evangelism and apologetics, to make sure that our best arguments are directed toward winning people and not just winning arguments, and to seek to do all this in a manner that is true to the gospel itself.” He writes with the perspective that (ibid.) “The heart of the problem is quite literally the problem of the heart.” Persuasion will not be effective if the problem is not well understood. One may appeal to the head, but ignoring the heart will be detrimental to the efforts.

The problem that Christians face in trying to combine persuasion with apologetics is that they may assume people are generally interested. Guinness (2015:22), however, points out, “Yet most people quite simply are not open, not interested and not needy, and in much of the advanced modern world fewer people are open today than even a generation ago. Indeed, many are more hostile, and their hostility is greater than the Western church has faced for centuries.” Pluralism has made for a diverse world, and this makes the current world (ibid.) “far more dismissive of our faith.” Consequently, apologists living in the shadow of such scepticism may need to be more creative than those of the past. As Guinness (2015:26) says, there are just too many people “who do not want to believe what we share or even to hear what we have to say, and our challenge is to help them to see it despite themselves.” This is no small task.

This understanding presents a real contrast with the way the early Christians tried to present the message. The Octavius is a good example of this process. Guinness (2015:28) captures well an important contrast between then and now in how people perceive the message, saying that the challenge for early Christian apologetics was to “introduce a message so novel that it was strange to its first hearers, and then to set out what the message meant for the classical age and its sophisticated and assured ways of thinking.” He argues, by contrast, that the challenge for much of the advanced modern world is to (ibid.) “restate something so familiar that people know it so well that they do not know it, yet at the same time are convinced that they are tired of it.” People are so used to hearing about Jesus Christ today that they think they know the story and the meaning already. In reality, they only know bits and pieces of the message, but really do not know or understand it.

Octavius was able to persuade Caecilius through showing that the novel message of Christianity made far more sense than what Caecilius had heard or had been accepting. In the current world, many people have heard some version of the gospel and may assume that they know what the gospel is about. How do Christians now face the challenge of taking what everyone knows (or think they know) and restate it in a way that is true to the actual message and, at the same time, refreshing and new?

Guinness (2015:31) suggests three primary questions to help with this process: “What is being said? Is it true? What of it?” This is reasonable enough, but it is also true that life is more than reason (2015:32), “so it can never be captured and explained by reason alone—crucial and valuable though reason is.” Because each person is unique and deserves to be recognized as such, one must learn how to best approach each one. This echoes what Paul the apostle recognized in writing to the Colossians (4:6). Christians are expected to learn something about how to approach people with the gospel message.

The key to the approach presented by Guinness is to understand that truth can be presented in both argument form and story form. He writes (2015:34) that there is a time for stories and a time for rational argument, “and the skill we need lies in knowing which to use, and when.” Because the world is fallen, people who predetermine that they will not accept truth will not, in the end, be persuaded by evidence if they won’t listen to it. Persuasion, then, is more than just giving cold evidence. As Guinness (2015:41) says, “Christian persuasion, while always addressing the human mind and therefore focusing on the act of knowing, must also address the human heart and what the Bible views as the anatomy of belief and unbelief.” Technique in how to go about this is challenging, but it must be done in a way that addresses both the head and the heart. It is not through cleverness of speech that apologists will win the day. The apostle Paul recognized this in his first letter to the Corinthians (2:1-5), saying that he did not come with superiority of speech or wisdom, not with persuasive words of wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power so that the faith of the hearers would rest not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God.

Because human wisdom alone does not come to know Christ (as Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31), the apologist must always trust and rely upon God. The reason for this is something that is often overlooked, yet very much captured by the Hebrew prophets (Guinness, 2015:51): “God is his own best apologist.” Guinness (2015:54-55) points out that faith desires to let God be God while sin frames God in ways that make God less than who Scripture claims him to be. Sin says that God does not exist, or that God is responsible for all the evil and suffering in the world. The apologist has the task of clearing the name of God so that his existence and character is (ibid.) “brought to the fore beyond question.”

This point is poignant particularly because it is exemplified in the Octavius. Octavius (Felix, 2016:39) contrasts the character of the pagan gods with his God. He speaks, for example, of “the contemptible and disgraceful characters of your gods” as a way of showing the contrast. On the other hand, Octavius argued (2016:31), “He who thinks that he knows the magnitude of God, is diminishing it; he who desires not to lessen it, knows it not.” By addressing character, Octavius was able to do exactly what Guinness was suggesting for the current age: clear the name of God and let his existence and character be brought to the front of the discussion. This will be done in the next chapter.

Noted earlier was Baylis’ observation (1928:148) that the two greatest points of stress in the Octavius are on God’s existence and the “expectations of a future life.” While Minucius does not delve very far into the nature of Jesus, these two points can indeed become foundational to persuasive techniques. They are broad enough categories that can serve as a basis for taking the next steps in evangelism. In reality, these are worldview questions that need to be explored further if modern Christians will find the benefit of this ancient work.

CHAPTER 6
THE NATURES OF GOD AND MAN

"Who is God?" and "What is Man?" are probably the two most important worldview questions that can be asked and answered. Nash (2009:26) writes, "The most important element of any worldview is what it says or does not say about God." What a worldview says about human beings is close behind. Both have their foundations in Genesis. Each impacts the other, and no worldview can avoid answering, whether explicitly or implicitly. The Bible begins to address these questions from the very first chapter. God is the Creator of all, and mankind, which includes male and female, is created in God's image, amenable to God, and expected to bear the responsibility of being divine image-bearers. The Octavius does not ignore these questions. The text of Minucius' work is filled with references and implications about these most significant matters. Yet these are not merely theological or philosophical issues, for the answers given will have a most practical impact for the way people live, and also the way that Christians seek to teach and persuade others of the truth. Consideration of the Octavius would, therefore, be incomplete without thinking through some of the teachings and implications of these two questions.

6.1 The Nature of God

In Caecilius' opening remarks (Felix, 2016:11), he referenced the nature of God: "Let the seeds of all things have been in the beginning condensed by a nature combining them in itself—what God is the author here? Let the members of the whole world be by fortuitous concurrences united, digested, fashioned—what God is the contriver?" The nature of God is a major concern in the Octavius, and Caecilius essentially fired the opening salvo which Octavius spent significant time addressing in his response.

Caecilius does believe in the gods, at least in a deistic sense, acknowledging (2016:15), "Even in our repose we see, we hear, we acknowledge the gods, whom in the day-time we impiously deny, refuse, and abjure." The gods are something to which they give deference, but these gods do not necessarily rule continually in the lives of those who acknowledge them. Caecilius is not so much concerned about what the gods require since families should honour their own gods. However, he minds that Christians are different because their God is not like the others at all. He seems to have no trouble with a variety of gods who have little impact on daily life, but the one God he cannot abide is the God of the Christians. Yet this is the one God who makes all the difference in the world.

Caecilius argues that since Christians are seeking to change others to accept their God, then Christians are in the wrong for going against what had well been established by previous pagan generations. Perhaps if Christians kept their own God to themselves, that would be acceptable (not unlike the modern world would demand). However, Christianity, by its nature, is evangelistic and will not keep the faith to itself. Even though the nature of these other gods remains uncertain, Caecilius says (2016:16), “I suffer nobody swelling with such boldness, and with I know not what irreligious wisdom, who would strive to undermine or weaken this religion, so ancient, so useful, so wholesome…” Anything other than the traditional pagan religions is put into the category of a “pretended philosophy.” He wonders, why rage against the gods? The problem is that he does not understand the true nature of the God of the Christians.

Caecilius’ portrayal of the God of the Christians is particularly based in his comparisons to physical objects seen in pagan religion. He charges Christians with (2016:19) cloaking “whatever they worship,” given that “honourable things always rejoice in publicity, while crimes are kept secret.” Christians have no altars, temples, or known images; they do not speak openly and do not freely assemble. He suggests that the reason for this is that they “adore and conceal” something that is worthy of punishment or shameful. Further, he charges Christians with worshipping a God who is solitary and desolate, whom no free people or kingdoms, including Roman superstitions, have ever known. He recognizes that the Jews (ibid.), a “miserable nationality” as he calls them, worshipped a God peculiar to themselves, but at least they openly worshipped this God with temples, altars, victims of sacrifice and ceremonies. Now that the Jews were under Roman control, then so was this God subject to the Roman deities. Yet the Christians are charged with worshipping a monstrosity of a God whom they can neither show nor behold, who is supposed to inquire diligently into the character and actions of all men, including their secret thoughts. He is supposed to be everywhere present, and Christians make him out to be (ibid.) “troublesome, restless, even shamelessly inquisitive, since he is present at everything that is done, wanders in and out in all places, although, being occupied with the whole, he cannot give attention to particulars, nor can he be sufficient for the whole while he is busied with particulars.”

Essentially, because he cannot see or understand the God he critiques, he downplays God’s nature and then decries him as incoherent. When he asks about the nature of the resurrection, he argues that the God of the Christians is essentially unjust (2016:20-21): “For whatever we do, as some ascribe it to fate, so you refer it to God: thus it is according to your sect to believe that men will, not of their own accord, but as elected to will. Therefore you feign an iniquitous judge, who punishes in men, not their will, but their destiny.” The belief in resurrection results in a god who is unjust because of the nature of punishment. In some ways, Caecilius sounds like the modern atheist whose depictions of God are so far removed from the way Scripture describes

that one is hard-pressed to recognize what they are talking about. Yet Christians need to contend with such views.

Octavius began his reply not only by speaking to the nature of mankind, but also pointing to nature as evidence that there is a God (2016:28): “For what can possibly be so manifest, so confessed, and so evident, when you lift your eyes up to heaven, and look into the things which are below and around, than that there is some Deity of most excellent intelligence, by whom all nature is inspired, is moved, is nourished, is governed?” He argues that nature requires a “Supreme Artist and a perfect intelligence” to create, construct, and arrange the universe, and the only way to fully understand it is to also be of the “highest intelligence and reason.” For example (2016:29), the order of the seasons and the harvest “would easily be disturbed unless it were established by the highest intelligence” and the beauty of mankind “confesses God to be its artificer: our upright stature, our uplooking countenance, our eyes placed at the top, as it were, for outlook; and all the rest of our senses as if arranged in a citadel.” Octavius’ argument is that God knew what he was doing, and it took the kind of intelligence and reason that God possesses in order to achieve what happened in creation.

The discussions of God in The Octavius show how important God is to every worldview. Scripture says in Proverbs 21:30, “There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the Lord.” Genesis 1:1 frames the starting point for the biblical worldview: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This is not a formal argument for God’s existence. The Bible assumes that God’s existence is a given, and the rest of creation owes its existence to the power and sovereignty of God. As the apostle argues in Romans 1:20, the creation of the world manifests God’s invisible attributes; “His eternal power and divine nature” are clearly evidenced through what has been made, and people are without excuse for not seeing it. This understanding stretches throughout the whole of Scripture and encompasses all of reality. For the Christian, this is non-negotiable. Either God is such a Creator or he is not. Accepting the God of Scripture requires accepting him as that Creator.

Every worldview says something about God, and, again, as Nash indicates (1992:26), this is the most important element of any worldview system. This belief will have the greatest impact practically on how people live their lives, what they think about sin, grace, and salvation, the moral decisions they make, and even how and what they think about other human beings. Worldviews differ greatly on this point, yet it is the point at issue that lies at the foundation of who people are.

The types of questions people need to grapple with include (Nash, 1992:26-27): Does God exist? What is God’s nature? Is there only one true God? Is God personal or impersonal? Does God love, will, and act, or is God just an impersonal force? Not all who believe in the divine share the

same worldview. Some are monotheistic, some polytheistic, and others pantheistic. Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism are theistic, but certainly are not the same worldview. Likewise, though Christians and Muslims believe in one God, their worldviews are vastly different, and their understanding of God is widely divided. There may be some common elements among various worldviews, but their differences are usually even greater. This is one lesson echoing strongly in the Octavius. God is not the same as the pagan gods. The worldviews of those who hold to biblical monotheism are vastly different from those who hold to polytheism.

The view of God held within a worldview is critical, and conversations about purpose and meaning do well to begin here. Polytheists or even atheists are no exception in this issue. All have a view of God and that view affects everything else they understand and practice. Further, everyone has ultimate concerns, which will take the place of God, if God is not their foundation. In that sense, everyone believes in some kind of a god that occupies the greatest, most noble, and ultimate concern of life. It might be power, money, sex, self, science, the environment, or something else, but it occupies that same divine place in a person's heart. Biblically, when anything other than Yahweh occupies that place, it is called idolatry, and this, indeed, is a major sin dealt with in Scripture.

6.1.1 Reaching for Something Higher

One of the unique features of human beings, and which overlaps human nature with God, is the apparent need to reach out for something greater and higher than themselves. Andrews (2018: loc 3909) points out that "a good case can be made out that we are all inherently religious, believing in something or someone that transcends our humanity." Koheleth, in Ecclesiastes 3:11, wrote, "He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end." It seems undeniable that there is something in humans that pushes them to reach toward something higher than themselves, and the biblical view of God makes sense of this. This is true, not only of theists who strive to reach up toward God and out toward fellow humans, but of atheists who strive to make their lives meaningful by reaching out to greater causes. They might gravitate toward social causes, civil rights issues, environmentalism, or something else that points to greater, universal purposes. Meaning is not found by turning inward, but by reaching outward, and people appear to know this instinctively. Humanist Paul Kurtz (1983:41), in his Defence of Secular Humanism, wrote, "No deity will save us; we must save ourselves." They see a need to save themselves from something (perhaps themselves), even if they do not believe in God.

This human phenomenon of searching beyond brute materialism is what McGrath (2012:108) calls "a homing instinct for God" and later (2012:118) "the intuition of hope." While atheists may

argue that meaning is not found in transcendence,[29] brute materialism cannot explain why humans feel this way. There is nothing inherent about reaching outward that is required to survive in some evolutionary sense. Transcendence cannot be tested in a science lab, nor is this an illusion foisted upon humanity by accidental, mindless, purposeless, amoral, chance processes. If it is, then why would it matter than anyone cares? People would be reaching out because it makes them feel better, not because it serves an objectively real, moral purpose with any kind of ultimate meaning.

This idea of transcendence makes sense with God at the foundation because it is based on being made in the image of God, who is Himself above and beyond raw material. God is not a being among many but is the source and ground for all being as well as (Nash, 1992:40) the ground of all physical and moral laws. Being made in His image, human beings desire to reach beyond brute material to concepts and actions that are more meaningful than what raw material alone can provide.

The biblical worldview seeks to show that good is not an arbitrary concept made up in the minds of fallible people. Rather (Koukl, 2017:90), God is "completely and thoroughly and perfectly good." Good is inherent in, and flows from, God's nature. Meaning for human beings is built upon being made in God's image. Without God, reaching outward to bigger causes becomes an exercise in futility, as Ecclesiastes shows. With God, humans can find meaning and purpose in Him. The need to reach for something higher has real meaning. Social justice can only be meaningful if there is an actual quality of justice that is objective and real. Brute materialism cannot account for this, as raw material in itself is neither just nor unjust. Raw material is neither good nor bad.

The search for meaning makes sense if what Paul said is true in Acts 17:26-27, particularly that mankind is made to "seek God." Seeking God will also have the benefit of learning to serve others (cf. Philippians 2:2-4). Loving God and loving others are not only the two greatest commandments, they are the most noble of all human pursuits. Seeking the Lord will make the most of what it means to be human because, as Andrews writes (2018: loc 4082), humans "were uniquely designed to know and have fellowship with God." That understanding is rooted in the biblical worldview of God.

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[29] See Lennox (2019: loc 129). Atheists must argue this way to maintain their worldview, but there is no naturalistic explanation that can adequately account for abstract needs focused on matters like justice and love. These are, by nature, transcendent, yet even atheists will argue that they are needed. Christians, on the other hand, gladly acknowledge their transcendent needs based on a God who is transcendent.

6.1.2 Who is the Biblical God?

Moses and Aaron said to Pharaoh in Exodus 5:1-2, "Thus says the Lord,[30] the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go." Who is the Lord? That is the question Octavius was really dealing with, and it is the same question Christians currently must consider and discuss.

Misunderstandings about God are nothing new, as Caecilius well illustrates in his initial charges. Well before then, Pharaoh greatly underestimated Yahweh and had no idea who he was really dealing with. In his mind, Yahweh was a lesser being who did not deserve to be respected or trusted. He had his own ideas about who God is, or what God should be, and he could not conceive of the God of Israel having such authority over him. This is not unlike the way people today think about God. Who is He? Why should they obey His voice? Why should they grant that the Christian's God has such authority over their lives?

Since every worldview says something about God, Christians especially ought to have a sound view of who God is. Who is the real God of Scripture? When people talk about God, are they really talking about the same God that unbelievers are talking about and denying? Because there is often not a common understanding what people mean by "God," discussions can easily get derailed. As Guinness (2015:55) points out, "Sin has framed God," and consequently, "God's name must be cleared and his existence and character brought to the fore beyond question."

A straw-man argument is one in which a person makes a caricature or an easily-defeated version of the opposition's position.[31] The problem Christians must deal with is that denials of God often entail straw-manning God, making God out to be a weak character unknown to Scripture, or bringing God down to a level no greater than humans, if not less. Once this is done, God is easily dismissed, for who wants to believe in a god who is no wiser and no more knowledgeable than they are? When unbelievers mockingly speak of "the flying spaghetti monster"[32] or something similar, they have only shown that they are like Pharaoh in that they do not know who God really is. Believers should not try to defend a caricatured version of God. Rather, believers find

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[30] Of significance is that the term for Lord here is יְהוָה (Yahweh, itself transliterated in several ways). This is the personal name of God and so reflects who He is (I AM). This was not just about any Lord, but Yahweh, the specific God of Israel, and by extension, of Christians.

[31] Kreeft (2008:79) defines "Straw Man" as consisting in "refuting an unfairly weak, stupid, or ridiculous version of your opponent's idea (either his conclusion or his argument) instead of the more reasonable idea he actually holds. You first set a "straw man," or scarecrow, then knock it down, since a straw man is easy to knock down."

[32] Henderson (2010). This was a term first used in derision and parody of God and religion, but then became a bit of a social movement on its own. See https:// www. britannica. com/topic/Flying-Spaghetti-Monster.

themselves in a situation much like Paul's in Acts 17:22-31 when he went into Athens and had to begin talking about "the unknown God." This is a starting point: "Let us talk about the God you may not know."

Unbelievers often deny a watered-down version of God. For example, as one has put it (Hart, 2013:32), many have "the habit of conceiving of God simply as some very large object or agency within the universe, or perhaps alongside the universe, a being among other beings, who differs from all other beings in magnitude, power, and duration…" The nature of God gets brought down to a low level so that he is conceived of being unable to know, do, or have more authority than the sceptic. If unbelievers cannot conceive of allowing something to happen, then they cannot allow for a God who can conceive of it in his wisdom. If people do not have ultimate power over life and death, then they cannot allow that God might have such authority. If they do not understand certain difficulties, then they will not allow that God does. Even if God does have such authority, they will not believe because he has not explained himself well enough to them. God, after being lowered to the level of an ignorant, foolish, narcissistic brute who is no better than a power-hungry dictator, is thus caricatured and readily dismissed because such a god is a "moral monster." (Rosenburg, 2012: loc 75)[33]

These caricatures and denials are not really dealing with the true God of the Bible, but with some antagonistic version of a god that has been brought under the umbrella of faulty, finite human reason. No Christian should try to defend these caricatures. The flying spaghetti monster caricature is ludicrous. Christians may at times feel pushed into a corner and forced to answer for a god they do not really accept. That will only hurt the cause more. There is a better way.

This version of God who is painted as a "moral monster," who is prone to mistake and ignorance, is not biblical. Believers should not try to defend any understanding of God who is less than the fully divine Yahweh, the Creator with all wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and power. Otherwise, the discussion will not be centred about the true and living God of Scripture. Pointing this out is a first step to having a better conversation.

People ought to be cautious when an argument begins with phrases like, "Why would an all-powerful, all-knowing God…" allow something like the problem of evil. There can be legitimate

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[33] Thomas Paine (2013: loc 10927) made a similar argument in this work *The Age of Reason.* He wrote, "People in general do not know what wickedness there is in this pretended word of God. Brought up in habits of superstition, they take it for granted that the Bible is true, and that it is good; they permit themselves not to doubt of it, and they carry the ideas they form of the benevolence of the Almighty to the book which they have been taught to believe was written by his authority. Good heavens! it is quite another thing; it is a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy; for what can be greater blasphemy than to ascribe the wickedness of man to the orders of the Almighty?" Paul Copan (2011) has written an entire book dealing with the question, "Is God a Moral Monster?"

questions, and Christians should take those seriously. However, if an argument is being set up to show that God is no greater than human beings, and that the reason of man is capable of knowing better, then the discussion will suffer. If people grant that God is omnipotent and omniscient, then they should grant that God knows what he is doing, and why. When faulty and finite humans judge that God's plans are foolish, they are pitting their minds against his in a way that assumes their wisdom exceeds his. They are no longer speaking of the God of Scripture at this point. Hart (2013:14) points out that "one of the more insidious aspects of today's public debates over belief and unbelief is that they are often sustained by the illusion that both sides are using the same words in the same way; since there are no immediately obvious linguistic barriers to overcome, each side understands the other just well enough to be deceived into thinking that both are working within the same conceptual frame." This is especially true when speaking about God.

Even if one is convinced that the biblical God is a "moral monster," would that fact alone mean that God does not exist? Not liking something is not evidence against its existence. How people feel about God is not evidence that God does not exist or that he does not deal with sin. How Caecilius felt about the God of the Christians was no evidence against God. Personal preference is just that, but it says nothing about objective truth. Reality must still be considered, and when the God is Scripture is in view, to be fair, one must look at God's total character rather than in piecemeal fashion as if knocking down one aspect of God is a fair representation of the total picture.

Imagine a literary critic wanting to critique the character of Alice from Alice in Wonderland. He knows it is fiction, but his goal is to look at her character. In doing this, he picks only a couple of character traits and ignores other traits that would help the overall perspective. Would anyone think that this critic is being fair to the character? Likewise, even if an unbeliever thinks the Bible is fiction, the critique of the character of God needs to be fair, which means taking all of God's characteristics, not just singling out a couple and ignoring the rest. To present a skewed and warped image of the character of God, even if the critic does not believe God is real, is not dealing fairly with the issue.

Octavius' spoke to the unity of God and the fact that God cares not just for the whole of the universe, but even for the parts. He asked (Felix, 2016:31) if one can really believe that there is a "division of the supreme power" and that the "whole authority of the true and divine empire is sundered" when it is clear that God, "the Parent of all," has neither beginning nor end, but rather "He who gives birth to all gives perpetuity to Himself." He existed before the world, orders everything by his own word, arranges all things by his wisdom, and perfects all by his power. Octavius argues further that God cannot be seen. He is brighter than light, cannot be grasped, is "purer than touch," and his value cannot be estimated. Octavius argues (ibid.), "He is greater than

all perceptions; infinite, immense, and how great is known to Himself alone. But our heart is too limited to understand Him, and therefore we are then worthily estimating Him when we say that He is beyond estimation. I will speak out in what manner I feel. He who thinks that he knows the magnitude of God, is diminishing it; he who desires not to lessen it, knows it not." This last statement is significant, for it gets to the heart of why straw-manning God is fallacious. To diminish the magnitude of God is no longer to be speaking about the same God, and if believers and unbelievers are not talking about the same God, the discussion goes nowhere.

The biblical God has wisdom and knowledge unfathomable to a finite mind. He has the knowledge of perfect justice. He declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). He has the power of life and death, and he can exercise that power in ways that finite humans cannot comprehend (Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6; Psalm 68:20). When humans cannot comprehend the fullness of divine power, but still think they have God figured out, then they have diminished him, as Octavius indicated.

One might object, "But you have made an argument about God that cannot be defeated. It is stacking the deck. If what you say about God is true, then there would be no way to deny Him." To this the Christian can only say that this is the nature of the biblical God, for if God could be defeated, he would not be as described in Scripture and would not be God. God cannot ultimately be denied when, in order to so, unbelievers must present a false image of God. Yet if God exists, then all knowledge and wisdom is his, and human beings will not fully understand His ways. The God in whom Christians believe and are willing to defend has infinite wisdom, knowledge, power, and can do far more abundantly beyond anything they can ask or think (Eph 3:20). The God of Scripture is the One whose ways and thoughts are not that of human beings, as Isaiah 55:8-9 indicates.

Ultimately, no one is in a position to deny the actual God who is revealed in Scripture. People will replace God with a false image, but that false image is an idol that cannot stand. Octavius discredited the false gods of the Romans, demonstrating the differences in belief systems. People need reminding of the importance of God's nature, for when they begin to doubt, they may be downgrading their concept of God. What they are doubting is a toned-down version of a god that does not exist. The answer is not to give up on God, but to give up the pride in self-conceptions of God. Humility is in order.

Octavius argues for the unity of God, and in so doing appeals to various philosophers whom, he said, express the same views that Christians believe. For example, he references Thales (Felix, 2016:33) as saying that "water was the beginning of things, but that God was that mind which from water formed all things." Then he declares, "You see that the opinion of this original

philosopher agrees with ours." He references Anaximenes and Diogenes of Apollonia as believing that "air, infinite and unmeasured, is God. The agreement of these also as to the Divinity is like ours." He says that Anaxagoras taught that God is "the motion of an infinite mind," and that the God of Pythagoras "is the soul passing to and fro and intent, throughout the universal nature of things, from whom also the life of all animals is received." Xenophanes believed that "God was all infinity with a mind," and Antisthenes, though recognizing many gods of the people, said that the "one God of Nature was the chief of all." Of Aristotle, Octavius says (ibid.) he varied, "but nevertheless assigns a unity of power: for at one time he says that Mind, at another the World, is God; at another time he sets God above the world." He says, "Xenophon the Socratic says that the form of the true God cannot be seen, and therefore ought not to be inquired after."

