

WHY DOES MOSES MATTER TO CHRISTIANS?

Examining the Meeting Point of Ancient Inscriptions,
Archaeological Discoveries, and the Hebrew Scriptures

Wednesday, June 23

- 7:00-7:15 pm **“Why Does Moses Matter to Christians?”**
Introductory remarks by Pastor Donald Moldstad
- 7:15-8:30 pm **“Is There Compelling Evidence of the Israelite Sojourn in Egypt?”**
Keynote address by Dr. Douglas Petrovich, concluding with audience Q and A

Thursday, June 24

- 8:30-9:15 am “Apologetics Writers’ Workshop” (see note below)
- 10:00-11:30 am **“Can Archaeology Teach Us Anything about the Conquest of Canaan?”**
Dr. Douglas Petrovich, concluding with audience Q and A
- 11:30 am–1:00 pm Lunch Break
- 1:00-2:15 pm **“Is Hebrew the World’s Oldest Alphabet,
and Why Should Laypeople Care?”**
*Dr. Douglas Petrovich,
concluding with audience Q and A*
- 2:15–2:30 pm Break
- 2:30-3:45 pm **“How Can Believers Make Inroads within
an Academy Plagued by Skepticism?”**
*Panel discussion, addressing the hesitancy of liberal and secular scholars to
accept the evidence of biblical Israel’s place in the history of Egypt and Canaan
—Dr. Douglas Petrovich with Rev. Joseph Abrahamson and Rev. Steven Sparley*
- 3:45-4:00 pm **“How Does Evidence Properly Serve the Proclamation of the Gospel?”**
Closing remarks by Pastor David Thompson
- 4:15-5:00 pm Alternative time slot for “Apologetics Writers’ Workshop” (see note below)



Note: The “Apologetics Writers’ Workshop” is designed for ELS pastors and lay delegates as a supplement to the synod convention. It will be held either Thursday morning at 8:30 or else Thursday afternoon at 4:15, depending upon whether the convention concludes its regular business on Wednesday afternoon or continues into Thursday morning. This workshop will begin with brief remarks from representatives of the Board for Home Outreach and the Center for Apologetics and Worldviews. The remainder of time will engage participants in brainstorming for the crafting of “Q and A Leading to Christ” flyers that apply apologetics to evangelism.

About the Sponsor

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod's **Center for Apologetics and Worldviews** presents evidence for the truth of Christianity, critiques worldviews that oppose Christianity, fortifies believers with a proper interpretation of Holy Scripture, and engages unbelievers in conversations leading toward the Gospel proclamation of forgiveness in Christ. The center serves students at Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, boards and member congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the church at large, while furthermore welcoming all people to consider the evidence for Christianity.

By simultaneously strengthening believers and reaching out to unbelievers, the center seeks to present winsome arguments in a compassionate manner, addressing the doubts and confusions that abound in our post-Christian times and pointing to both the fact of Christ's resurrection and the salvation message that rests upon that truth. Archived video recordings of prior apologetics conferences may be found at www.blc.edu/apologetics/events. For additional resources, visit www.els.org/apologetics.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod is an American Lutheran church body of 130 congregations in full fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). The ELS is also a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), which currently consists of 24 church bodies throughout the world in fellowship with one another. Following Jesus' command to bring the Gospel "to all nations," the ELS operates missions in seven countries around the world: Peru, Chile, India, Korea, Ukraine, Czech Republic and Latvia. See www.els.org/about.

About the Host

Bethany Lutheran College is a Christian liberal arts college owned and operated by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and committed to the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the statements of faith known as the Lutheran Confessions. The college provides Christian higher education in a challenging academic environment where personal mentoring guides students to pursue knowledge, truth, and discernment for productive and fulfilling lives.

Bethany Lutheran College engages students with the saving knowledge of Christ and assists them in developing their God-given talents and abilities for meaningful lives of service in the family, church, and society. A program of study grounded in the liberal arts and taught through the discerning lens of a Christian worldview equips students with knowledge, understanding, and adaptable skills. See www.blc.edu/about-us.

