

Baker Encyclopedia Christian Apologetics

Apologetics, Argument of. There are many types of apologetics (see [APOLOGETICS, TYPES OF](#)). But according to classical apologetics, there are certain logical steps in the overall argument in defense of the Christian faith. Since each step is treated in detail in other articles, only the logic of the argument will be sketched here.

The Steps. The overall argument in defense of the Christian Faith can be put in twelve basic propositions. They flow logically one from another:

1. Truth about reality is knowable (see [TRUTH, NATURE OF](#); [AGNOSTICISM](#)).
2. Opposites cannot both be true (see [FIRST PRINCIPLES](#); [LOGIC](#)).
3. The theistic (see [THEISM](#)) God exists (see [GOD, EVIDENCE FOR](#)).
4. Miracles are possible (see [MIRACLE](#)).
5. Miracles performed in connection with a truth claim are acts of God to confirm the truth of God through a messenger of God (see [MIRACLES AS CONFIRMATION OF TRUTH](#); [MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF](#)).
6. The New Testament documents are reliable (see [NEW TESTAMENT, DOCUMENTS, MANUSCRIPTS](#); [NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF](#); [NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS](#)).
7. As witnessed in the New Testament, Jesus claimed to be God (see [CHRIST, DEITY OF](#)).
8. Jesus' claim to divinity was proven by an unique convergence of miracles (see [MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE](#)).
9. Therefore, Jesus was God in human flesh.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) affirmed as true, is true (see [GOD, NATURE OF](#)).
11. Jesus affirmed that the Bible is the Word of God (see [BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR](#); [BIBLE, JESUS' VIEW OF](#)).
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the Word of God and whatever is opposed to any biblical truth is false (see [WORLD RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY](#); [PLURALISM, RELIGIOUS](#)).

The Application. If a theistic God exists and miracles are possible and Jesus is the Son of God and the Bible is the Word of God, then it follows that orthodox Christianity is true. All other essential orthodox doctrines, such as the Trinity, Christ's atonement for sin, the physical resurrection, and Christ's second coming, are taught in the Bible. Since all these conditions are supported by good evidence, it follows that there is good evidence for concluding that orthodox Christianity is true.

And since mutually exclusive propositions cannot both be true (see [LOGIC](#)), then all opposing world religions are false religions (see [WORLD RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY](#)). That is, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and other religions are false insofar as they oppose the teachings of Christianity (see articles related to [ISLAM](#); [MONISM](#); [ZEN BUDDHISM](#)). Therefore, only Christianity is the true religion (see [PLURALISM](#)).

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Apologetics, Classical. See [CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS](#).

Apologetics, Experiential. See [EXPERIENTIAL APOLOGETICS](#).

Apologetics, Historical. See [HISTORICAL APOLOGETICS](#).

Apologetics, Need for. *Apologetics* is the discipline that deals with a rational defense of Christian faith. It comes from the Greek word *apologia* which means to give a reason or defense. In spite of the objections to doing apologetics in this sense from fideists and some presuppositionalists (see [FIDEISM](#); [PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS](#)), there are important reasons to participate in the work of apologetics.

God Commands It. The most important reason to do apologetics is that God told us to do so. The classic statement is [1 Peter 3:15](#), which says, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” This verse tells us to be ready. We may never run across someone who asks tough questions about our faith, but we should still be ready to respond if someone does. Being ready is not just a matter of having the right information available, it is also an attitude of readiness and eagerness to share the truth of what we believe. We are to give a reason to those who ask the questions. It is not expected that everyone needs pre-evangelism, but when they do need it, we must be able and willing to give them an answer.

This command also links the work of pre-evangelism with Christ’s place as Lord in our hearts. If he is really Lord, then we should be obedient to him as “we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” ([2 Cor. 10:5](#)). This means we should confront issues in our own minds and in the expressed thoughts of others that prevent us and them from knowing God. That is what apologetics is all about.

In [Philippians 1:7](#) Paul speaks of his mission as “defending and confirming the gospel.” He adds in verse [16](#), “I am put here for the defense of the gospel.” This implies that the defender of the gospel is out where he or she can encounter others and defend truth.