Octavius references other philosophers, gathering their understanding of God and nature to show that there was a consistent point recognized by all. He says that Plato's God is "by His very name the parent of the world, the artificer of the soul, the fabricator of heavenly and earthly things, whom both to discover he declares is difficult, on account of His excessive and incredible power." Important here is to note that his argument was not that the nature of the biblical God and the nature of the God spoken of by philosophers was the same in all respects; rather, they all spoke to the unity of God, and it is in this where Christians may find common ground.

Octavius believed that the philosophers in general believed ultimately that there was but one God, though with many names (2016:35), "so that anyone might think either that Christians are now philosophers, or that philosophers were then already Christians." This was not unheard of, for even the apostle Paul quoted ancient philosophers. For example, in Acts 17:27-28, Paul reference a quote from Aerates' poetry, saying that God "is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'" Appealing to the philosophers is not out of the question, particularly when their observations consistently line up. That is not, however, a blanket endorsement of all philosophers or their concepts.

Appealing to the philosophers does not alone lend itself to thinking that the representations of the gods were in agreement with all aspects of God. Octavius spoke strongly against various perversions of God and the problem of idolatry, which was the occasion for his objecting to Caecilius. As he puts it (2016:38), "In like manner with respect to the gods too, our ancestors believed carelessly, credulously, with untrained simplicity; while worshipping their kings religiously, desiring to look upon them when dead in outward forms, anxious to preserve their memories in statues, those things became sacred which had been taken up merely as consolations." He developed the argument that men were adopted as gods and he saw this as preposterous, especially since these gods were miserable, would die, and not rise again: "Is it not

ridiculous either to grieve for what you worship, or to worship that over which you grieve?" These gods, he argued, were reconstituted from Egypt and reused in Rome. Such gods are made, shaped by men, and burned in the fire. They are, according to Octavius (ibid.), "contemptible and disgraceful characters."

Octavius is purposefully drawing a sharp distinction between the gods of the pagans and the God of Scripture. They are (2016:40) "fables and errors" invented by ignorant men then celebrated by the next generations. Their moral flaws were evident, yet they represented self-made authority (ibid.): "And all these things have been put forward with this view, that a certain authority might be gained for the vices of men." The rituals were obscene, the rites were cruel, and the gods were excuses for men to act in evil ways. Octavius did not hold back in his critiques.

Octavius is not far removed in his rebukes from the way that Isaiah taunted and showed disgust for the idols that became popular in Israel. In Isaiah 44:9-17, Isaiah characterizes the idols as profitable for nothing. The craftsmen are only human, and those who practise idolatry will be put to shame. An ironsmith makes idols over the coals with hammers, then he dies. A carpenter carefully measures and constructs something into a shape of a man to be worshipped. The rest of the wood is thrown in the fire to help keep people warm and to make bread. These who practise idolatry are blind and deluded, not realizing that they hold lies in their hands. Octavius argued (2016:42) that if men were presented with the instruments and machinery used to produce the images, they would be ashamed that they had ever "feared matter, treated after his fancy by the artificer to make a god." A god of wood that came from a pile of wood or an "unlucky log" that is hung up, cut, hewn, and planed" is worthless. Gods of brass or silver that were beaten with hammers and forged on anvils cannot feel the "injury" done to them while they are being forged, and neither can they feel the worship that flows from the veneration of the worshippers. At what point do these gods begin to exist? He says (ibid.), "Lo, it is melted, it is wrought, it is sculptured—it is not yet a god; lo, it is soldered, it is built together—it is set up, and even yet it is not a god; lo, it is adorned, it is consecrated, it is prayed to—then at length it is a god, when man has chosen it to be so, and for the purpose has dedicated it." Octavius understood the heart of idolatry, and he was forcing the issue with Caecilius, as he, too, needed to answer for his beliefs about the divine nature.

Octavius exemplifies the need for Christians to understand and defend the true nature of God. While Octavius provides a starting point, more should be explored when it comes to God's nature. Isaiah 40:12 puts in perspective God's nature. He measures the waters in the hollow of his hand, marks off the heavens by the span, and weighs the mountain and hills in scales. While the God of Scripture is beyond anyone's full understanding and cannot be estimated, as Octavius argued, there are several attributes revealed about God. It is doubtful that all attributes could be

catalogued or understood. However, there are several of which people should be aware. Some will be grouped as they fit together. While attempting to understand them on their own, the attributes and characteristics of God should be viewed as a whole, not parcelled out as separate pieces. Every aspect of who God is should be understood as consistent with all else that is known about Him. The unity of God must remain intact in the minds of those who defend him. For example, God's justice and ability to judge should be seen as consistent with His power, wisdom, and knowledge. His love should be seen as consistent with his holiness. What, then, are some of these attributes?

God is the omnipotent Creator (Gen 1:1; Acts 17:24). The Creator has an absolute right to command and expect obedience. He is to be honoured (Lev 10:3). His authority reaches everywhere, and nothing is left untouched by His power. This serves as a sharp contrast to the gods described by Caecilius, whose powers were limited when it came to the lives of the worshippers. The biblical God is omnipotent and, as Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:20, he has the ability to do "far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." He is the One without whom nothing else could even be conceived of. Versions of God denying this power and authority are not dealing with the biblical God.

God is the God of all wisdom and knowledge. Paul proclaimed in Romans 11:33 that the "depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" are unsearchable and unfathomable. The Psalmist (147:5) exclaimed, "Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite." John wrote in 1 John 3:20, "God is greater than our heart and knows all things." Octavius said (2016:59), "God has no need of information. We not only live in his eyes, but also in his bosom." God's knowledge and wisdom is beyond human understanding, and He can exercise these attributes to the greatest potential. According to Proverbs 3:19-20, it was by God's wisdom, understanding, and knowledge that he created. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding." That challenge in Job 38:4 should cause people to reflect on whether it is wise to be so critical of God. A view of God that will not conceive of his power, wisdom, and knowledge will be inadequate.

God is a God of love, goodness, and holiness. The statement, "God is love," in 1 John 4:16, speaks volumes about God's nature. Love is not a created thing, but it proceeds from God's eternal nature and underlies all that he does. He is holy and sinless, requiring his people to be holy, too (Lev 11:44). God is the ultimate standard of all that is good, holy, and loving. There is no higher standard to which he is accountable. This can be compared to Hebrews 6:13-14. When God swore an oath, he swore by himself, for he could swear by no one greater. There can be no greater standard than God. Any conception of God that sees him as accountable to another standard will be flawed.

God is just and has the right to judge. Sin violates the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Because God is holy, something had to be done about the sin. While he could have justly condemned the world, the purpose of his creation was not for judgment. He effected a plan by which he could be just and justify those with faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26). The call for justice is common even with people in the world when they suffer a wrong, so the idea of God being just should not be a surprise. There must be a reckoning for sin, and this is consistent with God's nature. God, as judge of all the earth, will do what is right (Gen 18:25). Judgment and justice are his right to determine, and any view of God that will not grant this will fail to understand the biblical God.

God is a God of fellowship. God's nature is relational; he desires fellowship. At least two important doctrines in Scripture are informed by this: first, God is triune. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are fully divine and are united in all things. There is fellowship and unity. Octavius says nothing about God's trinity.[34] Second, God wants to maintain fellowship with those whom he has made in His image. Sin breaks fellowship, so when sin entered the world in Genesis 3, God effected His plan to allow sinful humans to be forgiven and reconciled to Him. This plan culminated in the death and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ. The gospel message is the proclamation of the grace and forgiveness of God available through Him. Paul, speaking of those in Christ as being a new creation, wrote, in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 that God through Christ "reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." The purpose of Jesus' coming was to reconcile the world to himself, so the message of the gospel includes a strong appeal to be reconciled to God.

God does not live in a man-made image or temple. One of the complaints of Caecilius is that Christians worship what they cannot see. Consequently, the Roman religions were superior as is evidenced by their temples and man-made images. They worship what they can see. Octavius clarifies that God cannot be confined by a man-made image or temple. He asks (2016:57), "What image of God shall I make, since, if you think rightly, man himself is the image of God? What temple shall I build to him, when this whole world fashioned by his work cannot receive him?" While God did have a temple built in Solomon's day that indicated his presence, God cannot be contained by a material building. People cannot look upon God any more than they can look upon the sun, which is dwarfed by God's glory (cf. 1 Tim 6:16). Christians do not worship what is secret, as Caecilius argued. Christians worship the God who is obvious and present everywhere. Paul made a similar point to the Athenians in Acts 17:24-25 where he argued that God does not dwell in temples made by human hands since he gives to all life and breath. Octavius appears to allude to this when he says (2016:58), "Not only do we act in Him, but also, I had almost said, we live in

[34] This simple statement cannot adequately express the triune nature of God. Such a study is beyond what this thesis can cover. Nevertheless, the relational nature of God is fundamental to understanding the Trinity.

him." If people think that God needs to have temples and images to believe, then they are looking for the wrong God. Instead, the one who exemplifies God's image perfectly (Heb 1:1-3) came in the flesh to reveal God more perfectly (John 1:1, 14, 18).

God is all glorious. Everything about God is surrounded by His glory. The glory of God is arguably the most overarching theme of Scripture, for all that is done is, Ephesians 1:12 says, "To the praise of His glory." This glory is manifested in the presence of light, a theme which is interwoven throughout Scripture from beginning to end. "Let there be light" are the first words recorded as being spoken by God Genesis 1:3, Scripture ends with God being the light in heaven (Revelation 22:5), and Jesus came from heaven as "the light of the world" (John 9:5). This is the foundation on which Christians are to be lights in the world (Matthew 5:14-16; Philippians 2:14-16). God's glory is to be ever before Christians.

The preceding, while not exhaustive, may serve as foundational in a quest to understand more about God and his nature. The God of the Bible is great beyond understanding. When discussions about God occur, such as are seen in the view of Octavius, understanding what is meant when people talk about God is critical. For Christians in the modern era, the only God they ought to be interested in serving and defending is the God of Scripture with all the characteristics attributed to him.

6.2 The nature of human beings

Understanding more of God is a first step in understanding better the nature of mankind. Calvin (2010:1) tied these together in his Institutes, saying that "it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God." Speaking of life as a circle, Caecilius says of the final nature of man (Felix, 2016:11), "Man, and every animal which is born, inspired with life, and nourished, is as a voluntary concretion of the elements, into which again man and every animal is divided, resolved, and dissipated. So all things flow back again into their source, and are turned again into themselves, without any artificer, or judge, or creator." He saw man as part of the cycle of life but gave no indication of any hope beyond what nature itself provides. Caecilius' view of God affected his view of human beings. Indeed, how one views human beings is a corollary to how one views God.

When Octavius replied to Caecilius, he referenced the nature of man (2016:27-28) and mankind's relationship with God, arguing that man ought to know himself, to look around to see what he is, where he comes from, and why he, whether gathered together from the mere elements or harmoniously formed from atoms, "or rather made, formed, and animated by God." He then says that this inquiry cannot be done without investigating the universe because things are so coherent

and linked together that without examining with diligence the nature of the divine, “you must be ignorant of that of humanity.” He says that one cannot perform social duties well unless they know that “community of the world,” which common to all men and differing from wild beasts that are born only to try to find their own food. Men stand up tall and look toward heaven. Men are able to converse and reason. They are able to feel and imitate God, and because of this they have (ibid.) “neither right nor reason to be ignorant of the celestial glory which forms itself into our eyes and senses.”

Socrates was known for his philosophical concept of knowing the self (2011: loc 1915), so this was not a new idea. Octavius also knew that knowing the self was found not only in looking inwardly, but by observing outwardly the universe and mankind’s relationship to it. The only way to know humanity was to seek the divine. One of the great divides in worldview concept is where the starting point is for understanding anything. Genesis gives the divine starting point from verse 1. Genesis starts with God and moves to man, compared to other worldviews that start with man and moves (if at all) slowly toward the concept of God or gods. Octavius points out that understanding man requires understanding the relationship of man not only to the universe, but also to the common community of the world. It is not difficult to notice that humanity differs from the beasts and animals, but there is a commonality among human beings that helps them understand who they are.

6.2.1 The importance of Genesis

Genesis teaches that there is an Almighty Power who is responsible for the existence and sustenance of all that has come into existence. What else can adequately explain existence, life, meaning, and purpose? Is mere matter capable of displaying intelligence? Does existence make sense once God is taken from the picture?

Francis Schaeffer (1968:22) noted, “We cannot deal with people like human beings, we cannot deal with them on the high level of true humanity, unless we really know their origin—who they are. God tells man who he is. God tells us that He created man in His image. So man is something wonderful.” Is mankind “something wonderful” or are human beings something unimagined and without purpose? Are humans a product of the Ultimate Mind or merely products of raw, brute materialistic forces that had no purpose in any mind?

If there is no ultimate Mind who created, then people can be nothing more than the result of mindless processes. If people are not accountable to God, then there is no greater purpose than what people dream up, and morals are arbitrary without any real standards. Who could say otherwise? Schaeffer and Koop (1983: loc 182-183) noted, “If man is not made in the image of

God, nothing then stands in the way of inhumanity. There is no good reason why mankind should be perceived as special. Human life is cheapened." This is one reason why Octavius could point to the grave immoralities supported by the pagan religions. Humanity is cheapened when failing to understand their task of being in God's image. Understanding the image of God in human beings is why Genesis is foundational to the Christian's worldview, and it presents some vital concepts that cannot be overlooked and should not be minimized, including:

There is a Supreme Being who is not limited to the material universe. God transcends the material world, and He cannot be confined to human terms and limitations. He is capable of doing what people are not able to think (Eph 3:20). God cannot be contained by human thought. This thesis has considered that efforts to deny God will straw-man God, bringing His knowledge, understanding, and power down so that human reason becomes superior. When this happens, God becomes an easy target for denial. Then, once God is denied, the nature of man as being in God's image is abandoned, and this changes the way that people view other human beings.

God has made His wisdom and power known through creation (Rom 1:19-20; Heb11:3; Psalm 19). Creation "talks," and it tells of God's glory. There is a reason the magnificence of creation inspires awe in people. Humility and praise are the legitimate responses, as Psalm 8 shows. Since God created all things, He has absolute authority (cf. Acts 17:24-31). Upon what basis can God command all men everywhere to repent? Upon what basis could God command life and death? He created all men and therefore has the right as Sovereign Creator. All that he has made belongs to him (cf. Deut 32:39).

There is far more about God that ought to be considered from Genesis, but the foregoing provides a basis for considering what it means to be human, to which the study now turns. As Calvin (2010:2) said, "men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God."

6.2.2 Made "in the Image of God."

What is man? This is the second significant worldview question, and Octavius, while not as extensive as to the nature of God, does speak to this matter. Octavius argues that mankind needs to look toward the divine and the heavens (2016:28), "whereby we recognize, feel, and imitate God…" Genesis 1:26-27 teaches that man (male and female) is made in God's image. This is said about human beings, but not about anything else in all of creation. This makes humankind unique in all of creation. Andrews (2018: loc 4038) writes that humans "are unique because among created things only Man bears God's image. Nothing in the inanimate cosmos was made in the image of God. Nothing in the plant or animal kingdoms is imprinted with that image."

Octavius, objecting to making images of God, pointed out that such is folly because (2016:57) “man himself is the image of God.” God made humanity in his own image, but man trying to make an image of God is idolatrous and sinful. Human beings are not beasts, and animal life, while important, is not to be equated with human life. Darwinism teaches that humans evolved from lower life forms, which means that, as Darwin (1874:80) put it, “the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind.” While Christians would not want to promote or condone the abuse of animals, one must never think that human beings, as God’s image-bearers, are merely higher forms of animals with no special nature. This explains why, as Octavius put it, beasts look to nothing but their food while humans look to heaven. As argued, human beings among all creation seek to reach outward to something greater and higher. They look to the heavens, and this makes sense if they are made in God’s image.

What does it mean to say that human beings are made in God’s image? Who can fully express what it means to be made in God’s image? While this would rightly include a spiritual nature, the image of God is much more. Contextually, “made in God’s image” starts with the idea of God giving dominion or kingship to humans over the rest of creation. While the rest of God’s creation is astounding, that God gives to human beings this special nature is glorious, as the Psalmist expressed, “what is man that you are mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:4)

Humans have the capacity to love because God is love. Humans can know because God is knowledge. Humans can reason because God is rational. Humans have a moral nature because God is moral. Humans can make free decisions because God is freedom. Humans can have eternal life because God is eternal. Humans have the capacity to feel emotion because God is a God of emotion who can feel joy and pain. God gives true purpose and meaning to life because He is filled with purpose. People can be holy because God is holy. Human beings are made to reflect the nature of God. No one but Jesus has done this perfectly, but human beings are not just products of mindless processes.

Wright (2016:356) argues that “the true human vocation” is to be “image-bearers, reflecting God’s glory into the world and the praises of creation back to God.” He argues (2016:263), “To reflect the divine image means standing between heaven and earth, even in the present time, adoring the Creator and bringing his purposes into reality on earth, ahead of the time when God completes the task and makes all things new.” This is, he argues, what it means to be the royal priesthood of God. There is a human responsibility to properly reflect God in this world, which means that this is not about looks as much as character. People are meant to reflect God’s holy character as his image-bearers.

Edgar Andrews (2018: loc 4072) argues that the fact of being made in God's image implies that "humans actually share certain attributes or characteristics with their Creator." This is not just sharing in God's functions (e.g., ruling) and abilities (e.g., language), but sharing in his attributes, sharing in who God is. Andrews points out (2018: loc 4079) that this does not mean Adam and Eve were mini gods, given that they were created, but "it does mean that they were uniquely designed to know and have fellowship with God." Yet how did Adam and Eve share God's nature? Andrews answers (2018: loc 4096) that there are "some divine attributes that created beings cannot share (they are 'incommunicable')—such as God's self-existence, omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. But other divine characteristics can be shared (they are "communicable")—like intelligence, wisdom, love and mercy." Andrews suggests four divisions of "duplex attributes" (2018:4099): (1) soul and spirit, (2) language and logic, (3) creativity and competence, and (4) law and love. It does make sense to recognize the difference between what is possible for humans to share with God and what is not possible to share with God. For example, God alone has immortality (1 Tim 6:16), so there is an aspect of immortality that human beings cannot share with God. However, God gives immortality as it flows from His nature, so there is a mirroring of God's nature, though not identical.

Beale and Kim (2014:29-30) point out that "Images reflects a greater reality," and that Adam and Eve were created and placed in the Garden of Eden to indicate God's presence and rule over the earth: "As God's image, Adam and Eve were to reign with God as kings and representatives of God." An image is an icon (ibid.), and "Icons do not point to themselves, but icons usher in a far greater reality. Similarly, we represent God so that our presence ushers in the presence of the Almighty God wherever we go." Seeing God's image, at least in part, as being representatives of God also makes sense, and it points strongly to the purpose that human beings have for living on earth.

Being made in God's image calls upon humans to seek after Him, strive to live by his will, draw near to him, and be conformed even more closely to His image. Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:13-16 that Christians are to prepare their minds, keep sober, and fix their hope on God's grace. As obedient children, they are not to be conformed to former lusts but to be holy, for God is holy. Holiness stems from God's character, and while human beings will be imperfect at this, they still have a standard in God and a task (vocation) to seek to be more like God.

Scripture shows the multi-dimensional nature of mankind. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 of "spirit and soul and body." Humans are neither just bodies nor just spirits. They are multi-faceted. Understanding this is important because Christians, of all people, are to look forward to the resurrection. Humans will not be eternal bodiless spirits but will be raised up in bodies prepared for this very purpose. Bodies return to the dust, but when Christ comes again, they will be

changed, transformed into glorious bodies prepared for eternal life (2 Cor 5:1; 1 Cor 15:43, 44, 50-54). What exactly this will be, God only knows, but Christians do know they will be like Christ (1 John 3:2). The body, therefore, is not a meaningless part of human existence. Jesus asked the question in Matthew 16:26, “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” This question shows that the soul, the totality of one’s very being, is most significant and valuable. Nothing on this earth is worth the loss of a soul, and nothing could buy back a soul lost for eternity.

6.2.3 The dignity of being human

Humans are expected to behave within certain boundaries. These boundaries point to a sense of human dignity, which, in turn, grows out of reflecting the image of God. Following are four areas that speak to the dignity of human beings:

Love: Since God is love, creatures made in God’s image have the capacity to love. Yet this capacity to love also requires free will, for love must be chosen, not forced. The dignity of humanity is fulfilled in loving God first, then loving others (cf. Matthew 22:36-40). One of the challenges in modern culture concerns the question of free will. Love requires free will, but when God is removed from the picture, free will is in jeopardy. Even atheists recognize and teach this. For example, atheistic scientist Sam Harris, in his book on free will, argues (2012:5): “Free will is an illusion.” He makes his case that all alleged choices are just the products of a chain of causes that precede consciousness and over which none can assert control. It sounds a bit like fate. Then, Jerry Coyne, another atheistic evolutionist, argues (2012:web) that one’s will has no bearing on what one does, that what anyone thinks is a choice is already predetermined by previous causes. Again, free will an illusion. If such were the case, true love would be impossible. This is why understanding that “God is love” is crucial. God’s attribute of love is what helps human beings understand their own free will to choose to love God and others.

Responsibility: Responsibility, first given by God in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2), is something people regularly expect from others. As Coppenger (2011:66) wrote, God “can and does hold all men responsible for their actions.” Responsibility makes little sense in a universe derived from mindless, purposeless processes. It does make sense if people are made in God’s image. Being responsible is expected within a context of human dignity. It recognizes that one lives within a community and actions impact others.

Ethics and Morality: Morality is part of human dignity, and immorality offends this dignity. Coppenger (2011:25) speaks of forms of immorality that continue “to be an offense to our status and dignity as human beings.” People only apply morals to human beings, but why? People do

not generally talk about the morality of animals or the ethics of inanimate objects. There is something special and dignified about human beings that requires a sense of respect and moral accountability. Everyone has a moral line that must not be crossed. Which worldview will really make sense of the human moral nature?

Compassion: Jesus was known for his compassion (cf. Mark 6:34; 8:2; Luke 7:13). Suffering is a problem of the broken world, which is due to the problem of sin (Gen 3). Pain also brings a response of compassion from both God and mankind. People generally recognize the need for sympathy and empathy, which is also a reflection of God's image. The compassion of God is at the heart of God's grace and mercy. His desire is not for people to suffer indefinitely, but to be freed from suffering eternally. This is why he has taken steps to bring salvation and freedom from corruption (see Romans 8:18-25).

The dignity of humanity is tied to being made in God's image. People have caused the world to enter into a corruptible state through sin. Sin is undignified, showing a lack of respect for both God and humanity. Even so, God saw humanity as worthy of coming to this earth to die for all mankind. This should add an extra level of respect for others. When people sin against others, they sin against Christ (see 1 Corinthians 8:12). If God sees humans as worthy of saving, does that not say something about how all of humanity should be viewed? The blood of Christ was shed for everyone. How can those who respect God do anything but show respect for God's creation in His image and God's desire to save all those made in His image (1 Timothy 2:4)?

How important is human dignity? When a man finds simple pleasures in being too mundane, and must instead seek even greater pleasures, he may soon find himself unable to find any true, lasting pleasure at all. For in feeling discontented at even the simplest of honourable activities, he will soon find no tasteful activities to suit his desires, and so go deeper and deeper into those sinful, perverted pleasures that finally lay waste to the soul. Tainted by the taste for wickedness and for the seeking out of evil desire, a man ceases to be a man of dignity and instead becomes as a beast seeking only to fulfil selfish lusts. Human beings are made for far better purposes, and this stems from as relationship to God as the Creator. Humans are made to bear the image of the Almighty God.

6.2.4 The purpose of human beings

The purpose of human beings is connected to their being made in God's image. Wright (2016:76) links the image of God with a covenant of vocation, saying that what the Bible offers is not some "works contract." The vocation of which he speaks (ibid.) is that of being "a genuine human being" with human tasks to perform as part of the Creator's purpose for the world. "The main task of this

vocation is ‘image-bearing,’ reflecting the Creator’s wise stewardship into the world and reflecting the praises of all creation back to its maker.”

The purpose of human beings, as God’s image-bearers, is to worship God and to bear witness to the world about God. Upon referring to God’s people as a “royal priesthood,” a “holy nation,” and a special possession of God, Peter writes (1 Pet 2:9) that Christians are to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” This may well be what Octavius had in mind (Felix, 2016:28) in speaking of imitating God and not being ignorant of that “celestial glory which forms itself into our eyes and senses.” Christians seek to imitate God, and in so doing they proclaim God’s Excellencies as God’s royal priesthood.

Upon what basis can Christians especially proclaim God’s Excellencies? Would this not be something that all mankind ought to be doing? The answer to that is “yes,” but when people deny God, they cannot also be proclaimers of God’s glory, for sin is a falling short of that glory (Rom 3:23). Peter, however, in verse 1 Peter 2:10, identifies the reason for being able to proclaim the glory of God: “Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Christians can proclaim God’s excellencies because it is only in Christ that the reclamation of God’s image can be found (2 Cor 4:3-6).

Further, if, as Beale and Kim (2014:30) indicate, the image of God is distorted by sin, then the only way to properly represent God is to be remade in Christ, who alone bears God’s image perfectly, not because Jesus was created,[35] but because he is God in the flesh. Beale and Kim continue (2014:33), stating that “We can only accomplish our mission as we recognize our identity as icons of God,” and “Only by the presence of Jesus with us and the power of his word in us can we accomplish his work through our lives. We are icons who conquer through his presence in us.” Further (2014:35), “God’s ultimate goal” in creation the world and human beings was to “magnify his glory throughout the earth by means of his faithful image bearers.” Jesus allows humans to be remade in God’s image, as they initially were meant to be, and in so doing are in a position to show forth God’s divine glory in the world. In this way, they truly are lights and luminaries in a dark world (Phil 2:14-16).