"Free Conference" Format

This conference follows the format of what is known as a "free conference," similar to the format of the Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary Reformation Lectures. Participation in the conference is intended for academic discussion in a setting outside of the framework of fellowship. The presenters and participants are understood to speak for themselves, and the viewpoints they share are not necessarily representing in any official way the church bodies of which they are members.

Session Titles and Abstracts

Is There Compelling Evidence of the Israelite Sojourn in Egypt?

Compelling evidence of Israelite presence in Egypt exists to support biblical chronology's indication that they resided there ca. 1876–1446 BC. This includes numerous epigraphical inscriptions in full-blown Hebrew that date from ca. 1840–1446 BC, as well as Middle Egyptian (hieroglyphic) inscriptions that identify Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh, and one of Manasseh's obscure sons. Israelite architecture and other forms of material culture also attest to how these Asiatics in Egypt were indeed Jacob's family and descendants.

Can Archaeology Teach Us Anything about the Conquest of Canaan?

An Israelite exodus from Egypt ca. 1446 BC leads to a 7-year conquest of Canaan that began ca. 1406 BC (after 40 years in the wilderness of Sinai). If this is true, one would think that the archaeological record in Israel would reflect a hostile takeover ca. 1400 BC. Dr. Petrovich will look more closely at the three sites that Joshua and his forces burnt by fire—Jericho, Ai, and Hazor—revealing that the archaeology of the “Late Bronze Age I” (1550–1400 BC) aligns well with biblical history and chronology.

Is Hebrew the World's Oldest Alphabet, and Why Should Laypeople Care?

Among the fifteen inscriptions that are translated in Dr. Petrovich's book, three inscriptions mention distinctive biblical figures, whose names are not found in any other Semitic records. He will reveal not only what these names are, but why their discovery is so important for destroying both the Documentary Hypothesis and the Late Exodus view. (The Documentary Hypothesis denies that Moses wrote the Pentateuch in the 15th century BC, attributing Genesis through Deuteronomy to post-exilic Jews just a few centuries before Christ. The Late Exodus theory claims that the Israelites left Egypt in the 12th century and downplays the miraculous sea crossing, contrary to the biblical testimony of the miraculous crossing on dry ground in the 15th century. Unfortunately, these perspectives are dominant in most universities and seminaries today.)

How Can Believers Make Inroads within an Academy Plagued by Skepticism?

Few scholars in Ancient Near Eastern Studies today regard the Bible as historically accurate. Archaeologists, historians, linguists, and theologians treat the Bible, in varying degrees, as legends written long after the facts the text purports to narrate. When a scholar does point to evidence supportive of a more literal-historical reading of the Bible, fellow scholars tend to dismiss that work with prejudice. Dr. Petrovich will be joined by two other panelists to discuss this challenge, critique Dr. Petrovich's own work, and suggest how to steer academic discussions toward a more respectful treatment of God's Word.

Apologetics Writers' Workshop

This session is designed especially for ELS pastors and lay delegates as a supplement to the synod convention. The workshop will begin with brief remarks from representatives of the Board for Home Outreach and the Center for Apologetics and Worldviews. The remainder of time will engage participants in brainstorming for the crafting of “Q and A Leading to Christ” flyers that apply apologetics to evangelism.

Keynote Presenter

Douglas N. Petrovich (Ph.D., M.A., Th.M., M.Div.) is Professor of Biblical History and Exegesis at The Bible Seminary in Katy, Texas. He is author of *The World's Oldest Alphabet: Hebrew as the Language of the Proto-Consonantal Script* (2016) and *Origins of the Hebrews: New Evidence for Israelites in Egypt from Joseph to the Exodus* (in press, 2021). He earned a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto, with a major in Syro-Palestinian Archaeology, a first minor in ancient Egyptian language, and a second minor in ancient Near Eastern religions. He completed Master of Divinity and Master of Theology (in N.T.) degrees from The Master's Seminary, as well as a B.A. in Evangelism from Moody Bible Institute. He previously taught at Wilfrid Laurier University (Waterloo, Canada), the University of Toronto (Scarborough campus, Canada), Novosibirsk Biblical-Theological Seminary (Siberia, Russia), and Shepherds Theological Seminary (Cary, North Carolina). Dr. Petrovich's research interests include biblical history and exegesis, Egyptology, and ancient Near Eastern history (including archaeology, epigraphy, chronology, and iconography). He is married and has three adult children, and he enjoys virtually every sport known to humanity. He also is an avid numismatist.

