



**DYNAMIC GOSPEL
NEW EUROPE**

CONVERSATION
AND GATHERING

**June 2021
Conversation**

Table of Contents

Welcome	3
Instructions	4
The Ecclesial Apologetic for God: Becoming a Good Church in the Eyes of a Watching World	8
Bearing Witness to Christ in the Realm of Ideas: A Holistic Missional Approach to Apologetics in Europe	15
Interview Prof. John Lennox	22

Welcome

How can we make Christ known in today's Europe where scepticism and misconceptions about Christianity abound? The focus of the June 2021 Lausanne Europe Conversation is apologetics. Traditionally, apologetics is understood as the defence of the truth of Christianity, but more broadly it can be seen as anything we say or do that contributes to the plausibility and credibility of the gospel.

This month we will reflect on an interview with one of today's great Christian apologists, Oxford mathematician Prof. John Lennox, but we will also read two articles by Dave Benson and Lars Dahle, which challenge all of us to see ourselves, and our churches, as essential in the apologetic task. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email us at conversation@lausanneeurope.org

And if you are just starting your Impact Group, or are confused about what they are about, then check out the introduction pages to the [Conversation](#) and [Impact Groups](#) to find out more.

Instructions

1. Introductions and Prayer

Give time for everyone to introduce themselves if this is your first Impact Group. Ask someone to pray that God would use this time to build up our confidence in proclaiming and living out the truth of the gospel in a sceptical age.

2. Apologetics

The Ecclesial Apologetic for God: Becoming a Good Church in the Eyes of a Watching World

Dave Benson is the Director of Culture and Discipleship at LICC (The London Institute of Contemporary Christianity). His article is a passionate call for a broader agenda for apologetics, one that involves the whole of life and the whole of the church.

Bearing Witness to Christ in the Realm of Ideas: A Holistic Missional Approach to Apologetics in Europe

The second article we would like you to read this month is by Lars Dahle, Associate Professor in Systematic Theology and Christian Apologetics at NLA University College, Norway. Inspired by a phrase in the preface to Lausanne III Congress statement, the article is a call “to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching in every nation, in every sphere of society”, but also and particularly, “in the realm of ideas”.

The articles by Dave Benson and Lars Dahle raise lots of challenging questions. You will probably not have time to discuss all of the questions below, so before your Impact Group, read through the questions and decide which ones are most relevant for your group.

1. As Christians, we are deeply challenged by ideas and assumptions within our cultures. Which secular ideas are most influential in your context and how are the Christians around you wrestling with them? How can you come alongside others, as they attempt to answer these questions so that they can better live, serve, and witness in their everyday lives?
2. How effective have you found classic answers and philosophical apologetics for God's existence with your secular friends? Where does, or doesn't, it 'connect'?
3. How do you share and show that following Jesus is truly good news for your neighbours in the here-and-now of their everyday lives?
4. Share a story of where you've seen a truly 'good church in the eyes of a watching world' embody and make plausible Jesus as Lord to sceptical Europeans.
5. What needs to change in your church for it to embody the gospel and become this holy and beautiful community of 'wise peacemakers' - characterised by

love, humility, integrity, and simplicity - that draws people to Christ once again?

6. How can we resource Christian families, local churches, and other Christian communities to become attractive and mature contexts where key Christian truths are affirmed, and Christians are equipped for everyday witness?
7. Were there any other insights from the two articles that you found particularly helpful?

3. Interview with Prof. John Lennox

Lastly, we would like you to watch a short except from an interview with Prof. John Lennox. Lennox's debates with leading atheists like Richard Dawkins are the subject of new film *Against the Tide*. While filming, the producers took a moment to interview him and ask him some more personal questions about his stand for Christian truth.

The following questions mainly draw on quotes from the interview so do make sure everyone has seen the clip and, if not, then it might be worth watching it together. Then discuss the questions together.

