

# Presenting Original Apologetics

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## Abstract

Based on the approach of 'Original Apologetics', returning to the Petrine call to all faithful that they learn the faith and respond to others in a Christian manner (1 Pt 3:15), this paper sets out how these ideas have been presented ordinarily in the parish setting to clergy and laity, consistent with the call of *Gaudium et Spes* 62.

By describing the general content and progression in an initial format of four presentations, the course's main points can be seen to develop in each of these. The presentations introduce the original Petrine call, then identify similar scriptural calls by Paul and Jude. Alongside these, several calls from Second Vatican Council documents based upon these sources are given. Supporting content includes the Two Ways theme and a brief history of apologetical development. These lead to the final presentation which presents the Council's many calls in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* for clergy and laity to work together to develop the capability to respond to others' questions or challenges about the faith, which should ideally be developed within the parish setting. The final part describes the rationale of the content and intentions to give a concise outline and further explanation of these.

The paper seeks to establish the feasibility of presenting Original Apologetics, an academically-formed approach, to ordinary faithful, to outline possible developments of the original study in presentations, and thus to provide an example of how the Original Apologetics ideas can be developed for use in parishes and beyond. This can enable others to view the content in general and is a starting point for developing similar courses, including adaptations for other denominations and creating academic courses. Overall, the aim is to aid transformation of the theological-apologetical ideas of Original Apologetics into their practical application in the parish or a similar setting.

## Keywords

apologetics, Peter's call, Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, parish, Original Apologetics, apologetics preparation, laity, clergy

## Introduction

In his letter to the faithful, Peter calls Christians to be prepared and respond in a Christian manner to those who ask them about their faith as Christians (1 Pt 3:15). This straightforward call from a fisherman developed into apologetics, which has for the most part been recognised

as an intellectual then academic field.<sup>1</sup> However, the recent development of a different approach, named ‘Original Apologetics’,<sup>2</sup> in some ways a *ressourcement*, brings together several Scriptural calls and several similar calls in the Second Vatican Council documents. The apologetical call is for all the faithful to learn, that is, to be prepared, to answer others about their faith and to do so in a Christian manner that befits Peter’s call in vv 15-16, when questioned or challenged. That all Christians are called to this is understood from the Epistle being addressed to all the faithful in Asia Minor (1 Pt 1:1), not only leaders, intellectuals, or other particular persons.

For Original Apologetics reasonably to be for all Christians as called for by both Scripture and the Council, it follows then that it should be able to be presented to Christians of all backgrounds, capabilities, and interests. Therefore, to explore the feasibility of this, the key components of the original research have been initially formed into four presentations of around one-hour including discussion. This form is for use in, ordinarily but not exclusively, Catholic parish settings,<sup>3</sup> keeping in mind the call of the Council: ‘theologians, within the requirements and methods proper to theology, are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times’.<sup>4</sup> While the content has so far been developed for the Catholic sphere, the fundamental scriptural calls indicate it can be revised for use by non-Catholics also. The content and delivery can be and have since been adapted to a single condensed presentation, two one-hour lectures, and expanded into a draft course adaptable to BA and MA levels (12-30 hours or more).

In the initial four-presentation form, each presentation has begun with a prayer, followed by a Powerpoint presentation and then questions, discussion, and a closing prayer. The content is based on the key idea of ‘Original Apologetics’, based on the recognition of St Peter as the first recorded Christian to use the term *apologia*, in 1 Pt 3:15, from which a simple yet profound definition of apologetics can be extracted. Each presentation explores passages from Scripture and the Council documents, from the lens of Original Apologetics as the three elements of Preparation, Response, and Christian Manner as well as the universal aspect of the call. The second and third presentations also offer additional themes that support understanding of the idea, taken from the original article. The fourth proceeds from the Council’s calls to both laity and clergy to a proposal for developing the idea practically in the parish. Delivery is adapted in terms of speed, depth, key content and additional content, and time allotted in recognition of the audience and the universal call of the Council.<sup>5</sup>

This article first seeks to establish the feasibility of presenting Original Apologetics, an academically-formed approach, to ordinary faithful; it would be in some ways paradoxical and ironic if this was not possible as the approach centres on being a straightforward interpretation of Peter’s and other consistent calls to all faithful. Second, the aim here is to outline how some of the themes mentioned briefly in the ‘Original Apologetics’ article might be developed for presentation in this case to ordinary faithful. Further, an outcome of both of these is to provide an example of how the Original Apologetics ideas can be developed for use in parishes and beyond, which can support others who might wish to develop similar, or to generate feedback to help develop the quality and effectiveness of presentations of Original Apologetics to a wide range. To achieve the above, the paper first describes the four presentations’ general outline,

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<sup>1</sup> Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1999), 27. Dulles does not mention 1 Peter, Jude, or Paul’s 2 Timothy in the whole of his highly regarded *History*.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Nicolson, ‘Original Apologetics’, *Theology and Philosophy of Education* 2, no. 2 (December 2023): 4–12, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10413418>.

<sup>3</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA) 10. All Vatican II documents can be found from the contents page at [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/index.htm](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm).

<sup>4</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) 62.

<sup>5</sup> AA 29.

then describes each in turn, thus showing how the academic content can be adapted for ordinary faithful and how certain themes might be developed, which results in providing a template for others interested in presenting such content. The following section on content and intentions considers core and contributing ideas, which explain the purposes of the content and show that it is consistent with the original study. In places, reasoning for chosen features in the course are also sometimes given to illustrate how the course's feasibility was developed.

### General Outline of the Presentations

The four presentations have a similar overall structure, which develops over the course of the four. As a general familiarity develops, the content is increasingly challenging and focused on how the recipients can develop their own participation in apologetical activities called for in Scripture and the Second Vatican Council.