Additional Speakers

Rev. Joseph Abrahamson serves Faith Ev. Lutheran Church, Clara City, Minnesota (E.L.S.). He and his wife, Mary, have ten children. Pastor Abrahamson is a graduate of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, and of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies. He has served on the faculty/staff at Bethany Lutheran College teaching Religion, Linguistics, and Archaeology; and was on staff at the University of Wisconsin as an Information Processing Consultant while doing graduate work in Semitics. Pastor Abrahamson served Clearwater Lutheran Parish (ELS) from 2001 to April 2015. He has served as an instructor for Lutheran Theological Seminary (ELDK) in Nyamira, Kenya since 2018. He regularly contributes scholarly commentary for the Bethany Institute for Biblical and Ecclesiastical Languages (bibelanguages.blogspot.com).

Dr. Ryan C. MacPherson is Director of the Center for Apologetics and Worldviews, chair of the History Department at Bethany Lutheran College, the author of several books, including *Rediscovering the American Republic* (2 vols.), *The Culture of Life*, and *Debating Evolution before Darwinism*. As an adjunct professor for the M.A. in Theological Studies program at Martin Luther College, he teaches courses in Creation Apologetics and Bioethics. He lives with his wife Marie and their six homeschooled children in Mankato, Minnesota. He also serves as President of the Hausvater Project, which mentors Christian parents.

Rev. Donald Moldstad is a member of the Religion faculty at Bethany Lutheran College, and has served as campus Chaplain since 2005. Having completed a Masters of Divinity at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1985, he has served congregations in Minneapolis, Minn., Naples, Flo., and Mankato, Minn. He has a B.F.A. in Art from Minnesota State University, Mankato. In 1980 he married his wife Gina. They have been blessed with two children and seven grandchildren.

Rev. Steven Sparley was born in Minneapolis, Minn. After attending Bethany Lutheran College, he graduated from the University of Minnesota with a B.A. in Classical Greek in 1977. He went on to Graduate School in the interdisciplinary Department of Ancient Studies, where he was also an instructor of Sumerian language. He received his Master of Divinity degree from Bethany Lutheran Seminary in 1984. He has served as a parish pastor in Minnesota and Oregon, as a home missionary in Colorado, and a foreign missionary in Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic, where he and the Rev. James Krikava founded St. Paul Lutheran Church and Martin Luther Elementary (Základní) School. Additionally, he has served as a visiting seminary professor in Ukraine (1996–2005) and India (2006). He and his wife are blessed with five children.

Rev. David Thompson received his M. Div. from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Minnesota. He has been pastor of several congregations of the ELS, Professor/Dean of Students at Bethany Lutheran College, Executive Director of EdWatch (researching worldviews in schools), Director of the Biblical Worldview Conferences, and Chaplain/ Director at Bethany's Retreat and Conference Center. He is author of the book, *What in the World Is Going On? Identifying Hollow and Deceptive Worldviews* (NPH). Pastor Thompson currently serves St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Lombard, Illinois. He and his wife, Jenna, have six children and ten grandchildren.

“Why Does Moses Matter to Christians?”

Donald Moldstad

Examples of Jesus’ Direct References to Moses in the Gospels

- “Did not Moses give you the Law?” (John 7:19)
- “What did Moses command you?” (Mark 10:3)
- “Have you not read in the book of Moses...” (Mark 12:26)
- “Offer the gift that Moses commanded...” (Matthew 8:4)
- “Offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded...” (Mark 1:44)
- “Moses said, ‘Honor your father and ...’” (Mark 7:10)
- “They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them...” (Luke 16:29)

Examples of Paul’s Direct References to Moses in Romans

- “Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses...” (Romans 5:14)
- “God says to Moses...” (Romans 9:15)
- “First, Moses says, ...” (Romans 10:19)
- “Moses describes in this way the righteousness...” (Romans 10:5)

(In the New Testament there are 200 quotations from or allusions to the book of Genesis alone.)

Different Views of the Pentateuch among Skeptics

Skeptics begin with the premise that supernatural revelation is impossible. The Israelites began with crude animism and polytheism like other ancient cultures. Hebrew religion was constructed in a process of purely human origin.

