Brothers and Sisters, We Are All Apologists Now[1]

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Thank you, President Mohler, for the invitation to deliver this address. Thank you as well to my many colleagues over these past fifteen years, including Provost Paul Akin and my dean Dr. Hershael York. Welcome not only to those of you for whom I am a professor but also to the many for whom I am privileged to serve as a pastor at Sojourn Church Midtown. Last of all but most of all, thank you to my wife Rayann and our daughters Hannah, Skylar, Kylinn, and Katrisha—you are the ones through whom God brings the most joy into my life.

A Description of the Times

Apologetics is no longer a task that's limited to biblical scholars and theologians. In some sense, it never was—or at least it shouldn't have been—but the scope of apologetics has necessarily expanded. Cultural and societal changes have turned apologetics into an unavoidable consequence of living

publicly as a Christian. Pursuing a Christian way of life will inevitably require providing a defense of this way of being in the world, not merely for apologists but for all of us.

This is not to suggest that Christianity has only recently become counter-cultural. Authentic Christian faith has always pressed against prevailing cultures, even when the people in those cultures have considered themselves to be Christians. The point is that, for centuries, faithfulness to a Christian way of life was widely assumed to contribute positively to the social order in Western contexts. Even when the truthfulness of Christianity was questioned and the demands of Christianity were rejected, the positive impact of Christianity was broadly assumed. This assumption has taken a variety of forms over the centuries. In the Middle Ages, "the social bond … was intertwined in the sacred, and indeed, it was unimaginable otherwise."[2] At the dawn of modernity, Christian piety was perceived increasingly as a means of promoting civility.[3] And yet, even as the precise nature of the perceived utility of Christian faith changed, Christianity was still assumed to be good for the world.

Apologetics When the Goodness of Christianity Is Assumed

As long as the goodness of Christianity was assumed, it was conceivable for Christian apologists to restrict the scope of their work to defending beliefs that seemed unbelievable to unbelievers. Thus, many early modern apologists focused on defending the reality of the resurrection or the truth of Scripture by building a case for Christianity's most miraculous claims from historical and scientific evidences. With the modern proliferation of worldviews in which theistic first principles were no longer perceived as necessary, apologists recognized the need not only to defend these miracles but also to contend for metaphysics that allow for a Christian view of the world. Even then, these apologists only rarely saw a need to defend the goodness of Christianity for the social order.

Today, however, it can no longer be assumed that Christian morality is understood to be good for the world. The public practice of Christian ethics is increasingly perceived as incompatible with human dignity and flourishing. This change has been underway for generations, but the precise stakes of this change have become clearer in recent years.

What Happens When Christianity Is No Longer Considered Good

In 2019, for example, British medical doctor David Mackereth lost his job for declining to use pronouns that conflicted with an individual's birth gender. When he appealed to a tribunal, Mackereth lost his case because—in the words of the tribunal—the general practitioner's "belief in Genesis 1:27, lack of belief in transgenderism[,] and conscientious objection to transgenderism … are incompatible with human dignity." Such convictions—the tribunal continued—"conflict with the fundamental rights of others."[4] The irony of the claim that "belief in Genesis 1:27" stands in opposition to "human dignity" and "fundamental rights" is, of course, that the commitment of Western jurisprudence to human dignity and universal rights originates in a long tradition that traces back to Genesis 1:27. Describing a belief in Genesis 1:27 as "incompatible with human dignity" is like attempting to withdraw funds from a bank while simultaneously refusing to admit that the bank exists. It is akin, in the words of one author, "to insisting that seeds are incompatible with flowers, or grain with bread."[5]

What is clear in this instance and many others is that the public practice of Christianity is no longer presumed to be good for the social order. To pursue a Christian way of life is—based on the assumptions undergirding this decision—to stigmatize innocent people and to stand in opposition to human dignity.

This change has profound implications for apologetics. Broadly speaking, one might say that the necessary scope of modern apologetics has extended from miracles to metaphysics to morality—and this change is not limited to courtrooms, classrooms, and boardrooms. I recently glimpsed it firsthand when I stepped into student ministry for a few months and encountered a different set of doubts than I had ever faced before.

The Doubts I Never Dreamed I Would Face

I first worked with middle school and high school students nearly three decades ago, when Britney Spears was a new artist and George Lucas had not yet inflicted the *Star Wars* prequels on millions of unsuspecting fans. During those years, students typically didn't struggle with their faith until

the first year or two of college. When they did doubt their faith, the questions they asked had to do with the truthfulness of Scripture or the plausibility of miracles, and their perceived alternative to Christian faith was agnosticism or atheism. These students did not always pursue a Christian way of life, but they and their parents assumed that Christian ethics were good for them and that Christian faith makes the world a better place.