First is the opening prayer. Before the presentation, if a member of the clergy is present, it is requested that he offers an introductory prayer. In one parish, the priest joined this with the well-known course prayer, which is apt for apologetical development of the person and their community:<sup>6</sup>

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful  
and enkindle in them the fire of your Divine love.  
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created  
and You shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

The format should be given as structured, with some fluidity possible: Presentation, Questions/discussion, Examples in our own experience. Recipients are encouraged to take part more actively at the end by considering possible contributions during the presentation. While interruptions for clarification are welcomed throughout, discussion should wait until the end.

Every presentation begins with 'Historical Context', to enhance understanding and appreciation in the listener. This supplies the listeners with useful background information regarding the early decades of Church history, including from the Book of Acts, and the wider contemporary environment, which is described further below. While hearing ideas and calls in homilies is normal, listeners find it more effective if able to place the content in the historical context. Understanding context is important, for example, the Holy Land is called the 'Fifth Gospel',<sup>7</sup> and learning about the land, customs, architecture, life, and ways, or especially visiting there, colours the understanding significantly. Then, 'Engaging with Others' outlines the different people/situations that early Christians of the first century encountered and were called to engage with: Jews, Greeks, Persecutions, and the final possibility of taking the Easy Path (or Gate, Way, etc.), against which Jesus warned (Mt 7:13-14). Key, foundational content, which is described in more detail in the following subsection, is established in Presentation 1 and repeated in subsequent presentations, thus creating a standard pattern of information: the origin and meaning of *apologia* and the three elements of Peter's call as well as the universal aspect.

Then the main scriptural content is presented as the original, ancient calls. In switching to the modern Council's related texts, a pivot screen depicts a timeline image that has the Bible

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<sup>6</sup> As described in *Gravissimum Educationis* (GE) 2 and unpacked in Janet Schaeffler, 'Advice from a Master Catechist: The Prayer to the Holy Spirit Explained', Catechist, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024, <https://www.catechist.com/advice-master-catechist-prayer-holy-spirit-explained/>.

<sup>7</sup> A well-established description used by the previous two popes: Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010, 89, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html); regarding Francis, see Courtney Mares, 'Pope Francis: The story of the Holy Land is the "Fifth Gospel"', Catholic News Agency, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/250121/pope-francis-the-story-of-the-holy-land-is-the-fifth-gospel>.

and Early Church at the left end and at the right is Vatican II and Today's Church. This linking invites and supports a short explanation of the Council's *ressourcement* theme. Then the content is from one or more Council documents. The scriptural and conciliar quotes are compared to the original call of Peter by examining them together, highlighting the three elements and universal aspect. A colour-highlight system established in Presentation 1 is effective for indicating different parts of the text being closely connected with the scriptural call. This then is followed by more specialist content to an appropriate depth in Presentations 2-4, as outlined below. The Conclusion slide then summarises the main points, and leads into time for discussion and sharing thoughts and experiences.

### *Presentation 1 – Introduction to Peter's Call*

The first presentation is the least heavily laden in terms of depth of content, to avoid overburdening those present with a new approach and also to assess the potential future level of interest and understanding for pitching the complexity and depth of later content. Taken from the 'Original Apologetics' article, it covers Peter's original apologetical call and a sentence from *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 10.

First, the universal aspect of Peter's call is established – apologetical response was not originally intended for elite interests, academic debates, or intellectual discussions, albeit these play an important part in apologetics as a whole. The Epistle is addressed in 1 Peter 1:1 to 'the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappado'cia, Asia, and Bithyn'ia', that is, today's Turkey. The Historical Context slide already established the fact of the Christian Diaspora of the 60s and how the Christians, many being Jewish converts, were generally used to mixing within their own cultures but were then suddenly in the Diaspora being called upon to engage with others, meaning many may have been taking the easy path of non-engagement. Peter's call was, of course, to engage when asked or challenged about the faith ('the hope that is in you', 1Pt 3:15). As Peter was calling all Christians to such communication activity, and not just leaders or educated faithful, it can be extrapolated that the call applies to all Christians in all situations,<sup>8</sup> which is reinforced by the Church's canonisation of the text, meaning that it applies (to at least some extent) to all the faithful – it would surely be outlandish to argue against this.

The term *apologia* is then examined and defined in the next slide. The original usage (to our knowledge) is in the Greek legal milieu as the response to or defence against a *kategoria*, accusation. In the NT Greek of the Epistle, the key word is *απολογία* (accusative form). Then the word is split into its component parts: apo-logia. Logos is the main root of the word, being a term that evades complete and satisfactory defining in English. Often regarded as word, idea, concept, it is connected with the prefix apo- here, which means out, away from. Together, they make the more awkward sounding 'speaking out', which should not be confused with the English phrasal verb possible meaning to speak from within a group, to attract attention by speaking out. It is simply an idea or concept being collected or gathered together and expressed, thus the English 'response', 'answer', 'explanation', or 'defence'.

Then the key text of 1Pt 3:15-16 is presented:

<sup>15</sup> ... Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence;

<sup>16</sup> and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (RSVCE)

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<sup>8</sup> Nicolson, 'Original Apologetics', 6–7.

This is the only time the whole of v. 16 is presented in the programme, here only to show that it fits with the final part of v. 15 (as shown in meaning 3 below), which should be noted as being part of v. 16 in some translations.<sup>9</sup>

Then v. 15 is parsed into three partially overlapping meanings:

1. Always be prepared to make a defense’,
2. ‘make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you’,
3. ‘do it with gentleness and reverence’.

