

## CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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### 1) Introduction: The importance of apologetics in the church

- Definition
  - Our word apologetics comes from the Greek *apologia*, “originally used of a speech of defense or an answer given in reply” (Boa & Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*)
  - In practical terms, it is the rational defense of the Christian faith
  - It is also often described as “the handmaid to evangelism”
- New Testament precedents
  - Apologetics is *commanded*—e.g., 1 Peter 3:13–17; Jude 3–4
  - Apologetics is *modeled*—e.g., Acts 17:22–34, 18:4, 22:1
  - The apostles *reason with* and *persuade* opponents and doubters
  - The apostles teach believers how to *identify* and *answer* heretics and spiritual imposters
  - Note: Every book (except Philemon) addresses false teachers and false teachings
- Key historical precedents
  - Early church fathers (versus Judaizers, Gnostics...)
  - Ecumenical councils, creeds (versus Arianism, Docetism, Sabellianism...)
  - Protestant reformers

### 2) Some current threats to the Body of Christ in Africa

- Internal—*widespread weakness/vulnerability among both pastors and laity*:
  - Lack of Bible knowledge
  - Lack of doctrinal knowledge
- External:
  - Cultic groups and heretical movements
    - Local syncretists/African-initiated churches—e.g.,
      - amaZioni (est. 15–18 million)
      - amaNazaretha (est. 5 million)
    - Imported missionary sects—e.g.,
      - Jehovah’s Witnesses (1.3 million)
      - Seventh-day Adventism (3.1 million)
      - New Apostolic Church (est. 8 million)
      - Bahá’í faith (est. 500,000)
      - Universal Church of the Kingdom of God
      - Branhamites
      - various South Korean groups—e.g., Good News Mission, WMSCOG, Shincheonji
    - Africanized neo-Pentecostalism (with its numerous “prophets” and “apostles”)
  - Growing influence of atheists and skeptics (especially on campuses)
  - Missionary Islam

- Note: such groups are working in every available medium, in dozens of languages

### 3) The surprising lack of apologetics in evangelical theological institutions in southern Africa

- Prior research: Apologetics in theological institutions in east Africa
  - Courses in apologetics, cults, and related subjects (e.g., contemporary worldviews, comparative religions, African traditional religions, Islam) were scarce
- Current research: Informal survey of apologetics in evangelical seminaries and Bible colleges in eight English-speaking southern African countries
  - Courses in apologetics, cults, and related subjects currently by few schools

### 4) Possible reasons for the neglect of apologetics in evangelical theological education

- Misperceptions
  - Apologetics isn't really *biblical*
  - Apologetics is for a few brilliant philosophers, not "real people"
  - Apologetics is irrelevant where actual atheists are few
  - Apologetics is mostly about arguing, debating
  - Apologetics has little practical value
- Lack of appealing African advocates, role models (a rare exception: Dr. Conrad Mbewe)
- Lack of standardized, *contextualized* textbooks and other curriculum resources
- Lack of qualified instructors

### 5) Consequences of the neglect of apologetics in theological education *include...*

- Unprepared pastors unable to guard their flocks against deceivers from without and within
- Vulnerable congregations unable to identify and answer spiritual counterfeits

### 6) Corrective steps that can begin now *include...*

- Giving due emphasis to apologetics in relation to theology, evangelism, missions
  - Incorporating apologetics approaches whenever possible (e.g., Baucham, *Exegetical Apologetics*)
- Requiring at least one apologetics survey course for all diploma and degree programs
  - Including general apologetics; contemporary cults, religions, and worldviews
  - Identifying and adapting the best existing curriculum resources, creating new ones
  - Keeping content culturally relevant, regionally specific (i.e., groups and issues)

### 7) Conclusion: *In obedience to Scripture...*

- We must equip pastors and Christian workers to face real-world challenges to biblical faith
- We must actively disciple lay believers for biblical discernment and defending the Gospel