1. John Lennox said that it was important to expose his faith in God to its opposites, *“to all manner of philosophies and religions and arguments that question it” and that he “tried to listen to agnostics and atheists...and to walk in their shoes and see with their eyes so that when I come to my own conclusions they are based on having considered what other people think and not simply being blinkered by blind faith”.*

How does exposing our own faith to its opposite help us to articulate the gospel?

2. John Lennox’s parents actively encouraged him to question his own beliefs, rather than seeking to protect him from “the big world outside”. He sees a danger in being too protective of our young people in this regard, suggesting that they will *“grow up maybe to become professional people highly educated, but their spiritual knowledge will grow very slowly indeed and of course their peers will notice the difference and that increases the fear and results sadly for many people that their faith becomes privatised and then it disappears altogether under pressure.”*

Do you agree that the privatisation of Christian faith is the result of being over-protective?
How might we address this in our discipleship and church life?

3. The secular media do give a lot of profile to prominent atheists like Richard Dawkins and, as Lennox says, sometimes it can appear that the atheist argument has a stronger basis than is actually the case.

The Engage event coming during June will feature Christian media that has been developed to explore the compelling case for the existence of God as well as the evidence for Christ as God incarnate based on the film called [Against the Tide](#).

How might we use media of this kind both in our evangelism and in strengthening the faith of believers?

4. Prayer

Always make sure that you leave enough time to pray together every time you meet. Here are the prayer points for this month’s Conversation:

1. Pray for resources to identify and equip the Christians in Europe (and beyond) who are committed to publicly proclaim, demonstrate, commend and defend the truth, beauty and wonder of who God is in the everyday aspects of the culture we live in.
2. Pray that as Christians, we will boldly and authentically bear witness to Jesus Christ in all his teachings- in every nation, in every sphere of society and in the realm of ideas (Lausanne III congress).
3. Pray for wisdom to discern and identify our own apologetic roles as individuals and as a community, and publicly proclaim biblical truth with humility, integrity and simplicity, in our everyday lives.
4. Pray that as Christians we may be compassionate and sensitive to listen to those who share a different faith to ours, and gain wisdom from the Holy Spirit to respond from a point of understanding as we articulate the Gospel.
5. Pray for wisdom to know how best to use media as a tool for evangelism in the context of defending the

truth, beauty and wonder of God in our generation today.

5. Make Your Contribution to the Conversation

We really want to hear back from your Impact Group after each session. Please find a few minutes to summarise what you hear from God, the highlights of the discussion, and any questions that were raised, in the comments box immediately below.

[GO TO THE CONVERSATION](#)

The Ecclesial Apologetic for God: Becoming a Good Church in the Eyes of a Watching World

By Dave Benson

[Go to the article online](#)

As a lecturer in apologetics, teaching others to defend and commend the Christian faith, I'm convinced that Christianity makes more sense of our human experience than any other worldview, religious or secular. Followers of Jesus, today, need to share a coherent faith that corresponds to the way the world actually is. And we must answer secularist ideas proudly declaring that the material universe is all there is, so 'God botherers'[1] should get back in their box, privatising their faith. I praise God for the courageous and wise work of intellectual apologists like John Lennox, who swim against the tide of atheist

scholars and boost everyone's confidence to proclaim Christ's Lordship in the public square.

It's just that arguing this case to my secular friends often leaves them cold. By itself, it's not enough.

I remember inviting one such friend to a university talk I gave on arguments for God's existence. From most accounts, I was understandable and even-handed while pulling apart common atheistic objections. Together we explored philosophical arguments for why the universe needs a first cause; we judged the fine-tuning of the

cosmos as consistent with a wise and powerful Creator; and we considered the historical case – especially through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection – that 'God is there and not silent', as Francis Schaeffer liked to say.

My friend politely watched on as, after the talk, I engaged with sceptics angry at my supernatural take, and Muslims appreciative of the Kalam cosmological argument, but questioning the nature of this God. When chatting afterwards, though, it was obvious I'd missed the mark. The arguments failed to speak to the logic of her heart. Her desires. Her loves and hates.