These are then abbreviated into the three Petrine elements: Be Prepared, Respond, in a Christian Manner, which are henceforth referred to as Preparation, Response, Christian Manner;<sup>10</sup> allocation of specific colours here aids identification of these elements in scriptural and conciliar texts later when comparing them to Peter’s call. The choice of ‘gentleness and reverence’ being deemed ‘Christian Manner’ is in order to denote the delivery style of the communication according to vv 15-16 in a simple and memorable way to ordinary faithful. The Council uses the term ‘bear witness’ for this sometimes but this can be a little abstract. On the other hand, at an academic level, others might disagree with this generalisation but a robust discussion of this term is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper. At the parish level of presentation, ‘gentleness and reverence’ may be likened in some ways to love and truth, and are integral here to having a Christian manner. For the purpose of non-specialist recipients, this is more than adequate.

The pivot screen brings the presentation to the modern expression of Peter’s call in LG 10, which is the most straightforward and simple version of this in the Vatican II documents:

Everywhere on earth [all the disciples of Christ] must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them.(105)

The parenthesised words are from LG’s previous sentence and clearly are the reference denoted by ‘they’ in this sentence. The endnote number (105) is a reference to ‘1 Pt. 3:15’, which removes any doubt, but the sentence is unambiguous in its inspiration. Then, the three Petrine elements are recalled, highlighting specific wording from the LG quote to link it to the scriptural original source: Preparation for ‘disciples of Christ’, Response for ‘give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them’, and Christian Manner for ‘bear witness to Christ’, the last reasonably including gentleness and reverence. The term ‘disciples’ should be explained: it is often connected by Christians with the 12 Disciples of Christ in the Gospels. Instead, a definition of ‘disciple’ (Lat. *Discipulus*) is given as a pupil, student, follower, in other words, ‘One who follows Jesus’, that is, a Christian. As LG 10 refers to ‘all the disciples of Christ’, this is clearly the universal aspect and the Council is thus calling all Christians to be apologetically active. Finally, the Council’s quoted sentence is shown with the Petrine colour coding evident, showing all four (elements and aspect) as distinctly present in a clear and understandable way.

The Conclusion of Presentation 1 recaps the main points, and adds also that questions or challenges from others might be friendly (or even within oneself), or uncertain, or even hostile. The presentation ends by questioning whether the Christian should make an apologia – answer a question or challenge – or take the easy path, that is, remain silent or change the subject. This is an opportunity to bring listeners to the conclusion that they are being called by both Scripture and Council to learn their faith more, to be able to pass it on to others when questioned or challenged, rather than avoid engaging with such communication, as Peter originally did in his three-fold denial of Christ.

<sup>9</sup> While the Standard Version family (here, RSVCE) and others have the words ‘do it with gentleness and reverence’ (or similar) in v. 15, others such as the New Jerusalem Bible include it in v. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Nicolson, ‘Original Apologetics’, 5.



A point to note clearly with those present, though, is that Peter calls us first to be prepared before speaking out. Apologetics requires learning the faith sufficiently to be able to present it calmly to others, and praying about it is certainly part of apologetics as a Christian form of communication of the faith. Introduction of the idea that we are not seeking to win arguments but to help God win souls is expedient and that this is important for having a Christian Manner in apologetics. A brief preview of Presentation 2, which has further Scripture and Council calls encourages listeners to recognise that the apologetical call is wider than the two presented sources.

### *Presentation 2 – A Wider Call*

The purpose of Presentation 2 is to confirm and strengthen the call to apologetics for all the faithful by identifying it in Paul's writings and another Council document: *Dignitatis Humanae* (DH). This helps verify that the calls in the previous presentation were neither isolated nor misinterpreted but are part of a consistent and early call recalled by Vatican II.

After reminders about the term *apologia*, Peter's call, and the colour system for identifying the Petrine elements and aspect, the historical context in this presentation includes Paul and the ecclesial expansion through his travels in Asia Minor, aided with a map displaying the journeys and places featuring in Acts. Ephesus is the focus of the next section, particularly the new Ephesian bishop, Timothy, and Paul's letters to him, as per the original study.<sup>11</sup> The second of the letters includes several pertinent statements, which, in typical Pauline style, lack Peter's conciseness. Preparation is identified in 2 Tim 3:14-17 along with some Response. The latter is stated clearly in 2 Tim 4:2-4, especially v. 2, with a mention of Christian Manner. Verses 3-4 are of particular interest for explaining one reason for apologetics (loss of rational beliefs). And Christian Manner is discernible also in 2 Tim 2:14-15. The purpose as well as lengthier nature of Paul's writing style offers opportunities to explore the elements more deeply and contextually.

The second presentation's pivot from Scripture is to the Council's DH 14, which allows a more detailed exploration of the themes in the modern sphere in a particularly powerful apologetical call:

The disciple has a grave obligation to Christ, his Master, to grow daily in his knowledge of the truth he has received from him, to be faithful in announcing it, and vigorous in defending it without having recourse to methods which are contrary to the spirit of the Gospel.

The universal call is the word 'disciple', as defined in Presentation 1, which also fits with Preparation, while Response includes 'vigorous in defending it' – words that clearly refute the wide conception that Vatican II excluded apologetics<sup>12</sup> – and at the non-specialist parish level having a Christian manner is recognisably consistent with 'the spirit of the Gospel', which surely includes Truth and Love.<sup>13</sup> By displaying the DH extract with the colour coding, Peter's call is clearly consistent. The wording can be seen as being powerful and without ambiguity here, indicating that a return to the original meaning of apologetics was a call of the Council to all faithful.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> For example: Dulles, *History*, 325–9; Gardner Jacobs, 'Retrieving Apologetics', *Crisis Magazine*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2015, <https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/retrieving-apologetics>; Glenn B. Siniscalchi, 'Catholic Apologetics and the New Evangelization', *Church Life Journal*, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2016, [https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/catholic-apologetics-and-the-new-evangelization/#\\_edn1](https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/catholic-apologetics-and-the-new-evangelization/#_edn1).

