

# The Layman's Manual on Christian Apologetics



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Bridging the Essentials of Apologetics from  
the Ivory Tower to the Everyday Christian

**Brian G. Chilton**

*Foreword by Gary R. Habermas*

*Preface by Daniel Merritt*

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## THE LAYMAN'S MANUAL ON CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

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*Dedicated to my family. To Jennifer, my wife; Grayson,  
my son; Dennis and Gail Chilton, my parents;  
and to Virginia Church and Dan Talley.*

*Also, I would like to dedicate this book to my professor  
Gary Habermas, to the late Norman Geisler, and to  
the apologists everywhere whom God has used  
to strengthen my faith to what it is today.*



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## FOREWORD

Brian Chilton begins his volume *The Layman's Manual on Christian Apologetics* by framing his text against what increasingly looks like a coming time of struggle for believers in yet another new cultural revolution, similar in some ways to what transpired in the wake of the 1960s revolution. Depending on how the existing situation proceeds and works out, the field of Christian apologetics could face yet another incredible new challenge in addition to several others during the last few decades. The potential trials can only be imagined at present.

Allow me to explain. In 1977, I sent two completely different manuscripts on the subject of Jesus' resurrection to four leading publishers. All four rejected the manuscript they had received. One influential Managing Editor kindly sent me a long, detailed letter that is still in my files. Basically, he told me that apologetics was just about dead—it did not sell well anymore because the U.S. ethos had changed significantly post-1960s. Few folks, it seemed, liked to tell someone to their face that they were missing out on eternal life, or conversely, to always be arguing to prove their faith. It was not that I was wrong to head in this direction, only that apologetics was not selling well, so was forced to reject his manuscript. I really appreciated his honesty and we subsequently struck up a 40-year friendship!

Then, just a few years later, a Managing Editor at another major company wanted to know what I could write for them, because in this short time, he told me that apologetics had become the hottest subject in publishing! It was not that the two presses were that much different. But by this time, apologetics seemed to be a hot commodity at many presses, as I was to find out subsequently.

What had happened? Well, about the same time that these four refusal letters were arriving, the New Age Movement and its general mystical ethos had sprung up in many quarters. God could be anywhere, everywhere, or

nowhere, depending on your own thoughts and feelings—follow your own heart! Over the next two decades or so, the New Atheism seemed to pop up out of nowhere. (Isn't that always the way it seems with what appears to be new movements?) Additionally, post-modern ideas (however those were defined!) was ravaging university campuses, but now was reaching full swing into popular, everyday issues, including permeating the church.

Whoa! These ideas had exploded in a couple of short decades? During this time, a popular author contacted me because he was writing about apologetics in a unique way. His new book was named, *Who Made the Moon?* (Thomas Nelson, 2008). In the flyleaf of this book, Sigmund Brouwer intriguingly wrote, "I began the journey that led to this book because, as a father, I want to see my daughters in heaven." That sentence stuck in my mind and has not left since then, for his daughters were very young at that time. What in the whole world could be more important to a father?

In my opinion, these ideas just might fit together. When I received those four rejection letters, I wondered if I would ever write another thing—500 pages simply took too much time! (By the way, both of those resurrection books were eventually published!) But the encouragement just a few short years later to write more apologetics awakened me! Then with that line regarding his concern for his young daughters, Brouwer's comment haunted me. Now it seemed like a natural: nobody was ready to talk evidence *until* certain ideas had entered their own homes! Only then did the alarm sound!

So how does a Christian parent respond when they first find out that their teenage son or daughter has been entertaining several New Age ideas, or atheism, or the post-modern urge to define truth with a small "t"? Or, how about the challenge to demonstrate that Jesus ever existed in the first place without using the "prejudiced" Bible located in your home? What if another family member or friend revealed that they were thinking about walking away from their faith? Good answers were now needed. How did Mom and Dad respond? I'm sure some did quite well; others, not so much!