Man’s purpose is to worship. Caecilius (Felix, 2016:13-14) recognizes well that the purpose of man is to worship. The question is, what are people to worship? Caecilius’ answer was to perpetuate what one’s ancestors worshiped without questioning it. He argues from the idea that since fortune and nature are uncertain, it is (ibid.) “more reverential and better” as “high priests of

[35] A discussion of the divine nature of Jesus is beyond the scope of this thesis. I affirm, however, that Jesus was not a created being, but rather he is the one through whom all created things were made (John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-20).

truth" to take on the teachings of their ancestors and cultivate the religions that there handed down and adore the gods of one's parents. He sets this over against asserting opinions concerning the deities (which he believed Octavius was doing). Instead, one must believe the forefathers and simply follows suit. In the modern world, one might say, "Don't rock the boat" or "just go along to get along." Caecilius appears to think that seeking truth is a doubtful enterprise, so why not just do what one was taught to do from birth and leave it at that? Do not assert something new or different, like the Christians are doing. The implication is that since Christians are worshiping a god not so handed down by their parents, they are in error and need to go back to the Roman deities. This does not harmonize with the idea that at one time, every deity was new to someone.

Octavius, on the other hand, recognizes that the purpose of man is to worship and serve the true and living God, not the idols of paganism. As earlier seen (Felix, 2016:28-29), "Man ought to know himself," he said, but this can only be done by knowing "the celestial glory which forms itself into our eyes and senses." God cannot be ignored. He must be served and worshipped by those made in His image. There is nothing to be gained by worshipping the idols, but one can fulfil human purpose in worshipping the true and living God.

Man's purpose is to bear witness to God. Perhaps one of the reasons why idolatry is so egregious is that it always distorts the witness of the true and living God. Sin distorts the image of God in human beings, and idolatry distorts the ability to bear witness to the God whose glory has been offended and violated. Octavius shows that both the images made by idolaters and the practices associated with idolatry are depraved and unworthy of human devotion. Octavius' initial rebuke of Caecilius (Felix, 2016:8) included the idea that it is not the part of a good man to ignore seeing one, "in this blindness of vulgar ignorance," give himself to idols and stones. He felt compelled to say something because bowing to the idols, as Caecilius did, resulted in a disgrace and error that needed to be rebuked.

Bowing down to or honouring an image is a disgrace and discredit to those who do it or entertain it. This distorts the purpose of mankind, who, instead is supposed to be pointing toward the living God, who is not so worshipped by human products, as Paul indicated in Acts 17:24-25. Properly bearing witness to God is the true mission of humanity, and idolatry gets in the way of this. Peter, again, pointing to the true mission of mankind, writes (1 Peter 1:14-16), "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" Being holy is conforming to God's image, and holiness bears witness of God, who is the perfection of all that is holy. Christians engaged in evangelistic efforts ought to think about these matters, for though

what is said here applies to all Christians, those who are particularly trying to reach out to a lost need to see themselves in the light described.

The loss of purpose. God created humanity with a purpose. This stands in contrast to naturalism, which has no mind behind it. As the atheist Michael Ruse (Zygon, 1994:5-24) argued in favour of atheistic Darwinism, “The very last thing that Darwin and his followers are trying to do is put mind into nature.” This is not just about science; this is ultimately about the meaning of life, and even unbelievers know it. For example, David P. Barash, (2013:B12-B14), an evolutionary biologist and professor of psychology at the University of Washington, wrote a piece for colleagues in academia arguing that evolutionists ought to be existentialists because they need to superimpose their own meaning on life. The reason is because, as Barash says, there is this “less-well-known fact that, although evolutionary biology makes no claim that it or what is produces is inherently good, it also teaches that life is absurd.” Evolutionists may look at living things, “human beings not least,” as playing some kind of “vast existential roulette game” in which no one can ever win or beat the house. The goal of the game is just to keep playing, “But where, I ask you, is the meaning in a game whose goal is simply to keep on playing, a game that can never be won, but only lost? And for which we did not even get to write the rules?” He continues to argue (ibid.) that there is “no intrinsic, evolutionary meaning to being alive.” Therefore, “From the perspective of natural science generally, there is no inherent reason that anything—a rock, a waterfall, a halibut, a human being—is of itself meaningful.” There is a refreshing honesty to this piece because he recognizes the consequences of taking a position that disregards God. As has been argued, how one views God affects how one views human beings, and how one views human beings affects how one sees purpose in life.

Naturalists know that the meaning and purpose of life is altered when God is removed. While that does not prove or disprove God, it does show that what is at stake is most significant, for it gets to the heart of the purpose of existence. Scripture presents a very different picture. God created man (male and female) with the ability to make free moral choices. Humans are able to love, to think, to reason, to decide how they will live their lives. Human beings are unique among all of God’s creation, for, being made in His image, they are created to live in eternal fellowship with their Creator. This makes them accountable to the Creator for the moral choices that they will make, for their purpose is, ultimately, to glorify God. There can be no agreement here with worldviews that do not honour God in the first place. Octavius knew this.

God created humankind to love and serve both God and others. Jesus taught that the greatest command was to love God with all the heart, soul, strength and mind, with the second greatest to love others (Matt 22:36-40). Love is not in the capacity of raw, brute material, but it is within the reach of souls created by God with purpose. Love, then, is also tied to purpose.

If humankind is the product of blind chance and raw, mindless material, then what standard will be found for life and morals? There would be no greater purpose than what any one person decides for self only. Pinnock (1980:24) noted years ago that “Religion is the audacious effort to conceive of the entire world as humanly significant; it is rooted in a fundamental human drive toward meaning.” When people lose their ability to properly interpret the universe, they can no longer find “coherence and meaning” for life because they do not really know themselves. They do not know who they are or why they live, so (ibid.) “they begin to be immersed in darkness and chaos and desperately need to find something they can believe in and norms which they can follow.” Pinnock continues by saying that the result of the demise of the Christian faith, with no serious alternatives, results in the loss of meaning. In humanism and existentialism, people are born “into the world devoid of any inherent worth, meaning or direction, entirely on their own.” There is no purpose or order, no significance or value which they do not determine for themselves. Pinnock writes (ibid.), “They are driven logically to sympathize with Macbeth: ‘Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.’ At the heart of reality, where the believer finds the Lord, there is darkness and a vacuum. Small wonder we are seeing a crisis of human values, a great deal of aimlessness, inner emptiness and boredom.” There is a direct corollary between losing sight of who people are as human beings made in God’s image and losing sight of meaning and purpose in life.

The loss of purpose is illustrated when the Humanist Manifesto (Kurtz, 1983:24) says, “But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.” What exactly are people to save themselves from? Humanists admit that there is much mankind does not know, but they somehow know that God had nothing to do with anything. What is the point of life that arose from mindless, purposeless processes leading to nowhere? They can scramble around for purpose and meaning all they want to, and when they are done, they will have to answer the question as to why they can determine any purpose for anything. Who says? Why does it matter? Why should anyone care? A worldview without a purposeful foundation will flounder when forced to its logical conclusions.

The idea that “no deity will save us; we must save ourselves” sounds suspiciously familiar to those who read their Bibles. Genesis 3 records where the serpent came to Eve and tempted her to eat of the forbidden fruit in the garden. God had told Adam and Eve that if they ate of it, they would die. Satan said (Genesis 3:4-5), “You shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” What was the serpent saying? He was telling them that they did not need God to tell them what to do. This is the lie that people can decide for themselves what is right or wrong. Humans can be their own

gods, making their own moral choices. In other words, Satan was saying, “No deity will save you.” This is where humanism has its roots, and Genesis 3 reveals the source of such thinking. Idolatry was being pushed upon mankind from the beginning, and it was based on a lie.

One of the messages of Genesis 3 is that mankind is not here to serve itself in some selfish fashion. Created human beings are not God and do not get to decide their own morals. No one can be their own moral authority. In fact, the failure of moral relativism has become clear in a world that has witnessed horrific oppression, sexual harassment, and mass murders. The “do what makes you feel good” narrative of a godless culture is self-defeating, and this is made clear by the fact that those who openly eschew such immoral behaviour are themselves speaking in moral absolutes. This can only make sense when the moral standard to which Christians appeal is objective and absolute.

Scripture shows that mankind, left to itself, implodes morally. Humanity needs God. Because God created human beings, they have meaning, purpose, and reason to live. After discussing various avenues of life for which he tried to find some purpose, the preacher wrote in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil.” When all is said and done, the only thing that will have mattered is whether or not one has honoured God.

Purpose eludes those who take their eyes off of God, and human failure and selfishness have been far too prevalent and obvious for people to be their own authority. The wise have said in Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” Jeremiah made a similar point (Jeremiah 10:23): “I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.” Human beings turn away from God, lose their purpose, and then lie to themselves that they think they can do well without God. This has only resulted in disaster throughout history.

God made humanity to reflect Him and His glory. “God made male and female in His image” is a statement of purpose as well as nature. Humans are made to reflect God, made to glorify him, and made to live eternally in fellowship with both God and others who seek to serve him.

6.2.5 Illustrations in the modern moral climate

A loss of human and moral purpose leads to greater chaos. Christians, seeking to persuade non-Christians about God and salvation, have some poignant illustrations to which they can appeal to show what happens when God is taken out of the picture. Two issues that stand out are human rights and racism. Fundamental questions can lead to better discussions, perhaps. Where do

human rights come from? Why is racism evil? Questions like these point the discussions to the heart of what is most important about life and human beings.

For example, by asking, “Where do human rights come from?” one is forced to go back to the foundations of why they believe what they believe. Human rights are, as some would argue (Coppenger, 2011:27), along with justice and human dignity, one of the “transcendent values.” To speak of human rights is to ask that people think about what it means to be human in the first place. Do human rights come from a Creator who made mankind, or do rights come from other people who just happen to be in power? Geisler and Bocchino (2001:211) ask, “Do governments create human rights or discover them?” The difference in how one answers, politically, is huge, but even greater is the difference in understanding who humans are and why they exist.

If human beings are made in God’s image, then all humans stand in the same relation to God by virtue of creation in his image. This is one reason why the mistreatment of other human beings is so wrong. All people are made in the image of God, and no one has a right to abuse another one of God’s image-bearers. Such abuse is lifting self up over others, as if one has rights and others do not. There is a reason why the second greatest commandment ties directly to how people treat other people: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

If, on the other hand, human beings are products of brute materialistic, mindless, purposeless, amoral forces, then even the definition of what it means to be human is arbitrary. Humans would only be creatures of raw material who happen to be at the tips of the evolutionary branches that had no purpose in mind other than survival. What would be the point of that? As Dr Barash said (2013:B12-B14), such a view teaches that life is absurd. This affects how people would think of other human beings and how they ought to be treated. Morality is illusory and love is just an expression of the way chemicals react in physical bodies. How people view and treat others is based on arbitrary, subjective preferences of society, and there would be no overarching morality or standard by which all people ought to be treated. The consequences of such a view would be catastrophic for humanity. If there is no overarching purpose, there is no great, guiding reason why anyone ought to do anything moral. Human rights would have no universal standard to which anyone could appeal, so whoever is in power would be the determiner of rights. If human rights can be arbitrarily determined, they can be arbitrarily removed.[36]

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[36] Geisler and Bocchino (2001:189-228) engage in an important discussion about issues involved in law, human rights, and justice. They refer to the trials at Nuremberg after World War II in order to show the differences between positive law (what is created by humans) and natural law (what comes from God). If rights only come from people in power, then there can be no universal human rights. They also use Hitler as an example of how human rights are violated and how bigotry can become entrenched in thinking through education.

Similarly, the problem of racism illustrates what can happen when a proper view of God and human beings as being made in God's image is abandoned. Is racism wrong because some people in power say it is wrong? What if the people in power say it is good? Shall a society recognize that Hitler had a right to annihilate millions of Jews? Shall institutional racism against those of differing coloured skin be seen as good and moral? Most would say, "of course not," but then be unable to provide a foundational basis for why such action would be evil. What is the fundamental problem with oppressing others if not that it is a violation of their nature? Geisler and Bocchino (2001:199) write, "Civilization is dependent upon natural law with respect to the conviction that human nature is distinct from animal nature because the Creator endowed all of humanity with certain characteristics (unalienable human rights). These qualities do not depend upon any government, and they must bear witness to the eternal nature and moral character of the Creator."

If there is a God who created all human beings in his image, then making the case against racism becomes natural. While people have abused Scripture in order to abuse others, reasonable Bible students know that such can never be justified. The apostle told the Athenians in Acts 17:26 that God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth." God's design for his church was such that he, in Acts 10:34-35, "shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." God intended to bring into his folds those of all nations so that they all might be one in Christ.

Racism is an evil because people are made in God's image, and the implications of this truth are far-reaching. As Andrews (2018: loc 3810-3811) puts it, "The biblical worldview leaves no room for racism, tribalism, sexism, ageism, or any other 'ism' that seeks to make some people morally or biologically superior to others." All humans are valuable, and all actions matter because humanity is grounded in the reality that God made human beings with moral senses and final accountability. With God, evil has a day of reckoning, and justice is both real and matters. Racism is the result of sin and evil in the hearts of free will creatures who have rejected God's love and love for each other. The answer to racism will not be found in human governments, but in a much higher principle, so stated by Paul in Romans 13:8-10. Everything is summed up in love, and the ability to love like this is unique to human beings because they bear the stamp of God's image, who is love.

The love Paul speaks of helps one to understand what it means to be human and what it means to treat others with the kind of respect and honour that God's image-bearers ought to have. The kind of love spoken of here is part of what makes human beings unique among all creation. God is love, and mankind is to reflect that love back to both God and toward each other. There can be no proper fulfilment of purpose, worshipping, and proclamation of God's glory unless love is

present. Yet such love cannot be present in a world that is only formed of raw, brute, mindless material. James 2:8-9 corroborates the point by specifically mentioning partiality: “If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” Scripture identifies partiality, of which racism is a part, as sinful behaviour and contrary to the royal law of love. It is a slap in the face of those made in the image of God.

Mankind is unique among all creation, made in the image of God, and what it means to be human is fully realized in the gospel. More than mere material bodies, existence continues beyond this life and all will stand before God in judgment for their activities on this earth (2 Cor 5:10). Resurrection has purpose. Humanity is above the rest of creation, over the earth, plants and animals, and can share in a unique relationship with the Creator, in a fellowship that is eternal. Perhaps the greatest and most demoralizing of all sins is also the most foundational sin of mankind forgetting what and who he truly is as being made in God’s image.

Human beings are given life for the purpose of glorifying and pleasing God. They are meant to worship God and bear witness to his Excellencies. Sin is contrary to this purpose. Sin has destroyed and distorted relationships, happiness, and meaning. Yet since no man can save himself, God has made a way for salvation from sin through the death of Jesus Christ. There is no greater reason to this life than to serve God. In doing so, Christians believe, as the Hebrews writer says, that “God rewards those who diligently seek Him.” The promise of God is an eternal life, and so Christians live with a view to the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

CHAPTER 7
THE NATURES OF KNOWLEDGE, MORALITY, AND CHRISTIANITY

Being made in God's image means, among other things, having a moral capacity to choose. This also requires the ability to know, the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and the ability to weigh the choices and purposefully decide which direction to go. Knowledge forms a significant part of what it means to be human. This is tied to moral decision-making. Yet, also included in this is the nature of Christianity, for many like Caecilius object to Christianity on moral grounds, accusing the Christians of wickedness. Therefore, considering the natures of knowledge, morality, and Christianity will be the focus here.

7.1 The nature of knowledge and truth

Caecilius makes his case, in large measure, on the grounds that knowledge is uncertain. After Caecilius had shown his honour to the image of Serapis, Octavius (Felix, 2016:8) accused him of essentially doing so "in the blindness of vulgar ignorance." Caecilius, whose name derives from "blind" (web: latin-dictionary), picks up on this and argues (2016:11) that knowledge is uncertain, and therefore Octavius should not be judging him. He argues that there is (ibid.) "no difficulty in making plain that all things in human affairs are doubtful, uncertain, and unsettled, and that all things are rather probable than true." Because of this, he indicates, those who tire of "investigating truth" end up succumbing to "any sort of opinion rather than persevere in exploring it with persistent diligence." His implication is that this is what Christians have done. They have quit investigating truth and have given in to a strange "sort of opinion."

Caecilius recognizes limitations on man's knowledge but applies this to being unable to know God. He says that (ibid.) the "mediocrity of human intelligence is so far from (the capacity of) divine investigation, that neither is it given us to know, nor is it permitted to search, nor is it religious to ravish, the things that are supported in suspense in the heaven above us, nor the things which are deeply submerged below the earth." His argument is that because knowledge and truth are uncertain, and because the divine is so far beyond our ability to investigate, that human beings should rather seek to know themselves according to the "ancient sage" (presumably Socrates) and this will make them "sufficiently happy and sufficiently prudent." The effect is that it does not really matter what one knows or thinks relative to God as far as living daily is concerned; just know self and that is enough.

In his concluding arguments, Caecilius argues (Felix, 2016:22-23), "What is above us is nothing to us." In Socratic fashion, he believed that the "confession of ignorance is the height of wisdom."

Since he considered Christianity to fall into the new and superstitious, his conclusion was given (2016:23): “In my opinion also, things which are uncertain ought to be left as they are. Nor, while so many and so great men are deliberating, should we rashly and boldly give an opinion in another direction, lest either a childish superstition should be introduced, or all religion should be overthrown.” He places these matters in the realm of what cannot be known, and therefore should not be accepted if it differs from what had already been passed down. He also equates Christian belief with childish superstition. Then, in order to stave off any anticipated answer forthcoming from Octavius, he claims (2016:24) to be deeply moved, not about the current discussion, but about another kind of dispute relating to the nature of truth. He is concerned that truth would be changed “according to the powers of discussion” and that one’s eloquence would be the persuading factor. He is concerned that the “facility of the hearers” would affect the “allurement of the words” in such a way that the hearers would assent to everything that is said and would not be able to distinguish truth from error. There is some truth in even the most incredible ideas, and the same is true with falsehood. People believe bold assertions and are convinced by cleverness of the presenter and thus deceived by how brash and bold one might be in delivery. This is one reason why persuasion should not be just about eloquence.

For Caecilius, truth was obscure, and arguments could be twisted to sound persuasive depending on the hearer. This is true, but he appears to have been trying to head off what he was afraid could happen if the Christian case is stronger than he anticipated. In the end, his view of knowledge was fairly low, and this affected his overall approach. If people cannot be sure of anything, then the discussion is over before it begins. In some ways, this is not unlike what Christians face in the modern era. Truth is suspect, obscure, and changes according to the whims of the hearers. How can any knowledge be asserted or trusted at all? If no one can really discern the truth, then how can anything be said to be true? Is everything simply a matter of who gets the last argument, uses the most words, and yet too obscure to judge accurately?

When Octavius began his reply, he commented (Felix, 2016:26) that “if a man has no steadfast judgment of truth, even as his unbelieving suspicion is scattered, so his doubting opinion is unsettled. It is therefore no wonder if Caecilius in the same way is cast about by the tide and tossed hither and thither among things contrary and repugnant to one another.” His answer would be meant to convict and refute by “confirming and approving the truth alone.” While he notes Caecilius’ vexations about Christians as “illiterate, poor, unskilled people” who “dispute about heavenly things,” Octavius affirms (2016:27) that “all men are begotten alike, with a capacity and ability of reasoning and feeling, without preference of age, sex, or dignity.” He argues that the knowledge Christians have is gained not by wealth, but by “the very formation of the mind.” What matters is not the authority of the one who argues, but “the truth of the argument itself.” Truth is

paramount for the Christian, and the way to test and know it is to use the mind properly. Octavius makes it clear that Christianity is not something for the weak of mind but will require deep thought and reason as one seeks to find the truth.

Octavius agreed with Caecilius that man ought to know himself, and to look around and see what he is in relation to other aspects of creation, from animals to the universe as a whole. The implication is that it is indeed possible to know something vital about who people are. Yet all of this speaks to the nature of knowledge. Can human beings know truth, and if so, how can they know it? However, if humans cannot really know the truth, as per Caecilius, then how can they truly know themselves?

One of the intriguing aspects about human beings is their ability to think about thinking. They can think about how they learn and know. They can reason and think about how to improve the mind and how to engage in the learning process. In an elementary sense, people learn from what they are taught and told (revelation of new information). They learn from seeing and experiencing (what they are shown, examples they see, and patterns they observe). They learn from the reasoning process (inferences, drawing conclusions from the relevant data). This is the way communication and learning occur. This is also the way God communicates his authority to people. It is the process by which the mind is engaged and interacts with information. Most of the time the process is done without thinking much about it, but the fact that human beings can think about it at all is itself an amazing part of human nature.

A worldview impacts on what people think about knowledge and truth, where that knowledge comes from, and how secure that knowledge really is. How do people know what they know? Even more fundamental, and getting to the heart of a worldview, how is any knowledge of anything possible? Sire (2004:20) asks, “Why is it possible to know anything at all?” What underlies human ability to learn and know? How are people able to think and reason? This is about the functioning of the mind. For Christians, this is paramount, given that they are to love God with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind (Matt 22:36-40). The use of the mind is a major feature of the concern of Christians. With it they engage the flesh or live by the Spirit. With it they love God or they love the world. With it they decide, discern, and intentionally act.

The biblical foundation with respect to knowledge is succinctly stated in Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10. The “fear of the Lord” is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom. God made human beings with the ability to communicate, to listen, to reason, to draw conclusions, to experience a world that is knowable, and to know a God who is the grounding of all truth and knowledge. Without God, there is no possibility of knowledge, as there would be no existence without him. The biblical worldview embraces knowledge and truth, but the source of knowledge is different from what

other worldviews accept. Which worldview makes knowledge and truth real and viable? When someone, like Caecilius, casts all knowledge into a fog of doubt, how can Christians respond? What should Christians think about knowledge and truth, and how will this impact their attempts to convey the gospel message to the world. Following, then, are principles and concepts about knowledge and truth that grow out of understanding why discussions like that in The Octavius are meaningful.

7.1.1 Knowledge begins with God

Octavius argued that God is the beginning point of knowledge, and that (Felix, 2016:28) “unless you diligently examine into the nature of divinity, you must be ignorant of that of humanity.” God is the source of all truth, all knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. God does not point to a separate source of knowledge, but he is the ultimate knowledge source, for all that can be known will flow from him. He is Truth (John 14:6). He is Wisdom. He is the great I AM. Without God, there is no truth or knowledge possible anywhere for there would be no being or existence. God is not just a competing version of where truth came from but is the ground and ultimate reason why such a concept of truth exists at all. Hart (2013:95) writes that God “is beyond all mere finite beings and is himself that ultimate ground upon which any foundations must rest.”

God made humans with minds and with the ability to think, reason, learn, and make moral decisions. He made minds capable of hearing, of grasping, of understanding, of recognizing designs and patterns, of knowing how things function and fit together, of drawing conclusions from gathered information. In the biblical worldview, the foundation for knowledge is grounded in an intelligent Creator who made human beings with these abilities. Without this foundation, or especially with a foundation rooted in mindless, accidental processes, people would have no reason to believe that minds would be capable of grasping. They would have no reason to believe that minds, that intelligence, that reason, or that knowing anything could possibly exist at all.

The universe is about information and how that information is put together, but information is more than brute material. God also made humans with senses that help them put that information into a context that brings it together. Lennox (2011:63) points out that people need to learn how to use their senses correctly to properly interpret this information. Interpretation is like a puzzle in which the pieces alone make no sense, but when put together those same pieces form a beautiful picture. Humans gain knowledge through what they hear, what they see, and what they experience. If the senses cannot be trusted, then no knowledge will be possible. Christians believe senses can generally be trusted because they are grounded in an intelligent Creator who made them this way.

Looping back to the nature of God, the simple truth is that God is the God of all knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. What he knows and understands is far beyond human ability to grasp (Ps 147:5; Prov 2:6; Isa 40:28; Rom 11:33; Eph 3:20). This is the biblical picture of God as it concerns his wisdom and knowledge. Knowledge is grounded in him because he is the source of it all. Without God, no knowledge would be possible. The biblical worldview also recognizes that the God of all wisdom and knowledge has revealed himself, which helps make sense of the pieces of the puzzle and how they fit together as a whole. People can see patterns and designs of the universe through their reasoning abilities, and God, by revelation, tells what it all means. In special revelation given by the Holy Spirit, God has explained more about who he is, what his character is, and what people ought to think about him. He also tells people what He wants from those whom he made in his image. The only way to know God's will, or God's mind, is through knowing what He reveals (1 Cor 2:6-13; Heb. 10:36; Matt 7:21). God has revealed himself even more fully through the appearance of Jesus Christ, who is considered to be God manifested in the flesh (John 1:1, 14, 18).

Knowing God is more than knowing facts about God. Knowing God is about a relationship, a fellowship people can have through Jesus (see 1 John 2:3). The relationship is based on knowing, so if knowing is not possible or, at best, questionable, there can be no real fellowship. To cast knowledge and truth into a cycle of doubt and question is to put fellowship with God into question as well. How can people know that they are in fellowship with God if truth is in question?

Christians can also know that what they do in their service to the Lord is not in vain. After discussing resurrection, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." This knowledge is based on the resurrected Christ. "In vain" can be connected back to the earlier part of the chapter (vv. 12-19), where faith and preaching are vain if Christ was not raised. There is a direct correlation between the confidence Christians have in serving God and the conviction that He was raised from the dead. This is the biblical worldview.