<sup>13</sup> See Eph 4:15, as shown in *Presentation 4* below.

The presentation then turns to the supporting theme of the Two Ways concept in Judaeo-Christianity to help identify following God within apologetics<sup>14</sup> and an understanding of there being right answers that direct the listener to the right path: to and with God. These then can enable speaking out effectively to others. While this is not the only interpretive framework, it offers a clear distinction including good or evil, good or sinful, etc., and also Gospel themes: sheep and goats, two paths that are narrow and wide, etc. A brief Two Ways history is given, from Adam and Eve and then their elder sons, Deuteronomy (especially 30:15-20) as a key presentation of Two Ways, then the Psalms (especially 1), Proverbs, and Wisdom books, followed by early Christian literature, the later Early Church focus on Heaven and hell, then on to Mediaeval examples, and finally Sunday Mass readings today. This shows that still the Church is teaching that we are called to follow the right path. It is for apologists today to develop a clear foundation through Preparation, then to help others do the same, against alternative offerings from worldly narratives, such as many prevalent relativist or materialist ideas that are against the Gospel. Ultimately, it is to become and develop as a 'Friend of God' (cf. Jas 2:23, regarding Abraham), being one who walks his path or way, speaking Truth as an 'Act of Love'.

At this stage, a preview of the third presentation points to there having been two types of apologetics in history, hence the *ressourcement* call of Vatican II, because apologetics has often been used in ways less than faithful to Peter's original call.

### *Presentation 3 – Two Types of Apologetics*

A question that can arise from course participants before the third presentation is answered here: Why was this [Original Apologetics] not being done already?<sup>15</sup> It is a valid point recognised by those with previous awareness of apologetics and the mix of positive, negative, and otherwise neutral viewpoints regarding it; it can also be formed by those discerning its simplicity while never having encountered it, or that it is being presented as something of a novel approach.

The answer to the question is historical and the historical context given here helps to introduce the Christian experience of persecutions in the Roman Empire, for example, during the 90s under Domitian,<sup>16</sup> and the heresies that were developing in and around the fledgling Church. These were namely Docetism and early Gnosticism, and also Judaisers, who sought to reintroduce specific Jewish practices that had been superseded, such as food laws and circumcision. Thus, the faithful were living often in challenging situations.

The next Scripture passage presented as showing canonical consistency with Peter's call is the single-chaptered Book of Jude, as per the 'Original Apologetics' article.<sup>17</sup> Specifically, this is v 1 (universal aspect), v 20 (Preparation), and vv 3, 22-23 (Response). Notably, Christian Manner is not included in the somewhat more concise and to-the-point text. This omission also occurs in the subsequently presented conciliar passage from *Dei Verbum* (DV) 8, which cites Jude 3, but otherwise is clearly another call consistent with Peter's call:<sup>18</sup>

Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter

<sup>14</sup> Nicolson, 'Original Apologetics', 7–8.

<sup>15</sup> This question has arisen during and after this presentation in parishes and refers to a wider development of this approach, that is, all Christians learning their faith and being encouraged to respond to others appropriately. While this approach may well have been used somewhere at sometime, it has never been significantly developed as either an integral or alternative approach to apologetics hence its omission in Dulles, *History*.

<sup>16</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 181–4, 210–17, esp. 212–3.

<sup>17</sup> Nicolson, 'Original Apologetics', 6–7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

(see 2 Thess. 2:15), and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all (see Jude 1:3)

Another commonality between the two texts presented here is the use of Tradition for Preparation of the faithful, that is, learning the faith and passing it on (*tradere*).

Then, the theme of ‘learn the faith, pass it on’ becomes thematic in Presentation 3 as the figures of Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, and Irenaeus<sup>19</sup> and their linking of learning and passing on the faith can be likened to the cycle of the apologist: Preparation leads to communication, which is Preparation for the listener who is a potential new apologist. In some ways like the oral tradition of the earliest Christians, information about the faith is passed on to others. This leads to the question of why this did not continue to our present day? If this was the norm in the Early Church, why was there a discontinuity and since when?

Tracing back to Justin Martyr in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century, there were developments that led to such change.<sup>20</sup> Justin was an intellectual who developed elite-level apologetical content and theology and this approach became a trend, for example, in the Alexandrian School. Apologetics has almost entirely continued at this level until modern times while ordinary-level content seemingly became rare, then non-existent, if the lack of extant sources is accurate. Somewhere between the easily readable *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus* (c. 140) to Origen’s report (c. 250) of ordinary Christians being discouraged from dialoguing with non-Christians except those without education,<sup>21</sup> responding about the faith seems to have become more or less the preserve of the well-educated, and often the clergy, at least in terms of there being no known texts or practices showing otherwise.<sup>22</sup> In general terms, ordinary faithful clearly ceased to be apologetically prepared at some time in the Early Church period, albeit evidence of this development is likely to be minimal. It is very challenging to gain insight into any extent of Preparation or even catechesis under increasing persecution by the third century. The distinct lack of source evidence available today as well as Origen’s narrative pointing towards apologetics being intellectual indicates the high likelihood of a significant end to an established form of the Preparation element of the ordinary faithful that was an important feature for the Apostolic Fathers,<sup>23</sup> albeit ‘absence of evidence is indeed not evidence of absence’.<sup>24</sup> Later, with the influx of converts after the fourth-century legalisation of Christianity it can be surmised that basic catechesis – learning the foundational facts of the faith – replaced any learning that had enabled one to respond to others about one’s faith because it is far more manageable, especially in the short-term. At this point, asking a priest present about the prospect of hundreds of converts seeking instruction each year illustrates the point.