My friend only showed up because she trusted me personally, and could see in our church community a quality of grace in short supply elsewhere. She wasn't wrestling with abstract questions fired by detractors like Richard Dawkins and the not-so-new atheists. Rather, she was wanting to make sense of why we would give our lives for something bigger than the here-and-now, building a community around Jesus' way of life.

We were intriguing to her, and broke the mould. Based on media portrayals and some of her encounters with proud apologists quick to answer but slow to listen, she

expected Christianity to be full of bigoted hypocrites. Religious conviction looked irrelevant at best, and dangerous at worst, characterised by church abuse, religious violence, financial scandals, and judging the LGBT community over sexual ethics. The apologetic my friend needed would address these stumbling blocks with the evidence of attractive lives. She wanted to see the effect Jesus had in everyday living, at the heart of what was truly important in her worldly experience: work, family, friendship, and managing mental health. What kind of apologetic can do this in post-Christendom Europe?

As countless studies, like the [European Values Survey \(EVS\)](#), demonstrate, Europe continues to secularise. Christian belief and practice is falling away. But for most citizens, they can't be bothered debating what looks unimportant in their day-to-day. In his analysis of the EVS, [Jim Memory](#) concludes, 'Apologetics that is targeted on atheism is only reaching a tiny proportion of Europe's population. The much greater challenge is reaching the huge number of unbelieving Europeans who are indifferent to Christianity and consider religion an irrelevance to modern life.'

We desperately need a broader agenda for apologetics.

What if, as [John Stackhouse argues](#), apologetics is 'anything that points to the plausibility and credibility of the gospel; all we say and do that can help those who are not (yet) Christian take Christianity and the gospel more seriously than they previously did'? How might this shift our imagination and way of representing Christ in the public square? The force of persuasion suddenly shifts from abstract arguments to the integrity of a community whose life together puts skin on the claims of the kingdom. Sacred arguments are embodied in the secular realm.

Take one of the church's first apologists, Justin Martyr. He made brilliant arguments in the second century to defend Christians against accusations that their brand of religion poisoned everything. He even made the case that Christianity was morally superior to its competitors, drawing on philosophy to defend the freedom to follow Jesus and point people to him in the marketplace. And yet, his neighbours needed more than this for his apologetic to stick.

As historian Rodney Stark explains, it was the whole-life witness of Christian martyrs following Jesus' path of loving sacrifice that transformed the Roman Empire and made

this strange faith worth believing in. When facing plagues far worse than the Covid pandemic, Christians stayed in the cities to nurse neighbours back to health or hold them close as life faded away. It was this embodied 'moral argument' that first Christianised Europe.[2]

In Julian the Apostate's Epistle to Pagan High Priests, written as the last pagan emperor of Rome, he complains of Christian goodness and charity enticing local citizens to change faith: 'These impious Galileans (Christians) not only feed their own, but ours also; welcoming them with their agape, they attract them, as children are attracted with cakes.... Whilst the pagan priests neglect the poor, the hated Galileans devote themselves to works of charity, and by a display of false compassion have established and given effect to their pernicious errors. Such practice is common among them, and causes contempt for our gods.'

This apologetic is arguably more important in Twenty-First Century post-Christian Europe than it was in Justin Martyr's day. In a secular age, winning arguments comes less from robust debate or even the historical record, however well we can tell this [amazing story](#). More powerful is the authority of authenticity: lives lived

beautifully and compellingly among our neighbours as a witness to something (or someone) beyond the here-and-now.

This is not an intellectual argument, but a moral one. The biblical understanding of 'the beauty of holiness' (1 Chr. 16:29; 2 Chr. 20:21; Ps. 96:9; Heb. 13:18) can help us: the NASB translates Psalm 29:2 as calling for us to 'Worship the LORD in holy array', in brilliant colour reflecting the rainbow-like unity-in-diversity that is our triune creator. What might this look like today, through our churches sent together as witnesses in the world?