There have been three primary hypotheses. All three of these views approach the Pentateuch as a compilation of sagas handed down orally and later recorded.

1. **The Fragmentary Hypothesis** – the OT is small fragments of writings, that someone finally combined.
2. **The Supplemental Hypothesis** – (disagrees with #1) – the Pentateuch was one basic document called “E” (Elohists), which was then supplemented with additions by a later author, “J” (Jahwist).
3. **Documentary Hypothesis (DH)** – Julius Wellhausen used concepts from the Theory of Evolution to view the development of the Pentateuch, proposing that the text grew over time, composed by at least four different authors: J- Jahwist / E – Elohist / D – Deuteronomist / P – Priestly. Each author added to a larger body of work. In time these views were blended into one large composition that became attributed to Moses.

Challenges to the Documentary Hypothesis

1. No other literary works from antiquity were produced in this way, by a “scissors and paste” method.
2. There is no historical or archaeological evidence of any such composition.
3. Numerous archaic words in the text indicate an early date of writing (including a few which were “lost”).
4. Other Semitic literature shows this level of sophistication in language existed in Moses’ day.
5. Accounts mentioned in the Joseph episode show the author was acquainted with the culture, idioms and vocabulary of ancient Egypt. In Exodus, Moses uses a greater percentage of Egyptian

words than are found elsewhere in the OT. Likewise, the details in the itinerary of Numbers 33 demonstrate first-hand knowledge.

6. Those who favor DH begin with an assumption that the Biblical record is suspect. Other ancient literature is not treated with this same prejudice. Critics magnify slight stylistic differences into contradictions.
7. The DH assumes Israel's religion is a product of evolutionary development. No such evidence exists – not in any ancient sources of Jewish history in written form or oral tradition, nor in the text itself.
8. Skeptics claim writers would not be able to use repetition and duplication, though this was common in other languages of that day.
9. Not a single example in the multiple ancient copies of the Pentateuch shows a separation or compilation of sources. All material has been transmitted as one united writing. It has arrived in history with no “seams.”
10. The DH falsely assumes that modern scholars can more accurately date the composition of ancient documents and reconstruct ancient happenings than ancient authors themselves.
11. DH supporters are very divided in their views. More recent research in this same line of thinking has moved even further from the original starting points of agreement (disagreement on the amount of writers is substantial). All start with non-supernaturalistic rationalism that presupposes multiple sources and not Moses.
12. Even leading proponents of DH acknowledge how complex the process would have to have been to create such writings – that each author was heavily influenced by previous writers. Many hands at many times had shaped the Pentateuch, or Hexateuch (some find multiple layers of authors just in the J portion of the text).
13. Later writings in the Jewish canon clearly assume Mosaic authorship: Joshua 8:32; Psalms 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 32; 1 Kings 2:3; Isaiah 63:11; Jeremiah 15:1; Hosea 12:13; Micah 6:4; and Malachi 4:4.
14. All ancient listings of OT books treat Moses' writings as a separate and complete unit, as does Josephus. 15) Even the members of opposing Jewish parties in Jesus' day commonly accepted Mosaic authorship.
15. Early Christian fathers do not criticize the Jewish status of the Pentateuch (J. Martyr, Tertullian, Basil, etc.).
16. For thousands of years believers—including children—have read the words of Moses without finding conflicting streams of thought, without being troubled by multiple names for God, or without being confused into thinking there must have been multiple authors. The natural reading of the text flows even for a child.
17. Moses was the perfect candidate: He possessed the educational background from both Egyptian and Hebrew instruction. Writing was an important part of day-to-day life in Egyptian culture, even among the common people. As the founding father of the nation of Israel he had incentive for such a writing, and had the time for a grand composition during the sojourn in the Sinai desert. As an eyewitness to these amazing events, it would be expected that he would record them, purely on a human level. The foundational and elementary character of the doctrinal teachings in the Pentateuch favor an early time of writing.