In 2019, I returned to student and family ministry for a few months in a temporary role, and I discovered a very different set of challenges and doubts. Doubts about Christian morals now preceded any questions about Christian miracles. One young woman in particular confessed that she found the historical evidence for the resurrection to be compelling. Yet she was willing to reject Christianity and the Bible if the Christian faith could not accommodate her conception of herself as bisexual and perhaps transgender. In her mind, for Christians to withhold affirmation of her self-conception was to disregard her dignity and to devalue her psychological well-being. According to her analytic attitude, evidence for the Christian faith was irrelevant unless the Christian faith could be conformed to her perception of what is good.[6]

This is a dilemma I never envisioned in the 1990s—an acceptance of the evidence for the central miracle of the Christian faith coupled with a rejection of this same faith on the basis of its perceived immorality. Her simultaneous reception of the rational argument and her rejection of the moral requirements of Christianity suggested that her objections to the Christian faith were emotivist and pre-rational in nature.[7] For her and many others like her, moral doubts about Christianity have taken precedence over challenges related to miracles or metaphysics.

When the Goodness of Christianity Is in Question, Every Christian Is an Apologist

As long as apologetics remained in this realm of miracles and metaphysics, it might have been conceivable—though perhaps not desirable—for apologetics to remain the domain of trained experts who argued for rationality and provided evidences based on their areas of expertise. However, when it becomes necessary to contend for the social good of publicly practicing Christian faith, no Christian can be exempted from defending the way of life that they are pursuing. This is why, *brothers and sisters, we are all apologists now*!

The question is not whether we will do apologetics; it is whether or not we will do apologetics well. When the very morality of Christianity is in question, we and every one of our students—regardless of their vocation—will be called to defend why they are pursuing their calling in a manner that is marked by their faith. Whether we are training students to launch businesses or teach the Bible, to counsel in the church or oversee corporate communications, to work in public education or write a commentary, to run for political office or lead a student ministry, apologetics must have a place in what we teach.

Furthermore, the primary mode of this apologetic must move beyond merely appealing to evidence for the reality of miracles and the reliability of Scripture. Evidences from science and history have their place, to be sure, but they are not the place where the challenges begin. Neither will it be sufficient for our apologetics only to point out the flawed presuppositions of secular worldviews and the superior epistemology that begins with the Triune God. This approach also has its place. And yet, when doubts and suspicions are pre-rational, effective defenses of Christianity are more likely to begin with narratives and ethics repeated in community—but where can contemporary Christians locate an approach to apologetics that is fitted for a context in which the social good of Christianity is in doubt?

We Have Been Here Before

At this point, it is helpful to recall that the early twenty-first century is far from the first time that Christians have faced the charge that their faith is immoral. In *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* Carl Trueman rightly recognizes the second century AD as one possible precedent for this present era in which the very goodness of Christianity for the social order must be defended.

> In the second century, the church was a marginal sect within a dominant, pluralistic society. She was under suspicion not because her central dogmas were supernatural but rather because she appeared subversive in claiming Jesus as King and was viewed as immoral in her talk of eating and drinking human flesh and blood and expressing incestuous-sounding love between brothers and sisters.[8]

Pursuing a Christian way of life required second-century Christians to provide a defense of their very way of being in the world. Nevertheless, Christianity flourished

> by existing as a close-knit, doctrinally bounded community that required her members to act consistently with their faith and to be good citizens of the earthly city as far as good citizenship was compatible with faithfulness to Christ.[9]

Carl Trueman does not detail precisely how the habits of the second-century church might shape cultural engagement and apologetics today. That is what I would like to do in the remainder of this address. My goal is to consider what such an apologetic might look like in practice, recognizing particularly the ways in which what we see in the second century might inform what we do in our churches and in our classrooms in the twenty-first century. The writings of second-century apologists will provide the framework for this discussion, with a particular focus on a work that I have spent much of the past year studying, the *Apology* of the second-century Christian philosopher Aristides of Athens.

How an Apologist from the Second Century Might Inform Our Apologetics Today

The original *Apology* of Aristides seems to have been written in the early or mid-second century.[10] Little is known about Aristides himself beyond what Eusebius of Caesarea preserves, that the author was "a believer earnestly devoted to our religion" who addressed an apology to Emperor Hadrian.[11] This placement of the apology in Hadrian's reign may represent a misunderstanding of the text that was known to Eusebius, but Eusebius is undoubtedly correct that the text belongs to the second century. Jerome adds the further detail that Aristides was "a most eloquent Athenian philosopher" who retained his philosopher's garb after becoming a follower of Jesus.[12]