God gave people minds in order to know truth both about God and about themselves. Knowledge requires certain assumptions that cannot be proven through scientific testing because such testing assumes these same points to begin with. Before people can ever say that they know anything, they must assume that their minds are real and that they are capable of grasping an objective truth outside of themselves. They must assume that minds are able of connecting dots and putting together legitimate information through reason so that proper conclusions can be drawn. People must be able to know reality (what is) and what that reality means. C.S. Lewis (1960:14-15) observed that all knowledge really depends on the "validity of reasoning." People express feelings of certainty "by words like *must be* and *therefore* and *since*," but if these are not

real perceptions of how things really are outside of our own minds, then they cannot express real knowledge claims. If these feelings are just how things “happen to work” but are not “genuine insights,” then knowledge is impossible. “Unless human reasoning is valid no science can be true.” The modern world is a bit of conundrum, for on the one hand there is a constant questioning of whether knowledge can be attained (post-truth), and on the other there is a stress on the need for science to answer all the big questions. People cannot have it both ways.

The biblical worldview is contradictory to universal scepticism, the claim that no knowledge about anything is possible. That position is self-defeating, for how can a sceptic know that no knowledge is possible? This is similar to the one who says, “There is no truth,” without asking whether that statement is true. If there is no such thing as truth, then knowledge is impossible. Likewise, if minds cannot be trusted to understand real information, then knowledge is impossible. David Bentley Hart (2013:17-18) observed, “If, moreover, naturalism is correct (however implausible that is), and if consciousness is then an essentially material phenomenon, then there is no reason to believe that our minds, having evolved purely through natural selection, could possibly be capable of knowing what is or is not true about reality as a whole.”

Knowledge requires some kind of foundation on which it can be built. As Psalm 11:3 says, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” This is why foundations are so important. They are about the information people accept, who they listen to, how they reason, and the way that information relates to everything else. All of this involves various levels of faith. It also requires accepting that truth is real.

7.1.2 The nature of truth

The discussion of the nature of truth is nothing new. Octavius shows that these discussions have been going on for millennia, and this is true well before Christianity got started. There is still a discussion that needs to happen in a current world that questions truth in every direction. If Christians are to be successful in persuading others and defending the Gospel, they need to be versed in the nature of truth.

According to Steinmetz from Time Magazine online (2016), Oxford’s word of the year for 2016 was “post-truth.” Post-truth “describes a situation in which feelings trump facts.” It is called an “apt choice for countries like America and Britain, where people lived through divisive, populist upheavals that often seemed to prize passion above all else — including facts.” The definition given for post-truth is this: “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”

According to Time (2016), “the word dates back to 1992, but Oxford saw its usage explode by 2,000% this year.” Steinmetz is applying the term primarily to the current political climate, but she suggests, “it may become the defining word of our time.” Though this term was initially seen within a political context, it is not difficult to see how the term broadly fits the way culture has been moving for quite some time. This includes the way people think of religion.

Though the terminology is shifting somewhat, the problem presented here is nothing new. The term some may be more familiar with is “postmodernism,” a term that describes a shift in thinking in which people create their own inward truth, objective facts are met with suspicion, everything, including truth, is relative, and tolerance must be applied to all, unless it involves people who believe that there is objective truth to which all are amenable. Beckwith and Koukl (1998:20) observed, “Today we’ve lost the confidence that statements of fact can ever be anything more than just opinions; we no longer know that anything is certain beyond our subjective preferences. The word truth now means ‘true for me’ and nothing more. We have entered an era of dogmatic scepticism.” McCallum (1996:31) adds, “Relativism says that truth isn’t fixed by outside reality, but is decided by a group or individual for themselves. Truth isn’t discovered, but manufactured. Truth is ever-changing not only in insignificant matters of taste or fashion, but in crucial matters of spirituality, morality, and reality itself.” The shift in this thinking has been moving further away from truth for many years now. People have lost confidence in truth. Knowledge is undermined as people are dogmatically sceptical, which is, at best, ironic. “There is no truth” is one of the most loudly declared statements of truth to be heard.

Post-truth and postmodernism are, essentially, the same. Groothuis (2013: loc 1526-1527) writes, “Many in the postmodern modern world have given up on the existence of objective truth entirely and so find no need to pursue it.” Post-truth advocates have outgrown truth. Feelings tell them more than evidence. Oddly enough, they see their position as a truth by which others should live.

In this post-truth, or postmodern, view, traditional morals may be seen as oppressive. People prefer to keep their morality and religion to themselves. This is because if people present their views as absolute truth, then they will come across as intolerant toward those who feel differently. Allan Bloom (1987:25), late professor at the University of Chicago, noted in 1987 that the trend toward relativism was already in full swing. He said that the danger that incoming students had been taught to fear “from absolutism” was not being wrong, but rather intolerance. They were seeing relativism as the only necessary virtue for education. Since there are so many claims to truth and “various ways of life and kinds of human beings,” tolerance and openness to relativism is the “great insight of our times.” Over the years this mind-set has become set in its ways, if not taken further.

The post-truth concept is at odds with the biblical worldview. God is the source of truth, and all the works of God's hands are "truth and justice" (Psa 111:7). The truth of the Lord is everlasting (Psa 117:2). The fundamental nature of truth is at stake. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and this can only be meaningful if that truth is objective and applies equally to all. Truth that is not objective cannot set anyone free.

Luke records concerning those who heard Paul in Berea (Acts 17:11) that they were noble-minded, "they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." There are differing attitudes found in Acts 17. There are the Jews at the beginning who were unwilling to listen when it involved what they did not already know. They accused Paul and the others of turning the world upside down (v. 6). Paul was reasoning from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence, and this successfully persuaded some. The end of Acts 17 shows a different mentality of wanting to hear new things only (v. 21). They let Paul speak, but the reaction to hearing about the resurrection was mixed. In contrast to both those in Thessalonica and those in Athens were those in Berea (v. 11). These were described as noble, eagerly examining what Paul had said to make certain that what they heard was the truth. Acts 17 shows that how old or new a teaching is matters little. Instead, what matters is whether or not it is true.

Truth is grounded in reality. Knowledge requires truth, and truth is tied to reality. Knowing something about truth also requires knowing about what is real. There is no sense in talking about the truth of something unless it is based in reality. For example, in discussing morality, some atheists will argue that moral values are illusory rather than real. They argue that morals have evolved merely to help humans survive, but they are not actual or objective. This view makes any discussion of truth relative to moral values meaningless, as atheist Michael Ruse (1994:5-24) wrote:

> "Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, it [ethics] is illusory." He references the Bible and says, "I appreciate that when somebody says, 'Love thy neighbour as thyself,' they think they are referring above and beyond themselves. Nevertheless, to a Darwinian evolutionist it can be seen that such reference is truly without foundation. Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction and has no being beyond or without this."

The rejection of an ultimate standard of morality is a worldview foundation for many. If God is not real and humans have come about through mindless processes, then how can morals be real either? Ruse continues (ibid.), "Morality is an ephemeral product of the evolutionary process, just as are other adaptations. It has no existence or being beyond this, and any deeper meaning is

illusory." Likewise, Richard Dawkins (1994:155) wrote, "The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference." Once God is disregarded, there can be no ultimate standard by which to judge moral behaviour. In this case evil cannot not real either, for any concept of it would, also, have come about through mindless processes. If evil is not real, then how can bad or good be meaningful categories? Truth is the same. If truth is not real, then truth-talk is meaningless. Koukl (2017:32) observes, "Confused talking leads to confused thinking. Some beliefs are true. Others are not. The difference matters."

If truth is real, then it must, in some way, be objective. How people feel about truth does not change reality; truth is still truth. Oliphint (2013:35-36) argues, "Since he is Lord, his truth is truth in every place and for every person." The objective nature of truth is seen in Paul's message to the Galatians (1:8-9) where he stated that if the apostles or an angel from heaven preach anything contrary to what they have already preached, that one is to be accursed. Scripture provides an objective standard to which people may appeal: the gospel that has been preached. If something runs contrary to that which has been revealed, then it is to be accursed. Paul's point here is significant: if anything runs counter to the objective standard, then it is false.

Truth can be discovered. Truth can be investigated, studied and known. God made people with minds that can reason, think, discover, and learn. As people grow and mature in their thinking, they ought to be able to discern between good and evil (cf. Heb 5:14). Investigation of truth fits the nature of the gospel and the human need to be informed. Luke began his gospel with this stated purpose in Luke 1:1-4, indicating that he was writing about what really happened, what was handed down by eyewitnesses, and what was investigated carefully from the beginning. The gospels contain truth-claims that can be investigated, and if people desire to know truth, then they will search for it and can discover it (cf. John 7:17).

Truth can be attained. Not all truth is discoverable. For instance, there are aspects of God's character and knowledge that people cannot attain (cf. Eph 3:20; Rom 11:33-34). This does not mean that no truth can be attained. There is truth within the reach of those who search, and this truth is understandable. People can know, be persuaded by, and submit to known truth. Jesus makes this point relative to the problem of sin in John 8:31-32 where he taught that his real disciples are those who abide in his word, "and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Truth sets people free from sin. Discovering and investigating truth will be valuable and lasting, for to find the truth is ultimately to find Jesus, who is the Truth (John 14:6).

Truth does not change. Groothuis (2011: loc 99) notes, "The very concept of objective truth is under fire today." This is so because people think truth is relative. Indeed, some matters are

relative. For example, it may be true that one prefers chocolate ice cream to mint chip. Tastes often change over time. However, though under fire, the nature of objective truth does not change. The kind of truth under consideration is not about taste, fashion, or personal preferences. Subjective preferences differ significantly from objective standards. Objective standards do not become subjective preferences simply because time has passed. God declared in Malachi 3:6, "I, the Lord, do not change." God is faithful, and his nature is constant. When God made an oath to Abraham, his faithfulness and immutability gave certainty to the promise (Heb 6:15-18). Likewise, Jesus said, "I am the truth" in John 14:6, and his faithfulness is as sure (Heb 13:8).

Truth is universal. Oliphint (2013:36) notes the irony of saying, "'Truth is relative'—ironically, that proposition alone seemed to be universally affirmed and thus not relative." Truth remains truth regardless of how much time passes. Denying truth is self-defeating since it affirms a true statement about truth. Applied to morality, universal morals are necessary to keep from plummeting into nihilism. Groothuis (2011: loc 3701-3703) argues the point this way:

> " … when moral standards are relative to the individual, nihilism is the result and 'everything is permitted' (Dostoyevsky). The argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*: 1. Relativism leads to nihilism. 2. Nihilism is morally unacceptable. 3. Therefore, (a) relativism is morally unacceptable. 4. Therefore, (b) we need another moral theory to support objective morality."

Murder, the unjustified taking of human life, for example, is always wrong, regardless of who the people are or where they are. Love, as a virtue, is always right everywhere and for everyone. These are universal in nature and all people would be amenable to the implications.

Truth is foundational and must be at the baseline of a worldview if that worldview is going to be successful and meaningful. If what is at the foundation of a worldview is false, then it will not be able to stand up to scrutiny. Within a worldview framework, truth will be consistent. If people believe contradictory premises, then they are missing truth somewhere, and a worldview arguing for "no truth" will fail on its own terms. Truth must be at the foundation. Nash (1992:56) points out, "The sceptic asserts that nothing can be known. In his haste he said that truth was impossible. And is it true that truth is impossible? For, if no proposition is true, then at least one proposition is true—the proposition, namely, that no proposition is true. If truth is impossible, therefore, it follows that we have already attained it."

Truth is, also, a cohesive total. The modern mind tends to parcel out knowledge in small pieces rather than seeing a bigger, whole picture. Pearcy (2005:22-23) speaks of "recovering a holistic view of total truth" so that the gospel can become a "redemptive force across all of life." If people

only consider the bits and pieces of truth, they may fail to understand how the puzzle fits together. Francis Bacon (n.d.: loc 10006) noted the idea that seeing only the parts can incline one toward atheism, while seeing the whole leads one to God. He could not conceive of the idea that "this universal frame is without a mind." He argues that God did not need to work a miracle to convince the atheist because his normal works should suffice for that. Then, he said (ibid.), "It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion. For while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no further; but when it beholdeth the chain of them, confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity." When people begin to the see the whole over the parts, they can begin to appreciate what God is doing and how reality makes sense.

To know anything is to know something that is true. Knowledge cannot otherwise be possible. Any attempt to communicate, educate, inform, persuade, or argue, must assume some form of truth. Knowledge is only as good as the foundation upon which it rests, and "the fear of the Lord" is as foundational as it gets (Prov 1:7).

7.2 The nature of morality and Christianity

The moral discussion in Octavius is important and informative for modern day Christians as they talk about morality. In rebuking Octavius for denying the pagan gods, Caecilius portrays Christianity in ways that thoroughly show a misunderstanding of what Christianity is about and what Christians do. He asks why anyone should rage against the gods, then launches into a faulty portrait of Christians. He calls them (Felix, 2016:16) "a reprobate, unlawful, and desperate faction." His characterization of Christians sees them as "the lowest dregs the more unskilled, and women, credulous and, by the facility of their sex, yielding, establish a herd of a profane conspiracy, which is leagued together by nightly meetings, and solemn fasts and inhuman meats." They are called a people who skulk and shun the light, are silent in public, but garrulous in secret. They despise temples as "dead-houses," reject the gods, and laugh at sacred things. They are wretched, half-naked, and despise "honours and purple robes." Caecilius exclaims, "Oh, wondrous folly and incredible audacity!" The Christian's hope is considered to be deceitful.

Caecilius portrays Christians in an immoral light. He continues to berate Christians (2016:17), speaking of their doing "wickeder things," abandoning manners, having their "abominable shrines of an impious assembly" maturing throughout the world. As such, he says, "this confederacy ought to be rooted out and execrated." His portrayal of Christianity continues as he says they know each other through secret marks and insignia. He portrays the love Christians have for one another as a lustful, incestuous manner (ibid.): "they call one another promiscuously brothers and sisters,

that even a not unusual debauchery may by the intervention of that sacred name become incestuous: it is thus that their vain and senseless superstition glories in crimes." He then charges them with adoring the "head of an ass, the basest of creaturely," consecrated by some unknown silly persuasion.

His understanding of what happens with new converts is also expressed in horrid disgust (2016:17-18) as he repeats the false narrative about young novices and their initiation rites. An infant is covered over with meal, for deceptive purposes, then placed before the novice, whereupon the novice slays the infant with "dark and secret wounds." His expression of disgust is then given, "Thirstily—O horror!—they lick up its blood; eagerly they divide its limbs. By this victim they are pledged together; with this consciousness of wickedness they are covenanted to mutual silence. Such sacred rites as these are more foul than any sacrileges."

Perhaps because it was considered to be so abhorrent, he accuses Christians of being incestuous. He has already made the accusation, but then he describes in more detail (2016:18) the alleged immorality of the Christians who assemble on a solemn day with all their "children, sisters, mothers, and people of every sex and of every age." After they had engaged in much feasting, the "fervour of incestuous lust" grew hot with drunkenness, they set it up so that a dog would be tied to their lamps, then provoked to jump so that the lights are extinguished. Then, "in the shameless darkness, the connections of abominable lust involve them in the uncertainty of fate." He admits that this may not all be fact, but even so he makes the charge and believes that this represents their desires.

These charges show a number of great misunderstandings that are based in hearsay rather than in actual fact, but they are clearly intended to discredit Christianity. He calls Christianity (2016:21) "a vile religion" for the beliefs and practices that he imagines and makes his charges with no proof. These are, he says, "figments of an unhealthy belief, and vain sources of comfort" passed off by "deceiving poets." This is not unlike some today who would say that believing in God is a crutch for those who fear the unknown.

Caecilius also characterizes Christians who are poor as (2016:21-22) "wretched creatures" believing in vain promise and deception. He says that the majority of them are poor, cold, and labouring in hard work and hunger, and yet God allows it to happen to them. He asserts a version of the problem of evil (ibid.): "He either is not willing or not able to assist His people; and thus He is either weak or inequitable." Yet these Christians dream of a posthumous immortality even when they are in great danger, consumed with fever, or torn up with pain. They do not feel their real condition or acknowledge their frailty. "Poor wretch, art thou unwillingly convinced of thine infirmity, and wilt not confess it?"

All of this, he argues, is a reflection of the God in whom Christians believe. Where is God in all of this, and how can one believe in a God who would cause them to come to life again if he cannot help his own people in this present life? He asserts as proof that the Romans, without any help from God, govern, reign, enjoy the whole world, and have dominion over the Christian. Meanwhile, the Christians are refraining and abstaining from “respectable enjoyments” in suspense and anxiety. Because Christians do not do what the pagans do, Caecilius charges (ibid.) that they are afraid of the gods whom they deny. They don’t concern themselves with public displays, banquets, or contests. They do not put flowers on their heads or grace their bodies with odours. “Thus, wretched as you are, you neither rise again, nor do you live in the meanwhile.” That is, Christians do not live life well in the present, and they will not rise again for the future life. This is how he sees Christianity, which is not unlike how many would continue to see it today.

Octavius counters by showing the immorality of the practices engaged in by the pagans. That, by itself, does not prove that the Christians were innocent. However, the premise Octavius is working from is that the reason the pagans make such outlandish charges of immorality against Christians is because they are the ones who know enough about these practices precisely because that is what they do. Octavius is also working from experience. He was a pagan himself and knew first-hand what they did. Now that he was a Christian, he knew first-hand what the Christians did. For example, after speaking of (Felix, 2016:39-40) “the fables and errors we both learn from ignorant parents,” he describes some of the beliefs relative to the gods that touch upon morality itself. He asks whether he should speak of the “detected adultery of Mars and Venus,” or of the violence of Jupiter. He speaks of the fact that it was their gods who gave the authority for their vices. “By these fictions, and such as these, and by lies of a more attractive kind, the minds of boys are corrupted; and with the same fables clinging to them, they grow up even to the strength of mature age; and, poor wretches, they grow old in the same beliefs, although the truth is plain, if they will only seek after it.”

Speaking of the practices Octavius calls obscene, he says (2016:43) that some sacred places are “crowned by a woman having one husband,” but there are some with many. It is bad enough that “she who can reckon up most adulteries is sought after with most religious zeal.” He asks whether a man who made libations with his own blood and tried to supplicate the gods by his wounds would be better to offer the profane than to have a religion steeped in immorality. Then he charges that those whose “shameful parts are cut off” wrong God in seeking to propitiate him by means of that shameful behaviour. After all, if God wanted such eunuchs, he could have brought them into existence instead of bringing normal men into existence only to have them become eunuchs. He says of this practice, “Who does not perceive that people of unsound mind, and of weak and degraded apprehension, are foolish in these things, and that the very multitude

of those who err affords to each of them mutual patronage? Here the defence of the general madness is the multitude of the mad people." That last statement is interesting because he is essentially charging the pagans with having lost their minds, and their only defence is a host of others who have lost their minds. Are some matters so bad that this is about all one can say? In some cultures, people have indeed become like beasts. Jude says (v. 10) that there are some who are "like unreasoning animals."

Octavius (2016:45) sees the beliefs and practices of the pagans as immoral and "sacrilegious with impunity," for "to adore what have taken by force is to consecrate sacrilege, not divinities." These gods were not deities, he says, but "monstrosities." He cut to the heart of the immoral practices associated with paganism (2016:45-46) and pointed out that "among very many of the virgins unchastity was punished, in that they, doubtless without the knowledge of Vesta, had intercourse too carelessly with men." Even the priests among them were guilty. Adulteries were being arranged by the priests to be committed among their shrines and altars. Pandering and violence were sanctioned, and "burning lust" was "frequently gratified in the little chambers of the keepers of the temple," perhaps even more "than in the brothels themselves." Paganism was steeped in sexual immorality, and yet they had the audacity to act indignant toward Christians by making charges without evidence. There was a clear divide between paganism and Christianity. Octavius was calling Caecilius' bluff and would not let the erroneous, malicious charges stand.

Later, Octavius argues that the wicked are deserving of punishment, for, he says (2016:62), in comparing the Christians with the pagans, that in the end the Christians will be far better off. "For you forbid, and yet commit, adulteries; we are born men only for our own wives: you punish crimes when committed; with us, even to think of crimes is to sin." Octavius is making the point that it is wrong, not just actually to do something wrong, but even to think the thoughts that lead to the action. With this, James 1:13-15 would agree. Evil desires lead people to commit the acts, but it is not enough just to condemn the acts; one must take steps to avoid that path altogether.

Octavius also speaks about the Roman auspices and auguries of birds (i.e., watching birds as a way of divining the will of the gods). He believed that (2016:47) the error in these practices were obvious enough, but then speaks to the perverseness that came from them, the ruin that it caused both for themselves and others, and the depravity that was involved in the practice. He argued that they were alienated from God by these "degraded superstitions." There was a clear moral distinction made between paganism and Christianity. Pagans would charge Christians with being guilty of the atrocities they practised, not understanding the nature of what they criticized. Caecilius had charged that Christians worshipped a criminal, and on one level that is understandable given that the cross was reserved for such. Yet Christians did not, and do not, worship Jesus Christ because they think he was guilty of anything. Rather, they believe Jesus to

be God in the flesh. Octavius points out (2016:52) that in these charges, the pagans “wander far from the neighbourhood of truth, in thinking either that a criminal deserved, or that an earthly being was able, to believed God.” Christians believe in a holy God who, as a man, was crucified as an innocent victim.

Octavius further shows (2016:53-54) that stories about Christians killing and drinking the blood of infants was just abject nonsense. “No one can believe this, except one that can dare to do it.” There are charges made sometimes against Christians that are so ludicrous that a blank stare might serve as the best answer. The morality of the Christian could never allow the killing of an infant or anything else associated with it. “To us it is not lawful either to see or to hear of homicide; and so much do we shrink from human blood, that we do not use the blood even of eatable animals in our food.” Sometimes people need reminding about the most basic truths of Christianity. Christians would never defend the kinds of practices they were being charged with, and they need to separate themselves from such charges when possible.

To answer the charge of incest, Octavius says (2016:55) that it was “the plotting of demons” that led to the “falsely devised … enormous fable against us.” This was meant to stain the modest character, outrage the people, and turn people away from Christianity by means of “an abominable charge” before they had even inquired into the truth of the matter. He further argues that, for Christians, the practice was to be modest not only in appearance, but also in the heart, so that “we gladly abide by the bond of a single marriage; in the desire of procreating, we know either one wife, or none at all.” The love that is shared among Christians is not that of lust, but is always sober, with joy tempered by gravity, and with both chaste discourse and body. “Thus we love one another, to your regret, with a mutual love, because we do not know how to hate. Thus we call one another, to your envy, brethren: as being men born of one God and Parent, and companions in faith, and as fellow-heirs in hope.” This is the heart of Christianity.

Further, Octavius addressed the charge (2016:63) that God did not care about the poor and struggling among the Christians. Octavius pointed out that it was not a disgrace that many Christians were called poor, but rather it was “our glory.” Especially if one is “rich towards God,” the material possessions matter little. The truly poor person is the one who, “although he has much, desires more.” He seems to be echoing what James taught in his epistle (1:9-10): “Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.” Christians do not see their own poverty as an indication that God is not with them. Rather, they gladly suffer the loss of material possessions, knowing that their treasures are in heaven and that their citizenship is heavenly. Having or not having material stuff in this life is not the measure of one’s relationship with God.

7.2.1 Morality as part of a worldview

Octavius is informative in dealing with other worldviews. The impact of religious views on morality is significant, even though some may deny this. Cyril Bailey (1907: loc 892) points out that while Roman religions, espoused by Caecilius, may be thought to have little impact on morality, the truth is that religion does have an effect on one's character. Bailey (ibid.) writes of Roman morality that "the ceremonial pietas towards the gods appears to have little to do with the making of man or nation. But in the history of the world the test of religions must be their effect on the character of those who believed in them: religion is no doubt itself an outcome of character, but it reacts upon it, and must either strengthen or weaken." Character and the religion that one espouses go hand in hand, and it is not reasonable to think that one can passionately believe and promote a religion without that religion affecting, in a significant way, what that person believes to be right and wrong. A religion without such an affect would be pointless.

Christianity is grounded in the character of God, which is holy (Lev 11:44-45). The significance of this for morality should be apparent, for those who follow God are to be holy as he is holy. While Christians know that they will not achieve the perfection of God, they see God as the perfect standard to which they must seek to conform (Matt 5:44-48). Holiness is more than being moral, as if all it takes to put on holiness is to make a few moral changes. Even so, holiness cannot be achieved through immoral behaviour. By its nature, Christianity is upward-looking, focusing on Christ who is in heaven (Col 3:1-2), and seeking to please God with a view toward eternal life. If there is no life beyond this life, then morality can become irrelevant. If there is no ultimate consequence for being holy or unholy (as Scripture would define it), then there would be no ultimate difference between the two characteristics.

Paul recognizes this type of philosophy in 1 Corinthians 15:32, writing, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" This was a quote from Isaiah 22:13, a time in which God's people were acting as though God was not there. They were doing what they wanted. If there is no resurrection, then "live it up," Paul says, because that is all there is, and soon it is all over with nothing further to show for it. Why would it matter?

Though the gospel redeems mankind from this way of thinking, the gospel is not just a moral system. The goal of the gospel is not only to get people to change moral viewpoints, because just being good morally does not save. Scripture shows that while immorality will condemn and keep one out of the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21), morality alone is not sufficient to save anyone. All have sinned, and the only way to salvation is through the blood of Jesus Christ (Rom 3:23; 6:23). Nevertheless, being human requires moral behaviour, and one's worldview needs to support moral nature consistently.