Regarding evidence and therefore likely also historical narrative, Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, an Arian at least until the Council of Nicaea,<sup>25</sup> was pivotal because he placed value

<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus’s *Adverses Haereses* (c. 180) is the latest known source of the Early Church to present apologetical content intended to be used at least to some extent by ordinary faithful in responding to others.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart Nicolson, ‘The Justinian Apologetical Turn, away from Original Petrine Apologetics’, *AUC Theologica* 14, no. 1 (2024): 97–115, <https://doi.org/10.14712/23363398.2024.8>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>22</sup> The apologists named by Dulles in his *History*, 27–89, are mostly clerical and all intellectual, thus requiring an education in order to access their content.

<sup>23</sup> Dulles, *History*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Nicolson, ‘Original Apologetics’, 7.

<sup>25</sup> While some question this, his writings led to his excommunication; his case was one of several heard at the Council of Nicaea. His own creed lacked key elements of what became the Nicæan Creed. Although prompted by Constantine to the expediency of agreeing to the Council’s Creed, he later was central to Athanasius and other Nicæan orthodox figures being exiled. See The Catholic University of America, ‘Eusebius of Caesarea’, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol. 5 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2003), 451–3.



only on intellectual content,<sup>26</sup> thus collecting only such texts,<sup>27</sup> and the fact that his library was unusually able to survive Diocletian's widespread book-burning in the early fourth century. This led to the development of the perception that only intellectual Christian literature existed in the Early Church<sup>28</sup> – the extent of ordinary-level texts is almost unknown except the recent identification of part of the aforementioned *Jason and Papiscus* and the comparative ease of reading some canonical texts and the relatively recently rediscovered *Didache*. Therefore, the perception grew that theological content, including apologetical texts, was intellectual and accessible only by and through clergy, which was reinforced by the scholarly styles of Athanasius, Augustine, and John Chrysostom, etc. Being relatively high-brow in the presentation, this content can be lightened by illustrating Petrine Apologetics as a whole pizza and 'Justinian Apologetics' as a sliver of pizza, being for the narrow minority at the higher intellectual level. The point is that Peter's original version is for all while Justin's level is for the few. It must be clearly stated, though, that Justinian apologetics is included in the Petrine, for the latter includes all levels and range, and Justin's and other elite contributions are very important.

Examples of occasional later developments with elements relating to Original Apologetics include the a response to the Mediaeval Revival around the Millennium that led in places to the highly problematic Albigenianism.<sup>29</sup> The approach that proved successful was not civil martial power or similar but that spoken by those steeped in the faith and willing to respond to those who had gone astray. Led by Dominic Guzman, this could have formed an Ordinary Apologetics movement but the Dominican Order became significantly involved with specialist thinking in the early universities instead of developing ongoing pastoral engagement. It might be said that fusing the preparation of the Dominicans and the pastoral engagement of the Franciscans might have developed something close to Original Apologetics, and this and other Mediaeval themes could be developed further in lengthier academic courses. Regarding the universal aspect and the potential for Preparation, the Fourth Lateran Council called for 'appointing preachers' and 'schoolmasters for the poor'<sup>30</sup> but these did not develop significantly. Later, it can be suggested that the Reformation would not have been the same had there been Ordinary Apologetics developed in the faithful and the Council of Trent could have turned out differently. After all, Charles Borromeo, when considered in light of the universal aspect and the three elements, was promoting Original Apologetics in some ways (reaching out to ordinary people, founding Sunday Schools, encouraging a Christian manner).<sup>31</sup> But it must be recognised that the general history of apologetics, as depicted by Avery Dulles,<sup>32</sup> has been and has continued to be Justinian, not Petrine.

In more recent times, the original article mentions a clear example of activity in the direction of Original Apologetics.<sup>33</sup> Developing this idea, which includes figures known across cultures, it can be said that there was an English-language apologetical spring from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with new approaches and personalities: G. K. Chesterton, the convert and journalist;

<sup>26</sup> As seen in Eusebius' own statements collected in Rebecca Denova, 'Eusebius on Christianity', *World History Encyclopedia*, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1854/eusebius-on-christianity/>. See also Andrew Louth in Eusebius, *History*, Introduction, xiii, xxiv-xxv.

<sup>27</sup> See Andrew James Carriker, *The Library of Eusebius of Caesarea* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2, 22-23, 299-311.

<sup>28</sup> NJ 1-24-17 [sic], 'Early Church Historians', *Fourth Century Christianity*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2017, <https://www.fourthcentury.com/early-church-historians/>.

<sup>29</sup> John Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 143-5.

<sup>30</sup> Norman P. Tanner, ed., 'Fourth Lateran Council: 1215', *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020, canons 10 and 11 respectively, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum12-2.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> William Keogh, 'St. Charles Borromeo', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03619a.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> Dulles, *History*.

<sup>33</sup> Nicolson, 'Original Apologetics', 9.

Ronald Knox, Catholic convert, priest and chaplain-apologist at Oxford and to convent schoolgirls during the War; C. S. Lewis, the Protestant apologist who reached out to all, from children to intellectuals; Frank Sheed, the Australian who dialogically took on allcomers in London's Hyde Park before starting an apologetics movement in America; and many others, in a sense culminating in Archbishop Fulton Sheen, the radio and television personality whose teachings presented apologetics to great numbers. Each of these exhibit in different ways the universal aspect as well as the three Petrine apologetics elements.

However, in Europe, which lacked the English-language sphere's tumult of Catholics and Protestants intermingling due to population shifts, apologetics tended towards being reduced to a tool of authority and was particularly defensive, sometimes only in people's memories but without the challenge of distinct new approaches. This led to the narrative around the Second Vatican Council and its reforms disrupting many previous norms. This is summed up in Professor Claude Geffré's words:

[T]he term 'fundamental theology' is now preferred to describe Christian apologetics. It is not simply that in an age of dialogue the word 'apologetics' is discredited. It is rather, and more profoundly, that we have become conscious of the weakness of apologetics when it pretends to prove the fact of revelation on historical grounds. We can only be sure of divine revelation within the experience of faith.<sup>34</sup>

Depth of analysis here depends on those present, but the 'discrediting' of apologetics, its 'weakness', and how it 'pretends to prove the fact' should be noted; a brief description of fundamental theology and its significant differences from apologetics – purposes, methods, and form especially – can also be given.