This earnestly-devoted Athenian philosopher begins his *Apology* by appealing to the beauty of the created order.[13] According to Aristides, the beauty and orderly motion of the cosmos require a deity who is "immortal, perfect, incomprehensible," and self-existent. "He stands in need of nothing," Aristides declares, "but all things stand in need of him."[14] After this declaration

of the necessary nature of the divine, Aristides turns to the concerns that drive his defense of Christianity: *Which of the four types of people in the world—barbarians, Greeks, Jews, or Christians—is devoted to a deity that meets these necessary qualifications? And what way of life does each type of devotion produce?*[15] From the perspective of Aristides, because human beings imitate what they venerate, defective devotion inevitably produces defective ethics.[16] It is at this point that the *Apology* of Aristides becomes particularly helpful when it comes to doing apologetics in an era when we are all apologists.

1. *Christians Practice Radical Civic Good without Bowing to the Civic Gods.* One of the central arguments Aristides makes is that it is possible to practice radical civic good without participating in the veneration of the civic gods. For Romans in this era, religion was not primarily a matter of beliefs or morals.[17] Religion referred to "the binding ties of duty to the gods, the state, and the family, expressed in the virtue of *pietas*. It was therefore the cement of society and the foundation of justice."[18] Civic devotion was primarily a matter of divination, supplication, and sacrifice with the pragmatic goal of securing divine favor and avoiding divine wrath. According to Polybius, writing three centuries earlier, these patterns of recognizing and reverencing the venerable gods were what held the Roman state together.[19] To reject such reverence was to risk provoking the disfavor of the gods in such a way that the social order itself might be torn apart.

Because Christians refused to participate in these religious rites, the church was seen as a threat to the cohesion and stability of the social order. It is for this reason that Aristides and other second-century apologists go to such lengths to make their case that Christians pose no threat to the social order. Christians accomplish civic good without venerating the civic gods. In fact, according to Aristides, Christians do *more* to strengthen the social order than barbarians, Greeks, or Jews. According to Aristides, the cosmos itself remains due to the prayers of the church. "To me there is no doubt," he writes, "that the itself earth abides through the supplication of Christians."[20] One aspect of the good that Christians do is asking God for his mercy on the world, but the church's contribution to civic good does not end with supplications directed toward the Christian God. It includes the lives Christians live together and the care they direct toward their neighbors.

Aristides begins his summary of this way of life with clauses that echo the Jewish Torah: Christians "do not adulterate or fornicate," "they do not covet what is not theirs," "they honor father and mother," "they love their neighbors," "they judge with justice," and so on. Despite the Jewish origins of these declarations, many of these values would have been, at the very least, recognizable to second-century Romans.[21] Some of these ethics would even have caused philosophically-minded Romans to nod their heads in agreement.[22] Yet Aristides does not stop with this summation of familiar ethics. He moves quickly to actions so radically generous that they would have been ridiculed as absurd among most of his neighbors.

Christians, according to Aristides, "rescue orphans from those who abuse them, and they give without grudging to the one who has nothing." Although some philosophers did criticize the practice of abandoning unwanted infants, rescuing the fatherless would have seemed ludicrous in a context where children unacknowledged by a father were widely perceived as disposable.[23] Aristides continues, "Whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one according to his ability pays attention and carefully sees to his burial. If anyone of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name 'Christ,' all of them provide his needs, and if it is possible for him to be delivered, they deliver him."[24] These patterns of giving to the impoverished and caring for the imprisoned are precisely the habits that Lucian of Samosata mocks as preposterous in his second-century summary of the events leading up to the death of the Cynic philosopher Peregrinus.[25] This Cynic philosopher falsely played the part of a Christian for a time and ended up in prison. Lucian's account of the event ridicules the compassion that Christians showed to Peregrinus. His satirical rhetoric reveals the degree to which the generosity of the Christian way of life went far beyond anything cultured Romans would have expected. A few years later, Celsus similarly criticized the ways that the church brought together people from every background and social class.[26]

Persons outside the Christian faith in the second century questioned how Christians could do anything other than civic harm since they abstained from the civic liturgies. The response of Aristides and other second-century apologists was that, despite their refusal to participate in the *cultus deorum,* Christians constituted a voluntary association, forming a *habitus* whose virtues contributed to the civic good without participation in the civic religion.[27] Christians contributed good to the social order not only through

prayers to their God but also through their care for the disadvantaged, and this good was greater than any good enacted by those who practiced the rites of the venerable gods.

The questions posed by those outside the faith in the second century were not identical to the challenges of the twenty-first century, and I do not pretend that they were. Today, the challenges have to do with whether a Christian can possibly contribute anything other than civic harm if he or she does not wear a Pride patch on a uniform or use someone's preferred pronoun or affirm a young woman's conception of herself as bisexual. Yet perhaps there is more similarity than one thinks at first. In some sense, these contemporary cultural demands constitute a civic liturgy that includes vestments and rituals, blessings and confessions and absolution, coupled with widespread incredulity that anyone who refuses these rituals could possibly contribute to the common good.[28] In such a context, all of us are apologists now because the conflict is between two contradictory sets of religious commitments.