[Jude 3](#) adds, “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and *urge you to contend for the faith* that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” The people Jude addressed had been assaulted by false teachers, and he needed to encourage them to protect (literally agonize for) the faith as it had been revealed through Christ. Jude makes a significant statement about our attitude in verse [22](#), that we “have mercy on some, who are doubting.”

[Titus 1:9](#) makes knowledge of Christian evidences a requirement for church leadership. An elder in the church should “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and *refute those who oppose it*.” Paul also gives us an indication of our attitude in this work in [2 Timothy 2:24–25](#): “And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. *Those who oppose him he must gently instruct*, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.” Anyone attempting to answer the questions of unbelievers will surely be wronged and be tempted to lose patience, but our ultimate goal is that they might come to a knowledge of the truth that Jesus has died for their sins. With so important a task at hand, we must not neglect obedience to this command.

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Reason Demands It. God created humans to reason as part of his image ([Gen. 1:27](#); cf. [Col. 3:10](#)). Indeed, it is by reasoning that humans are distinguished from “brute beasts” ([Jude 10](#)). God calls upon his people to use reason ([Isa. 1:18](#)) to discern truth from error ([1 John 4:6](#)) and right from wrong ([Heb. 5:14](#)). A fundamental principle of reason is that it should give sufficient grounds for belief. An unjustified belief is just that—unjustified (see [FAITH AND REASON](#)).

Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” He surely would have been willing to add that the unexamined belief is not worth believing. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Christians to give a reason for their hope. This is part of the great command to love God with all our mind, as well as our heart and soul ([Matt. 22:36–37](#)).

The World Needs It. People rightly refuse to believe without evidence. Since God created humans as rational beings, he expects them to live rationally, to look before they leap. This does not mean there is no room for faith. But God wants us to take a step of faith in the light of evidence, rather than to leap in the dark.

Evidence of truth should precede faith. No rational person steps in a elevator without some reason to believe it will hold him up. No reasonable person gets on an airplane that is missing part of one wing and smells of smoke in the cabin. People deal in two dimensions of belief: *belief that* and *belief in*. *Belief that* gives the evidence and rational basis for confidence needed to establish *belief in*. Once *belief that* is established, one can place faith *in* it. Thus, the rational person wants evidence that God exists before he places his faith in God. Rational unbelievers want evidence that Jesus is the Son of God before they place their trust in him (see [CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS](#)).

Objections to Apologetics. The most frequent opposition to apologetics is raised by mystics and other experientialists (see [EXPERIENTIAL APOLOGETICS](#)). Fideists (see [FIDEISM](#)) and some presuppositionalists also raise objections of two basic kinds: biblical and from outside Scripture. An apologist for apologetics can see in the Scripture texts usually quoted against the work some misunderstandings or misapplications, which do not really show apologetics to be unnecessary.

Objections to Apologetics from the Bible. The Bible does not need to be defended. One objection often made is that the Bible does not need to be defended; it simply needs to be expounded. “The Word of God is alive and powerful” ([Heb. 4:12](#)). It is said that the Bible is like a lion; it does not need to be defended but simply let loose. A lion can defend itself.

This begs the question as to whether the Bible is the Word of God. Of course, God’s Word is ultimate and speaks for itself. But how do we know the Bible, as opposed to the *Qur’an* or the *Book of Mormon*, is the Word of God? One must appeal to evidence to determine this. No Christian would accept a Muslim’s statement that “the *Qur’an* is alive and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword.” We would demand evidence (see [BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR](#)).

The analogy of the lion is misleading. A roar of a lion “speaks for itself” with authority only because we know from previous evidence what a lion can do. Without tales of woe about a lion’s ferocity, its roar would not have authority. Likewise, without evidence to establish one’s claim to authority, there is no good reason to accept that authority.