There are some questions that can help initiate further discussions with non-Christians. For example: What does a worldview have to do with morality? What makes morality intelligible? Which worldview legitimately accounts for moral responsibility? What is one's final, ultimate moral foundation? Where does it come from? Nash (1992:30), among other questions, asks, "Are there moral laws that govern human conduct? What are they? Are these moral laws the same for all human beings?"

A "sense of ought" is common through every culture and time. Coppenger (2011:32) speaks of the "sense of good and evil" and the "sense of the morally absurd." Even in Caecilius' charges against Christians, he is assuming a moral "sense of ought" while saying that Christians were engaged in immoral and heinous practices like incest and the killing of infants to drink their blood. Without some "sense of ought," what would be the point of making such charges? Today, it is not uncommon for unbelievers to call God and his followers immoral for the slaughter of the innocents in the Old Testament or for accepting that people will be eternally lost in hell.[37] The assumption of morality is found in virtually every counter-argument made. While there are explanations for the problems, the point is that there is no argument at all were it not for a moral nature built into human beings.

What explains this "sense of ought"? Would a foundation built on random, purposeless, amoral chance explain it? Does mere illusion explain it? Some believe so. Rosenberg (2012:3) asks and answers, "Why should I be moral? Because it makes you feel better than being immoral." Is that ultimately satisfying and consistent? Or would a foundation built on intention, purpose, and intelligence be a better foundation? Which foundation makes sense of the moral nature of mankind? What explains conscience, or right and wrong? Everyone has a line that must not be crossed; the only issue is what that standard is. Who gets to decide where the line is? Is all of this just at the arbitrary whims of society? Like Caecilius, some may feel content to say that people should just follow what the previous generations have discovered, but is that going to be sufficient for long? Will that provide the right foundation for a moral culture?

The moral nature of human beings makes sense within a worldview framework of an intelligent God who made humans in his image. Morality sets humans apart from the rest of creation, but why? Does random, purposeless, mindless chance explain this, or does intelligence serve as the better foundation? If morality came about by random, purposeless chance, why would any moral decisions matter at all? Who says? Who cares? What difference would it ultimately make? Is

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[37] Several apologetic works give space to dealing with questions like these. For example, Cowan and Wilder's (2013) *In Defense of the Bible* contains essays devoted to difficult questions. Groothuis' (2011) *Christian Apologetics* and Copan and Craig's (2012) *Come, Let Us Reason* are other examples of works devoting space to these types of issues.

morality that arbitrary and subjective, and are there no universal standards, no final judgment or final justice? What does a worldview have to do with one's view of morality? In short, the answer is everything.

7.2.2 The Biblical view of morality

Christians should be able to express the biblical view of morality to those who, like Caecilius, might have serious misunderstandings about it. The foundation begins with God. Christ upholds all things by the word of his power (Heb 1:3), and in him all things hold together (Col 1:17). God is not just a moral being accountable to a higher moral standard.[38] He is the standard and holiness is his nature. God is the place to start, just as Paul did in Athens (Acts 17).

God, as Creator, made male and female in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). Humans are moral creatures, meant to reflect God's holy nature and to be accountable for their actions. Paul made it clear that there will be accountability in 2 Corinthians 5:10). When people lose confidence in ultimate accountability and judgment, this will, in turn, affect moral judgments. Will this action really be all that bad? Will one really have to give an account for this? Why should people act a particular way, especially if, emotionally, they feel differently?

Because of who God is, He has the right to tell those created in his image how to act and think. Scriptures provide principles and guidelines for moral behaviours, and moral failure is called sin and falling short of God's glory (Rom 3:23). The effects of this problem can be seen from Genesis 3:5, where the lie is that people get to determine for themselves what is right and wrong, and in the process humans rebel against the glory and character of God.

A moral sense is built into the fabric of human beings. Nash (1992:60) writes, "Each human being makes distinctions between right and wrong," and "When someone wrongs us, our protests make it clear that we believe the other person is aware of the same moral law." Because of failures to live up to the standard, people need forgiveness from the one whose nature has been violated. The gospel is God's answer to this problem: through Jesus Christ people may find that forgiveness and be reconciled to God and made whole again. Forgiveness is not based on keeping moral laws, but upon the fact that Christ died as a sacrifice for sins so that people may, once again, live (2 Cor 5:21). Humans are moral failures and cannot earn their way back into divine favour by doing enough good. They need Christ. Sin leaves them broken, and only Christ,

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[38] The argument for this would follow along the same lines as that of the Hebrews writer with respect to God swearing an oath by himself, for he could swear by no one greater (Hebrew 6:13-20). As God cannot swear by one greater, since he is the greatest of all, then neither can God be amenable to a standard higher than himself, as there can be none higher. This is in the nature of God.

through His sacrificial death, can heal these wounds with forgiveness and renewal of purpose. This is the gospel. This is the biblical worldview.

Christians believe that their moral nature can only make sense in the light of the God who made them this way. With God, morality matters and actions have consequences. People are responsible and there will be final accountability. Continuing in sin will mean being lost. Receiving God's grace through Christ, by faith, means salvation (Eph 2:1-10). That is the essence of the message.

7.2.3 Giving up on God

What happens, though, when God is removed from the moral framework? Do morals still make sense? As Nash (1992:60) asks after the manner of Lewis, "What conditions best explain the fact of human moral consciousness?" Does it really matter what people do? Will there be any ultimate consequences for choosing to live one way or the other? Paul gives some insight in Romans 1:21-25. He speaks of those who "knew God" yet "did not honour him as God or give thanks to him." Consequently, they became "futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened." There is a direct corollary between how people view God and the direction that their thinking takes. They can claim to be wise, but instead are fools as they exchange God's glory for images resembling created things. There is a moral connection as God gives them up "in the lusts of their hearts to impurity," wherein they dishonour their bodies, themselves, and others. This, Paul calls, exchanging the truth of God for a lie.

Likewise, in Ephesians 4:17-20, Paul speaks of Gentiles who walk "in the futility of their minds," being "darkened in their understanding." Futile minds, darkened understanding, and calloused hearts aid people in giving themselves up to sensuality, greed, and every kind of impurity. Paul affirms, "But that is not the way you learned Christ!" There are consequences, a price to be paid for giving up God in human thinking. From early on the Preacher of Ecclesiastes learned to understand that without God, nothing lasts. Everything is vanity, and people have to ask, "What is the point of all of this?" This is where current society seems to be, and this is why Peter could say (1 Peter 2:16), "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God." Understanding who God is and what human beings are helps people see that they can live free lives without using that freedom to do anything and everything they might otherwise desire. Lewis (1952:17-21) argues that this notion of right and wrong provides a "clue to the meaning of the universe."

While many would deny that their worldview makes that much difference morally, occasionally there are unbelievers who admit that their philosophy gives them freedoms they would not

otherwise have. This is not saying that atheists cannot be moral people. As Roversi (2015:2) says, "I've never argued that atheists cannot be moral." They can be, and usually they are. McGrath (2012:108) shows that "at a popular level, atheist apologists react with anger to such probing of their ideas, suggesting that it amounts to suggesting they are immoral. It doesn't. It's not denying that atheists have moral values. It's asking how these values are justified."

Believers and unbelievers share a common grace from God and have a spark of moral ought within them. The notion of universal morality[39] speaks to something deep in human nature that is not accounted for on the basis of raw materialism. The issue is not whether atheists are moral; the issue is that they have no ultimate foundation for arguing for morality other than what feels good or what society says. The problem is in the worldview foundation.

Alex Rosenberg (2012:96) presents an attempt at an atheistic explanation of morality. He argues that people are all basically committed to the same morality and values, calling this "good news."[40] He then argues that there are no right answers to many moral questions (ibid.): "Real moral disputes can be ended in lots of ways: by voting, by decree, by fatigue of the disputants, by the force of example that changes social mores. But they can never really be resolved by finding the correct answers. There are none." He later writes (2012:109-110), "Our core morality isn't true, right, correct, and neither is any other. Nature just seduced us into thinking it's right. It did that because that made core morality work better; our believing in its truth increases our individual genetic fitness."

Here is a worldview foundation that argues that there is no final standard of morality and that there are no correct answers about moral questions. Nature simply seduced humans into thinking "it's right" because that supposedly increases genetic fitness. Oddly enough, he also acknowledges that (2012:110) "natural selection is not very good at picking out true beliefs, especially scientific ones," that (2012:111) "there is strong evidence that natural selection produces lots of false but useful beliefs," and that (2012:112) "Natural selection sometimes selects for false beliefs and sometimes even selects against the acquisition of true beliefs." His view of natural selection undermines moral knowledge.

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[39] I realize that an atheist may well take issue with this. However, there are certain core issues that virtually everyone would agree upon. For example, it is morally wrong to torture an innocent child, and it is doubtful that few would disagree with that. To speak of universal morality does not mean that every single person everywhere would agree, but it does suggest general agreement on basic moral behaviors. In *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Sweis & Meister, 2012:174-190), Paul Copan provides a solid overview of the moral argument. C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* (1952) contains perhaps one of the best overall cases for the moral argument.

[40] Interestingly, this argument by Rosenburg helps confirm the "universal morality" argument. He recognizes that all are essentially committed to the same morality.

Another example comes from the prolific writer and atheist from the twentieth century, Jean-Paul Sartre. In his essay, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Kaufmann, 1975:345-369), Sartre's starting point, like Nietzsche years before, is the non-existence of God. He admits that the existentialist (1975:353) "finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven." He knew that such a position meant that there was no good *a priori* because there was no intelligent mind to think it. It was not written that "the good" exists or that people must not lie, "since we are now upon the plane of only men." He references Dostoevsky as saying, "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted," then said that everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist and that without God one cannot find anything to depend upon. This is why he says that the existentialist thinks (1875:351) that "man is in anguish."

Aldous Huxley (1947:273) spoke of a "philosophy of meaninglessness" as an "instrument of liberation." This liberation, he said, was from a "certain system of morality." He wrote (1947:272), "The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do." This persuasively states the problem of giving up on God. While some may protest their conclusions, the reality is that they were recognizing the end result of what happens to morals without God.

Examples and quotes like this from unbelievers can be multiplied, but this should suffice to show that the battle over the moral nature of mankind is still alive. The question to ask at this point is, which worldview provides the better foundation for understanding the moral nature of mankind?

7.2.4 Moralizing and the Gospel

The difference between Octavius and Caecilius on the question of moral behaviour stemming from religious action was their foundation from which they operated. A foundation for morality is vital. However, there are dangers of which Christians should be aware when they are having discussions with unbelievers. This has to do primarily with the gospel as it concerns morality. If one is only concerned with morality, just giving moral opinions about right and wrong, then the gospel might be conflated with mere morality or moralizing and abridged there. Discussions about moral issues can become political quickly, and some may then confuse political views with the gospel message. Getting people to change morally can be good, but this is not the end goal for the Christian seeking to bring others to Christ. "Social morality," Lewis (1952:78-79) says, is not about providing a "detailed political programme." The goal is to save souls and live in the image of Christ.

Biblical morality is needed because immorality, unrepented of, will only condemn (Gal 5:19-21; 1 Cor 6:9-10). Christians are concerned with being holy as God is (1 Pet 1:13-16). Moral failure results in sin, and all are guilty and in need of salvation. However, changing a moral stance is not where the saving power lies. Grace will never excuse sin (Rom 6:1-2), but moral perfection is not where the power of salvation is found. Forgiveness and grace come through the death of Jesus Christ, and no gospel message can be complete if the cross of Christ is ignored.

Christians are aware that they are not morally perfect. They know they need Christ and the gospel, and they know others have the same needs. They want to stand for moral values, but they also need to stand for forgiveness and grace. The gospel is needed because people fail and cannot depend on themselves to fix the sin. Octavius (Felix, 2016:52) proclaimed, “Miserable indeed is that man whose whole hope is dependent on mortal man, for all his help is put an end to with the extinction of the man.” Everyone is guilty of sin (Rom 3:23) and Christ’s grace is offered to provide forgiveness. This is the essence of the message.

The good news of salvation is spread when teaching that forgiveness, grace, and mercy is offered through the cross. Morals do change when people submit to Christ as the King, but merely moralizing to get people to change will not, alone, mean that people are actually submitting to Christ. The message is not a political one, but a spiritual one. Everyone stands in the same position before God: guilty of sin and needing his grace. Christians are not distinguished from the world due to sinlessness, but rather because they have given themselves over to Jesus Christ, who alone can save them from sin (Acts 4:12). If people reject the message of the cross, then moral change will not change their eternal outcome.

CHAPTER 8
THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL

The Octavius is about the gospel, and the gospel is inextricably tied to the person of Jesus Christ, so it is fitting to provide some background on the so-called historical Jesus quests. Thomas Morris (1986:187) writes, “Since at least the time of Nicodemus, people have reasoned about what should be made of Jesus. And it has been the most widespread view of Christians throughout the centuries that it is eminently reasonable to believe Jesus to be, not just a teacher come from God, but God himself incarnate in human nature.” This was certainly part of the Octavius discussion. In more modern times, Reymond (1990:2-3) argues, the “theologically ‘in thing’ is to contend for a Jesus who was only a man by nature and for a Bible that is virtually silent regarding the classical incarnational Christology of a two-natured Christ…” For about the last two centuries (Bauckham, 2006:1), beginning with modern historical critical studies of the Bible, scholars have been searching for the historical Jesus. Norman Geisler (1999:385) divides these quests into four periods: 1) the first or “old” quest, 1778-1906; 2) the “no quest” period, 1906-1953; 3) the “new” quest, 1953-1970; and 4) the third quest, from 1970 to the present. In this brief overview, the following are representative of the influences that have guided historical Jesus studies within the last few hundred years. These impact the present study because of issues raised about Jesus Christ to which Christians need to respond.

Uniform agreement on Jesus Christ has never happened. Even when Christ walked the earth, many who witnessed his works did not believe. The identity of Jesus was in continual dispute, and he had many enemies willing to stand against him. Many thought Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets (Matt 16:13-14). Others accused him of being in league with the devil (Matt 12:24). Some referred to him as a “deceiver” (Matt 27:63) and thought he threatened to compromise their political power (John 12). Due to his claims and the charges of insurrection and blasphemy, Jesus was put to death. His disciples, however, still believed he was the Messiah, the Son of God, and the only one who could save them.

In the early centuries following Christ, the period in which Minucius Felix lived and wrote, apocryphal books were written that provided various views about who Jesus was. Some told stories of his childhood or filled in gaps not addressed by the canonical gospels.

These works may not have intended harm, but they still offered a different Jesus, one who (Komoszewski, Sawyer & Wallace, 2006:153) “didn’t look like the one in the Gospels,” and who was not truly human. Perhaps the most famous Nag Hammadi text, the Gospel of Thomas has become one of the more touted sources of modern scholars. Most agree that it was written in the

second century, perhaps as a Gnostic text. The opening of the work says (Aland, 1976), “These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and (which) Didymus Judas Thomas wrote. And he said: He who finds the explanation (ἑρμηνεία) of these words will not taste death.” The Gospel of Thomas claimed to provide the secret words of Jesus, placing salvation in the hands of those who can decipher those words. As Witherington says (2006:28), this “sounds nothing like the historical Jesus as he is depicted in the canonical gospels,” giving statements of Jesus without a context, enabling (Komoszewski, Sawyer & Wallace, 2006:162) “readers to twist their meaning into any shape they desired.” Many other such documents are extant, such as the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Mary, the Acts of Paul, and the Acts of John. They contain (Komoszewski, Sawyer & Wallace, 2006:164) “fanciful descriptions” that “have nothing to do with biblical Christianity or historical Christianity.” These demonstrate that discussions of Jesus’ identity are nothing new.

Some ancients thought Jesus was not really human or did not come in the flesh (1 John 4:3), but modern critics are more likely to argue that he was not divine. The “first quest” in modern times for the historical Jesus began with a posthumous publication of Reimarus’s Fragments (Reimarus, 1879), which was translated by Gotthold Lessing. According to Reimarus (1694-1768), Jesus was intentionally considered a worldly deliverer since the Jews were expecting one. The apostles abandoned that intention and changed the purposes of the real Jesus. The result (Reimarus 1879:9-31) was that there was a divide between what the apostles thought and what later disciples taught. According to Geisler (1999:385), this divide created the “partition between the Christ of Faith and the Jesus of history” which “remains a core tenet of much of modern New Testament research.” The basic assumption of modern scholarship is that there is a difference between the Jesus of history and the Jesus who became what is in the gospel accounts.

The work of David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) in *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* was very influential. Following Hume, and especially Hegel (Noonan 1950:137), who, according to Geisler (1999:309), “presented a desupernaturalized view of Jesus,” Strauss denied supernatural aspects of the Bible and thought of miracles as being myth. He argued (Strauss, 1860:846) that Jesus’ death is well-attested, but not so with the resurrection. The notion of an historical resurrection grew out of a desire from the disciples to keep the hope of Jesus alive in their minds. What better way to do this than to invent the concept that he really did rise from the dead? He wrote that the event was (1860:852) “surrounded and embellished with all the pomp which the Jewish imagination furnished.” The gap, then, is widened between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Strauss believed (1860:867) that he “annihilated the greatest and most valuable part of that which the Christian has been wont to believe concerning his saviour Jesus…” These ideas were “irretrievably dissipated.” Strauss was largely ignored before he died, but later

(McGrath & Campbell-Jack, 2006:679-680), he "came into his own in the early twentieth century," when many of his ideas were taken up and used by those like Rudolf Bultmann, who believed that the gospels needed to be "demythologized." These ideas were a big influence in twentieth-century biblical studies.

Albert Schweitzer (McGrath & Campbell-Jack, 2006:643) "stunned the academic world in 1906" with *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. This book refocused the studies in the historical Jesus and presented (Ice, 1985:13) a "direct challenge to those who believe the historical is so entangled with the dogmatic that nothing clear can ever be known of Jesus, and that historical studies are otiose and must give way to a literary-imaginative reconstruction." Schweitzer (1968:2) believed the quest was "the most vital thing in the world's history." He did not completely reject historical theology, but his emphasis still detached Jesus from history. He wrote (1968:399), "Jesus means something to our world because a mighty spiritual force streams forth from Him and flows through our time also. This fact can neither be shaken nor confirmed by any historical discovery. It is the solid foundation of Christianity." He said (1968:401), it was not Jesus as "historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time…" The historical Jesus was relegated (Ladd, 1967:46) to "first-century Judaism and has no relevance for the modern man." These views made the historical Jesus irrelevant and opened the door to a wide range of views about the meaning of Jesus Christ.

Schweitzer hurt the credibility of historical Jesus studies. Rudolph Bultmann (1958:8) followed the lead by arguing, "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist." Ladd (1967:48) sums up this concept: "The place of God's redemptive acting is not in the events of past history but in my human existence, in my historicity. The gospel is not a recital of what God did in Jesus of Nazareth; it is a proclamation of what God does to me here and now."

Bultmann (1958:6) continued, "I would lead the reader not to any 'view' of history, but to a highly personal encounter with history." This "encounter" came through his process of demythologizing. Knowing the historical Jesus was not possible, so it was necessary to strip the Scriptures (Geisler & Nix, 1974:20) of its "legendary form and to find the existential core beneath it." Only then will Jesus' words (Bultmann, 1958:11) "meet us with the question of how we are to interpret our own existence." The real events did not matter to Bultmann, but rather having this personal encounter.

In 1985, under the leadership of Robert Funk and John Dominic Crossan, a group of seventy-plus scholars became popularly referred to as the Jesus Seminar. Their intention was to reach the mainstream public and, according to Crossan (1991:425), provide a "popular education about

the problems and difficulties, results and conclusions of contemporary historical Jesus research." The Seminar maintained the presupposition that distinguished between the Christ of faith in the gospel accounts and the Jesus of history. They declared (Funk, Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, 1993:7), "the church appears to smother the historical Jesus by superimposing this heavenly figure on him in the creed: Jesus is displaced by the Christ…" By voting on the words of Jesus using coloured beads, the Seminar concluded (1993:7), "Eighty-two percent of the words ascribed to Jesus in the gospels were not actually spoken by him." Once they removed the supernatural, they found what they thought they would find.

The point is to demonstrate that the modern academic context relative to thinking about Christianity is that of denial, not unlike the ancient context. The four Gospels are given little credibility as historical sources primarily because they contain stories with significant supernatural elements. Due to modern presupposition against the supernatural reality, Christians have an uphill battle to fight.

8.1 The Octavius and the Gospel

One of the reasons that people misunderstand Christianity, according to Octavius (Felix, 2016:50), is that people hate and condemn what they fear. Men's hearts are obstructed by demons who sow false information and spread fear so that once "introduced into the minds of the ignorant" there is a secret sowing of hatred and fear. He says it is natural both to hate one you fear, and then to injure one you have feared if possible. These fears and thoughts (ibid.) "take possession of the minds and obstruct the heart" so that people hate Christians before they even known. Once they know them, they would either want to imitate or, at least, not be able to condemn them.

Octavius argues (Felix, 2016:50) that it is unjust to judge what is "unknown and unexamined." Christians in the days of Octavius had themselves once been the pagans and "while yet blind and obtuse, thought the same things as you; to wit, that the Christians worshipped monsters, devoured infants, mingled in incestuous banquets." He recognized that he was once among those who did not think Christians should be heard and that torture and violence against Christians was justified in order to get them to renounce Christianity due to their heinous practices (which, in fact, they did not practice). By making the point that those who became Christians were at one time pagan and thought just as Caecilius did, he is able to connect with Caecilius and show that it is not reasonable to make charges against Christians that have been unexamined. Perhaps Caecilius would listen after all.

The Apostle Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 that the cross of Jesus was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. Hengel (1977: loc 576) comments about this, “The one thing which made Paul’s preaching the offensive ‘word of the cross’ was the fact that in it the apostle interpreted the death of Jesus of Nazareth, i.e. of a specific man, on the cross, as the death of the incarnate Son of God and *Kyrios*, proclaiming this event as the eschatological event of salvation for all men.” It is difficult to imagine how a Jew or Gentile of that day would accept the idea of a Jewish peasant from Palestine who was crucified as a criminal as their Lord and Saviour. That offense has lingered for centuries.

In arguing against Christianity, Caecilius (Felix, 2016:17) demonstrated great disdain for the cross of Christ, saying that some think Christians “worship the virilia of their pontiff and priest,” and “adore the nature, as it were, of their common parent.” Yet he admits that he does not know whether or things such things were false. However, suspicion is warranted because of the Christians’ “secret and nocturnal rites.” Then he references the way that Christians explain what they do by appealing to Jesus (ibid.): “and he who explains their ceremonies by reference to a man punished by extreme suffering for his wickedness, and to the deadly wood of the cross, appropriates fitting altars for reprobate and wicked men, that they may worship what they deserve.” The disdain for preaching about a crucified saviour was manifested throughout the ancient world.

Misinformation and spreading fear were embedded in Caecilius’ arguments. Octavius (Felix, 2016:52) responded to the specific charge, saying that by attributing the Christians’ religion to the “worship of a criminal and his cross, you wander far from the neighbourhood of the truth.” No Christian would think that way, for (ibid.) “Miserable indeed is that man whose whole hope is dependent on mortal man, for all his help is put an end to with the extinction of the man.” Christians worship Jesus because they believe he is more than a man, and certainly not a criminal regardless of how he died. There is more to the story that unbelievers were not understanding. This is an important point to grasp, for apologists today often are dealing with misinformation and misunderstanding of the gospel.

There is a strong contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God in 1 Corinthians 1. The cross was a central part of God’s wisdom in carrying out his plan, but this seemed like abject folly to the worldly-minded who could not see the greater purposes of God. The idea still appears foolish to the world. Unbelievers may mock the nature of the cross, thinking to denigrate Christianity, but this is not new. A crucified Saviour does not go over well. Some perspective helps, for those in the western, modern world have a difficult time grasping just how horrific the cross was, and it is important to see these quotes in a fuller context. In two different speeches of Cicero between 70 and 60 B.C., one can see what he thought of the practice of

crucifixion. In *Against Verres* (5.66), Cicero says, “It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen; to scourge him is a wickedness; to put him to death is almost parricide. What shall I say of crucifying him? So guilty an action cannot by any possibility be adequately expressed by any name bad enough for it.” Then, in his defence of Gaius Rabirius (nd:16), he noted how terrible the punishment was:

> “Wretched is the loss of one's good name in the public courts, wretched, too, a monetary fine exacted from one's property, and wretched is exile, but, still, in each calamity there is retained some trace of liberty. Even if death is set before us, we may die in freedom. But the executioner, the veiling of heads, and the very word “cross,” let them all be far removed from not only the bodies of Roman citizens but even from their thoughts, their eyes, and their ears. The results and suffering from these doings as well as the situation, even anticipation, of their enablement, and, in the end, the mere mention of them are unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.”

Coinciding well with Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians, Wright (2016:19-20) speaks to the terrible nature of crucifixion, saying that “very mention of crucifixion was taboo in polite Roman circles, since it was the lowest form of capital punishment, reserved for slaves and rebels.” The Jews saw the idea of a crucified Messiah as scandalous, a “horrible parody of the kingdom.” This would have meant that their national hope was being “radically redrawn downward.” To the non-Jews, it was “sheer madness.” Wright continues (ibid.), “The early cultured despisers of Christianity had no trouble mocking the very idea of worshipping a crucified man.” Caecilius mocked this idea, too. This is significant background for what is happening in New Testament times.

Wright later points out (2016:53-54) that the very word “cross” was not something to utter in polite society, and, “Those who crucified people did so because it was the sharpest and nastiest way of asserting their own absolute power and guaranteeing their victim’s absolute degradation.” If, then, it is true that “the shame and horror were part of the intended meaning,” one can begin to see what the paradox of proclaiming victory through the cross was so poignant. This was the death reserved for slaves and rebels, yet it was God’s choice to subject himself to these horrors as the suffering Servant.