Redemption required incarnation – not a clever tweet from heaven or precise syllogism scrawled onto a sandwich board. Missiologist Michael Pucci explains, 'for the gospel is not a law or a disembodied message that God wants to convey, but the living, breathing word of the Kingdom exemplified in its messengers. ... Our brokenness and continuing transformation is a key part of what we testify to. The authenticity of transparency is a powerful vehicle of the gospel.'^[3]

In his letter to the scattered exiles, the apostle Peter urged the growing Christian church to 'live such good lives

among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us' (1 Pt. 2:12).

This is the context within which we find Peter's other famous exhortation, 'to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (1 Pt. 3:15). His wider call was

for the whole church to live a countercultural household code, exemplifying holiness even as they suffered persecution. Peter knew that the reasons for their hope became meaningful when they were incarnated in Spirit-empowered exemplary character, and a Kingdom-focused approach to life and work.

We might also consider Paul's logic in his letter to the Philippians. In chapter one, God's good work in them is working its way out, bearing fruit as a witness to Christ as they live blameless lives. Paul's gracious suffering under persecution advances the gospel; this is their greatest source of confidence. In chapters two through four, Paul pleads with the ekklesia—that is, the church, as the 'called out' ones representing Christ in their specific time and place—to turn away from the idolatry of power, success,

and greed, and instead embrace Jesus' demand for humility, integrity, and simplicity.

What difference would it make if, today, we were not only to 'hold firm to the word of life', but to 'shine like stars' as we did so (Phil. 2:15-16)? If we were to control our bodies and sexual desires, channelling our energy instead towards works of righteousness(3:1-7)? If we resolved arguments with each other, were free from anxiety, always mindful of God's peace, practicing material simplicity and financial honesty, and displaying contentment in all circumstances (3:17-21; 4:1-13)?

Both Peter and Paul are putting forth an ecclesial argument for God's existence. The church makes credible to every citizen, past and present, that God exists, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Heb. 11:6).

The way we love each other, and overflow in love for the life of the world, makes our common creator known. As we practice [humility, integrity, and simplicity](#), individuals—whatever their intellect and ability to craft an argument—are fused into a body that looks like Jesus. We become a truly good church in the eyes of a watching world.[4] And, over time, the alluring beauty of holiness, best seen when

we suffer for doing good, will be evident. The gospel is not made more plausible with better arguments alone, but with lives that allow it to take on form.

What, then, might this ecclesial apologetic look like for us as 'called out' ones representing Christ in our specific time and place? I long to see a movement of disciples, a community of 'wise peacemakers' (Mt. 5:9), who can make sense of the times we're in and know what it takes to out-love evil with good. When we gather, we're formed to become people who seek the shalom of the places in which we are scattered throughout the week. We are one good church commissioned to bear the presence of God in diverse cultural contexts, making a difference in whatever we do, wherever we are, whoever we are.

These whole-life disciples will have learned to follow the way of Jesus in their particular situation and moment, empowered to listen, imagine, create, and communicate. It might look like a senior accountant humbling herself to truly listen to her colleagues at work, making sense of why they're feeling undermined by the leadership, and everyday bringing their needs to the Father in prayer. It might look like a football hooligan with a fascist bent and a history of violence, being radically saved to imagine his

enemies in a rival club becoming friends and part of the same community house.[5] It could be a young mum in a close-knit accountability group where she practices [Examen](#) and open confession to keep short accounts with God, helping her deal with underlying anger; only then does she have what it takes to create a brave space that heals rifts between parents running the toddlers' play group. And it might look like a retiree trained to communicate to everyone on his street just why Jesus is good news, as he follows in the footsteps of the church in bygone pandemics: his evident love for each person and practical care on a first-name basis earning him the right to speak peace over their anxiety.