– based upon notes by R. E. Honsey and G. O Lillegard / Bethany Luth. Theol. Seminary

A Tradition of Precision

Uniqueness of the Ancient Hebrews

The Hebrew people were theologically unique among surrounding cultures, firmly established in monotheistic worship, which is evidenced by archaeology, in contrast to their pagan neighbors. Even those who today question the teachings of the OT Bible recognize that it is a unique piece of ancient literature. Despite being scattered throughout the world by various wars and enslavements, the Hebrew

people maintained a resistance to the perversion of their ancient texts. No other writing has been so often copied, printed, translated, read or studied. The Masoretes and scribes had very strict regulations in the handling of the text, which surpass all other efforts of transmission. At times they would number letters in the book to find the middle letter in hopes of never adding or subtracting a single letter. The Talmud declares that one mistake invalidated an entire new copy making it worthy of destruction. It mandated the skin used as parchment, and the very clothing to be worn by the copyist. The first century Jewish schools in Jamnia, Tiberia and Babylon carried on this same practice. Consider the layers of study, elaboration, and protection Hebrews placed around their ancient texts:

Torah – *taught to all of Israel every seventh year as the supreme rule of faith and life*

Targum – *explanation of the Old Testament by famous rabbis*

Mishna – *oral traditions of the rabbis, written down (part of the Talmud)*

Gemara – *rabbis' commentary on the Mishna (part of the Talmud)*

Midrash – *sermons of the rabbis*

Halakah – *collection of Laws from the Torah*

The claim of divine authority of the Torah was understood and acknowledged in all epochs of Jewish history.

Even the translation of the Hebrew OT into Greek (Septuagint, 200BC) stood out as a unique piece of literature among the cultures of the region, demonstrating a strong desire to cling to their ancient writings. No other religion or culture had such a text that was so preserved, accessible and understandable to so many people.

Moses, a Type Foreshadowing the Coming Christ

<i>MOSES</i>	<i>SIMILARITIES</i>	<i>CHRIST</i>
Exodus 2:2-10	Divinely rescued at birth from the plans of a murderous, evil king	Matthew 2:14-15
Exodus 5	Standing before evil earthly rulers on behalf of the Lord's Kingdom	John 18:28-38
Exodus 14:21	Used by God in a miraculous way to provide food for multitudes	Matthew 14:20-21
Exodus 17	God's agent for delivering water (the Living Water) to His people	John 4
Exodus 3	God's specially appointed spokesman to speak on His behalf	John 14
Numbers 1	Twelve tribes/disciples who serve God's people under His leadership	John 1
Exodus 16:15	Having observed God's glory, His face was radiant with light	Matthew 17
Numbers 11:16-17	Equipped with seventy helpers to carry out the work of serving the people	Luke 10:1
Exodus 14	Divinely appointed leader who was to lead God's people in the way of truth	John 18:36-38
Numbers 12	Discredited and rejected by many from among His own people	John 7:5
Exodus 32:32	Stood before God the Father to make intercessory prayers for the people	John 17
Exodus 32:32	Willingness to be punished and separated from God for the sins of others	Isaiah 53:3-9
Matthew 17:3	Miraculously reappeared to the faithful after His death	Luke 24:36-43

Two Debates about Moses: The Exodus and the Pentateuch

(Context for Understanding Dr. Petrovich’s Scholarship)

- **The Exodus Debate:** Did the Israelites leave Egypt in the 1400s BC (*biblical chronology*), a few centuries later (“*Late Exodus*” theory), or not at all (*skeptical denial*)?
- **The Pentateuch Debate:** Did Moses write the first five books of the Bible in the 1400s BC (*biblical history*) or did later editors assemble this book from fragmentary legends and myths (“*Documentary Hypothesis*”) about a thousand years later (“*Late Composition*” theory)?

This chart serves merely as a rough approximation for comparing biblical chronology with the “Late Exodus” and “Late Composition” theories, and for showing where the Wadi el-Hol and Serabit el-Khadim inscriptions fit within that debate. Some of our conference presenters will offer more precise dates together with reasoning in support of their conclusions.