Hengel (1977: loc 698) shows that the nature of the cross was so horrid that there are very few detailed descriptions of crucifixion, and “they come only from Roman times.” The gospel accounts are the most detailed of anything currently available in history. In fact, Hengel says, “No ancient writer wanted to dwell too long on this cruel procedure.” That should not be surprising, for it is never something that would make anyone comfortable. Nor should it make anyone comfortable. Even the Gospels simply say that they crucified Jesus without going into great detail of what all was involved.

Josephus, writing toward the end of the first century A.D., describes Jews being caught and crucified by Roman soldiers during their wars that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. He says (1875:731), of the procedure, that "they were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died, and were then crucified before the wall of the city." This was so "miserable" that even Titus pitied them. He writes that the soldiers (ibid.), "out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies." Crucifixion was devastating and humiliating, even to watch.

Seneca, a contemporary of Jesus (ca. 4 BC -AD 65), in his consolation to Marcia (Works, 1920: loc 7265), wrote, "I see before me crosses not all alike, but differently made by different peoples: some hang a man head downwards, some force a stick upwards through his groin, some stretch out his arms on a forked gibbet. I see cords, scourges, and instruments of torture for each limb and each joint: but I see Death also." Then, in his letters (2016: loc 6452), Seneca gave the following description, again important for understanding how they viewed their own times:

> "Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain, dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly tumours on chest and shoulders, and draw the breath of life amid long-drawn-out agony? I think he would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross!"

This description, according to Hengel (1977: loc 780), is said to be "unique in ancient literature." Hengel (1977: loc 1010) further calls the cross "particularly cruel." He continues (1977: loc 1028) to say that there is largely unanimity in the Roman world that crucifixion was a "horrific, disgusting business." Accordingly, there are few inscriptions talking about the practice: "Crucifixion was widespread and frequent, above all in Roman times, but the cultured literary world wanted to have nothing to do with it, and as a rule kept quiet about it." This is the world in which Christ and the apostles lived. They lived with the reality of the horrors of crucifixion.

Perhaps one can see why, in this context, the preaching of the cross was so offensive. Herein, according to Hengel (1977: loc 2343), "the earliest Christian message of the crucified messiah demonstrated the 'solidarity' of the love of God with the unspeakable suffering of those who were tortured and put to death by human cruelty…" The preaching of the cross was offensive, radical, and yet remains as the core of the gospel message. Hengel concludes (1977: loc 2374) that the "theological reasoning of our time shows very clearly that the particular form of the death of Jesus,

the man and the messiah, represents a scandal which people would like to blunt, remove or domesticate in any way possible." People do try to soften up the cross. Crosses are slapped on bumper stickers and worn as jewellery, but rarely, if ever, depicted as shameful and humiliating. The cross represented the worst of Roman culture in matters of crime and punishment. Therefore, Christians need to reflect (ibid.) "on the harsh reality of crucifixion" to help people overcome "the acute loss of reality which is to be found so often in present theology and preaching." How people view the cross, especially those who teach and preach, affects what they preach and how they preach it.

Caecilius thought Christians were "reprobate and wicked men" who, by worshipping Jesus who died on a cross, with the assumption that he was a criminal, were worshipping what they deserved. Convincing someone with these assumptions that the cross of Jesus actually has an atoning and salvific effect is never going to be easy. The challenge of Christians in the modern world remains the same. They must seek to persuade others that, while the offense of the cross is real, it is necessary if there is going to be any hope of anything beyond the here and now. The cross was not an afterthought of the gospel message, but rather the central feature of it, coupled with resurrection.

8.2 The Gospel in defence of itself

Christians should not overlook the fact that the offence of the cross can serve as an apologetic for the truth of the gospel. In this case, the Christian is letting the message speak for itself, and this is a preferable approach. Once again, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 serves as a starting point. Paul writes in verse 18 that the "word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." The Jews were seeking signs and the Gentiles were seeking human wisdom; the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles. The point Paul makes is that neither the Jew nor the Gentile could make sense of the gospel message based upon their own wisdom and efforts. The context of the day, in which even speaking of the cross was not considered wise, argues against any efforts to try to use a message of a crucified Jewish peasant being a saviour of the world. This is why, a little later, Paul writes that his message focused on "Christ and him crucified," not on persuasive words of human wisdom (1 Cor 2:1-5). Faith was not to rest on these elements that came from human wisdom, but upon a message that no one but God could have predicted within a culture that was so repelled by crucifixion.

The essence of the gospel message shows why this argument carried weight. A Jewish peasant, uneducated and from a small, obscure Galilean town enters into first century Palestine, claims to be the Messiah and Son of God, teaches with authority, works miracles, and skilfully silences his opposition. He boldly enters the temple grounds, teaches, and overturns tables of money

changers. Where would he get such authority? His enemies are the prominent Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. They continually test him, challenge his authority, and then seek to kill him. Consequently, they have him arrested and crucified as a criminal by the Roman powers. Three days later, his body is missing from the tomb and his disciples begin proclaiming that they saw him alive again. These disciples, who had initially fled the scene of the crucifixion, soon are standing boldly preaching the death and resurrection of Jesus, and willing to die for this message. Then that message soon begins to spread throughout the rest of the Roman Empire and thousands are accepting the truth of it, including a great number of Gentiles. As Brant Pitre (2016:190) notes, “From the ancient Christian point of view, not only was the tomb empty. Not only did Jesus appear to many disciples after he died. He also saved what is in many ways the greatest miracle of all for last. The Gentiles began to repent, and convert, and convert.” How does this happen?

Who invented the story of a crucified Jewish peasant from Galilee to be the crucified and resurrected Saviour of the world? Sceptics argue that the story is a myth and it sounds foolish, just as Paul indicated. In the late second century, those like Caecilius were mocking it and thinking that Christians were wicked for believing and following it. Wright (2016:20) again notes, “The early cultured despisers of Christianity had no trouble mocking the very idea of worshipping a crucified man.” How can a man who was put to death in the cruellest and most humiliating fashion be the victorious Saviour, and why should anyone follow him?

If the story is false, then pursuing its implications is a waste of time. The cross, coupled with the resurrection is paramount, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. If Christ was not raised then preaching is vain, faith is vain, the apostles (and others) were false witnesses and liars, and everyone would still be in their sins. Those who have died in Christ are just dead and gone, and Christians, whose hope would not go beyond this life, are to be pitied for accepting such a ridiculous view. There are many matters historically that if one is wrong about, would not matter or change anything at all; however, if one is wrong about Jesus and the resurrection, then nothing could matter more.

If the story is false, then faith is vain and any work done for the cause of Christ would be worthless (v. 58). On the other hand, if it is true, then faith is worthwhile and the detractors will be found in an arduous position. They will be without hope, lost, and eternally in regret. Perhaps this is why Paul would say that all of this is of “first importance.” This takes precedence over all other questions. While this point alone does not prove the case, it is not unreasonable to think that those who really are searching for truth would at least want to take the time and energy to consider, research, and study the matter in depth. More often, the matter simply gets pushed aside.

Where did the story originate? How does it spread so quickly in a world that would have been repulsed by the crucifixion and unconvinced that a man could be raised from the dead? Here are some basic considerations that need to be on the table:

First, the message of the gospel came to light in the first century. There is no doubt here. The story is said to be historical and that which was accomplished "among us," according to Luke 1:1-4. It is said to be based upon multiple eyewitnesses. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians within about twenty years of when the events are said to have occurred. This is known even among critics.[41] Where, then, did the story come from? Is the timing and way in which the story was spread more likely to be based on truth or legend? If legend, how did the story of a crucified Jewish peasant followed by a resurrection spread so quickly to so many people? What really makes sense of this? As Wright (2016:19) asks, "How on earth did something so obviously crazy or scandalous or foolish become so central so quickly?"

Second, the story would not have arisen within a Gentile community. Pagan Gentiles of that day would not have concocted a story about a Jewish Messiah being put to a humiliating death as a criminal, then arising to become the saviour of the world, especially to the Jews first. Yet this point would also argue against the notion that the story of Jesus was just mirroring pagan myths of the day. Caecilius, for example, does not believe that Christians are following the pagan myths of the time, which is one of his reasons for responding as he did. Rather, he is mocking Christians for beliefs that he considered to be against what the pagans believed and practised in their traditions. Consider that Paul, when he preached at Athens, was able to preach the resurrection on the basis that it was new to the Athenians (Acts 17:20-21). Some thought it was strange and they sneered at it while others wanted to hear more (v. 32). Why would they consider it strange and new if it were just a rehashing of what they already believed and thought? Why would the Romans later persecute and kill Christians if all they were doing was following the same stories and myths already well accepted? The facts simply do not support such an argument.

Third, if the story did not come from the Gentiles, then it must have arisen from among the Jews. The problem here is in answering which Jewish community would have invented the story of this uneducated Galilean peasant who in reality was the Son of God (divine) and promised Messiah who would liberate them from sin? Wright argues (2016:58-59), given that nobody "in that world would have been able to hear the word 'cross' or be reminded of someone dying in that way without feeling instinctively the horror and shame of the whole thing," and that (2016:65) there is no evidence that anyone among the Jews looking for their promised Messiah "thought that such a figure would suffer," one would be hard pressed to produce the Jewish community that created

[41] Evidence for this is provided in the following section on the resurrection.

this story. Why would they have invented the story of their Messiah who condemned their attitudes and then blamed their own Jewish leadership for his suffering and death? Further, to claim to be the Son of God was considered blasphemy, and it was on this count that they sentenced him to die. Then, to be put on a cross or stake was to be cursed. He was cursed, put to death at the insistence of his own people while his disciples fled in fear. How does any of this make sense of a Jewish community inventing the story? Add to this a number of “embarrassing” facts in the gospels that are unlikely inventions. For example, the disciples fought with one another, Jesus’ own family thought he had lost his senses, and the miracle in Mark 8 in which a blind man is not instantly healed. While these have explanations, they are, on face value, not what one would expect, especially if it is being invented to bolster Christianity. If it were invented later, then those later disciples were poking holes in their own attempts to get people to take their story seriously. Peter Williams (2018: loc 2156) writes that “There are many particulars in the Gospels that the authors would be unlikely to have invented. Although one can usually think of complex reasons why someone might invent them, those are not the simplest explanations. The simplest explanation is that these reports are true.”

If the story of Jesus were not to have come from typical Jewish or Gentile communities, then from where did it arise? It would not have come from the wealthy, ruling class, given the friction between this class and Jesus, and it could not have come from the poor who had no means or ability to write and produce the gospel accounts. The Jesus of Scripture is not the Messiah expected by any particular Jewish group. From where, then, does he come? This is the conundrum of trying to explain the gospel accounts with an assumption that they cannot be telling what really happened. They would have to assume that the story arose from within an isolated and even unorthodox Jewish community that was unlike the rest. Yet if that is the way it happened, what would explain the fast, widespread acceptance of Jesus as the one who died and rose again, and why is there no evidence of the alleged community that gave birth to the most influential story ever told?

In spite of efforts to explain it away, the story remains intact. The irony is that those details that make people think that the message is foolish and therefore invented are the same details that make it unlikely to been invented in the first place. The way the story is told is far more likely to support its truth. Otherwise, the critics would have to accept that a group of uneducated fishermen somehow worked in conjunction with highly educated Jews in order to create a myth that condemned all of them, gave them no advantage culturally, and, at best, created a false hope, just as Caecilius charged. Yet they were willing to put their own lives on the line for what they would have known to be a lie. That lie, then, becomes the chief cornerstone for creating a new movement unlike anything in history, and one which is accepted by both Jews and Gentiles.

Christianity is not founded upon a couple of private testimonies, but it is based on the public proclamation of what happened in public where many could see it and testify. Luke wrote (1:1-4) that the events could be investigated. Peter was confident enough in Acts 2:22 to affirm that Jesus was attested to by God through miracles, “as you yourselves know.” This is not how myth works. As C.S. Lewis wrote in God in the Dock (1970: loc 2010), “Now, as a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing.”

What is the best explanation for the existence of the gospel message? Paul’s answer in 1 Corinthians 1 still rings true. Jesus was a stumbling block to the Jews, foolishness to the Greeks, but the power of God to those who believe. The best explanation of the message is not that it was merely invented by those who never knew Jesus, but that these are the events that really happened. The reason that the Gospel is its own best defence is that it fits what really happened, while alternate explanations are found wanting because they have little explanatory value. Paul asks, in 1 Corinthians 1:20-21, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?” The wisdom of men would not have invented the story of the cross, but God’s wisdom is entirely different from human wisdom.

The nature of the gospel precludes boasting on the part of people. No group can come forward to claim that they invented the story about a crucified Messiah who turns out to be the Saviour of all mankind. God’s wisdom shines through the message, and this is what ultimately makes the gospel message so powerful. Only through the wisdom of God can people begin to put the puzzle together regarding sin and salvation. The only way it makes any sense is to start viewing it through the lenses of the entirety of Scripture.

8.3 The Gospel and misunderstandings

The Gospel of John, in particular, shows that the message of Christ is often prone to being misunderstood. There is a consistent theme of misunderstanding in John’s account. For example, in chapter one, the question about John’s identity showed misunderstanding, though John was clear in his efforts to point to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus’ teachings about the temple were misunderstood in chapter two, and his teaching about the new birth was misunderstood in chapter three. In chapter four, the woman at the well was confused about what Jesus was claiming, and in chapter five the Jews there struggled to understand his teaching about himself. The teaching on the bread coming down from heaven and eating the flood and blood of Jesus was misunderstood in chapter six, while in chapter seven there was division over where Jesus came from. Many misunderstood Jesus’ teachings about truth and freedom in chapter eight. Virtually every chapter shows that there are serious

misunderstandings about the nature of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus, and the meaning of the miracles. As Carson (1991:182) says in his commentary on John, “Irony and misunderstanding are reported in the Synoptic Gospels (*e.g.* Mk. 7:15ff.; 8:15ff.), but they are prominent features in John (*e.g.* 3:3ff.; 6:41ff.; 11:4–53…).”

There should be no wonder, then, over the fact that people continue to misunderstand Jesus and the nature of the gospel message. There are likely several reasons for this. Jesus argued in John 5:39-40 that the Jews whom he addressed searched the Scriptures because in them they think they had eternal life, “and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” There has to be a willingness to hear. In John 8:43, Jesus asked, “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.” In John 7:17, Jesus argued, “If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” Without a willingness, there will be no true understanding.

Paul taught, in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” This is a continuation of the context in which people thought the message of the cross was foolish and others stumbled over it. Looking at Scripture woodenly, flatly, and without seeing the connections spiritually, there will be no real understanding.[42] Forced contradictions and bad-faith interpretations are the result.

Why, then, was there so much disagreement and misunderstanding between Octavius and Caecilius? Mostly because Caecilius was creating problems that did not exist in the gospel message. In the modern world, the same issues exist when unbelievers distort what Scripture teaches in order to gain points rather than seeking to understand. Christians can be guilty of this, too. However, all of this stresses the need for Christians to know Scripture well and to be able to explain and teach well what they know. Many will misunderstand anyway, but the effort must still be made to reach out with the gospel. Knowing that many will reject it does not make it easy, but it must still be done.

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[42] Though hermeneutics is not within the scope of this thesis, I do want to note that connections throughout Scripture are significant for helping deal with potential difficulties, especially when it comes to seeing how the New Testament writers used the Old Testament. Graves (2014:53) notes that “biblical texts share a common historical trajectory in which later texts frequently refer back to earlier texts. This creates a great number of common themes and intertextual connections within Scripture. Early Christian thinking about higher senses served as a theological way to identify and organize these interconnections.”

8.4 The Gospel and the problem of sin

In the process of reasoning, explaining, and proving that Jesus is who He claimed to be, people need to be convinced that they are guilty of sin if they will ever see the need for forgiveness. The gospel will be better understood when people better understand the nature and problem of sin. This is not an easy task, for it requires that people have a basic understanding of what sin really is and why it is such a problem. It also requires a broad-based understanding of what Scripture teaches. People generally do not like to see themselves in the context of being “bad.” Yet that is exactly what must happen. The sick need to see a need for a physician.

If idolatry is worshiping something other than God, then all are guilty of it and it is still just as much a problem as it has ever been. One may make the case that all sin is idolatry, for in every sin people are putting self over God. It is the clay trying to take authority over the potter, the image trying to control the one in whose image they are made. It is exchanging the “glory of the immortal God” for the lesser images, even of self (Rom 1:23). Sin, therefore, is not simply doing something wrong, but at the deeper level it is seeking to change places with God, to dethrone the Almighty in order to create one’s own rules and seek one’s own undeserved glory. Sin forms idols of the clay and acts as if the Potter is meaningless or can be ignored. The mess humanity makes with the image of God in which all are made is the reason for the corruption and despair of the world.

Unbelievers like Caecilius would mock the cross, but it brings up an important question. Could Jesus have died just about any kind of death and would that have been sufficient for God’s purposes? Likely not, for then the ugliness, reproach and humiliation of the cross would, at best, be gratuitous and excessive. Why, if any death would do, go through the brutal death of scourging and crucifixion? Why would the death of the cross come at just the right time in history? Again, crucifixion was horrific. It was the most extreme punishment, which is why Cicero thought it to be so inhumane and unworthy of Roman conversation. Herein one’s human image is essentially humiliated and destroyed. Yet humanity represents God’s image. For Jesus, in Isaiah 52:14, “his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.” Why did it have to have been this way?

Crucifixion would demonstrate the horrific nature of what sin does. The physical destruction of Christ’s body essentially shows what sin does to the image of God in mankind. No animal sacrifice could have accomplished such a feat (Hebrews 10:1-10), for no animal was made in God’s image. The death of Christ is God manifest in the flesh, the one who is the exact representation of God according to Hebrews 1:3, coming in that image as a man and having his visage decimated. In doing so, he paved the path of forgiveness so that the image of God can be remade, reborn, and repurposed in human beings. Christians can be conformed to his image. This is why the

resurrection was also necessary. Death would not, could not, have the last word. Death would be defeated once and for all.

Sin first enters the picture in Genesis 3:1-6. The serpent (the devil, as Revelation 12:9 indicates) brought temptation to Eve and she ate of the fruit from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She then gave to Adam, who was with her, and he also ate. God then explained to them the consequences and curses that would come as a result of the sin. Sin is such a problem because it is a violation of the nature and glory of God (Rom 3:23). Humans are trying to take God from His throne and usurp His authority for their own. Satan told Eve in Genesis 3:5, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” To paraphrase, he was essentially saying, “You don’t need God telling you what to do; you can decide for yourself what is right and wrong. You can be your own gods.” This is why God cannot simply let sin go. His glory, His holiness, and His very nature is at stake, as is the image in which God made humankind. Sin is idolatry. If He did nothing, then it would be like showing that His glory and holiness mean nothing. This is not tenable for a God who is entirely holy.

Why would Christians need to persuade people that they are guilty of sin? This is hardly the most pleasant of topics. After all, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). As it is written and repeated in Romans 3:10-12, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” This is the state of humanity prior to and without Jesus Christ. Would this not make people feel badly? Will it not make them feel guilty? Will it not sting and hurt to know just how much they have offended God and marred the image in which they are created? Who wants to be persuaded of this?

The answer to these questions is that people must first appreciate the nature of the problem before they can appreciate the solution to the problem. One of the grand themes of Scripture is how God responds to the problem of sin. This theme is marvellous, full of grace, and culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If people are going to be persuaded that they need Jesus, then they must feel the sting of sin. When confronted by the Pharisees for eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus pointed out in Mark 2:17, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” If people do not know they are sick, they will not know that they need a physician. Convincing people that they are sick and need the physician is half the battle. People are sin-sick and do not realize it. As Guinness (2015:43) says, “We have sinned, and we need to repent and to be forgiven and put right. The effect of creative persuasion is therefore spiritual and moral, and not simply intellectual.”

A good illustration of this process is found in Isaiah 6:1-8. Isaiah first sees the vision of God sitting on His throne. He is overwhelmed by God's glory and holiness, and he responds by recognizing his own sinful condition. All it took for Isaiah to be convinced was seeing God for who God is. At this point, one of the seraphim took a coal from the altar, flew to Isaiah, touched his mouth and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." Isaiah experienced forgiveness of sins. He experienced God's grace. Isaiah was then ready to respond to God's commission to go preach. He was ready to serve only after he was convinced of sin and received forgiveness.

People need to know where they stand in relation to God and sin. "Christian persuasion," according to Guinness (2015:41) addresses "the human heart and what the Bible views as the anatomy of belief and unbelief." In understanding their sin, they may then be in a position to receive the grace and forgiveness from God. Only then will they be ready to serve in God's kingdom as God intended. Persuasion of sin will lead to their being persuaded that they need Christ, which will also convince them that they need to obey and serve God. This is a layered process.

In order to receive the blessings and benefits that come from fellowship with God, people first need to know they are not "good," but instead are guilty of sin. They are sick and in need of the Great Physician. The persuasion, therefore, is not about sin alone, but about how they can go from being sinners to saints and fulfilling their God-given purpose. Christ came as a man and suffered the extreme destruction of his own visage. He was then raised again to defeat death that was so destructive to his image, and by extension, to all mankind. Defeating such death and destruction paved the path not only for forgiveness of the sins that caused the destruction, but also for the renewal of that image in him (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). The culmination of all of this will find its completion in the final resurrection, wherein all will be restored. Through Christ, God offers forgiveness, purpose, hope, renewal, and eternal life.

To further help mankind realize how bad sin really is, God has shown this even through the writings and laws of the Old Testament. Some may well wonder why God would allow terrible things to happen. Reading through some of the stories of the Old Testament does make one gasp and wonder how God could be the author behind these accounts. Whether Cain and Abel, Ham and Noah, Judah and Tamar, or David, Bathsheba, and Uriah, and more, one wonders why these stories are there. Then, there are various laws that make people wonder how God could be behind it all. Laws surrounding how to treat virgin captives, or stoning children who curse parents, or how to treat slaves, or even the commands to slaughter nations will make people feel uneasy and repulsed. Why would God do it that way? Are these stories and laws proof that the Bible is flawed?

The truth is that people are supposed to feel that way when reading these passages. These remind readers of the problem of sin. Scripture is gritty. It shows why sin is a real problem. Life is filled with wounds from sin, and Scripture opens these up in full view. People will resist it. They do not want these reminders. Yet they are necessary in order to come to the solution that only God can provide. Christians ought to prepare themselves to discuss these matters with those who ask (1 Pet 3:15).

The Law showed what it was like to be under sin. It provided the best resolution apart from Christ, but it was not enough. The Law dealt with a corrupt world, but it still ended up being a burden that no one could bear (Acts 15:10). Though there were elements of God's grace and mercy, it was far from ideal. The Law was not equipped to deal with the full effects of sin, and so was "weak" (Rom 8:3). It was incomplete and pointed the people to something or someone much greater. A better way was coming. When people feel uneasy in reading parts of Scripture, they are feeling the ugliness of sin, which is exactly what Scripture was designed to show. The Law shows the despair of sin, not the solution to it (cf. Rom 6-7).

Scripture presents a broken world before it presents the solution. It cannot be well understood if people quit reading after seeing the problem. The solution was meant to come at the right time, and Jesus did. Until Jesus came, the story was indeed meant to be seen as incomplete. The Gospel was on its way. Scripture was given with a purpose, and that purpose is fulfilled in Christ, where grace and love are more fully demonstrated.

8.5 The Resurrection

Once people have been convicted of their sins, the door is opened up for them to be persuaded concerning God's solution to the problem of sin. This solution culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Whatever else Christians seek to persuade others about, the crucifixion and resurrection are front and centre. Paul wrote to a troubled church in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." He also said that the death and resurrection of Jesus are of more important than anything else (15:1-4). Not that Paul never dealt with other issues, as the epistle shows, but that every issue still needs to find the cross at its centre. Without the cross of Christ and the subsequent resurrection, there is no Christianity, and faith is vain.

Persuading people to accept the cross is a unique challenge, especially given that it is foolish to many and a stumbling block to others (1 Cor 1:18-25). To the believer, however, the word of the cross is the power of God, and this is why the believer knows that others need that same

message. This is why they want to share the good news. They know that herein lies true salvation and grace. While the challenge may have its mountains to climb, the need outweighs the difficulty.

The message of the cross is not about a political system; it is about a fundamental relationship between God and human beings. The kingdom of God is not of this world (John 18:36); it is a about being transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom, the rule, and the reign of God's dear Son, "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13-14). Trying to persuade people to understand and accept the cross is an effort to get people to see sin for what it is, to see themselves in need of the Saviour, and to submit themselves to the rule of the King who has sacrificed himself in order to save them.

The cross needs to be seen within the total view of God's plans and purposes. Isolated, by itself, it would appear to be just a death of a criminal. Many people died on Roman crosses in the first century, but the message of the cross of Christ transcends the first century into all eternity, for through His blood "He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12). The persuasive power of the message of the cross is not found just in a death, but in what that death accomplished and how that death was turned into victory. Perhaps this is why Jesus would say in John 12:32, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." The drawing power of the death of Jesus is in a mission accomplished for the sake of all humanity. It is a message of love, of grace and mercy, and of a commitment from God to provide life for all eternity to those who submit themselves to Him in faith.

The death of Jesus Christ was not the end of the work of Jesus. If all that occurred was death, then death would never have been fully defeated. The resurrection of Jesus, then, is the signal event that demonstrates the truth of all the claims. This is also the claim that is the most difficult for persuading others. Many will accept that Jesus lived and died. They see that the same as they would see anyone from the past; it is what anyone would expect of people who lived in the past. However, to convince them that Jesus rose from the dead is something else. Christians understand that this is difficult. After all, when it's all said and done, Christians are asking people to believe that a dead man came alive again. That's not something anyone expects to see, nor is it something that anyone living back then expected to see.