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God can't be known by human reason. The apostle Paul wrote, "the world by wisdom knew not God" ([1 Cor. 1:21](#) KJV). This cannot mean that there is no evidence for God's existence, however, since Paul declared in Romans that the evidence for God's existence is so "plain" as to render "without excuse" one who has never heard the gospel ([Rom. 1:19–20](#)). Further, the context in 1 Corinthians is not God's existence but his plan of salvation through the cross. This cannot be known by mere human reason, but only by divine revelation. It is "foolish" to the depraved human mind. Finally, in this very book of 1 Corinthians Paul gives his greatest apologetic evidence for the Christian Faith—the eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Christ which his companion Luke called "many infallible proofs" ([Acts 1:3](#) NKJV). So his reference to the world by wisdom not knowing God is not a reference to the inability of human beings to know God through the evidence he has revealed in creation ([Rom. 1:19–20](#)) and conscience ([Rom. 2:12–15](#)). Rather, it is a reference to human depravity and foolish rejection of the message of the cross. Indeed, even though humankind knows clearly through human reason that God exists, nevertheless, he "suppresses" or "holds down" this truth in unrighteousness ([Rom. 1:18](#)).

Natural humanity can't understand. Paul insisted that "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God" ([1 Cor. 2:14](#)). What use, then, is apologetics? In response to this argument against apologetics, it should be observed that Paul does not say that natural persons cannot *perceive* truth about God, but that they do not *receive* (Gk. *dekomai*, "welcome") it. Paul emphatically declares that the basic truths about God are "clearly seen" ([Rom. 1:20](#)). The problem is not that unbelievers are not aware of God's existence. They do not want to *accept* him because of the moral consequences this would have on their sinful lives. [First Corinthians 2:14](#) (NKJV) says they do not "know" (*ginosko*) which can mean "to know by experience." They know God in their mind ([Rom. 1:19–20](#)), but they have not accepted him in their heart ([Rom. 1:18](#)). "The fool says *in his heart*, There is no God" ([Ps. 14:1](#)).

Without faith one cannot please God. [Hebrews 11:6](#) insists that "without faith it is impossible to please God." This would seem to argue that asking for reasons, rather than simply believing, displeases God. But, as already noted, God does call upon us to use our reason ([1 Peter 3:15](#)). Indeed, he has given "clear" ([Rom. 1:20](#)) and "infallible proofs" ([Acts 1:3](#) NKJV). Second, this text in Hebrews does not exclude "evidence" but actually implies it. Faith is said to be "the evidence" of things we do not see ([Heb. 11:1](#) NKJV). Just as the evidence that a witness is reliable justifies my believing testimony of what he or she saw and I did not, even so, our faith in "things not seen" ([Heb. 11:1](#) NKJV) is justified by the evidence that God does exist. The latter evidence is "clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" ([Rom. 1:20](#)).

Jesus refused to give signs for evil men. Jesus rebuked people who sought signs; hence, we should be content simply to believe. Indeed, Jesus did on occasion rebuke sign seekers. He said, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign!" However, this does not mean that Jesus did not desire people to look at the evidence before they believed. Even in this passage Jesus went on to offer the miracle of his resurrection as a sign of who he was, saying no signs would be given, "except the sign of the prophet Jonah" ([Matt. 12:39–40](#); cf. [Luke 16:31](#); see [MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE](#)).

Jesus offered his miracles as a proof of his messianic office (see [MIRACLE](#); [MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF](#)). When John the Baptist inquired whether he was the Christ, Jesus offered miracles as proof, saying: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor"

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([Matt. 11:4–5](#)). And when replying to the Scribes, he said: “ ‘But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ He said to the paralytic, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home’ ” ([Mark 2:10–11](#)).

Jesus was opposed to entertaining people by miracles. He refused to perform a miracle to satisfy King Herod’s curiosity ([Luke 23:8](#)). On other occasions he did not do miracles because of their unbelief ([Matt. 13:58](#)), not wishing to “cast pearls before swine” ([Matt. 7:6](#)). The purpose of miracles was apologetic, viz., to confirm his message (cf. [Exod. 4:1–9](#); [John 3:2](#); [Heb. 2:3–4](#)). And this he did in great abundance for “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him” ([Acts 2:22](#)).

Do not answer a fool according to his folly. It is argued that atheism is folly ([Ps. 14:1](#)), and the Bible says we should not answer a fool. We agree with [Proverbs 26:4](#), but we also concur with [Proverbs 26:5](#) which says, “Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.” Either the Book of Proverbs was put together by a mad man, or the lesson of the passage is that we have to be careful in how and when we choose to confront false ideas. Don’t just argue with someone who will not listen to reason, or you will be just as foolish as he is. But if you are able to show a person the error of his thinking in a way that he can understand, perhaps he will seek God’s wisdom rather than relying on his own.