Unfortunately, at this point, some believers conclude falsely that apologetics is unbiblical or that it contradicts faith. But such a criticism ignores literally dozens of biblical passages. Apologetic evidences may help minister to people in at least three distinct ways. First, apologetics can strengthen the faith of believers, as when Jesus answered John the Baptist's doubts by pointing him to His many miracles (Luke 7:18-23). If this was all apologetics accomplished, it would be worth its weight in gold. Second, the Holy Spirit may use evidence to bring unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ, such as John's comment that Jesus' miracles were recorded for this very purpose (Jn 20:30-31). Third, evidences may also challenge unbelievers by simply

making them think, even when they disagree or do not want to listen. Jesus reported to unbelievers that his resurrection would be the sign that his teachings were true (Matt. 12:38-40). After Paul provided resurrection evidence and argued that this event demonstrated the truth of his message, some Greek philosophers came to faith while others were challenged (Acts 17:30-34).

Amazingly, Paul even commented that our faith is vain apart from the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-11, 14, 17). Good books can help equip us to defend our faith in a biblical, meaningful, and even practical way. Enter Brian Chilton's work, *The Layman's Manual on Christian Apologetics*. Don't miss the subtitle, directed "*from the Ivory Tower to the Everyday Christian*." Someone may be thinking, "Right! That's the connection I needed." As the title and Contents indicate, this book was written to provide evidences and good answers to tough issues for lay people who now want the resources. Brian is finishing his PhD in Theology and Apologetics, so he has the "apologetic chops" as we might say, to produce great responses. But Brian is also a pastor who has been in the trenches for almost 20 years—enough time to see many ideas come and go, sometimes invading families. Practical challenges and concerns need to be tested and Brian has helped others do just that.

Note, too, that Brian didn't get one of my rejection letters. The time has now come. People today need honesty and real-world answers. Check out Brian's volume and see if it helps to build bridges where and how they are needed most.

—Gary R. Habermas, PhD

Research Professor  
Liberty University



## PREFACE

A farmer would never go into the field to labor without a proper understanding of the basic laws of nature and without the proper tools needed to experience a harvest. A soldier would never venture onto the field of battle without an understanding of his enemy and armed with the proper ammunition which will result in conquest. An athlete would never enter the arena of competition without a good grasp of their opponent and the proper equipment necessary which will lead to victory. Likewise, every Christian should strive to avail themselves of the proper tools which will enable them to gain an understanding of Christian truths which will allow them to confidently defend with assurance the “faith once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

The book you hold in your hands, *The Layman’s Manual on Christian Apologetics*, is a tool that will give the Christian a greater understanding of the glorious truths of the reality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are living in a world that is growing increasingly hostile to the Christian faith, and it behooves those who embrace the truths of Christianity to be prepared to defend with confidence the one true reality that determines one’s eternal destiny. Peter reminds believers to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (I Peter 3:15). The Greek word translated as “give an answer” is *apologian*, from the root word *apologia*. *Apologia* is the source for the terms “apologetics” and “apologist,” which refer to a rational defense of the Christian faith. And believers are exhorted to be ready to give an “answer back” or a reasoned explanation for the hope that is in the heart.

It has been this writer’s privilege to have read Brian Chilton’s *The Layman’s Manual on Christian Apologetics* and I excitedly endorse this “tool” as a must for any Christian seeking to obtain a reasoned defense of

the faith. Brian, in an orderly and uncomplicated manner, communicates glorious biblical and spiritual truths that are both rational and logical in their presentation. This will be a book you will refer to again and again for two reasons: it will strengthen the believer as well as prepare the believer to confidently “give an answer” in defense of the faith. This is a book you will be glad you read.

As you absorb the truths found within these pages, it is Brian’s prayer that when you have the opportunity to “give an answer” to a searching soul, that the divine light of the Gospel will brightly illuminate the path that leads that searching one to the foot of the Christ of the cross where alone is found eternal life.