How, then, can Christians today demonstrate their contribution to the common good while refusing to conform to these civic liturgies? One possible response, grounded in the *Apology* of Aristides, is for Christians to be characterized by such generosity toward the disadvantaged and the marginalized that these habits of life seem absurd to the world.

What if the church's participation in care for the impoverished, our love for prisoners, and our welcome of children in the foster system was so widespread that an awareness of these habits was at least as widely known as our stand against progressive sexual agendas? What if these habits caused contemporary equivalents of Lucian of Samosata to develop comedy routines that mocked not merely our supposedly out-of-date morals but also our inexplicable generosity? What if the church's pursuit of communities that are richly multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic, and multi-generational caused the twenty-first century counterparts of Celsus to turn up their noses at the strangeness of Christian community?[29] And, as the faculty that is forming the next generation of Christian leaders, what might we add to our lectures and readings and course activities to move students toward these realities? Aristides was not describing civic good that the world would recognize as good. He was describing something better—a goodness so rich and radical that it could not be fitted into the world's categories—and so should we.

2. *Christianity Is a Coherent Commitment that Requires Consistency Between Profession and Practice.*

A further point that Aristides makes is that Christianity represents a coherent commitment that requires consistency between profession and practice. This stood in stark contrast to the competing commitments that characterized his cultural context, and his point is deeply relevant for our apologetics today. It was generally agreed in the second century that "even if rationality led to skepticism about the nature of traditional gods, the ancient customs [regarding the worship of these gods] should be maintained."[30] In other words, profession and practice were separable. Participation in the rituals of the gods did not require belief in the stories repeated about the gods.

Christianity, unlike Roman religion, required consistency between the beliefs professed and the habits practiced.[31] Belief in a singular deity who has "no other god as his companion" compelled Christians neither to reverence "idols made in a human image" nor to consume "food consecrated to idols," according to Aristides.[32] The coherence of Christian profession and practice provided evidence for its superiority.

This argument for the truthfulness of Christianity may be found in other early apologists as well, and it persisted for some time. More than two centuries after Aristides, one of the evidences for the truth of Christianity that Augustine of Hippo presented to Romanianus was the consistency between Christians' beliefs and their practices. The Greek philosophers had, according to Augustine, participated in pagan worship, yet these same philosophers taught in their schools that the gods were not real. The consistency of the Christian life was what the philosophers sought but never achieved, according to Augustine.[33]

Aristides articulated not only this external coherence between profession and practice but also the internal coherence of Christianity. According to Aristides, barbarians, Greeks, and Jews all lived within contradictory narratives that only the Christian narrative is able to reconcile. The barbarians claimed, for example, that the elements of the cosmos were divine, but they protected, manipulated, and even destroyed these same elements, revealing that the elements could not be divine after all.[34] The Greeks made righteous laws yet venerated and imitated unrighteous gods whose actions contradicted these righteous laws.[35] The Jews received a righteous law from God but they did not keep it—according to Aristides—and chose to worship the angels through whom the law was given instead of the God who gave it.[36]

As he engages each alternative commitment, Aristides follows the same pattern: he re-narrates the story of each genus of people—barbarians, Greeks, and Jews—and shows the contradictions within their constitutive narratives. Then, after showing the contradictions in each alternative commitment, Aristides retells the constitutive narrative and present practices of Christianity. When he does, he reveals that, in Christian faith, there is no contradiction. There is, instead, coherence and consistency between the truths professed, the liturgies practiced, and the lifestyle required. Because a sovereign and singular God is both Creator and Redeemer, any apparent inconsistency in the faith originates either due to a misunderstanding of what God has communicated or because of rebellion against what God has commanded.

In a time when apologetics is the task of every Christian, this coherence between beliefs and practices becomes a crucial argument for the Christian way of life. For one thing, Christianity's call for consistency between profession and practice provides an explanation—grounded in the venerable witness of the church throughout the generations—for why a Christian should not verbally affirm that which he or she knows to be false regarding an individual's gender. This call for consistency also stands as a reminder of the importance of the local church in the life of the apologist, since church discipline is a divinely ordained means for maintaining consistency between Christian profession and practice.