Apologetics is not used in the Bible. If apologetics is biblical, then why don’t we see it done in the Bible? By and large the Bible was not written for unbelievers but for believers. Since they already believe in God, Christ, etc., there is no need to prove these truths to them. Apologetics is primarily for those who do not believe, so that they may have a reason to believe.

But apologetics *is used* in the Bible. Even those familiar with it don’t recognize it, since they don’t realize that what they are looking at is really apologetics. Moses did apologetics. The first chapter of Genesis clearly confronts the mythical accounts of creation known in his day. His miracles in Egypt were an apologetic that God was speaking through him ([Exod. 4:1–9](#)). Elijah did apologetics on Mount Carmel when he proved miraculously that Yahweh, not Baal, is the true God ([1 Kings 18](#)). Jesus constantly engaged in apologetics, proving by signs and wonders that he was the Son of God ([John 3:2](#); [Acts 2:22](#)). The apostle Paul did apologetics at Lystra when he gave evidence from nature that the supreme God of the universe existed and that idolatry was wrong ([Acts 14:6–20](#)).

The classic case of apologetics in the New Testament is [Acts 17](#) where Paul reasoned with the philosophers on Mars Hill. He not only presented evidence from nature that God existed but also from history that Christ was the Son of God. He cited pagan thinkers in support of his arguments. Apologetics was done in the Bible whenever the truth claims of Judaism or Christianity came in conflict with unbelief.

Objections to Apologetics from Outside the Bible. These objections against apologetics arise from assumptions of its irrationality, inadequacy, or fruitlessness. Many come from a rationalistic or skeptical point of view (see [AGNOSTICISM](#)). Others are fideistic (see [FIDEISM](#)).

Logic can’t tell us anything about God. This objection is self-defeating. It says that logic doesn’t apply to this issue. But the statement itself is a statement claiming logical thinking about God. It appeals to logic because it claims to be true while its opposite is false. That claim, called the law of noncontradiction (see [FIRST PRINCIPLES](#); [LOGIC](#)), is the basis for all logic. A statement that logic doesn’t apply to God applies logic to

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God. Logic is inescapable. You can't deny it with your words unless you affirm it with the very same words. It is undeniable.

Logic in itself can tell us some things about God—at least hypothetically. For instance, if God exists, then it is false that he does not exist. And if God is a Necessary Being, then he cannot not exist. Further, if God is infinite and we are finite, then we are not God. Also, if God is truth, he cannot lie ([Heb. 6:18](#)). For it is contradictory to his nature to lie. Likewise, logic informs us that if God is omnipotent, then he cannot make a stone so heavy that he cannot lift it. For whatever he can make, he can lift.

Logic cannot "prove" the existence of anything. True, mere logic shows only what is possible or impossible. We know by logic, for example, that square circles are impossible. We know also that something can exist, since no contradiction is involved in claiming something exists. But we cannot prove by mere logic that something actually exists. However, we know that something actually exists in another way. We know it intuitively and undeniably. For I cannot deny my existence unless I exist to deny it. The statement "I don't exist" is self-defeating, since I have to exist in order to be able to make the statement. So, while mere logic cannot prove the existence of anything, we have undeniable knowledge that something exists. And once we know that something exists (e.g., I do), then logic can help us determine whether it is finite or infinite. And if it is finite, logic can help us determine whether there is also an infinite being (see [GOD, EVIDENCE FOR](#)).

Reason is useless in religious matters. Fideism argues that reason is of no use in matters that deal with God. One must simply believe. Faith, not reason, is what God requires ([Heb. 11:6](#)).

But even in Scripture God calls on us to use reason ([Isa. 1:18](#); [Matt. 22:36–37](#); [1 Peter 3:15](#)). God is a rational being, and he created us to be rational beings. God would not insult the reason he gave us by asking us to ignore it in such important matters as our beliefs about him.

[Fideism](#) is self-defeating. Either it has a reason that we should not reason about God or it does not. If it does, then it uses reason to say we should not use reason. If fideism has no reason for not using reason, then it is without reason for its position, in which case there is no reason why one should accept fideism.