Since God does not want anyone to be gullible, He has provided for the repository of evidence to be documented. Luke starts his Gospel by indicating how his investigation included eyewitnesses. Paul, writing about twenty years after the events in question, says that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are "of first importance" (1 Cor15:1-4). He then lists a number of witnesses, including himself. One of the important factors in this Corinthians epistle is that there were those in Corinth who were denying the resurrection yet were apparently failing to see the

implications of what those denials meant. If there was no resurrection, then Christ had not been raised, and if Christ had not been raised, then everyone was still in their sins and faith was vain. Even in Corinth, those who were supposed to be Christians already needed further convincing of the truth of the resurrection.

Acts 4:33 describes the preaching of the apostles: “And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.” The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, so they were among the first to persecute the disciples. Yet opposition never stopped the disciples from preaching what they knew to be true. They were on a mission to persuade the world that Christ died for their sins and rose again to defeat death and reign as the Davidic King sitting on His throne. This same message is what Christians continue to teach. It is what the world needs. It will take persuading. It will take reason, explanation, and proof. It will take commitment and love. Resurrection remains the most critical message the world has ever known or needed.

8.6 Octavius and the Resurrection

There is a basic dichotomy here: either Jesus Christ was raised from the dead or he was not raised. In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul lays the groundwork for understanding the importance of the resurrection. He argues for an historical resurrection that is the basis for the resurrection of all. It is also the basis on which Christians may know that all the work they do for the Lord will not be in vain (v. 58). It stands to reason that the resurrection (tied to the death of Jesus as a telescoped event) is the single most important event in human and salvific history. If Christ was not raised from the dead, then faith is vain and people are still in their sins. The resurrection is the basis for the living hope of the child of God (1 Peter 1:3-4). The resurrection is also one of the most opposed doctrines of Christianity, and the Octavius teaches something about this as well.

Caecilius (Felix, 2016:16) argued that the Christians “do not fear to die for the present: so does a deceitful hope soothe their fear with the solace of a revival.” He supposed that this demonstrated the folly of the belief held by Christians in the resurrection. Yet what he really touched upon was the greatest strength of the Christian’s faith. Caecilius (2016:20-21) tried to show the folly of believing in the end-time resurrection, and he argues that Christians are “deceived by this error,” and as a result they promise to themselves, if they are good, a “blessed and perpetual life after their death.” To the unrighteous, eternal punishment awaits. Then his objection turns to the nature or resurrected bodies. What kind of bodies will they be, or will there be bodies at all? Will they be the same bodies, or will they be renewed? How can it be the same body if it has been previously destroyed? Will it then be another body? Will it be a new man who is born, not the former one

restored? These types of questions he asks are intended to show that no real sense can be made of the resurrection. Essentially, this is an argument based on ignorance. Because people cannot understand exactly how it will happen, then it is pointless to believe in it. There is no room given for trusting God to make it happen. There is no room for allowing that one's lack of understanding is not evidence against it. He further asks (ibid.), "what single individual has returned from the dead either by the fate of Protesilaus[43], with permission to sojourn even for a few hours, or that we might believe it for an example? All such figments of an unhealthy belief, and vain sources of comfort, with which deceiving poets have trifled in the sweetness of their verse, have been disgracefully remoulded by you, believing undoubtingly on your God."

Caecilius rejects the resurrection on the basis that it does not make sense to him. He cannot conceive of the idea that a body can be reformed. Interestingly, he does capture the essence of what resurrection is: a renewed body that is in continuity of the present one, yet different in nature. His objection also demonstrates, once again, that Christians were not simply mirroring the pagan religions. Caecilius is saying that resurrection of a person in time was unheard of; there are no examples of one being raised from the dead that he had known about. What Caecilius failed to understand, and what so many since have failed to understand since, is that with God such is possible.

Caecilius (2016:20) further characterizes the Christian's view of the afterlife as "old women's fables." He says that Christians believe they will again live after death "with I know not what confidence." They believe in one another's lies, and it is as though they had already lived again. He sums up his thoughts this way (ibid.): "It is a double evil and a twofold madness to denounce destruction to the heaven and the stars, which we leave just as we find them, and to promise eternity to ourselves, who are dead and extinct—who, as we are born, so also perish!" How can Christians, on the one hand, say that everything will be destroyed, and, on the other promise themselves eternity when people just become dead and extinct? One is reminded of Ecclesiastes 9:5. The living know they will die, and their memory is forgotten. Is that the end of all men? Is there really no hope?

The resurrection, then, like the crucifixion, can be a stumbling block for many. Once again, this is nothing new. In Athens, some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers speaking with Paul, in Acts 17:18, said, "'What does this babbler wish to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection." They took him to the

[43] Protesilaus was a figure in Homer's Iliad who, though slain, appeared alive, briefly, to his wife.

Areopagus and asked to hear about this “new teaching.” The true doctrine of resurrection was not their normal way of thinking.

Paul went up the hill and faced the crowd in Athens in Acts 17, where he was given an opportunity to talk about the resurrection and final judgment. This generated a mixed response, as indicated in verse 32: “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’” When the apostles were first preaching, they were opposed by Sadducees who, in Acts 4:2, were “greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” The apostles were then arrested and sternly warned to quit teaching in the name of Jesus, to which they responded in Acts 4:19-20, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” Many considered the teaching of the resurrection to be “new teaching” and “strange things,” which again shows that the resurrection teaching was not just mirroring what pagans had already been believing. This was a challenging new doctrine that both intrigued and repelled many.

In chapter XXXIV, Octavius (Felix, 2016:61) responds to the resurrection arguments made by Caecilius. He begins by chastising any who would be so foolish or brutish as to dare deny that man, as he was first formed by God, so again can be re-formed. This goes back to the nature of God. If God is powerful enough to make a man in the first place, he is powerful enough to make him anew. How can it be a problem for God to restore something when he is the one who made it? Further, how can one think that just because something is not apparent to “our feeble eyes, it perishes to God?” God reserves all things in the “custody of the elements,” whether they have “dried up into dust, dissolved into moisture, compressed into ashes,” or taken up in smoke. It really does not matter so far as God is concerned. Then, Octavius argues (ibid.), Christians do not fear losing one who has already died and been buried in the earth, for the consolation is that “all nature suggests a future resurrection.” How so? “The sun sinks down and arises, the stars pass away and return, the flowers die and revive again, after their wintry decay the shrubs resume their leaves, seeds do not flourish again unless they are rotted: thus the body in the sepulchre is like the trees which in winter hide their verdure with a deceptive dryness.” The “spring-time of the body” is coming, he says, which is why Christians wait patiently for God to bring it about.

According to Octavius, nature is the indicator that people should expect resurrection. Ultimately it is God who makes this happen, and why should that be something so hard to believe? This is similar to Paul standing before Agrippa and asking in Acts 24:8, “Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?” If one can accept the idea of a God who can create, what is the real problem in accepting that the same God can recreate, reshape, reform, and make all things new again? Caecilius, in many ways, demonstrates that the faith pagans had in their gods

was not something that they expected to see much from. He implied that not even they had the power to bring a man back to life. This is a major difference between the pagan deities and the true and living God.

The resurrection ties into final judgment. After all, according to Octavius (2016:61-62), many are conscious of what they deserve and consequently "rather desire than believe that they shall be nothing after death; for they would prefer to be altogether extinguished, rather than to be restored for the purpose of punishment." They are granted both liberty and God's patience in this life, which, he says, means that the longer God waits, the more just the punishment. Octavius argues (2016:63) for final judgment wherein the wicked are punished and the righteous rewarded with eternal life. Moreover, judgment is not based upon fate. Instead, the "mind is free; and therefore, man's doing, not his dignity, judged." It is not the star under which one is born for which he is judged, but "the particular nature of our disposition is blamed." This is why being poor in itself "is not our disgrace, but our glory," and if one is rich towards God, physical poverty is not a problem (one might compare this with James 1:9-11). Keeping innocent is better than being wealthy. Jesus taught, consistent with this, to lay up treasures in heaven instead of earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves can break in and steal; one's treasure is where his heart is (Matthew 6:19-20). Even the problems and the suffering that may come on Christians are not indicators of God's disfavour of his people, but rather a means by which there is a "discipline of virtue." God can and does deliver from trouble, and Christians will come out "as gold by the fires," which is an echo of 1 Peter 1:6-8.

Octavius (2016:65) argues that final justice belongs to God, for "God's soldier is neither forsaken in suffering, nor is brought to an end by death." The wicked will not fare so well, and, according to Octavius, perhaps the wicked have forgotten that God abounds in riches, flourishes in honours, and excels in power. Apart from the knowledge of God, "death must come." Christians, however, live with a view to the future (2016:68), for "Thus we both rise again in blessedness, and are already living in contemplation of the future." Christians have a living hope through Christ's resurrection, and this is what gives them the motivation to stay true and faithful even through the most difficult of trials.

8.7 The Apostle Paul's testimony

Scripture teaches in 1 Corinthians 15 that death is an enemy and that Christ has defeated death by means of the resurrection. Do Christians have good reason to believe in resurrection? The answer is that they do have good reason, and it goes well beyond the answer given by Octavius. Perhaps nature's seasons do point to a resurrection concept, but that does not make his answer easy or intuitive. Believing in an end-time resurrection is conditioned upon believing in the in-time

resurrection of Jesus Christ. Unbelievers have problems with the resurrection, and this is to be expected. It is also the one doctrine on which Christians must stand. Paul refers to the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances as that which of first importance in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Why do Christians believe it? That it has long been considered a strange doctrine is well documented, and Christians may even admit that it is strange, but are there good reasons why this has been so foundational for Christianity? Here the argument made by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 will be briefly considered as foundational to the case.

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15 is significant for making the case for the resurrection of Jesus. Wolfhart Pannenberg (1975:89), who defended the historicity of the resurrection, noted, "The historical question of the appearances of the resurrected Lord is concentrated completely in the Pauline report." Sceptics may relinquish the Gospels to late dates (which is debatable), but even if true, that in no way dismisses the report given by Paul. Paul wrote independently of the Gospels and did not need to rely on them for his information. Interestingly, if one were to argue that Paul simply used the Gospels, they would then have to admit that the Gospels were early. Pannenberg (1975:89) also writes, "At the least, one ought to accept Paul's intention of giving a convincing historical proof by the standards of that time." Paul's intent was to relay accurate information about what really happened. Pannenberg (1975:90) contended that Paul wrote with historical intent and asserts that Paul wrote "very close to the events themselves." If Paul's intent was to record what happened historically, and he made this record within, roughly, a twenty-year timeframe, then he had the witnesses who could have confirmed what he was saying. How likely would historians doubt other events with such strong testimony? That would probably depend upon their presuppositions about the supernatural.

Even sceptics agree that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and that he wrote it early. They agree that Paul wrote this epistle within about twenty years of the events in question. For example, Ehrman (1998:293) considers that 1 Corinthians is one of Paul's "undisputed" letters that can be "situated in the early Christian movement of the 40s and 50s of the Common Era, when Paul was active as an apostle and missionary." Funk (1996:259), of the Jesus Seminar, also dated 1 Corinthians to "around 54 C.E." and Paul's vision of Christ within five years of Christ's death, which, by his account, would be around A.D. 34 or 35 (1996:264). Crossan (1991:397), also of the Jesus Seminar, concedes that the "resurrectional apparition" was "summarized by Paul as early as the winter of 53 to 54 C.E." Marcus Borg (1994:105) dates 1 Corinthians to "around the year 54." Lynch (2010:44) agrees that the "generally accepted letters," which includes 1 Corinthians, "are the earliest surviving writings of the Jesus Movement, composed between 50 and 60." These sceptics readily admit that Paul is the author of 1 Corinthians and that he wrote the epistle relatively early.

Given that 1 Corinthians is authentic to Paul and that it is early and well-attested, there would have been many people alive in his time who could have testified to the events in question. In 1 Corinthians 15:5, Paul references the fact that Jesus "appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now." The events of which Paul writes were less than twenty-five years from the time of this epistle and within the lifetime of many who saw and knew Jesus. Ian Wilson (1984:142) commented, "The one incontrovertible aspect of this matter is the belief that Jesus had risen from the grave, whatever its origin, caught on very soon after the crucifixion and spread like wildfire. And it was embraced by an extraordinary diversity of people." Early attestation and widespread, diverse acceptance cannot be easily dismissed, for this does not fit the mould of mythology and legend. The evidence here, as Roberts (2007:68) argues, is that within about twenty years or less, "the early Christians were passing on information about Jesus" in a stylized manner, "which would have facilitated the accurate transmission of that tradition. Paul was delivering to the Corinthians the exact message that had been given to him earlier." Though the epistle was written some twenty years later, the story itself backs up much closer to the events.

What this means is that from the time of the events to the time that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, there was not enough time for legend theories to become so fully developed. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 indicates that the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus was already well in circulation before he wrote, which would push the time of the acceptance of the resurrection back even earlier. There appears to be little time at all between the events and the acceptance of the events by the disciples. The acceptance of the concept of resurrection was not as common as some might assume for the ancient world. Many Jews may have accepted an end-time resurrection (Komoszewski, Sawyer, & Wallace, 2006:255), but generally the ancients did not accept the idea of resurrection for a person in time. Croy (1997:37) points out, "as far as we know, no Stoic ever entertained the notion of the resurrection *of the body*." This can even be seen in Paul's exchange with the philosophers of Athens in Acts 17. The resurrection was considered new enough they would let Paul talk, and odd enough that many refused to believe it anyway. As earlier noted, this does not comport with the common argument that the stories of Christ were just mirroring ancient mythology.

Caecilius (Felix 2016:20-21) mocked the idea of the resurrection. He considered it to be a fable, yet his resistance to it also shows that the acceptance of resurrection of a person in time was not in any way a given among the ancients. Octavius spends a good bit of time answering such objections and, at the same time, showing the folly of the pagan religions. Christianity clearly differs from paganism. While many have argued for similarities, the difference between Christianity and pagan religions are far greater. In fact, it may well be argued that if any borrowing

was taking place, it was the pagan religions borrowing from Christianity. The mystery cults (Komoszewski, Sawyer & Wallace, 2006:237) “took note of the Christian movement and started to emulate it. Only after A.D. 100 did the mysteries begin to look very much like Christianity, precisely because their existence was threatened by this new religion.” What sounds like Christianity among the myths actually post-date the New Testament documents. Evidence shows that (Komoszewski, Sawyer & Wallace, 2006:255) the “theories that the resurrection was an idea incorporated into Christianity from pagan sources simply have no factual substance.” Eddy and Boyd (2007:208) state, “If we had a cultural context that was conducive to legend making, and if we have several centuries, or at least several generations, to allow for a legend of this magnitude to develop, the legendary-Jesus theory undoubtedly would be more compelling. But we have neither.” Monotheistic Jews would have been hostile to the idea of a truly divine nature in the Messiah or worshiping him. This is one reason they opposed Jesus. Yet the accounts and the acceptance of such so early shows that there was something other than mere legend at work. The question needing to be answered is, what makes the most reasonable sense out of all the data?

Paul’s belief that Jesus rose from the dead was verifiable by multiple witnesses. The documentation of this is given within close proximity to the events and given during a time when there would have been resistance to what they were being asked to believe and accept. Why, then, is there still such resistance when it appears that the timing and the documentation are sound? Perhaps the sceptical philosopher Antony Flew, a former atheist who did come to believe there is a deistic version of God, gives the best insight into this. In a debate with Gary Habermas (Habermas & Flew, 2005:71), Flew admitted the evidence was good, but showed the nature of presuppositions when he said, “miracles are things that you just take to be impossible.” Ronald Nash (1984:92) said of such presuppositions that they are not “conducive to an open-minded historical investigation.” If the evidence is there, and if presuppositions do not get in the way, then, to borrow from Paul, why should it thought incredible that God can raise the dead (Acts 26:8)?

The implications of the resurrection of Jesus reach far and wide. Is there any event in history that is more important? Believing that Jesus was raised from the dead is critical for the child of God (Rom 10:9-10), which is Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. If there is no resurrection, then Jesus was not raised, and if Jesus was not raised, then faith is vain. This was an awesome display of God’s power (see 2 Cor 13:4), and it is the signal event that gives hope to those who otherwise have none. This hope, Peter says in 1 Peter 1:3-5, is alive. Death has been dealt its own death blow (Heb 2:14-17), and this means that everything done for the Lord is worthwhile, according to 1 Corinthians 15:58.

The resurrection is the key to recognizing and embracing the Lordship of Jesus Christ. According to Paul, in Romans 1:4, Jesus was “declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.” Knowing this should convince people to confess Jesus as Lord, submitting their lives completely to Him and His will. Believers should be able to say, with Thomas, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). They should confess, with Peter in John 6:68-69, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.” The authority and kingship of Jesus is absolute, and this power was demonstrated by the resurrection. Once one is persuaded of this, everything changes. Caecilius himself came face to face with this very decision.

CHAPTER 9
DEALING WITH OBJECTIONS

Arguments are in the realm of ideas that are set forth as propositions along with reasons for accepting the propositions as true. One should expect that there will be counter-arguments made, objections that can either stand the test of truth or not. Dealing with objections is always a challenge for apologists, for there are many and various problems with which to grapple. Yet any persuasion will be greatly minimized if the apologist is unable to deal adequately with the questions that may be raised. While no one can guarantee that every argument will have been heard and weighed, one should at the least be prepared to deal with categories of objections.

According to Jensen (1981:254), the term *refutation* comes from the Latin *refutare* and means "to repulse, attack, weaken, destroy, block the claims of other people." This lessons the likelihood that others will accept the position if they perceive that a decent refutation is being offered. However, especially for the Christian, refutation alone is not enough. This must be accompanied by a positive case. Jensen again writes, "Since refutation usually takes place within a broad context of two clashing cases, actually, both tearing down and rebuilding, refutation and rebuttal, are constantly going on." Jensen (256-257) also points out how important it is to know the target audience, know the position of the opposition, and select the important material to refute. All of this is important for the Christian, who not only must deal with objections but must also present the case for Christ in a clear and kind way. This can certainly be a challenge, especially in a world that is more and more hostile to the message of Christ. How can Christians be prepared for this?

Repelling objections by using the methods of philosophers is, essentially, what some apologists attempt to do. Presuppositionalism, according to Groothuis (2011: loc 622), "limits positive apologetics to showing the logical coherence of Christian doctrine and relies on negative apologetics to refute non-Christian perspectives." For example, Greg Bahnsen (2007:144), a presuppositionalist, argued that while the believer cannot be neutral in approaching an unbeliever, the believer can, momentarily and "for the sake of argument," take the unbeliever's position in order to show the outcome of that worldview when fully followed. Using the methods of philosophers is exactly what Minucius says (Felix, 2016:68) that Octavius did. This also fits in with what the wise man said in Proverbs 26:5, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." Considering further the idea of answering objections, and using the Octavius as a model, there are some principles that can be practically applied.

9.1 Take serious objections seriously

Questions and objections need to be taken seriously as a standing rule. While there are some objections that seem to be a bit childish or naive, the first step in dealing with an objection is not to write it off, for it may not seem so elementary to the objector. One must give due consideration so that the person asking or objecting knows that there are real answers. The apostle Paul enjoins upon Christians in Colossians 4:5-6, “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” There needs to be a certain level of grace and honour given to the situation. If questioners know that they are being shown respect, they can take the answers seriously. If they perceive that they are being ridiculed, mocked, or simply not given consideration, they will likely conclude that there is no answer, and their scepticism is affirmed in their minds.

When Caecilius finished his discourse against Christianity, he challenged Octavius to answer. He tried to soften whatever answer may be given by indicating that there is always another side (Felix, 2016:24) and that hearers might be distracted by alluring words of the opposition so that they “assent without distinction to everything that is said,” unable to separate truth from falsehood, and unaware that is always a little truth even in the incredible, and vice versa. He continues (ibid.), “Now therefore we are anxious—because in everything there may be argument on both sides; and on the one hand, the truth is for the most part obscure; and on the other side there is a marvellous subtlety, which sometimes by its abundance of words imitates the confidence of acknowledged proof—as carefully as possible to weigh each particular, that we may, while ready to applaud acuteness, yet elect, approve, and adopt those things which are right.” There is a sense in which he is correct, but in another sense, he appears to be setting himself up for being able to deny whatever is said on the other side. In the end, he does assent to Christianity. Nevertheless, people need to be aware of their own biases in these matters.

Caecilius made his case and wants his position to be taken seriously. He anticipates that Octavius might sound like he is right because he may have much to say and might be clever in speech. When Octavius begins his reply, he does so with a sense of seriousness and gravity (Felix, 2016:26): “I will indeed speak as I shall be able to the best of my powers, and you must endeavour with me to dilute the very offensive strain of recriminations in the river of veracious words.” He further affirms, “I will not allow, I do not believe in, any chicanery.” He does believe that Caecilius has been deceived, “cast about by the tide, and tossed hither and thither among things contrary and repugnant to one another.” His interest in refuting what Caecilius argued is so that truth may be set forth and Caecilius may know it. He finishes this opening statement by showing how serious he is about dealing with what Caecilius said. He says there is nothing to be angry or aggrieved about, even if one should think and give his thoughts about the divine. What is wanted is not

(2016:27) “the authority of the arguer, but the truth of the argument itself.” If one is unskilled in discourse, that in itself is not a problem because what matters is the reasoning process not “coloured by the pomp of eloquence and grace,” but rather “sustained by the rule of right.” Octavius, while speaking straightforward and bluntly, does take the objections seriously and is eager to deal with them and show the truth. He is not interested in making himself sound good, in sophistry or eloquence, but simply in what is right. Christians seeking to know truth and teach others will always be eager to do the same.

Even with individual objections that may sound ignorant, Christians should not assume that the objector is trying to misrepresent and mock. The time may come to call that out if the evidence shows it, but that is not the place to start. Christians should assume that the questioner is legitimately looking for answers rather than trying to trip up and embarrass. Then Christians can provide the serious answers. If the objector is not serious, that will likely come out as the discussion continues. Proverbs 26:4 does also say, “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.” There does come a time when the discussion needs to end, if it becomes clear that the objector is not serious or will not listen. Jesus would say that it is time to shake the dust off the feet and move on. Until then, Christians should assume that they are dealing with honest hearts who want the truth. Following, then, are suggestions for helping the Christian deal with objections.

9.2 Assess the nature of the objection

What kind of objection or question is being given? There are a number of types of objections or questions, and the apologist must assess the importance and the nature of these. Some of these may be seen through the way that Caecilius argues.

An objection might be philosophical in nature. The first objection given by Caecilius concerns the nature of knowledge. He says (Felix, 2016:10), “there is no difficulty in making plain that all things in human affairs are doubtful, uncertain, and unsettled, and that all things are rather probable than true.” This is philosophical and deals with epistemology. He further states (2016:11) that “all men must be indignant” and “feel pain” that certain persons should determine certainty on the matters over which “philosophy itself deliberates still.” That is, since philosophers still wrangle over the nature of truth and knowledge, then what makes anyone think they have settled the matter now? The nature of the objection is philosophical, which would require an answer rooted in philosophy. Octavius (2016:27) recognized this and indicated in his initial reply that even poor people discover wisdom by paying attention to the “formation of the mind.” He implies that, sceptical philosophy notwithstanding, there is truth to be discovered through the reasoning

process coupled with “the rule of right.” One should never use scepticism to abandon all efforts at knowing truth. After all, if knowledge is not certain, how would the objector ever know it?

Another type of objection is religious in nature. Caecilius takes Christianity to task for their exclusive understanding of God, which dishonours all the other gods of the Romans. He argues (Felix, 2016:13) that Octavius should believe his forefathers and parents who taught him to “adore the gods” and respect all the local gods of the various places. Even the practices associated with these gods should not be ignored. Even though Caecilius did not think they could know the nature of the gods, it was still their responsibility to honour them. Those who do not do so are considered to be guilty of (2016:16) “folly and incredible audacity.” This exclusive nature of Christianity is often railed against in the modern era.

One of the most common objections to Christianity in the twenty-first century relates to this objection given by Caecilius. In his film *The Case for Faith*, Lee Strobel interviews former evangelical preacher, turned atheist, Charles Templeton. Templeton’s two major objections were philosophical and religious. Philosophically, he could not get past the problem of suffering; religiously, he could not get past the idea that Christians think Jesus was the only way to salvation. After referencing Acts 4:12, he says, “Such an insufferable presumption!” Christians need to understand the nature of such objections. How can Christians say that they are the only ones to know truth and have a reward of eternal life?

When Octavius responded to Caecilius’ religious objection, he did so by addressing the nature and unity of God, which has already been explored in more depth. His point shows that if people really understood the character and unity of the God of the Christians, then they would know that God cannot be shared with the gods of the pagan religions. He says (Felix, 2016:31), “Canst thou believe that in heaven there is a division of the supreme power, and that the whole authority of that true and divine empire is sundered, when it is manifest that God, the Parent of all, has neither beginning nor end…” The problem with the “many religions are fine” approach is that it divides God and essentially causes God to be many and contradictory. If God is one, and united, then there will not be all of these different paths. Certainly, the God of Scripture has no affinity for having his people be divided (e.g., 1 Corinthians 1:10-12; John 17:20-21).

Another kind of objection utilized by Caecilius (Felix, 2016:17) concerns the moral questions associated with the perceived practices and beliefs of Christians. This is a subset of the religious objection, but it flows into morality, which has also been considered. Christians need to be prepared to deal with this kind of objection, for unbelievers will charge God with being immoral, and Christians with being immoral for following an immoral God. Caecilius accused Christians with being lustful and incestuous, and with being vain and glorying in crime. For Christians, these

types of slanderous charges should come as no surprise, for Jesus warned about them and the apostles not only suffered abuse, but told Christians to ready for abuse as well (1 Peter 2:12; 4:1).