Perhaps most importantly for the sake of apologetics today, the internal coherence of Christian faith reminds believers that any commitment which contradicts Christian faith will also, in the end, contradict itself. Every human commitment includes some fragment of truth, goodness, or beauty. These crumbs of truth, goodness, or beauty—no matter how fragmentary they may be—will cohere with Christianity in some small way, but they will do more than cohere with some aspect of Christian faith. They will also introduce internal contradictions in any commitment that stands against Christian faith. In the *Apology* of Aristides, even the barbarians recognize the beauty of the cosmos; it is not their recognition of this beauty that introduces the contradictions in their commitment, it is their divinization of it.

The contradictions of the twenty-first century are not the same as the ones that Aristides faced, but the responsibility of apologetics to point out these contradictions is perhaps more crucial than ever. Today, the inconsistencies may be found in other places—for example, in the contradiction between the

affirmation of human equality and dignity on the one hand and a rejection of humanity's formation in God's image on the other hand.[37]

What this should shape within the Christian is humble confidence—confidence because Christian faith does indeed provide a coherent and comprehensive account of the way the world is, yet humble because God alone comprehends this account wholly and completely. A Christian marked by this humble confidence can simultaneously recognize the world's narratives as false and yet celebrate every strand of truth, beauty, and goodness that appears in these false narratives. The Christian can do this because each of these strands stretches back to transcendental reality and thus reveals a contradiction in the world's narratives that Christian faith alone can resolve.[38]

The strategy that Aristides follows is to re-narrate the constitutive story of each alternative commitment in his context, showing the contradictions in each one; then, he recounts the beautiful coherence and explanatory strength of the Christian metanarrative. What if this strategy became more predominant in our classrooms as a way to engage the commitments that stand against Christian faith? Every developmental theory, every secular practice of leadership, every approach to marketing, every philosophical system—each one has a story which draws from a well of common grace but which is at the same time rightly critiqued as defective by the Christian metanarrative.

What this requires practically is to practice retelling the constitutive narratives of these defective commitments in a manner that recognizes both the transcendental realities within them and their contradictions. When critiquing these claims, we re-narrate their own narratives in a manner that reveals their brokenness and their beauty, showing how they have failed even to measure up to their own best ideals—which is, at least in part, what Augustine did with the history of Rome in the first ten books of *City of God.*[39] Then, much like Augustine in the second half of *City of God,* we highlight how the glimmers of truth, beauty, and goodness that mark these claims are known in their fullness only in the coherence of the Christian community and the Christian metanarrative. As the dominant cultural narratives in our own day turn from a neutral perspective on Christianity to a negative view, the glimmers of common grace within the culture's stories may grow dimmer and more distorted, but they are never completely absent—and every glimmer of light within them, no matter how faint, is an evidence of their own contradictions.[40]

3. ***Apologetics Calls the Community to the Public Practice of the Truth.*** According to the apologists of the second century, it is possible to practice radical civic good without bowing to the civic gods, and the coherence of Christianity testifies to its truth by revealing the contradictions in every competing narrative. Having heard my considerations regarding how these truths might be contextualized in the twenty-first century, some of you may now find yourselves wondering, "Will these tactics from the second century work? Will they persuade the world that Christians are, in fact, good for the social order? Might they at least provoke the broader culture to embrace our presence in the public square?"

My answer is, "No, they won't, and I never intended them to do so." Encouragement clearly is not my spiritual gift. I have no confidence that these arguments will persuade any contemporary secular progressivist that Christian professions and practices are good for the world. As far as anyone today can tell, the apologies of Aristides and Justin and Athenagoras did not change imperial perceptions of Christianity. In the second century, the worst persecutions were, after all, yet to come.

Why, then, have I provided you with these ancient examples? And why have I dared to declare that we are all apologists now? It is not because I expect these practices to convince any secularist of the social good of Christianity. It is because God works through practices such as these to form us into the type of community that will persist past the rise and fall of every power that resists God's truth. What is likely to take shape through these particular practices is not the persuasion of the world but the formation of a people—a people who persist in publicly practicing and proclaiming their faith.

The very literary form of apologies such as this one from Aristides seems to have been meant to call the Christian community to persist in living its commitments publicly. At least three second-century apologists—Aristides, Justin, and Athenagoras—wrote their apologies as appeals to emperors of Rome. Yet it seems probable that none of these apologies ever reached an emperor, and it is quite possible that the authors never intended them to do so.[41] Why, then, did these apologists address their apologies in this way? There is more than one possible response to this question, but I will propose the answer that I find most compelling: the inclusion of the emperor's name moved these documents into the public sphere. The purpose of these apologies was the formation of Christians; however, addressing the apology to the

emperor imbued the church's catechesis with public accountability, even if the document never reached an emperor. By presenting these declarations of Christian faith in a way that extended beyond the church into the public realm, the apologists helped to form communities that publicly practiced truth. Still today, public declarations of our beliefs and practices might not persuade the world, but such declarations are important nonetheless because they make us publicly accountable to live the truths we have declared.