This is the beauty of holiness. It's a good church filled with the Spirit, making plausible and credible the reign of God through good lives that stoke the curiosity of the most ardent sceptic. Of course, this apostolic witness works in tandem with the genius of philosophical apologists who answer tough questions and stand against the tide of European secularists who are drifting ever further from Christian belief. Nevertheless, first things first, for 'unless we are content to answer questions no one is posing...the most urgent apologetic task of the church today is to live

in the world in such a way that the world is driven to ask us about the hope we have.'[6]

In my experience, I have seen that Christianity cannot prove or legitimate itself apart from our Christlike lives. May we, then, participate in the Lord's work of making his church ever more radiant and beautiful, without stain or wrinkle or blemish, but holy and blameless (Eph. 5:27-28). May we once again be 'good' in the eyes of a watching world, 'shining like a beacon on a hill'. May our essential apologetic be an ecclesial one.

Notes and References

[1] 'God botherer': demeaning British slang for a person who persistently promotes religious beliefs to others, even when unwelcome.

[2] See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 83-88, 189, also chapters 4 and 8.

[3] Michael Pucci, 'The Gospel and Human Poverty,' in *Hearts Aflame: Living the Passion for Evangelism*, ed.

Michael Tan (Singapore: Eagles Communication, 2008), 222-224.

[4] See Mt. 5:43-48; Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Tm. 3:15; 1 Pt. 2:9-12; 1 Jn. 4:12. See also Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer, 'Creating a Goodness Culture,' ch. 5 in *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020).

[5] This true story of Revd Dave Jeal, chaplain to the Bristol Rovers, is powerfully told by Dan Morrice in *Finding the Peacemakers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2021), 95-134.

[6] Philip Kenneson, 'There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing', in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, eds. Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 169.

Bearing Witness to Christ in the Realm of Ideas: A Holistic Missional Approach to Apologetics in Europe

By Lars Dahle

[Go to the article online](#)

"We long to see greater commitment to the hard work of robust apologetics."

The Cape Town Commitment

My first encounter with Christian apologetics was during my high school years. I was deeply encouraged as a disciple and witness when I discovered that the biblical Gospel makes sense as a worldview, is founded on historical facts, and can transform lives. These early formative discoveries have influenced my ministry significantly throughout different phases. Today, I am

convinced that, as evangelical Europeans, we need to (re)capture a vision of the Gospel as true, good, and beautiful.

Facing up to contemporary challenges in Europe

Pre-Christian, Christian, and post-Christian ideas exist alongside each other in today's Europe. When sharing the Gospel in more secular contexts, we may find that it does not make sense to our friends, neighbours, and colleagues:

- Christian ideas and images are often viewed through the cultural lenses of post-Christendom. This means that they are seen through stories of mythical and factual abuses of power by churches and Christians throughout history.
- Biblical realities, concepts, and images – such as God, Father, holiness, sin, love, salvation, cross, freedom, and Jesus Christ – are often not being perceived through the lenses of classical Christianity. This is due to the loss of a shared worldview framework.
- The wider cultural milieu may be a context where the biblical Gospel is not seen, heard, or felt as a relevant worldview option, whether in terms of reason (arguments), affections (feelings) or imagination (stories).

Furthermore, in secular European contexts God is often viewed as absent or non-existent. Prayer is only a psychological exercise. The Bible is seen as a collection of irrelevant ancient texts which contain some literary gems. Science has replaced faith in God. Christianity is not seen as unique, but only as one worldview alternative among many. Jesus is an inspiring humanist. The Christian faith is no longer considered as objectively true; though it may

function as a source of personal inspiration or as a kind of spirituality which may lead to increased well-being.

God is usually taken for granted within our Christian churches, and sermons may describe his love and goodness. However, the existence of God is hardly ever justified, it is usually only presupposed. The Bible is quoted and applied, but in many cases no reasons are given for the selection and credibility of the biblical books. Jesus is being worshipped, but often no deeper explanation is presented for his uniqueness and his salvation. Prayer, liturgy, and mission are primarily seen as valuable Christian traditions, and thus never argued for in relation to the wider secular context.