How did Octavius handle this type of objection? In one way, handling this is relatively simple. Since Christians were manifestly not doing anything close to what Caecilius was charging them with, a simple denial is sufficient, coupled with the efforts to teach what they really do and why they do it. If the unbeliever has a heart for understanding and is sincerely seeking truth, then this will be sufficient. Octavius (Felix, 2016:5-51) chastises Caecilius for such irresponsible charges, indicating that those who make the charges had never inquired into them nor proved them. He says these are the stories of demons filling up the minds of the unwary and ignorant in order to stir people up against Christians. These common reports are (ibid.) “always fed by the scattering of falsehoods,” but will waste away “when the truth is brought to light.” Ironically, as Octavius argues, it is the pagans who worship the beasts, offering up the heads “of oxen and of wethers” (castrated male goats) and dedicated gods mixed of goats and men or with faces of dogs and lions. While the pagans worshipping the beasts do not prove Christians avoided doing the same, once again it shows that sometimes people make false accusations against others that they are practising.

Another type of objection is the historical objection. While Caecilius (Felix, 2016:17) does not deal much in history, he references the death of Jesus on the cross and the concept of the resurrection both as being foolish and Christians worshipping what they deserve since Jesus was apparently a criminal. Octavius (2016:52) picks up on this point and seeks to set that straight, telling Caecilius that “you wander far from the neighbourhood of the truth” in thinking this way. While history can be difficult, it is still discoverable and important. If nothing else, the gospel accounts need to be accurately represented. Sometimes what people describe Christians believing is so far astray that there needs to be constant correction and appeal to what the text actually teaches. Since Christianity is historical in nature, the claims can be investigated as other historical events.

Christians realize that many will see the message of the cross of Jesus as foolish or a stumbling block. So much of this is based upon misunderstandings of the purpose of the cross, what God was accomplishing, and how God fulfilled these plans to bring about salvation. Often, the Christians must seek to correct these misunderstandings and show the true nature of the cross in the face of faulty views and portrayals. By assessing the nature of the argument being made, the apologist may respond appropriately. This requires listening closely and taking seriously the objections and questions.

9.3 Find common ground

One of the ways that Octavius approached Caecilius was by appealing to common ground. Octavius (Felix 2016:32-35) argues that belief in God was not far-fetched and that, in fact, most philosophers had agreed upon that. As noted, the apostle Paul makes the same kind of point in Athens (Acts 17:28). Octavius (1016:50) also appealed to common ground when he noted that Christians used to be unbelievers and held the very same views that Caecilius held. Because Octavius had been on both sides of the debate about Christianity, he says that it is unjust for Caecilius to "form a judgment on things unknown and unexamined, as you do!" Octavius says he and others have been penitent, and "while yet blind and obtuse, thought the same things as you; to wit, that the Christians worshipped monsters, devoured infants, mingled in incestuous banquets." He asks, "Do not you acknowledge that we felt and did the same as you feel and do?" Sometimes those who have been in the shoes of others can be most effective at reaching the ones they used to be like.

While finding common ground is sometimes difficult, it does help to place matters on a more level playing field so that there can be greater understanding. For the unbeliever, perhaps he can begin to understand that his own ideas about Christianity are not quite right. Believers might be in a position to understand what it was like to hold faulty ideas about Christians with their beliefs and practices. Christians can address the concerns from the vantage point of having been there, but also from now knowing the truth about Jesus.

For some, common ground may seem impossible due to the idea that God must first illuminate the mind to understand, since, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Is there common ground to be found with the unbeliever? Octavius seems to think there is.

In one sense, the common ground would have to be found in recognizing the ability to think. While unbelievers have developed, according to Paul in Romans 1:21 and Ephesians 4:17, a "futile" way of thinking in terms of their overall worldview, they can still be appealed to logically and emotionally (correctly done), to consider their self-defeating positions on the nature of reality and morality. Any evangelism or communication assumes that those being taught can reason, listen, and understand. If they cannot, then no communication is possible, and evangelism would have no real purpose. The assumption is always that Christians can communicate the gospel to a world that is sceptical while relying on God who can open their hearts and minds to hear. As Os Guinness (2015:26) says, "There are all too many people who do not want to believe what we share or even to hear what we have to say, and our challenge is to help them to see it despite

themselves." They may not listen, as the prophets of old often discovered, but the efforts to teach still need to legitimate efforts.

Whether or not the common ground will be found, Christians must still seek it. They might speak of their former experiences outside of Christ because they know what it is like to be lost and in sin. They know what it was like to rebel and stand against God. They can identify with the world in that way, then show why they came out of it and why others need to listen as well. Like Jesus told the man who had been dispossessed of demons (Mark 5:19), "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." Telling others what the Lord has done and how he has had mercy is something every Christian ought to be able to do because each has experienced it. The responsibility to listen is always on the hearer, but the effort to find the common ground is the responsibility of the Christian.

The apostle Paul shows this attitude in his efforts to reach others. He explicitly says this is what he is doing in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. He made himself a servant to all in order to win more people. He became a Jew to the Jews, acted under the law to those under the law, became like a gentile to the gentiles, weak to the weak, and so on. This point is summarized in this one statement: "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." Here was an attitude of finding common ground to the best of his ability so that others can be saved. The self-sacrificial attitude is vital if the world will be reached with the Gospel.

9.4 Define terms properly

Peter Kreeft (2008:123) says of definition that it is crucial to logic. This is because a definition tells what a thing is, "and if we do not know what a thing is," he writes, we cannot really know what to "predicate of it," that is, what to say that it really means. If that is the case, then there would be no premise for reasoning. Without definition, there can be no common understanding, and without that common understanding, there can be no communication. Without communication, there can be no preaching or teaching of the gospel message. Definition is basic to the entire process of discussing and understanding.

Terms are bigger than just words, and context is vital to seeing what terms mean. For Christians, definition is critical to an understanding of who God is, what love means, what faith is, what the cross means, what resurrection means, and so on. If these terms are not properly defined, then others hearing those words will assign their own thoughts to them, and discussions will likely go off the tracks. Even though the same word is being used (e.g., "God"), differing understandings

are being applied and communication does not actually take place. Many arguments derail on this very point.

Adler and Van Doren (1972:96-97) insist on the importance of definition by saying that a word can have many meanings, and if an author uses a word in one meaning while the reader reads it with another meaning, then "words have passed between them, but they have not come to terms." This makes for "unresolved ambiguity" and the communication process is incomplete and ineffective. For proper communication to occur, then, it is necessary for all parties to "use the same words with the same meanings." This is the essence of communication, and it is what they call "the miracle of two minds with but a single thought." Some may not think this is possible, but if it is not possible, then neither is communication.

This principle is of utmost importance to be effective, for evangelism depends on communicating well. Octavius spends a significant amount of his response in discussing the nature of God. For modern Christians following this model, they, too, will likely need to spend time discussing what they mean by words like "God," "faith," and "love" precisely because these are the words so often redefined and reinterpreted in a world that accepts, almost without question, that morals are not set. Discussions go awry when words are not commonly defined and understood. For the apologist who seeks to open the doors and offer the gospel, this principle is critical. They need to make sure they are using common words in the way. Communication depends on it.[44]

9.5 Correct the misunderstandings

If mis-definitions create misunderstandings and stumbling blocks for communication, then they need to be corrected and defined properly. Yet the problem of misunderstandings goes much further than just knowing how words are defined. Misunderstandings also involve concepts and

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[44] Even a child's book like Charlotte's Web shows the importance of understanding the same words in the same way. To see the significance of this, the full quote is necessary to follow the reasoning. When Wilbur, the pig, wanted play with the lamb, the following discussion ensued, with the lamb speaking first:

> "In the first place, I am not interested in pigs. Pigs mean less than nothing to me." "What do you mean, less than nothing?" replied Wilbur. "I don't think there is any such thing as less than nothing. Nothing is absolutely the limit of nothingness. It's the lowest you can go. It's the end of the line. How can something be less than nothing? If there were something that was less than nothing, then nothing would not be nothing, it would be something—even though it's just a very little bit of something. But if nothing is nothing, then nothing has nothing that is less than it is."

ideas that are played out in how people act. The Octavius is filled with Octavius correcting misunderstandings of Caecilius, who may well represent a significant number of the pagan worshipers of his day. Caecilius' misunderstandings about the assemblies of Christians, their love for one another, why they called each other brothers and sisters, and other matters demonstrated that he was speaking of things he did not understand. Octavius saw the need to respond specifically to these misunderstandings.

Correcting misunderstandings and false charges is normal and necessary in teaching the gospel. People have many ideas that can misrepresent what Christians believe and practise. While one should not assume that they intend to misrepresent, the reality is still that Christianity has been a misunderstood religion. If people are not purposefully misrepresenting Christians, then they are ignorant, and that is something that can be corrected if they are willing. Sometimes even Christians misunderstand and fail to represent properly what Scripture teaches or what Christians are supposed to do. The continual need to teach, correct, and teach again is not only part of the normal reasoning process (e.g., Matthew 28:18-20), it is what is found throughout Scripture. 2 Timothy 2:24 indicates that the Lord's servants must be quarrelsome, but kind, able to teach, enduring evil, and "correcting his opponents with gentleness." Scripture is sufficient to offer this correction, as Paul indicates in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, but the one doing so must still do so in love while being careful not to fall into the same pit (Galatians 6:1).

The nature of truth means that there can be a deviation from that truth. In logic, there are a host of what are called fallacies precisely because it is easy to go astray in the reasoning process and misrepresent arguments, truth itself, and others with whom people differ. This is why Christians need to spend some time correcting false representations of God, defining faith biblically instead of culturally, helping people understand the purpose of the cross, and so on. The Christian's faith is filled with propositions that are often misunderstood, and this should not be a surprise, for Jesus himself was often misunderstood. As noted, the Gospel of John has, as one of its main themes, the misunderstandings that people had of Jesus and his teachings. Apologists are simply trying to stand in that gap so that people are not rejecting Christ out of their own misunderstandings. Of course, not everyone will be persuaded that they are incorrect in their perceptions. Nevertheless, Christians must seek to correct these problems when presented with the opportunities.

9.6 Address the core issue

Arguments can go astray by focusing on the wrong issues. There are often peripheral issues that surround a core issue, and it is easy to get caught up in the peripherals such that the core gets lost and undervalued. For example, when it comes to worldview issues, every worldview has what may be called a "touchstone proposition." According to Nash (1992:51), this refers to "a

proposition that is held to be the fundamental truth about reality and serves as a criterion to determine which other propositions may or may not count as candidates for belief." If a proposition goes against that fundamental truth, then it must be considered false and therefore needs to be rejected. Now there may be a number of related matters that are peripheral to that proposition, but the proposition itself is the core that needs the real attention. Nash, for example, submits the following proposition to fit that bill for Christians (ibid.): "Human beings and the universe in which they reside are the creation of the God who has revealed himself in Scripture." Perhaps people can get caught up in trying to understand human beings better, or understand the universe better, or better express the concept of revelation, but the core issue remains the same.

When people object to Christianity, they often do so on the basis of peripheral issues. The apostle Paul said that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus are of "first importance" in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Since the resurrection is a core issue for Christians, that needs to be a primary focus. Sometimes people get caught up in the questions about the resurrection narratives and whether or not there are any contradictions in those accounts. While there is a proper place for studying the question of alleged contradictions, the resurrection can get lost in the discussion. An apologist might suggest that even if there were a contradiction (for the sake of argument), that does not change the core issue of the resurrection, for all the Gospels are united on that historical event. Licona (2010:67) uses the example of the sinking of the Titanic to make the same point. Some eyewitnesses say that the ship went down in one piece, while others said it split in half first. There were contradictions between the accounts, yet no one thought that the Titanic did not sink. All were agreed upon the core event. While there is a time and place to discuss apparent contradictions, the stress needs to remain on the core matter that all accounts are agreed upon: Christ died and was seen alive again.

Octavius spends time on two core issues: the unity of God and the resurrection. While he takes time to answer other objections and misrepresentations, he nevertheless addresses in more detail the core matters accepted by Christians. These are not peripheral beliefs, and they do get to the heart of why Christians profess to be who they are. Nash's "touchstone proposition" speaks of humans being the "creation of God." Octavius (Felix, 2016:31) speaks of God as the "Parent of all" with neither "beginning nor end." He argues strongly for the God of creation saying (2016:58), "Not only do we act in Him," but "we live with Him." As to the resurrection, while he does not talk specifically about Jesus, he defends resurrection (2016:61) as something that "all nature suggests." Through Octavius, then, Minucius Felix does address core issues of the Christian faith, even if in some cases he is not as specific as one might wish.

Rather than get side-tracked by peripheral issues, Christians need to stay focused on the core of the gospel message when they are seeking to teach others (namely, the death, burial, and

resurrection of Jesus). While there are a host of other interesting questions (like, what does 666 mean in Revelation?), most of the time those questions are not core to the Christian's faith. Not that they are never addressed at all, but when it comes to seeking to persuade others of the truth, there is such an idea as "first things first" that Christians need to bear in mind. Other matters will come in time.

This principle may also be applied to other matters like Christians having to manoeuvre their path through political arguments and striving to uphold morality in a fallen culture. While Christians always want to stand up for what is right and moral, it was earlier noted that there is a difference between "moralizing" and actually making others disciples of Christ. Christians can spend their time trying to make people be more moral, but that in itself will not save souls. Those who become Christians will be moral but being moral alone does not mean that one is a Christian. While bad morals will cause souls to be lost (e.g., Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 or Galatians 5:19-21), having good morals are not what saves. The blood of Christ is still needed for salvation and forgiveness. That is the core. The rest will follow when someone wishes to follow Jesus Christ.

9.7 Maintain a godly manner

Jesus Christ desires for his disciples to live in a way that they are lights in the world and salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13-16). This has the potential of leading others to glorify God. The apostle Peter made a similar point in 1 Peter 2:12, teaching Christians that they need to keep their conduct honourable "so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." Paul, also, wrote in Philippians 2:14-15, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." Specifically, to the task of apologetics, Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:15 that those who set apart Christ as Lord in their hearts are to be ready to give a defence of the reason for the hope that in them, and to do with "gentleness and respect." Christians are, according to Colossians 4:5-6, to "walk in wisdom toward outsiders" and maintain gracious speech seasoned with salt, "so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Christians need to maintain their concern that the influence they have remain as pure as possible. Even when slandered, they need to maintain their own integrity as they seek to find others who might be seeking God.

Maintaining a godly manner while answering objections and trying to persuade others of the truth is critical because it tells people how serious one is about one's professed commitment. If Christians want to have credibility, then they must not be quarrelsome, constantly wrangling, fighting and disputing. They must be seen as kind, gentle, and respectful. Those who will not be respectful are likely making it all about themselves. McGrath (2012:16) makes the point well when

he says that there “must be no mismatch or contradiction between the message that is proclaimed and the tone of the messenger’s proclamation.” He says that Christians ought to be “winsome, generous, and gracious.” If people are going to be offended by the gospel, then “it must be on account of its intrinsic nature and content, not the manner in which it is proclaimed.” He notes that it is one thing for the gospel message to be offensive, as would be expected with the nature of the cross, but quite another “for its defenders to cause offense by unwise choice of language or an aggressive and dismissive attitude toward outsiders.”

The conclusion of the Octavius shows that all parties were happy with how it turned out. Minucius, as a bystander (Felix, 2016:68-69), commented that he was lost in admiration over what had taken place. He believed that Octavius had “repelled the malevolent objectors” with the same weapons used by the philosophers. He had shown that the truth was both “easy” and “agreeable.” Once the facts are explained, the context set, and people are willing to listen, then the Christian faith may not be as insurmountable as they first thought.

Caecilius was forced to recognize how badly he had misrepresented Christians by Octavius’ responses, and was persuaded by Octavius. While he still had questions (Felix, 2016:69-70), his response was positive, and he rejoiced that he believed. Though he recognizes that Octavius was his “conqueror” in the discussion, he still considered himself a victor because he learned to be “triumphant over error.” He yielded to God and claimed for himself the way of life that he had previously rejected. When one turns from error to truth, it is not the person who has lost but the error that he had espoused. Everyone wins when truth is acknowledged by all.

While Octavius was straightforward and sometimes blunt, he was still respectful in the discussion and sought to persuade Caecilius, not by abusing and insulting him, but by dealing with the error objectively and promoting the truth. He patiently made his arguments and led Caecilius through the maze of difficult questions that had been raised. In the end, all were better for it. If Christians at any time are going to be successful in persuading non-Christians of the truth of Jesus Christ, they need to engage in conversation with respect and dignity. If they do not, then they end up making themselves the focal point and getting in the way of others accepting Jesus. As Paul wrote in Romans 12:18, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” This is the Christian’s desire at the beginning of each conversation.

Why do arguments fail? Just because an argument is made does not mean that it is correct or reasonable. Just because an argument is made that is correct and reasonable does not mean that it will be persuasive. There are many ways to go wrong in an argument and there are multiple reasons why people may not accept a legitimate argument. This is one reason Christians need to pay attention not only to the reasoning process but also to their manner.

What makes any position persuasive to another person? Is it just the bare facts? Is it the way the position is presented? Is it an emotional appeal? Is it all of these and more? Sometimes it is difficult to put a finger on why an argument works for one person but not another. Even so, there are matters to avoid when presenting a case. Even when an argument is persuasive as it may touch on the emotions, it might be persuasive for the wrong reasons. An illogical argument may still persuade someone. In that sense, persuasion is not itself tied to good argumentation or even truth. Christians, however, want to be persuasive using solid reasoning and truth. Understanding how to approach objections can go far in trying to reason with people who yet have not been convinced.

CHAPTER 10
CONCLUSION

The premise of this thesis has been that the Octavius of Minucius Felix is a tool for modern day Christians as they strive to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are many ways in which Christians can seek to defend the Gospel, yet here is this lesser known ancient work of a Latin apologist who helps give some perspective not only to the types of misinformation and faulty charges to which Christians were subjected in the early years, but also what types of topics and answers might be formulated in every era since. The Octavius, in this light, becomes a practical work that is informative for helping modern apologetics because, while a product of its time, it is timeless in its methods and basic foundational issues discussed therein.

Because there has been comparatively little written about the Octavius over the years, this current focus may seem new to many people who might not have read or heard of it. People are much more likely to have heard of Tertullian, though the reading of the Patristics is not something that is often stressed. There can be a benefit to the newness because it can give some fresh perspective on topics and issues that are centuries old. Perhaps there is some irony to that, but this little volume, as old as it is, can be seen in a newer, practical light. Christians are often looking for new ways to approach old subjects, and though this is old, because it is not as known it can some important insights.

There are still some unknowns about the Octavius. Whether the contents of the Octavius were actually witnessed by Minucius Felix or whether he was using a rhetorical story to make his points is unknown. It is also still unresolved whether Minucius wrote prior to or after Tertullian. However, neither of these matters are critical to the practical nature of this thesis. The point was to consider the content itself to see how practical it can be for the modern apologist trying to defend the Gospel. That task is independent of the unknowns, so the focus has been on the practical value. Even so, there has been consideration of works, like Cicero and Tertullian, and philosophies, like Stoicism, that are readily apparent in the Octavius. The Octavius was not born in a vacuum but was very much a product of its own time and culture. That feature is part of what makes it a valuable resource, for every era of Christianity will be influenced by its current culture, and knowing how to weave through the worldviews of one's time is important for every era.

The art of persuasion has also been considered in some detail. After all, the Octavius is about persuasion. It is about a pagan trying to persuade a Christian that Christianity is not worthy of accepting, and then it is about a Christian answering the objections and persuading the pagan of the truth of Christianity. Truthfully, that is what evangelism is about, and if apologetics can be

seen as a subset of evangelism, then the practical value of what the Octavius addresses can be appreciated.

A major facet of apologetics as seen in the Octavius is the role of presuppositions. Overstating the importance of recognizing presuppositions and biases when seeking to persuade another of a particular position would be difficult. People bring so much to the table of discussion, and if they are not willing to be honest about that, the discussion cannot move forward in any meaningful way. Christians, too, need to recognize their own presuppositions and enter the discussion with full disclosure. There is no real hiding who Christians are and what they want to accomplish in missions and evangelism, for trying to do so would only backfire and destroy credibility. Presuppositions are a necessary part of how people think, but they can be dangerous if not acknowledged and occasionally challenged. The Octavius helps people see what presuppositions can do in a discussion.

Part of the presupposition puzzle is the nature of worldviews. In many ways, the use of the Octavius to help with modern efforts is a nod to what some might call worldview apologetics. Focusing on worldviews has become an important way for some to get to the core and heart of an issue and keep from getting side-tracked into peripheral matters. Worldviews are foundational and everyone has one. However, not everyone thinks seriously about them, which ignores a vital part of who people are as human beings.

Common to worldview issues are the questions about who God is, who man is, how people know anything, and why people should be moral. The Octavius addresses all of these issues as major components of the work, so it was important in this thesis to consider these subjects in more depth. Christians may find occasions in which they can talk with others about these matters and knowing how to address them as worldview questions can be beneficial. Included in this discussion are the nature of Christianity and the nature of the gospel because, again, Minucius was defending these as the heart of his message. These have been placed in the midst of the worldview discussion because they fit the same pattern as the other questions. Everyone will have a view of Christianity and the Gospel through a worldview lens that makes them more or less palatable. How, then, can modern day Christians utilize what the Octavius does in order to help their own defence?

Finally, there are some suggestions in a summary chapter on dealing with objections. Christians can learn to stay focused, stay on topic, and reasonably handle objections that will come their way. They need patience, willingness, and perseverance as they work to help others come through the painful process of changing their own worldviews. Christians, then, can consider the Octavius to be one more important tool in their toolbox of apologetics. At the least, people should

be familiar with what the work is about and why it is important less than two hundred years after Jesus Christ.

In order to emphasize the practical nature of what the Octavius shows, the following conclusions may be safely drawn:

Christians ought to be open to investigation and offer others the opportunity to investigate both the nature of biblical Christianity and the nature of the Author of it, Jesus Christ. There is no reason why Christians should fear talking to others about Jesus Christ. Truth has nothing to fear from being investigated, and since Christianity is a religion that is supposed to be historical in nature, then it is also a religion that can be investigated.

Christians ought to be willing to listen. The Octavius, while a dialogue, is not structured as a formal debate. Rather, one party speaks and makes his argument while one listens, then the other takes his turn. It might have been tempting for Octavius to interrupt Caecilius in order to jump right on a particular argument, but he does not do so. Octavius is patient while Caecilius makes his faulty charges and outlandish statements. When Caecilius stopped of his own accord, only then did Octavius start addressing the arguments. Christians need to be patient as they listen to others so that they can address the real arguments.

Christians should learn the truth well enough to teach it and then be willing to answer faulty charges. Being patient through listening to the charges is part of that process, but it takes more than patience. It takes knowledge of the Scriptures, knowledge of God, and knowledge of the times and culture in which one lives. By studying worldview categories, Christians can learn the types of arguments that they will face, then try to address the issues from the ground up, starting foundationally with the core arguments. Especially if they know well the truth with respect to the gospel and the Scriptures, they will be able to spot the counterfeits and the straw men that they will have to face.

Christians should be willing to show that the truth of Christianity is not some outlandish myth but is the essence of reason and is agreeable to the nature of philosophy. As Minucius praised what Octavius did, he recognized that the nature of the truth was agreeable and easy. Christians do not need to make the truth abrasive. The gospel is its own best apologetic, as argued, and Christians need to get themselves out of the way so they are not stumbling blocks. Christians can show the reasonableness of the gospel message by appealing to its nature. The gospel is not the result of myths that were told over time but is a product of the very people who make the claims. Christians can show that this is the reasonable view to hold, and perhaps in so doing persuade others of the same.

Christians should look for ways to find the common ground with others. Octavius did this through his appeal to philosophy. He also did this by showing that he had been a pagan at one time and so he knew well the arguments coming from the other side. As Paul the apostle was willing to become all things to all people in order to increase the chances of reaching them, so Christians today can learn from Octavius and Paul before him to seek out common ground when answering objectors. There is an underlying principle here that the objectors are not the enemies. Octavius blamed the demons, and there is truth to the fact that the Christian's real enemy is not the other person who is objecting, but rather the principalities and powers in the heavenliness who stand against God (Ephesians 6:12). The real battle is against the devil who will do all he can to confuse and use the unwary to push his agenda.

Christians should stay focused on the gospel and not allow the discussions to be derailed into areas that will not be helpful to anyone listening. Octavius went through the points that were made by Caecilius and answered them without getting terribly side-tracked with other matters. There is a certain focus shown by Octavius that keeps him from rambling about unrelated issues and losing the train of thought. The writer of Hebrews said (Hebrews 12:3) that Christians are to be fixing their eyes on Jesus, and this is true both in running the race, per the context of Hebrews, and in teaching others about Jesus whether with the use of apologetic tools or not. By letting the core issues remain the core issues and then redirecting discussions getting off based back to the foundational core, Christians can keep the conversations headed in right direction.

Because of the lessons learned, the subject matter addressed, and approach used, the Octavius of Minucius Felix is a solid tool for modern Christians in their defence of the gospel. Modern Christians may not find the same exact objections made, but there is enough similarity that the value is still present. The idolatry of the Roman Empire ceased a long time ago, but the idolatries of the modern world are in full force. It is doubtful today that Christians will be charged with the same crimes that early Christians were charged with, but modern Christians still face false charges and need to stand for what is right. The specifics are not so much the issue as much as the foundational principles that underlie specifics of each generation. By becoming familiar with how worldviews handle major questions of God, humanity, knowledge, morals, Christianity, and the gospel, Christians of any generation can face their own particulars with a sense of confidence and resolve. One is commended, then, to read the Octavius of Minucius Felix in a practical light in order to see that, while the specifics change, the foundations remain the same over time.

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