To claim reason is just optional for a fideist will not suffice. For either the fideist offers some criteria for when to be reasonable and when not, or else this timing is simply arbitrary. If a fideist offers rational criteria for when we should be rational, then he does have a rational basis for his view, in which case he is not really a fideist after all.

Reason is not the kind of thing in which a rational creature can choose not to participate. By virtue of being rational by nature one must be part of rational discourse. And rational discourse demands that one follow the laws of reason. One such principle is that one should have a sufficient reason for his beliefs. But if one must have a sufficient reason, then fideism is wrong, since it claims that one need not have a sufficient reason for what he believes.

You can't prove God by reason. According to this objection, the existence of God cannot be proven by human reason. The answer depends on what is meant by "prove." If "prove" means to demonstrate with mathematical certainty, then most theists would agree that God's existence cannot be proven. This is because mathematical certainty deals only with the abstract, and the existence of God (or anything else) is a matter of the concrete. Further, mathematical certainty is based on axioms or postulates that must be Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999).

assumed in order to get a necessary conclusion. But if God's existence must be assumed to be proven, then the conclusion that God exists is only based on the assumption that he exists, in which case it is not really a proof at all.

Another way to make the point is to note that mathematical certainty is deductive in nature. It argues from given premises. But one cannot validly conclude what is not already implied in the premise(s). In this case one would have to assume God exists in the premise in order to validly infer this in the conclusion. But this begs the question.

Likewise, if by "prove" one means to reach a logically necessary conclusion, then God's existence cannot be proven either, unless the Ontological Argument is valid. But most thinkers hold that it is not. The reason one cannot prove God by logical necessity is that formal logic, like mathematics, deals with the abstract. Unless one begins with something that exists, he can never get out of the purely theoretical realm. *If* there is a triangle, we can know logically and with absolute certainty that it must have three sides and three corners. But there may not be any triangles in existence anywhere except in someone's mind. Likewise, unless we know something exists, then logic cannot help us to know whether God exists. And logic by itself cannot tell us whether anything exists.

If by "prove," however, we mean "give adequate evidence for" or "provide good reasons for," then it would seem to follow that one can prove the existence of God (see [GOD, EVIDENCE FOR](#); [COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT](#)) and the truth of Christianity.

No one is converted through apologetics. The charge is made that no one ever comes to Christ through apologetics. If this implies that the Holy Spirit (see [HOLY SPIRIT, ROLE IN APOLOGETICS](#)) never uses apologetic evidence to bring people to Christ, this is clearly false. C. S. Lewis noted that "nearly everyone I know who has embraced Christianity in adult life has been influenced by what seemed to him to be at least a probable argument for Theism" (Lewis, 173). Lewis is an example of an atheist who came to Christ under the influence of apologetics. The skeptic Frank Morrison was converted while attempting to write a book refuting the evidence for the resurrection of Christ (see Morrison). Augustine tells in his confessions how he was led toward Christianity by hearing a Christian debate an unbeliever. Harvard Law School professor Simon Greenleaf was led to accept the authenticity of the Gospels by applying the rules of legal evidence to the New Testament. God has used evidence and reason in some way to reach virtually all adults who come to Christ.

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Apologetics, Objections to. See [APOLOGETICS, NEED FOR](#).

Apologetics, Presuppositional. See [CLARK, GORDON](#); [PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS](#); [VAN TIL, CORNELIUS](#).

Apologetics, Types of. There are differing kinds of apologetics systems, and no universally-acknowledged way to categorize them. Divergent approaches seem to be determined by the perspective of the one categorizing them. Nonetheless, there are some generally understood terms one can employ to view in a meaningful way the distinctives among more popular approaches.

Categorizing Systems. It is tempting to make logically exhaustive categories of apologetic systems. Two problems preclude this. First, the category may seem to work but the corresponding category that would logically oppose it is too broad. Second, divergent systems often are lumped into one category. For example, if one uses the categories of presuppositionalism and nonpresuppositionalism, not only are there differing kinds of presuppositionalism but significant differences among nonpresuppositional systems. If one uses evidential and nonevidential the same result occurs; classical and historical apologetics and even some forms of presuppositionalism (e.g., Systematic Consistency) must be mated in the same category. The same is true if one uses classical apologetics and nonclassical apologetics as two broad categories.