Thus, many confessing Christians in Europe (and beyond) are faced with a highly demanding experience of cognitive dissonance between Christian stories, beliefs, and truth-claims within the church on the one hand and dominant secular narratives and arguments in the wider culture on the other hand. This is due to key cultural factors such as secular paradigms in the academy and the media, the increasing presence of worldview pluralism, and the marginalization of Christian faith and practice.

Following the call to apologetics in the *Cape Town Commitment*

These urgent missional challenges are included in the Cape Town Commitment in the section on “Bearing witness to the truth of Christ in a pluralistic, globalized world” where a call to action is issued in relation to apologetics:

We long to see greater commitment to the hard work of robust apologetics. This must be at two levels.

1. We need to identify, equip, and pray for those who can engage at the highest intellectual and public level in arguing for and defending biblical truth in the public arena.
2. We urge Church leaders and pastors to equip all believers with the courage and the tools to relate the truth with prophetic relevance to everyday public conversation, and so to engage every aspect of the culture we live in.

In relation to our June Conversation and the upcoming Engage II event, the first level is exemplified by the public ministry of Oxford mathematician and apologist John

Lennox, whereas we as Christian leaders need to mobilize the whole people of God for faithful witness in our everyday lives. For this key missional task, we may benefit from a wide spectrum of apologetic resources, such as the video series Exploring the God Question and the movie Against the Tide, both produced by Kharis Productions and both involving John Lennox. It is fruitful to reflect on this call to apologetics in the Cape Town Commitment in the light of a key sentence in the preface, where the goal of the Lausanne III Congress (and the subsequent statement) is summarized as bringing “a fresh challenge to the global Church to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching – in every nation, in every sphere of society, and in the realm of ideas.”

We need to let this challenge refresh us. This can be done by unpacking the meaning of this highly condensed sentence. It contains two key parts:

- The second part describes integral Christian mission as an ongoing movement in three dimensions, i.e., the length dimension (“in every nation”), the breadth dimension (“in every sphere of society”), and the depth dimension (“in the realm of ideas”). This means that

relevant Christian mission engages with all three dimensions in every context.

- The theological and missiological foundation for this 'mission in 3D' is articulated in the first part of this mission statement – i.e., “to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching”. This means that authentic Christian mission has Christ and his teaching at the centre and emphasizes truth, integrity, and a holistic perspective.

Thus, apologetics should be an integrated part of our contemporary Christian dialogue, witness, and discipleship in a secular and pluralistic world.

When a Christian argues for the Christian worldview as the best explanation of any given evidence, experience, or phenomenon, this takes place in a pluralistic context of competing truth claims and contending apologies. Every religious and secular worldview has its own apologists and its own apologetic contributions. This is the context for a holistic missional approach to Christian apologetics, with pre-evangelism, evangelism, and post-evangelism as the three key categories.

Christian apologetics as pre-evangelism: Answering and agenda-setting.

Apologetics has traditionally been assigned the roles of answering honest questions about the Christian faith, dealing with serious objections to biblical truth claims, exposing influential myths about the Gospel, and positively deconstructing current secular and religious worldview alternatives. These functions of apologetics have often been described as the removal of intellectual stumbling blocks on the way to (potential) personal faith in the God of the Bible. Apologetic argument cannot create belief, but it may create an atmosphere in which belief could come to life.

This is an everyday task for each one of us, in our personal relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours. As expressed by Paul: “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” (Col. 4:5f)

This pre-evangelistic function also relates to the public agenda-setting role of Christian apologetics, which is crucial in contexts of competing truth claims where the

Christian story is often forgotten, neglected, or marginalized. Through being salt and light in mainstream media and in the academy and other educational contexts, Christians in public roles may help to create and sustain a cultural milieu in which the biblical gospel can be heard as intellectually defensible and experientially satisfying. This is clearly a key task when confronted with political correctness, influential secular thought, and alternative religious beliefs.