**—Daniel Merritt, Ph.D.**

Director of Missions Surry Baptist Association

## INTRODUCTION

As Bob Dylan quipped in 1963, “the times, they are a-changin’.” I have been in the gospel ministry for close to twenty years. The ministry today is far more challenging than it was in mid-nineties when God first called me. My grandfather was in the ministry. The challenges he faced in the seventies and eighties were far different than they are now. The advent of the internet and the creation of social media have exposed individuals to questions previously asked only in the ivory towers of academia. In addition, an increasingly secularized culture has created a greater spirit of skepticism in American culture. The challenges facing the modern church are more complex, more challenging, and greater in scope than they were in previous generations.

### **The Slow Death of Cultural Christianity in American Culture**

The primary problem the church is facing is the demise of *cultural Christianity*. What is cultural Christianity? *Culture* is defined by the *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* as “the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.”<sup>1</sup> When Christianity is added, one speaks of the shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices of society developed around the Judeo-Christian worldview.

For instance, when cultural Christianity was prevalent, individuals knew that worshipping God and being in church were admirable things. I remember going to the drive-in theater in Mount Airy, North Carolina with my parents as a child. The better movie (the A-movie) was played first. Before the second movie was played—which was generally a lesser known

1. Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Logos Bible Software.

movie and more cheaply made (the B-movie),<sup>2</sup> the theater had an intermission. This allowed individuals the opportunity to leave their vehicles to head over to the snack shop in the back building. Clips on the screen with talking cartoon tacos, hot dogs, popcorn, drinks, and fries encouraged individuals to quench their thirst with an ice-cold Pepsi or fill their hunger with a scrumptious hamburger or butter drenched popcorn. The commercials were enough to clog a person's arteries by viewing them alone.

In addition to the food commercials, the intermission also featured a promo encouraging individuals to attend church the following Sunday. The slide would read, "See you in Church Sunday! When you attend church, it's not an ordinary act, it is something worthwhile. When you attend church, you come to God's house to adore, to worship, to praise. See you in Church Sunday!"<sup>3</sup> This generation assumed that people knew that they needed to be in church as seen by shows like the *Andy Griffith Show* and even *The Twilight Zone*. It was assumed that everyone at least respected the Christian worldview.

During the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies, the culture began shifting away from its Judeo-Christian roots. The internet certainly sped up the process of secularization in the mid-nineties, especially with social media and chat boards which exposed the underlying cynicism and skepticism already taking root in Americana. It may surprise you to discover that the process had begun far before the sixties.

In fact, the argument about where truth is found goes back to debates held in ancient Athens. Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490–c. 420 BC) is quoted as saying, "man is 'the measure of all things, of the existence of the things that are and the non-existence of the things that are not.'"<sup>4</sup> Protagoras suggests that truth is dependent upon each person. Truth is made by the person observing it. Thus, truth is different for each person. One can readily note from Protagoras's worldview that the ideals of secularism are anything but new.

In stark contrast, Socrates of Athens (c. 470–399 BC) argued that truth was not found within each person but was transcendent. Socrates says,

Let us stick close to the statement we made a moment ago, and assume that nothing exists by itself as invariably one: then it will be apparent that black or white or any other color whatsoever is

2. These movies were often kung-fu movies which featured the late, great martial artist Bruce Lee. I loved them. My mom, not so much.

3. For an example, at the 4:40 mark, see "Drive-In Movie Ads: Drive in Intermission 1960's, YouTube (August 6, 2009), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26pQNKEOXjo>.

4. Plato, *Theaetetus* 152a, Logos Bible Software.

the result of the impact of the eye upon the appropriate motion, and therefore that which we call color will be in each instance neither that which impinges nor that which is impinged upon, but something between, which has occurred, peculiar to each individual.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, truth exists outside of the individual. Otherwise, each person would only know what was perceived by oneself. Actual truth could never be fully known. Seeing that Socrates believed in God, in a manner of speaking, the philosopher contended that truth is found in the transcendent God and is discovered by the process of learning.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the contention between Protagorean and Socratic philosophy is quite vast. For Protagoras, humanity sets its own standards. For Socrates, God has established the standards for all creation. So, how did we as a Western civilization move from a Socratic viewpoint of truth grounded in a Judeo-Christian worldview to a secularist Protagorean viewpoint of truth grounded in secular humanism?