I have the privilege of teaching in two distinct fields of study here in this place: apologetics and family ministry. It is at this point of catechizing God's people to persist in the public practice and defense of the faith that these two fields come together. Seen in this way, apologetical catechesis of the church and parental catechesis of children represent two facets of the same calling, with similar challenges.

The public practice of Christianity is no longer assumed to be good for the world. The points at which the faith must be defended have expanded from miracles and metaphysics to the very morality of living publicly as a Christian. No one among us or among our students will be able avoid defending our way of being in the world—and so, brothers and sisters, we are all apologists now.

Even if our defenses do not persuade the world that Christianity is good for the social order, they form a community that persists in holiness, love, and proclamation of the gospel. And, no matter how vast the gap may grow between us and the prevalent culture, this gospel remains "the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).

And this brings me back to the young woman who preferred her own bisexual self-conception over evidence for the resurrection that she herself admitted was compelling. During the pandemic, I lost track of this teenager but, throughout 2019, her engagement with church followed a predictable pattern. She would attend student ministry for a short time before declaring she would never return, due to her disagreement with the moral implications of the gospel. And yet, a few weeks later, she would be back again. I never asked why, but I think I know. It was because the people of God loved her and cared for her in a way that no one in her home or at school did, despite her unwillingness to embrace the gospel. As far as I know, she never was persuaded that Christianity is good for the world, but she had discovered that Christians could be good to her. Someday, somewhere, I pray that God

will work through that knowledge to clear her moral confusion as he draws her to himself. In the meantime, we persist in defending the goodness and truth of the Christian faith, forming God's people to proclaim God's truth knowing that God is still at work through the gospel, even in a world where we are all apologists now.

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1 This address was originally given as Dr. Jones' Faculty Address, February 2023 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

2 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 43.

3 Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 103–104.

4 Iliana Magda, "He Opposed Using Transgender Clients 'Pronouns. It Became a Legal Battle," *New York Times* (October 3, 2019): www.nytimes.com. See also Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe: How We All Came to Believe in Freedom, Kindness, Progress, and Equality* (Sydney, Australia: The Good Book, 2022), 191–196.

5 Spencer Klavan, "Going Off the Rails," *Claremont Review of Books* (Winter 2020): www.claremontreviewofbooks.com. Walter Lippmann articulated the foundations of this contradiction when he—in the words of George Marsden—declared that "his liberal colleagues were trying to build a public consensus based on inherited principles, even after they had dynamited the foundations on which those principles had first been established," George Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Englightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 44. The perceived opposition between human dignity and a Christian understanding of reality may also be observed in *United States v. Windsor,* 570 U.S. 744 (2013). In this decision, the Supreme Court of the United States overthrew the most central paragraphs of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act. What is most important for the purposes of this address is not the court's final decision but the characterization of why someone might oppose same-sex marriage. The justices dismissed opposition to same-sex marriage as the unfair imposition of disadvantage on homosexual couples with the intention of placing "a stigma upon" their unions.

6 "The analytic attitude expresses a trained capacity for entertaining tentative opinions about the inner dictates of conscience, reserving the right even to disobey the law insofar as it originates outside the individual, in the name of a gospel of a freer impulse," Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 31.

7 Emotivism "rests upon a claim that every attempt … to provide a rational justification for an objective morality has in fact failed," leaving the individual to choose his or her own first principles, Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* 3rd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 22–23.

8 Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 406.

9 Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* 407.

10 The textual history of the *Apology* is complex, and the form of the earliest Greek text cannot be established with certainty prior to the fourth century. The Syriac version seems to have been translated from an earlier version of the Greek text than any surviving Greek manuscript. Nevertheless, the contours of the argument remain substantially the same both in the Syriac and Greek versions. See Markus Vinzent, *Writing the History of Early Christianity: From Reception to Retrospection* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 206, and, William Simpson, "Aristides' *Apology* and the Novel *Barlaam and Ioasaph*" (PhD diss., King's College London, 2015), 238–239. For modified stemma indicating textual sources, see William Rutherford, "Reinscribing the Jews: The Story of Aristides' *Apology* 2.2–4 and 14.1b–15.2," *Harvard Theological Review* 106 (2013): 66.

11 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Volume I, Books 1–5,* ed. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library 153 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 4:3:3.

12 "Aristides Atheniensis philosophus eloquentissimus, et sub pristino habitu discipulus Christi," Hieronymus, *De viris Illustribus [Berühmte Männer],* ed. Claudia Barthold (Fohren-Linden, Germany: Carthusianus Verlag, 2010), 186.