<u>Approx. Dates</u>	<u>Biblical Persons/Events</u>	<u>Inscriptions/Manuscripts/Theories</u>		
2000 BC	Abraham			
1900 BC	Isaac			
1800 BC	Jacob ... Joseph and His Brothers	Wadi el-Hol (Egypt, 2 inscriptions)		Middle Bronze
1700 BC	Israelites’ Sojourn	Serabit el-Khadim		Middle Bronze
1600 BC	in Egypt	(Egyptian mining colony in Sinai, 30+ inscriptions)		Middle Bronze
1500 BC	Moses / Exodus / Pentateuch	Archaeological Finds at Hazor		Late Bronze
1400 BC	Joshua / Conquest of Canaan			New Kgd.
1300 BC	Judges			Late Bronze
1200 BC	Ruth	Ramesses II as the Exodus 1:8 Pharaoh?		Late Bronze
1100 BC	Samuel / Saul / David	(“Late Exodus” Theory)		Late Bronze
1000 BC	Solomon’s Temple			Iron Age
900 BC	Ahab / Elijah & Elisha	Paleo-Hebrew Script		Iron Age
800 BC				Iron Age
700 BC	Assyrian Conquest / Hezekiah / Isaiah			Iron Age
600 BC	Babylonian Captivity / Daniel	Aramaic/Hebrew Script		Iron Age
500 BC	Ezra / Nehemiah	“Documentary Hypothesis”		Iron Age
400 BC	Malachi	(“Late Composition” Theory)		Iron Age
300 BC				Iron Age
200 BC		Dead Sea Scrolls		Iron Age
100 BC				Iron Age
4 BC	Birth of Jesus Christ			Iron Age
AD 30	Crucifixion and Resurrection			Iron Age

The World's First Alphabet

Proto-Consonantal Hebrew

Classical Hebrew

<u>Pictogram</u>	<u>Acrophony</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Letter</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Sound</u>
	<u>E</u> lef	cattle	א	Alef	(guttural)
	<u>B</u> ayit	house	ב	Bet	b, v
	<u>G</u> ahar	bend	ג	Gimel	g
	<u>D</u> elet	door	ד	Dalet	d
	<u>H</u> alal	praise	ה	He	h
	<u>W</u> aw	pillar support	ו	Vav, Waw	v, w
	<u>Z</u> eah	sweat (brows)	ז	Zayin	z
	<u>Ch</u> ut, <u>Ch</u> aser	thread, enclosure	ח	Chet	ch (Bach)
	<u>T</u> ov	good	ט	Tet	t
	<u>Y</u> ad	hand	י	Yod	y
	<u>K</u> ap	palm of hand	כ	Kaf	k, kh
	<u>L</u> amad	teach	ל	Lamed	l
	<u>M</u> ayim	water	מ	Mem	m
	<u>N</u> achash	serpent	נ	Nun	n
	<u>S</u> arach, <u>S</u> ear	stinky fish, hair	ס	Samek	s
	<u>A</u> yin	eye	ע	Ayin	(guttural)
	<u>P</u> eh	mouth	פ	Pe	p
	<u>T</u> seror	sack	צ	Tsade	ts (boots)
	<u>Q</u> ur	spun-fiber	ק	Qof	k, q
	<u>R</u> osh	head	ר	Resh	r
	<u>S</u> hadayim	breasts	ש/ש	Sin/Shin	s/sh
	<u>T</u> ayish	male goat	ת	Tav, Taw	t, th

Adapted from Douglas Petrovich, *The World's Oldest Alphabet* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2016).