The shift away from the Judeo-Christian worldview in the Western world began with the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The dawning of the American experiment came during the midst of this Enlightenment era. This is not to say that the United States was not built upon Christian principles. Rather, it originated within the time frame of the Enlightenment period.

While the Enlightenment was not necessarily bad in and of itself, it did create a movement that placed more emphasis on human reason than traditional beliefs which led to a more Protagorean construct. Traditional beliefs often need to be challenged. But writers of the Enlightenment—secularists such as David Hume, John Locke, Voltaire, and Baruch Spinoza—pushed the envelope farther than most. Hume would deny that miracles could be proven. The God of Voltaire and Spinoza was not one who interacted with the world but was largely hands off. This led to the concept of deism, a belief that would influence some American founders as James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin. Spinoza's biblical criticism and Immanuel Kant's ideology would influence German theologian Rudolf Bultmann who held that enlightened Christians should demythologize the Bible. Bultmann, an influence on many critical scholars, wrote,

5. *Ibid.*, 153e–154a.

6. Socrates also notes, "Look round and see that none of the uninitiated is listening. The uninitiated are those who think nothing is except what they can grasp firmly with their hands, and who deny the existence of actions and generation and all that is invisible." *Ibid.*, 155e. That is, some truths exist beyond the capacity of the senses to detect.

Can the Christian proclamation today expect men and women to acknowledge the mythical world picture as true? To do so would be both pointless and impossible. It would be pointless because there is nothing specifically Christian about the mythical world picture, which is simply the world picture of a time now past which was not yet formed by scientific thinking. It would be impossible because no one can appropriate a world picture by sheer resolve, since it is already given with one's historical situation.<sup>7</sup>

Skepticism already took root before the sixties and seventies. The development of the television, radio, and especially the internet in the nineties and beyond brought these ideas which were previously discussed in the halls of academia into the forefront of popular discourse. The problem is that traditional scholars who were trained in these areas did not pushback on the thoughts of guys like Bultmann as fiercely as progressive theologians were promoting their own. Many in the church today are faced with the same kinds of questions, but problematically they often lack the training needed to combat secularist philosophies.

## Responses of the Church to the New Demand

It should be noted that cultural Christianity and authentic Christianity are two different things. Even at the peak of cultural Christianity, many individuals claimed to be Christian because it was the hip thing to do. Like most trends, when Christianity was popular, everyone claimed to be a Christian. It is much like a child who says to his mother, "Ma, everyone else is a Christian. So, why shouldn't I be one, too?" In turn, mothers everywhere know the response that follows. "If everyone jumped off a building, would you jump, too?" Thus because of the popularity of Christianity, some individuals were part of the authentic church while other Christians were believers in name only.

The response of the modern church to the growing threat of secularism has been mixed. Some in the church choose the *ostrich response* which is to *deny* that there is a problem. These individuals claim that the problem is not as bad as some suggest so they continue their lives in a delusional utopia. This thinking has given rise to conspiracy theories where anyone who holds a different perspective is viewed with suspicious eyes. It is amazing the lengths some people will go to justify their own denial. Some individuals would rather adhere to ludicrous claims of some Orwellian conspiracy in

7. Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament Mythology and Other Basic Writings* IV.2.2, 3.

the medical community rather than accepting the fact that the person or the person's family has a disease that needs to be treated.

In like manner, advocates of the ostrich response will hold that the problem is not as bad as people think. Others will justify their denial with the belief with the notion that ideas travel in cyclical patterns, so we are just in a bad phase of the cycle right now. The question is, do we have a problem with doubt and a lack of faith in the modern church? The increasing decline of church attendance and the exodus of youth should serve as red flags that we do have a major problem.