Types of Systems. Despite the fact that the categories are not logically exhaustive and overlap, it seems best simply to use commonly understood titles and state the differences and similarities. Evaluation of each can be found in other articles on individual systems and their key representatives.

Three points help to understand each type: proponents will be listed; some chief characteristics will be described, and comments on overlap and/or contrast with other approaches will be made.

Classical Apologetics. Characteristics. [Classical apologetics](#) stresses arguments for the existence of God (see [GOD, EVIDENCE FOR](#)) as well as the historical evidence supporting the truth of Christianity. Classical apologetics is characterized by two basic steps: theistic and evidential arguments.

Theistic arguments are used to establish the truth of theism apart from an appeal to special revelation (e.g., the Bible). Classical apologetics accepts the validity of traditional theistic proofs for God, though some stress one over another. And some reject certain traditional proofs as invalid, often the ontological

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argument. But most accept some form of the cosmological argument and the teleological argument. Many also believe the moral argument is valid.

This first step of classical apologetics also involves drawing the logical inference that if a theistic God exists, miracles are possible; indeed, the greatest miracle of all, creation, is possible. The credibility of miracles (see [MIRACLE](#)) is essential to the next step in classical apologetics—the historical one—but it flows logically from the first step.

Second, confirmed historical evidence substantiates the truth. The New Testament documents are shown to be historically reliable (see [NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS, MANUSCRIPTS](#); [NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF](#); [NEW TESTAMENT, NON-CHRISTIAN SOURCES](#)). The apologist also shows that these documents reveal that Jesus claimed to be, and was miraculously proven to be, the Son of God (see [CHRIST, DEITY OF](#)). From this it is often argued that Jesus confirmed the Old Testament to be the Word of God and promised the same for the New Testament (see [BIBLE, JESUS' VIEW OF](#)).

Proponents. Classical apologetics was practiced by Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas. Modern classical apologists include Winfried Corduan, William Lane Craig, Norman L. Geisler, John Gerstner, Stuart Hackett, Peter Kreeft, C. S. Lewis, J. P. Moreland, John Locke, William Paley, R. C. Sproul, and B. B. Warfield.

Comparison with other approaches. Sometimes classical apologists begin this second step by showing that the Bible has been proven to be the Word of God. In doing so they often use the same basic evidence used by evidential apologetics. This includes miracles (see [MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF](#); [MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE](#)), fulfilled prophecy (see [PROPHECY, AS PROOF OF BIBLE](#)), the unity of the Bible, and other indications of its supernatural origin (see [BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR](#)).

The difference between the classical apologists and the evidentialists on the use of historical evidence is that the classical see the need to first establish that this is a theistic universe in order to establish the possibility of and identity of miracles. Evidentialists do not see theism as a logically necessary precondition of historical apologetics. The basic argument of the classical apologists is that it makes no sense to speak about the resurrection as an act of God unless, as a logical prerequisite, it is first established that there is a God who can act. Likewise, the Bible cannot be the Word of God unless there is a God who can speak. And Christ cannot be shown to be the Son of God except on the logically prior premise there is a God who can have a Son.

Evidential Apologetics. Evidential apologetics stresses the need for evidence in support of the Christian truth claims. The evidence can be rational, historical, archaeological, and even experiential. Since it is so broad, it understandably overlaps with other types of apologetics.

Some characteristics of evidential apologetics. Since evidentialists encompass a large and diverse category, their characteristics will be delineated according to type. Evidentialists often use *rational evidence* (e.g., proofs for God) in defense of Christianity. As such, they overlap with classical apologetics. However, for an evidentialist this is just one piece of evidence. Also in contrast to classical apologists, evidentialists do not hold that rational evidence is either necessary (since it is only one piece) or logically prior to the other evidence.

In the use of *historical evidence* there is again an overlap with evidential and historical apologetics. Evidentialists do not rest their whole case on historical evidence. They are more eclectic, interweaving Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999).

evidence from various fields. Evidentialists operate as attorneys who combine evidences into an overall brief in defense of their position, trusting that the combined weight will present a persuasive case.