Christian apologetics as persuasive evangelism: Commending and clarifying.

Evangelism and apologetics are distinct but related activities. Whereas evangelism is the actual proclamation of the Gospel, inviting people to believe in Christ and offering forgiveness and new life in Christ, apologetics is commending this Gospel of Jesus Christ as intellectually compelling, historically credible, and existentially attractive. Along the same lines, the Manila Manifesto “affirms that apologetics and evangelism belong together”.

Apologetics also has a key clarifying role in relation to conversion as a worldview decision. In the absence of an apology that will make sense to and engage outsiders, it is

impossible, even in principle, to decide between various worldviews. Therefore, as we share our personal testimonies, we need to be prepared to clarify why the Christian worldview should be preferred, based on God’s revealed truth in general and special revelation.

Within the current European context, one such strategic initiative is FEUER, the Fellowship of Evangelists in the Universities of Europe. This is a network of evangelicals across Europe who are committed to publicly proclaim, commend, and defend the truth, beauty, and wonder of the gospel in the university context to today’s generation of students. Such encouraging initiatives may also inspire evangelical churches and ministries to creative apologetic action on other arenas.

We may learn in this task from Paul’s encounter with King Agrippa and Governor Festus in Acts 26. After having shared his life story, the apostle faced tough opposition. He responded by commending the gospel of Jesus as true and reasonable, coherent, credible, and life changing.

Christian apologetics as post-evangelism: Affirming and equipping.

Whereas the pre-evangelism and the evangelism contexts

describe the external missional task of Christian apologetics, the post-evangelistic context describes the internal missional task of affirming the believer in his or her decision to start (or to continue) to believe in Jesus Christ. We should be ready to offer such affirmations to Christian believers, in ways that are personally engaging and culturally relevant.

As we have seen already, the apologetic task also includes equipping believers to bear witness to Christ and all his teaching, in every part of the world – not only geographically and culturally, but in every sphere of society and in the realm of ideas. This relates to the life-long task of developing a Christian mind, whether in relation to the academy, the media, our workplace, our relationships, or any other areas in our everyday lives.

This post-evangelistic task is at the centre of my own home ministry context in Norway. Inspired by the European Leadership Forum, we have established apologetic initiatives to enable Christians to grow in confidence and to be equipped for personal and public witness. The initiatives include an academic programme, workshops and online resources, a major annual national conference, and a new publishing imprint.

We find the task of affirming and equipping in the New Testament. Luke wanted to reassure Theofilos of the truth he was taught (Luke 1:4). Peter asks his readers to “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.” (1 Pet. 3:15) Today, the Christian family, the local church, and other Christian communities are strategic contexts for maturing disciples and preparing for witness.

Finding our own apologetic role

Thus, as evangelicals in Europe we are called to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching also in the realm of ideas. This is an urgent task, and every believer needs to be mobilized. Let us pray God for wisdom to identify our own apologetic roles, in the context of our own arenas, to enable us to be biblically authentic and culturally relevant in our personal and public witness.

Recommended further reading:

- Lars Dahle: “Truth, Christian Mission and Apologetics: A Response and A Proposal”, Norwegian Journal of Missiology 2013/1
<https://journals.mf.no/ntm/article/view/4285/3602>

- Lars Dahle: "Cognitive Dissonance as a Missiological Challenge and Opportunity: An Evangelical Perspective on Western Europe",
Theofilos 2018/2
<https://theofilos.no/issues/theofilos-vol-10-nr-2-2018/>

Interview | Prof. John Lennox

With Iain Morris

[Go to the article online](#)

Iain Morris

John, as the Producer – or at least one of them – of this film, *Against the Tide*, it's a privilege to talk to you, the central character in it. I've a number of questions I want to pose to you. And the first question I have for you is this: who are you? Who is John Lennox? What makes him tick?