Others have chosen to respond with the *Amish response* which is the response of *isolation*. Like the Amish, these individuals isolate themselves to their Christian communities and do not engage the culture. Worse yet, they may become hermits. When I lived in Southport, North Carolina—a coastal region in southeast North Carolina—I was told about a man who lived on a small island off an inlet at the intercoastal waterway. He had no electricity and no plumbing. The only way to get to his shack was by boat. As for finances, he would fish and gather oysters to make any money he required. The hermit had no contact with the outside world except for selling seafood at an occasional market. If this is the response we take, what impact will we make on society? None!

Those who take the Amish response intentionally become naïve to the problems of the world and lose interest in evangelism because evangelism would require them to leave their safety net. Their mantra is “ignorance is bliss.” Unfortunately, this response has led many well-qualified Christians to take themselves out of the public sphere. I believe that this response is partially responsible for the secularization of former Christian universities like Princeton, Harvard, and Yale. When Christians are uninvolved with the world, they essentially leave a dark world with no light. Thus, they leave no impact. How can a light shine in the darkness if there is no light to shine? A Christian must ask oneself whether God has called the Christian to evangelize? If so, how can a Christian evangelize if all one surrounds oneself with are other Christians? It is a nonsensical strategy. I also realize that parents want to protect their children. However, if a parent is not engaging their child and challenging them to analyze false ideas, then the child is left helpless against false philosophies when they enter the real world. The child will become easy prey for the secularist predators who desire to lead him away from the Christian worldview. Let me state that even though my son is in the public-school system, I am for homeschooling if it is where the parents can do so.<sup>8</sup> However, homeschooling parents must educate their children

8. We are blessed to live in an area where teachers are compassionate and largely

about the ideas of the world in order to show them the problems of opposing worldviews. That way when they enter the secular world, they will not be taken by surprise and will have a response to worldviews that are opposite of their own.

A third response came to me in a moment of inspiration at the proverbial eleventh hour in preparing this book. It is a response that is crippling the church, quite frankly. It is the *scapegoat response* which *blames others* for the current conditions. Because many congregants do not know how to respond to the changing demands threatening the church, they lash out at anyone or anything that might seek to change the status quo. Political candidates may become their scapegoat. Pastors and church staff may become their scapegoats of choice. Missionaries or other church members may receive their judgmental eye. In many churches across the nation, this response takes shape in generational wars. Older congregants fear the latest ideas from younger congregants falsely ascribing them to New Age or, worse yet, liberal ideologies. So, they will blame the younger generation for the current state of the church because they seem to be out-of-touch with the way the church works. Younger congregants ascribe the declining church to the older generation's obstinate idolatry which is set on traditions and methodologies that are as old as Methuselah. Thus, the older generation is blamed for the problems of the modern church because they seem to be out-of-touch with the way the world works. Such mindsets quickly escalate into turf wars if left unresolved. Let it be said, when congregants employ the scapegoat response, not only will they not make an impact in society, they will quickly implode what impact was being made in their churches.

The better response is the *shepherd response* which *deals and engages* with the problem. Shepherds were similar to modern mixed martial artist fighters for good reason. They had to be willing to fight for the protection of their sheep. Predators and thieves may try to kill or steal their sheep. However, a good shepherd was willing to deal with the threats that endangered one's flock. In similar manner, those individuals who accept the shepherd response will take seriously the task of evangelism. In addition, they desire to make an impact in the culture. Such thinking can actually bring about a solution to the problem. Rather than putting a band-aid on a deep wound, it adds balm to the wound and stitches it from the inside out. Ultimately, this response brings healing to the church and evangelizes the lost. Lastly, the shepherd response is the only healthy response that one can take. Across the nation, it is estimated that between 6,000 and 10,000 churches will close their door each year with the numbers expected to escalate unless something

hold traditional views in most matters.

is done to change the trend.<sup>9</sup> That's something like 100 to 200 churches each week! Apologetics is not only beneficial for evangelism and discipleship, it can also serve as a means to help dying churches.