Many evidentialists focus on *archeological evidence* in support of the Bible. They stress that both the Old and the New Testaments (see [ARCHAEOLOGY, OLD TESTAMENT](#); [ARCHAEOLOGY, NEW TESTAMENT](#)) have been substantiated by thousands of discoveries. This, they believe, gives reason to accept the divine authority of the Scriptures. Other types of apologetics appeal to archaeological evidence, who use the evidence in a different way.

Some evidentialists appeal to *experiential evidence* in support of Christianity, most often from changed lives. The testimony of those converted to Christianity is offered as evidence of the truth of Christianity. How else, it is argued, can one explain the dramatic, transforming, enduring, and often radical changes? The conversion of Saul of Tarsus ([Acts 9](#)) is a classic case in point.

Prophetic evidence (see [PROPHECY AS PROOF OF THE BIBLE](#)) is often offered to substantiate Christianity. It is argued that only divine origin accounts for the numerous, precise biblical predictions that have been fulfilled. For the evidentialists prophetic and other evidences do not comprise a specific step in an overall logical order (as it is in classical apologetics). Rather, it is the sum total of all the interlocking evidences that offer high probability of the truth of Christianity.

Some proponents of evidential apologetics. While evidential apologetics enjoys wide popular support, it offers few clear proponents who do not fit into other categories as well. It seems best, then, to characterize evidentialism by the various kinds of evidence stressed in the particular apologetic approach. A noted evidentialist approach is offered by William Paley in his *Evidences for Christianity*, although since Paley offered proofs for God first, he can be listed as a classical apologist. Bernard Ramm's widely used *Protestant Christian Evidences* is another example of evidential apologetics, though he seemed to move way from this in his later writings. The most widely distributed of evidentialist books is Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

Some comparisons with other approaches. While the use of evidence is not unique to evidential apologetics, the manner in which it is used is unique. Both classical apologists and some evidentialists use theistic arguments. However, for the evidentialists, establishing the existence of God is not a logically prior and necessary step. It is simply one strand in the overall web of evidence that supports Christianity.

Unlike historical apologetics, the pure evidentialist does not appeal to historical evidence as the sole basis for his case. For the evidentialists there are certain events, such as, the healings of Jesus, raisings from the dead, and fulfilled prophecy, which in themselves, apart from prior presupposition or proof that God exists, substantiate the truth of Christianity. Since the facts "speak for themselves" there is no need, according to evidentialists, to provide an independent reason for believing in God's existence. By contrast, both classical and presuppositional apologetics insist that historical events can only be interpreted in the light of the framework of the worldview of which they are a part.

Experiential Apologetics. Some Christians appeal primarily, if not exclusively, to experience as evidence for Christian faith. Some appeal to religious experience in general. Others to special religious experiences. Within this second category are some who focus on mystical experiences and others who identify what

they believe are particularly supernatural conversion experiences. There are obviously some significant differences under the broad experiential umbrella.

Types of experience. The value of general, unspecific religious experience is of limited value for a distinctly Christian apologetic. At best, *general experience* establishes credibility for belief in a supreme being of some kind (not necessarily a theistic God). Nonetheless, proofs from religious experience (see [GOD, EXPERIENTIAL APOLOGETICS FOR](#)) have been offered by Christians and others. General religious experiences are available to all.

Special religious experiences are more limited. The mystic, for example, claims a special experience of God. *Mystical experiences* (see [MYSTICISM](#)) differ from general religious experiences in that they claim to be direct and unmediated contacts with God. Christian mystics claim such experiences are self-evidently true.

Although so-called *existential experience* encounters with God (see [KIERKEGAARD, SØREN](#)) are not the same as mystical experiences, proponents claim that they too are self-authenticating. One is grasped by God in a nonrational, direct encounter that is more basic and real than a sense experience. Although not all would call such experiences apologetic evidence, they do serve, nonetheless, to vindicate Christianity among those who have them. Those who appeal to such experiences reject apologetic approaches in the traditional sense. They spurn rational arguments or factual evidence in favor of what they believe to be a self-verifying experience.

Some proponents of experiential apologetics. Among Christian mystics the name Meister Eckart stands out. Existentialists include [Søren Kierkegaard](#), [Rudolph Bultmann](#), and [Karl Barth](#) (see also [FIDEISM](#)). Others of a more general experiential nature include [Friedrich Schleiermacher](#), and Paul Tillich.