13 This aesthetic appeal is followed immediately by an argument from motion that seems to echo Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* Aristotle, "'Αριστοτελους των Μετά τα Φυσικά Λ," *Metaphysics, Volume II: Books 10-14. Oeconomica. Magna Moralia,* Loeb Classical Library 287 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935) 12:6–9 (1071b). See Thomas Gaston, "The Influence of Platonism on the Early Apologists," *The Heythrop Journal* (2009): 577.

14 Aristides of Athens, *Aristide: Apologie,* ed. Marie-Joseph Pierre, et al., *Sources Chretiennes* 470 (Paris: Cerf, 2003), chap. 1.

15 The tetrad of human races or genuses (γένη) in this taxonomy reveals a porousness between categories that, today, would be separately classified in terms of "religion" and "ethnicity." In *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), Love Sechrest documents the dominant functions of ἔθνος and γένος, two key terms that indicated group identity. Her research reveals the overlapping functions of these terms in the early centuries of Christianity, as well as the differences between ancient and modern perceptions of the terms. Ἔθνος frequently set one group in contrast to another in the context of war, religion, or land, with an emphasis on social or territorial boundaries; as an indicator of social boundaries, ἔθνος could include religion. Γένος, the Greek term sometimes translated "race," seems to have emphasized characteristics of kind or kinship; γένος could also include religion.

16 See, e.g., Aristides, *Apologie,* 9. See also "Προς Διογνητον," *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* 3rd ed., ed. Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 10:4: "Αγαπησας δε μιμητής έση αυτού της χρηστοτητος."

17 According to Cicero, if one wanted to know what was right and wrong, one went to philosophers not to the diviners in the temples, Cicero, "De Divinatione," *On Old Age. On Friendship. On Divination,* ed. W. A. Falconer, Loeb Classical Library 154 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 2:10–11. For further discussion, see Larry Hurtado, *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 188.

18 Frances Young, "Greek Apologists of the Second Century," *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians,* ed. Mark Edwards (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 100. For further discussion, see Michael Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 42–43.

19 Polybius, *Polybius, The Histories, Volume III: Books 5–8,* ed. W. R. Paton, rev. F. W. Walbank and Christian Habicht, Loeb Classical Library 138 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 6:56.

20 Aristides, *Apologie,* 16.

21 Justin Martyr similarly begins with patterns of life that would have been acceptable among certain philosophically-minded Romans before moving to patterns that might have been rejected or ridiculed. See *Apologia A,* 14–15 in *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis. Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone,* ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

22 Adulterous relationships were widely condemned in certain circles, and the first-century Stoic Musonius even took a negative view of sexual relations outside marriage, Caius Musonius Rufus, *C. Musonii Rufi,* ed. Otto Hense (Leipzig, Germany: Teubner, 1905), 64, 67, 71. See also Epictetus, *Discourses: Books 1–2,* trans. W. A. Oldfather (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 2:4–13. Some cults would also have resonated with certain Christian ethics, Hurtado, *Destroyer of the gods,* 172–174.

23 O. M. Bakke,*When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity,* trans. Brian McNeil (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2005), 28–33.

24 Aristides, *Apologie,* 15. The practice of burying the poor is particularly noteworthy. In much of the Roman Empire, if a deceased individual could not afford burial, his or her body was tossed into a mass burial pit. To avoid this fate, those with the capacity to do so joined funerary societies. The bylaws of one such society were inscribed on a marble slab in Lanuvium in the year 136, during the lifetime of Aristides of Athens. Joining this funerary society required applicants to donate 100 sestertii and one amphora of *vini boni,* followed by an ongoing monthly payment. The inscription on which these bylaws survive today was crafted, in part, for the purpose of publicizing the good deeds of the society's patron. The church provided a funerary society of sorts for those who could not join such societies, whether because they could not afford to do so or because these societies required acknowledgment of pagan deities. See Andreas Bendlin, "Associations, Funerals, Sociality, and Roman Law: The Collegium of Diana and Antinous in Lanuvium (CIL 14.2112) Reconsidered," in Markus Öhler, ed., *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen: Gemeinschaft und ihre Ordnung* (WUNT I 280, 2011), 251–252; Maureen Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45–46; Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge

University Press, 1992), 42.

25 Lucian of Samosata, "Περί της Περεγρινου Τελευτης," *Lucian, The Passing of Peregrinus. The Runaways. Toxaris or Friendship. The Dance. Lexiphanes. The Eunuch. Astrology. The Mistaken Critic. The Parliament of the Gods. The Tyrannicide. Disowned,* ed. A.M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library 302 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 11–13, 16. Notice in particular Lucian's sarcasm in chapters 11 and 12.