If dealing with the issue is the response you choose to take, then welcome to the world of Christian apologetics! If you want to simply hide your head in the sand and pretend that there is no problem. Put this book down now and go purchase an emotionally driven devotional. Then, go join a commune and sing *Kumbaya* while dancing around a campfire. But, don't blame anyone if your loved ones are taken astray by false ideologies.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, if you are ready to make a defense for the faith, then welcome aboard. Apologetics is the defense of the Christian faith. It is not a new concept. In fact, as you will discover in this book, apologetics has a rich history dating back to Jesus himself.

Even though you may be pumped to begin the study of apologetics, it must be admitted that many who have not been trained in seminary are threatened by apologetics and for good reason. Part of the problem that laypersons face is that the concepts that were at one time discussed in the halls of the ivory towers of academia have trickled down into the streets of the common person. Academic Christians in seminary possess training on how to deal with certain concepts that others do not have. While this book cannot provide all the tools that one needs to maneuver through the murky waters of academia, it is possible to make the material accessible to the laity so that they can feel more confident in sharing their faith with the majority of people on the street. That is the purpose behind this book, to make the most important material in Christian apologetics accessible so that anyone can engage their doubting friend or family member. Perhaps, this book will help you deal with your own personal doubts.

## Personal Testimony

Before we begin the book, I would like to share why this book is so important to me. I was saved at an early age and entered the ministry at the tender age of 16. In the late nineties, I started having doubts after reading a book by the Jesus Seminar titled *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say*. The

9. Thom S. Rainer, "Hope for Dying Churches," *Facts & Trends* (January 16, 2018), <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/>.

10. Even if you have some answers to the challenges, you may lose some of your loved ones to the pressing secularist worldviews that has captivated our society. But having no responses will most certainly leave your loved ones helpless against the attacks that arise against their faith.

book presented the four Gospels of the New Testament along with the Gospel of Thomas. The Seminar had gauged the teachings of Jesus according to what they thought were the most authentic sayings of Jesus. If they believed the words were authentic, they colored the words in red. If they thought the words were most likely Jesus's, they colored the words pink. If they thought that the words had some root in Jesus's teaching but was reworded by the writer, they colored the words in gray. Statements that were not Jesus's own words, but the writer's invention were colored in black. They deemed that only 14 percent of the statements ascribed to Jesus were ascribed to him as authentic. This caused a great deal of doubt for me in my young ministerial career. How could I tell people to trust a book which I was finding increasingly inauthentic?

I asked some leaders of the church. When I did, I was scorned and told that the Bible was true because it is the Bible and that I should not be asking questions like that. When I noticed that those same Christians were not living up to their own convictions, I became an agnostic. It was not something that I wanted to happen. I agonized and shed many tears during the process. I nearly had a nervous breakdown during the transition. But I found no help from the church. None. I only found scorn and shame.

Fast-forward five years. By 2005, I had married my wife and worked at a textile industry by this time. On a hot day in the summer of 2005, I was driving down Hanes Mall Boulevard in Winston-Salem, North Carolina when something told me that I should go to the local Lifeway Christian Bookstore. I had no clue why, but I did. While I was there, I picked up a copy of Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (the old copy) and Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ*. These books led me to the works of Gary Habermas and William Lane Craig. I found in these books the answers to the questions that had troubled me. I discovered that faith is based on fact. That truth completely changed me and strengthened me to a greater faith than I had before encountering my doubts.

## What to Expect

This book cannot provide an exhaustive treatment of apologetics. Each one of the chapters in this study could have its own graduate level course. This book is built so that the layman can understand apologetic principles and will provide a winsome defense for the faith. However, some issues are complex by their very nature. While the book has tried to simplify the issues, some may find that certain aspects of the book will require more attention than others. Don't become discouraged. If you have questions, ask! Seek out