John Lennox

Well, John Lennox is a person who was brought up to think and, coming from a profoundly real Christian background, I think what characterises my life more than anything else is the desire to know the truth – the truth about the big picture. I'm a mathematician; I'm a kind of scientist and interested in what nature can tell us. But that's only part of a bigger question. Where do the natural sciences fit into the big picture? Do they tell us everything

about reality? And because I believe in God, from a very early age, I wanted the evidences that would back up that belief and I spent most of my life attempting to understand those evidences by a very simple means; and that is to expose my faith in God and Christ to its opposites, to all manner of philosophies and religious and arguments that question it and all of these years I've tried to be open and honest. In other words, I've tried to listen to agnostics and atheists and people of other persuasions. I've tried to walk in their shoes and see with their eyes so that when I come to my own conclusions they are based on having considered what other people think and not simply being blinkered by blind faith by simply saying; I believe it.

Iain Morris

Blind faith. I heard you say that you believed from a very early age. Can I infer from that that there are problems lurking in the shadows for people who believe from a very early age and may just go on to accepting everything without challenging it?

John Lennox

Of course there are! But, you see, the basis of my belief when I was young was the hard evidence of seeing that Christianity was real in the life of my parents and they were unusual parents because they helped avoid the problem that you just mentioned by encouraging me to question my own beliefs. I always questioned my own beliefs before even I reached teenage and that was wonderful. In other words, let me put it this way. My parents encouraged me to think. They were convinced of the truth of Christianity and they wanted to give me the kind of education they didn't have themselves and so from an early age they encouraged me to put Christianity against the background of questioning; in other words, they did the opposite of attempting to form a ghetto around me to protect me from the big world outside. They introduced me to the big world outside and, by doing so, through

reading, through listening to lectures and so on they prepared me for it.

Iain Morris

What do you say to people who are a little bit afraid of this direction of travel and who would be concerned that, if we encourage people to ask questions, they may end up rejecting it all?

John Lennox

Well, there's always that risk but you see that comes from a certain instability and fear. If Christianity is true, then we've nothing to fear and the only way to overcome the fear is to face the questions and not try to repress them or to suppress them and I have found increasingly that, if you give people information and if you demonstrate to them that the arguments that they feel are so strong against God and against Christianity aren't so strong after all, bit by bit their confidence increases; but if they never do that, you see they will grow up maybe to become professional people highly educated, but their spiritual knowledge will grow very slowly indeed and of course their peers will notice the difference and that increases the fear and results sadly for many people that their faith becomes

privatised and then it disappears altogether under pressure.

Iain Morris

In your view, what is the intellectual firepower of atheism in relation to the Christian worldview?

John Lennox

Well atheist firepower I think is that atheism boasts quite a number of high powered public intellectuals. They're given a lot of space on the media so that the public never gets a balanced view and gets the impression that the evidence for atheism is everything and there's no evidence for anything else but the public never get the chance to hear anything else and that is where I want to step into the frame and say: hold on minute; there are alternatives to this atheism and they are very much more powerful because their explanatory power is much greater of all that we see around us.

Iain Morris

A difficult question in a way. When you stand up against atheism, do you think you and the Christian view stand up tall or do you emerge bloodied but not bowed?

John Lennox

That's a leading question I would say. I would incline to the fact that you might get a bash on your nose once or twice but intellectually, morally, spiritually, Christianity stands up tall because atheism, it's atheism that crumbles. As a scientist, the very bottom line for me is that atheism doesn't even give me a reason to trust the mind with which I do science because it tells me that the mind with which I'm doing science is essentially equal to the brain and the brain is the end product of a mindless, unguided process. Well no scientist I have ever asked would trust a computer if he or she thought it was the end product of a mindless, unguided process. So there's a big black hole at the bottom of atheism's thinking when it comes to science. Whereas, as a Christian I think, look, the justification for doing science, why science arose in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is that the pioneers believed in a God, an intelligent God who was behind the universe which was therefore a rational universe and therefore studying that universe could even be part of their worship for him. To me, there's no competition between the atheist explanation and the Christian explanation.