26 For the presence of barbarians, enslaved persons, women, and uneducated individuals in the churches, see the reply to Celsus in Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsum: Gegen Celsus,* vol. 5, *Fontes Christiani,* ed. Michael Fiedrowicz (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 2012), 7:36, 41. According to Aristides, Christians embraced one another as "brothers, without distinction" regardless of social class, *Apologie,* 15.

27 For a summary of early Christian *habitus,* see Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 122–128.

28 For the religious rhetoric and impulses grounded in unacknowledged Christian assumptions in contemporary progressivist movements, see, e.g., Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 532–533.

29 Although ancient conceptions of race and ethnicity differed from modern conceptions, the second-century apologist Justin recognized the uniquely multiethnic nature of second-century Christian communities. See Justin Martyr, *Apologia A,* 14, in *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis. Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone,* ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2005). Phrases such as "τοὺς οὐχ ὁμοφύλους" and "τὰ ἔθη" suggest that Justin was describing people previously separated by ethnic and cultural differences who now lived in fellowship with one another. For multi-ethnic, multi-socio-economic, and multi-generational churches as an apologetic argument for the truthfulness of the gospel, see Jamaal Williams and Timothy Paul Jones, *In Church as It Is in Heaven: Cultivating a Multiethnic Kingdom Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023).

30 Frances Young, "Greek Apologists of the Second Century," *Apologetics in the Roman Empire,* 100.

31 For Christianity as not merely a practice or a community but a faith with particular and distinct beliefs, see Larry Hurtado, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016) 122–123.

32 Aristides, *Apologie,* 15.

33 Augustine of Hippo, *De Vera Religione,* in *De magistro, De Vera Religione,* ed. Domenico Bassi (Milan, Italy: Edizioni Testi Christiani, 1930), chapters 3–7. According to Augustine, if Plato had returned to life and glimpsed this consistency, he would have immediately become a Christian.

34 Aristides, *Apologie,* 4–5.

35 Aristides, *Apologie,* 13.

36 Aristides, *Apologie,* 14.

37 "Today, as the flood tide of Western power and influence ebbs, the illusions of European and American liberals risk being left stranded. Much that they have sought to cast as universal stands exposed as never having been anything of the kind. … Humanism derives ultimately from claims made in the Bible: that humans are made in God's image; that his Son died equally for everyone; that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. … That human beings have rights; that they are born equal; that they are owed sustenance, and shelter, and refuge from persecution: these were never self-evident truths," Holland, *Dominion,* 539–540. See also Anthony O'Hear, *Beyond Evolution: Human Nature and the Limits of Evolutionary Explanation* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1997), 130–132.

38 This stands in continuity with Augustine's later declaration that "all the branches of heathen learning include not only superstitious fancies but also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of truth," Augustine of Hippo, *De doctrina Christiana libri quatuor* (Ingolstadt, Germany: Attenkover, 1826), 2:40.

39 Curtis Chang, *Engaging Unbelief: A Captivating Strategy from Augustine and Aquinas* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 66–93, and, Joshua Chatraw and Mark Allen, *The Augustine Way: Retrieving a Vision for the Church's Apologetic Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023).

40 For neutral world and negative world, see Aaron Renn, "The Three Worlds of Evangelicalism," *First Things* (February 2022): www.firstthings.com. Renn connects the strategy of "cultural engagement" with a neutral world that is no longer dominant. While agreeing with his assessment of the emerging trend as one that is negative toward historic orthodox Christianity, I see the role of cultural engagement differently. Each of the "three worlds" represents a particular configuration of points of cultural affirmation and cultural challenge. In some cases, the church affirmed and challenged the correct points; in other instances, some Christians recognized points of challenge or affirmation that others did not. Put another way, each "world" represents different potential configurations of cultural engagement, and the

transition from one to another is a reconfiguration of the particular points of engagement. If so, the shift may not be from a position of potential cultural engagement to a position in which cultural engagement is impossible. If so, what is needed in the current context is careful consider of which reconfiguration of cultural engagement preserves the most faithful witness in contexts that no longer assume the social good of Christian profession and practice.

41 Tessa Rajak, "Talking at Trypho: Christian Apologetics as Anti-Judaism in Justin's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew," *Apologetics in the Roman Empire,* 25; see also Loveday Alexander, "The Acts of the Apostles as an Apologetic Text," *Apologetics in the Roman Empire,* 19. Another point that may be significant in this regard is the philosophical bent of each emperor addressed by these early apologists. Each of the imperial addressees of these various treatises was known to some degree as a philosopher. It seems these names might also have been intended less as intended destinations for the apologies and more as appeals intended to attract the attention of philosophically-inclined readers. For further examination of Christians as and among philosophers, see Heidi Wendt, "Christians as and among Writer-Intellectuals in Second-Century Rome," *Christian Teachers in Second-Century Rome,* ed. Gregory Snyder (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 84–108.