Some comparisons with other approaches. Experiential arguments for God's existence are sometimes used by classical apologists and evidentialists. The difference is that, for the experiential apologist, the *only* kind of evidence is nonrational, mystical, and existential. In other apologetic approaches, the argument from religious experience is just one kind of evidence among many.

Presuppositional apologists, especially of the revelational variety, reject purely experiential arguments as unverifiable and of subjective interpretation.

[Historical Apologetics](#). Historical apologetics stresses historical evidence as the basis for demonstrating the truth of Christianity. These apologists believe that the truth of Christianity, including the existence of God, can be proven from the historical evidence alone. In one sense historical apologetics belongs to the broad class of evidential apologetics, but it differs in that it stresses the importance, if not necessity, of beginning with the historical record for the truth of Christianity.

Some proponents of historical apologetics. Christianity is a historical religion, so it is understandable that it would have a historical emphasis from the very beginning. The earliest apologists, including [Tertullian](#), [Justin Martyr](#), [Clement of Alexandria](#), and [Origen](#), defended the historicity of Christianity.

Since these early apologists were often unsystematic in their writing, it is difficult to tell whether they fall into the category of historical apologetics. Some did offer theistic arguments, but they probably did

not all see this as a logically necessary first step in an overall apologetic. Contemporary historical apologists include John Warwick Montgomery and Gary Habermas.

Some comparisons with other approaches. Historical apologetics is distinct from evidentialism in its narrow focus, using only one kind of evidence rather than many. It also offers a sequential argument. The historical apologist only begins with historical evidence as a basic premise. With historicity established, the apologist argues that certain claims are made in Scripture from which it can be inferred that God exists, the Bible is the Word of God, and Christ is the unique Son of God. The pure evidentialist has no such logical order that begins with historical evidence alone. Rather, the evidentialist employs a whole nest of evidence from which to conclude that Christianity is true.

Both historical and classical apologetics use historical evidence. But the classical apologist believes that historical evidence is only a second step, logically preceded by theistic arguments which establish the necessary worldview evidence by which alone one can properly interpret the historical evidence.

Presuppositional Apologetics. Presuppositional apologetics affirms that one must defend Christianity from the foundation of certain basic presuppositions. Usually, a presuppositionalist presupposes the basic truth of Christianity and then proceeds to show (in any of several ways) that Christianity alone is true.

According to *revelational presuppositionalism*, one must posit that the Triune God has revealed himself in Holy Scriptures before it is possible to make any sense out of the universe, life, language, or history. This is sometimes viewed as a transcendental argument. Revelational presuppositionalists include [Cornelius Van Til](#), Greg Bahnsen, and John Frame.

The *rational presuppositionalist* also begins with the Trinity revealed in the written Word of God. But the test for whether this is true or not is simply the law of noncontradiction (see [FIRST PRINCIPLES](#)). Christianity demonstrates its own truth in that, of all religions, it alone is internally consistent. [Gordon Clark](#) and Carl F. H. Henry are rational presuppositionalists.

Like the rational presuppositionalists, *systematic consistency* presuppositionalists believe a system must be rationally consistent. In addition, it must comprehensively take into account all facts. It must also be existentially relevant in that it meets life's basic needs. Only Christianity, they believe, offers such a consistent system. [Edward John Carnell](#) and Gordon Lewis hold this view.

[Francis Schaeffer's](#) apologetic approach has occasionally been listed as a separate form of presuppositionalism, a kind of *practical presuppositionalism*. Schaeffer believes that false systems are unlivable, that only Christian truth is livable.

Some comparisons with other Approaches. Presuppositional apologists reject the validity of theistic proofs. They accept the critiques of theistic argumentation by [David Hume](#) and [Kant](#) (see [GOD, OBJECTIONS TO PROOFS FOR](#)). Or they believe there is no meaning to "facts" apart from the Christian worldview.

Conclusion. Proponents of one type of apologetic system provide critiques of opposing systems. So both evaluation and sources are listed under each type of apologetic discussed above. Only books that treat apologetic systems in general are listed below in the "[Sources](#)" section.

Sources

Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999).

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