Returning to the English language sphere, the 1980s saw an American revival, particularly regarding responses of Catholics to Fundamentalist claims that were erroneous in different ways. This developed far wider in scope and content, leading, for example, to the Catholic Answers apostolate,<sup>35</sup> which had the foresight to claim the important 'catholic.com' website address. Continuing today, it is a powerful resource for apologists regarding a wide range of themes. Others, too, regard their apologetics work as an apostolate.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, by the end of the third presentation, listeners should have an idea of the two different approaches and how the Petrine approach has been developed in some ways in recent times in the English language sphere. However, there is much room for further growth. Encouragement to explore how to participate in this development and become apologetically-capable should be shared at this point as the topic of the fourth presentation.

#### *Presentation 4 – Apologetics in the Parish*

This programme is ordinarily presented in the parish setting, to enable effective sharing and also because this is the meeting point of faith-learning for most Christians, but it can be adapted for other settings. The development of the apostolate, with clergy and laity coming together as called for by Hans Urs von Balthasar a decade before the Council, is the focus of the Second Vatican Council in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA).

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 326–7.

<sup>35</sup> Described as an apostolate both by themselves – Catholic Answers, 'Why the World Needs Catholic Answers', accessed 25<sup>th</sup> October 2025, <https://www.catholic.com/about> – and others, for example, EWTN News, 'Catholic Answers apologetics apostolate joins Catholic Word publishing consortium', 21<sup>st</sup> August 2009, updated 26<sup>th</sup> September 2025, <https://www.ewtnnews.com/world/us/catholic-answers-apologetics-apostolate-joins-catholic-word-publishing-consortium>.

<sup>36</sup> For example, Dave Armstrong, 'The Pleasures and Perils of a Catholic Apologetics Apostolate', *Catholic Answers*, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2004, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-pleasures-and-perils-of-a-catholic-apologetics-apostolate>.

After the historical context describes the problem of the general narrative, which was strengthening against Christians by the turn of the century, and a reminder of the colour coding system, a section of Ephesians 4 is presented in two parts: vv 11-14; vv 15-16.<sup>37</sup> The former includes a universal aspect reference ('we all') and Preparation content in vv 13-14, including the origin of inspiring words from the Council to clergy as seen later. Verse 15 offers the other two elements in Paul's succinct words, which, when combined, can be said to include the original purpose of apologetics: 'speaking the truth in love'.<sup>38</sup> To do so leads to growing together towards Christ, the aim of the apostolate in AA.

Before plunging into presenting AA's calls, it is worthwhile to consider Balthasar's alternative to the strong progressive calls before the Council. He calls for clergy and laity to come together, and the former should 'equip them with sufficient knowledge of Christian truth and experience of life',<sup>39</sup> which is consistent with what he later describes as the 'third way'.<sup>40</sup> This is a precursor to AA and parts of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO) in many ways as is then presented.

The original article's interpretation of AA<sup>41</sup> has been developed further and presented by first establishing the AA call to be universal – 'the people of God' (AA 1), 'the laity' (AA 2) – then the method and purpose is given in AA 2, both being consistent with Petrine elements: 'activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men' and 'their temporal activity openly bears witness to Christ and promotes the salvation of men'. External and internal apologetics are distinguished: 'a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them' in AA 6, pointing to evangelisation and catechesis, albeit catechesis in the form of apologetical Preparation. It confirms apologetics as included in the apostolate: by identifying the problem, that 'in our own times, new problems are arising and very serious errors are circulating which tend to undermine the foundations of religion, the moral order, and human society itself'; and providing the solution, that the Council 'exhorts laymen – each according to his own gifts of intelligence and learning – to be more diligent in doing what they can to explain, defend, and properly apply Christian principles to the problems of our era in accordance with the mind of the Church' (both AA 6). All are called to participate apologetically, and, additionally, those faithful who are able should offer their talents in the public sphere both to serve society and be a Christian presence in such (AA 14).

Regarding the practicality of the universal aspect, AA 29 explains that 'In addition to spiritual formation, a solid doctrinal instruction in theology, ethics, and philosophy adjusted to differences of age, status, and natural talents, is required.' The appropriate adjustment of Preparation content to the capabilities of the faithful person being prepared is called for, which means enabling each individual according to ability. This is contrary to the more traditional style of education which presents a certain agreed level content to be learned and the learner is required to meet this standard or fail to be qualified/certified/enabled. Rather, the challenge is given to the educator here, to ensure learners can learn the content as best they can. Thus, the learner is the focus of the process, not the teacher or the expected standards. In this way, the call maintains its universality.

The Petrine elements are most clearly and succinctly presented in AA 31: 'In regard to the apostolate for evangelizing and sanctifying men, the laity must be specially formed to engage

<sup>37</sup> Nicolson, 'Original Apologetics', 5–6.

<sup>38</sup> AA 6 cites 2Cor 5:14, 'For the charity of Christ impels us', that we are called to 'announce Christ by words' to both faithful and non-faithful immediately before treating apologetical activity directly.

<sup>39</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 91–92.

<sup>40</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), chapter 3.

<sup>41</sup> Nicolson, 'Original Apologetics', 10–11.

in conversation with others, believers, or non-believers, in order to manifest Christ's message to all men.' The consistency of message, colour-highlighted in presentations, is set out below.

| Aspect/<br>Element  | 1 Pt 3:15                              | AA 31                              |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Universal           | the exiles of the Dispersion (1Pt 1:1) | the laity                          |
| Preparation         | be prepared                            | specially formed                   |
| Response            | make a defense                         | engage in conversation with others |
| Christian<br>manner | do it with gentleness and reverence    | to manifest Christ's message       |

Table 1: Petrine elements and aspect in 1 Pt 3:15 and AA 31

Therefore, it is clear that AA presents a Petrine call, as do LG 10 and DH 14, and similar is given in DV 8.

The question remains, however, how this can be developed beyond the page, screen, or discussion group. AA 10 addresses this clearly: 'The parish offers an obvious example of the apostolate on the community level'. In this spiritual and geographical location, it continues:

The laity should accustom themselves to working in the parish in union with their priests, bringing to the Church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which they should examine and resolve by deliberating in common[.]

This vision can be developed through regular group meetings where active and ongoing Preparation can meet opportunities to explore and resolve internal questions as well as equip the laity (and priests) for engaging with others externally.

The role of the priest is considered elsewhere from the other perspective, in PO 9, which in turn is considered in AA 25, 30. This corresponds with AA regarding laity working with clergy. Further, '[Priests] are defenders of the common good, with which they are charged in the name of the bishop. At the same time, they are strenuous assertors of the truth, lest the faithful be carried about by every wind of doctrine [cf. Eph 4:14].' Paul's call, already considered above, is referenced here regarding the problem of failing to 'assert the truth'. PO 9 also highlights the responsibility of priests for engaging with those who have fallen away from the faith, or who do not have faith, which certainly must include apologetical dialogue in some form.

The elements of Preparation and Response appear also in PO 19: 'that they may give apt answers to questions posed by men of this age, it is necessary for priests to know well the doctrines of the magisterium and the councils and documents of the Roman pontiffs and to consult the best of prudent writers of theological science.' Further, 'priests are urged to suitably and without interruption perfect their knowledge of divine things and human affairs and so prepare themselves to enter more opportunely into conversation with their contemporaries.' It continues: 'let priests more readily study and effectively learn the methods of evangelization and the apostolate'.

With appropriate guidance through these conciliar quotes, the listener can appreciate the apologetical calls to both laity and clergy, that they should work together towards a common goal, a purpose or telos:

The apostolate can attain its maximum effectiveness only through a diversified and thorough formation. This is demanded not only by the continuous spiritual and doctrinal progress of the lay person himself but also by the accommodation of his activity to circumstances varying according to the affairs, persons, and duties involved. (AA 28)

This call to form a parish group of clergy and laity requires active participation of at least some of those present and encouragement to others to partake. This means arranging regular meetings where the faithful can learn apologetical content, how to engage with others with a Christian manner of ‘speaking the truth in love’, and to share their faith by responding to the questions and challenges they face.

The approach above shows the feasibility of presenting Original Apologetics among ordinary faithful and the clergy. The developments of the ideas from the original article shown above are illustrative of one possible approach to presenting Original Apologetics.

### **Content and Intentions**

Having surveyed the general content and ideas presented, it is useful to consider the main themes or threads that make up the course, including the purposes of these as based on the ‘Original Apologetics’ article. This section describes the main content threads and the intentions of the course, and also the minor, supporting themes that appear in the second and third presentations.

#### *Core Ideas*

The core idea of the presentations is to unpack the call to apologetics as being both simple and universal. This approach is not consistent with the general development and specific purpose of the field of apologetics that grew since the second century, as depicted in Dulles’s *A History of Apologetics*. Instead, in a form of ressourcement, it returns to the scriptural calls and shows that these are recalled and developed in the Vatican II documents.

The first aim is to establish the origin as Peter’s call and identify the three elements as being applicable in the lives of the faithful, which are in one sense a challenge but also very achievable. While the refrain ‘Learn the faith, pass it on’ might be simplistic, it is both memorable and descriptive, and hopefully inspiring. Almost as important is the identification of the call existing in the Vatican II documents and LG 10 is clear and straightforward. By using the three elements and universal aspect, the call can be seen as spanning the history of the Church, from the apostolic age to the modern.

The Petrine call could be regarded as minor in that it is found amongst other instructions to the faithful, it is in a somewhat minor NT book, and it is brief. This makes the identification of similar calls in Paul and Jude a significant step in reinforcing the apologetical call. With three different apostolic voices, including Paul’s two letters coming from the most prolific NT contributor, the call is far more established and significant. This reinforcement is brought into recent times with the DH 14 and DV 8 quotations. It is thus clear to the course attendee that the apologetical call is universal, well-established, transcends time, and is given by multiple voices in ancient and modern times.

The culmination of the presentation of the calls is the fourth presentation, which answers the question likely already formed in the minds of the recipients: ‘So what do we do?’ It presents the practical calls of the Council to both laity and clergy in the AA and PO texts respectively: apologetics is confirmed as part of the apostolate in AA 6 and the Petrine call is apparent in AA 31. Further – less obvious but pertinent – calls are identifiable in both documents, interpretable through the lens of the Petrine call as including, arguably significantly, the more general call for the clergy to support and join with the laity in becoming much more involved in engaging with the wider world, having already become well-formed and prepared to do so, and in doing so to ‘bear witness’. The term ‘bear witness’ is a key, notably used in GE 2, where a clear apologetical meaning is included in the education of the person, as is evident especially here: ‘aware of their calling, they learn not only how to bear witness to the hope that is in them (cf. Peter 3:15) but also how to help in the Christian



formation of the world'.<sup>42</sup> By following 'bear witness' in other Vatican II documents, it is possible to identify apologetical themes to various extents. The Balthasar quote in his call for reform frames the fourth presentation well while the practical outcome of the presentations should be developing apologetical capability in the parish (AA 10). This means coming together to learn more about the faith and how to explain it to others, which is developing currently as Ordinary Apologetics.

### *Contributing Ideas*

The contributing themes in the second and third presentations are neither central nor necessary to Original Apologetics but they are a way of supporting the recipients who may have questions, which are perhaps even somewhat unformed.

The first is the Two Ways theme, which can be traced back to the very beginning of Scripture and is a strong theme of many OT texts, explicitly or implicitly. This theme, which develops as a lens for listeners seeing purpose in engaging in apologetical dialogue with others, is a means of supporting recipients in understanding the importance of speaking out.

The experience of presenting the course several times has led to the conclusion that this part is more clearly and effectively presented when leading with familiar Two Ways images in the Gospels, such as the sheep and goats, the maidens ready or not for the bridegroom, wheat or tares, etc. This leads to two paths or gates, narrow or wide (Mt 7). Then the theme in Judaeo-Christian history can be briefly presented: in Scripture, especially Deuteronomy, the first Psalm, many examples in Proverbs, wisdom books, then in the Gospels (especially Matthew), and later in the Apostolic Fathers (*Didache*, *Barnabas*...). Then there were later attempts to re-establish clarity to the faithful in choosing good or bad: the Mediaeval introduction of annual Confession and in recent times regular appearances in Sunday Mass readings. Finally, how Two Ways thinking contributes to apologetics can be shown in learning the faith teachings rather than being personally chosen as preferences, as well as the contemporary preference for favouring subjective 'truths' (my truth, your truth), and the rationality of apologetical answers, which is 'speaking the truth in love' (Eph 4:15) – to do so is to be a Friend of God.

The second contributing theme, the historical development of apologetics, can be divided into two parts. The first regards the Early and Mediaeval Church and the second is on modern examples of apologetics recognisable as Petrine apologetics to various extents. With original apologetics defined according to Peter's elements and universal call, by the end of the second presentation, some recipients are beginning to question why this is not well-known and established today, especially those with a previous understanding of apologetics being problematic. It is presented that the earliest generations of Christians seemingly followed Peter's call to at least some extent until the intellectualisation that began with Justin Martyr and led to apologetics being the preserve of at least the well-educated and possibly clergy alone by the time of Origen.<sup>43</sup> It seems that while early ordinary faithful were regarded as capable of apologetical activity, the complete lack of extant 'ordinary' apologetical texts – written by or for ordinary faithful – after Justin indicates that apologetics was becoming by the third century an activity for the few. However, this remains impossible to state with certainty as a lack of evidence is not evidence of a lack, and the great historian Eusebius of Caesarea's clear preference for only elite thinkers may have prevented a fuller picture.<sup>44</sup> Sharing examples of great theological and apologetical writers, who are all intellectual and often challenging to read, shows a consistent picture of elite thinkers, and later individual examples of sparks of Original Apologetics never lighting the fuel of an apologetical movement are found in Benedict's Rule,

<sup>42</sup> The scripture reference in GE 2 is an error in the official English translation, omitting the '1' of '1 Pt'.

<sup>43</sup> See Nicolson, 'Justinian Turn', 110, regarding Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3.52, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04163.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Nicolson, 'Justinian Turn', 105. See also Denova, 'Eusebius on Christianity'.

the Fourth Lateran Council, and St Charles Borromeo. It must be made clear in this section that while the Petrine universal call includes elite apologetics in contrast with the Justinian, elite form of apologetics with no place for ordinary apologetics, the contribution of elite apologetics has been of great importance over the centuries in many ways, and also we cannot presume Justin Martyr had any intention of apologetics becoming elite-alone.

The modern era is more accessible in cultural memory and in some places the time of the English apologetical spring can still be in living memory for a few in some places. There are many examples of great apologists at more ordinary and accessible levels. C. S. Lewis is a great internationally-known storyteller, Archbishop Sheen may be known to some already, and the stories of Frank Sheed on a soap-box in Hyde Park are not yet an image hidden in the mists of time. The journalist G. K. Chesterton and the Oxford chaplain Ronald Knox both wrote detective stories. These are figures with whom we can still connect with today. Placing Balthasar's call and the 1960s Council in this timeline, followed by the seeming death of apologetics, this can be still within living memory. And the 1980s American revival, advanced and magnified by the Internet, is continuing still today. Ending on this note enables the final question of the third presentation and the bridge to the fourth – 'How can we participate?'

The core theme of Peter's original call is supported by the themes of Two Ways and the historical development of apologetics, leading to the Council's perceptible calls for clergy and laity to develop apologetics within the parish as part of the call to develop wider apostolates.

## Conclusion

The presentations have been developed from the original source 'Original Apologetics', which focuses on the three elements of Preparation, Response, and Christian Manner, and the universal aspect, gleaned from 1 Peter and found through this lens in various New Testament and Vatican II documents. From the original study, courses have been developed initially as having four one-hour presentations and this paper has sought to show the feasibility of this adaptation and the developments taking place. Presented thus far in six parish / ecclesial community settings in the Czech Republic, it shows how this alternative approach to apologetics based on the calls can speak to all faithful.

Based on the original article's approach, by presenting the calls in Peter, Paul several times, and in Jude, as well as five Council documents, it has been feasible to adapt the content to be understandable and interesting for ordinary faithful, thus responding appropriately to GS 62 and AA 29. This has led to two follow-up groups having been formed, one of which is ongoing and developing what can be called Ordinary Apologetics.

Not only is presentation of Ordinary Apologetics to the faithful seen to be feasible, this paper shows some ways of developing Original Apologetics. However, the core concept can be applied in presentations or lectures in other ways, and feasibly can be extended in both scope and depth to academic courses. The presenting of the content and rationale behind the developments welcome both the creation of other forms of presentations, including for non-Catholics, as well as the organic development of how to fulfil more effectively Peter's original apologetical call.

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