Proto-Consonantal Hebrew

Hebrew Block-Letter	Projected Proto-Hebrew Original Letter	Middle-Egyptian Hieroglyphic Exemplar (Sign-List Number)	Original Hebrew Alphabetic Name (NIVEC Number)	Hebrew Consonantals of Middle Kingdom (ca. 1842–1760 BC)	Hebrew Consonantals of New Kingdom (ca. 1560–1307 BC)	Hebrew Consonantals of Iron Age - Canaan (ca. 1150–587 BC)
א			<i>ʿelef</i> cattle אֵלֶף (477)			
ב			<i>bayit</i> house בֵּית (1074)			
ג			<i>gāhar</i> bend גָּהַר (1566)			
ד			<i>delet</i> door דֶּלֶת (1946)			
ה			<i>hālal</i> praise הָלַל (2146)			
ו			<i>wāw</i> pillar-support (2260)			
ז			<i>zēʾah</i> sweat (brows) זֵעָה (2399)			
ח			<i>hāšēr</i> enclosure חֹשֶׁר (2958) <i>hūt</i> thread חוּט (2562)			
ט			<i>tōv</i> good טוֹב (3201)			
י			<i>yād</i> hand יָד (3338)			
כ			<i>kap</i> palm כַּף (4090)			
ל			<i>lāmad</i> teach לָמַד (4340) לָמַד (4913)			
מ			<i>mayim</i> water מַיִם (4784)			
נ			<i>nāhās</i> snake נָחָשׁ (5729)			
ס			<i>šēʾar</i> hair שֵׁעָר (8482) <i>sārah</i> stink סָרַח (6244)			
ע			<i>ʿayin</i> eye עַיִן (6523)			
פ			<i>peh</i> mouth פֶּה (7023)			
צ			<i>šarōr</i> sack צָרוּר (7655)	© 2015 Douglas Petrovich		
ק			<i>qūr</i> spun-fiber קוּר (7770)			
ר			<i>roš</i> head רֹשׁ (8031)			
ש			<i>šadayim</i> breasts שְׂדַיִם (8716)			
ת			<i>tayiš</i> male goat תַּיִשׁ (9411)			

Reprinted, with permission, from Douglas Petrovich,
The World's Oldest Alphabet (Jerusalem: Carta, 2016).

A Confessional Lutheran Understanding of Christian Apologetics and Its Practice

(Excerpts from a paper by David Thompson presented at the General Pastoral Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Oct. 2019 and published in the Dec. 2020 issue of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.

A copy of the full text may be found at www.blc.edu/event/2021-apologetics-conference.)

ANSWERING THE PARADOX: OFFERING EVIDENCE WHILE PRESERVING THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL AND GRACE ALONE

So here's the all-important question: How can apologetics (making the case for the truth that Jesus is the Christ by presenting evidence in which reason plays a role) be used in the service of the gospel without denying the bondage of the will and the efficient causes of the word and Holy Spirit?

We cannot unmake what we are. We have senses and our reason. And whether right or wrong reason can make a judgment. Reason, corrupted by the fall, cannot convince the will out of its hatred for God. It cannot grasp Christ and his forgiveness. It cannot be an instigating cause of faith. Nevertheless, we still have this reason that inevitably and naturally judges. We cannot avoid being creatures who will sense, reason, and make judgments, even if we wanted to.

So here is the way the paradox can be answered. It is a narrow path. But I believe it steers us correctly.

Apologetics is used in the service of the gospel *insofar* as it points to, implies, or confirms the truth of the gospel.

This is what is seen over and over again in numerous examples of Scripture, all the while upholding and acknowledging the precious means of grace. Reason can reason. But it cannot effect conversion. It can hear what is to be believed, but it cannot enable one to believe. It can see or hear the evidence in favor of the truth of the gospel, but it is not the power of God for salvation that creates faith. The gospel alone does that. But the evidence – that which reason cannot or should not ignore – can imply, point to, or confirm the word of the saving gospel which the Holy Spirit then uses to change the heart of stone within the rebellious sinner into a believing heart now reconciled to God because of the work of Christ.

This allows Scripture to stand and speak as it does when it comes to the purpose and/or result of apologetics (evidence used in the service of the law or the gospel or both) *and at the same time* the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of grace remain firm and true.

APOLOGETICS: THE HANDMAIDEN AND FRIEND OF THE GOSPEL

Apologetics is not “merely law preaching”; neither is it simply “clearing away obstacles which keep unbelievers from giving serious consideration to the claims of Scripture” (though it can and does serve these purposes). Apologetics is also a serving platter on which the gospel can be placed. It is not as if we make the case against false belief, then make the case for the truth of Christianity, and then “step out of the way so the gospel can do its work” (as some claim). No. The gospel is or can be embedded in the apology. This, as I have shown, is what is seen time after time in the words or examples of Christ and the apostles.

Is there some sort of implicit danger within or in using apologetics? No more so than in the proper preaching of the law, or even the gospel. We know that when the law is preached, most will hear it only to justify themselves self-righteously like the Pharisee in Luke 18 (10ff.) rather than repent. When the pure gospel is preached, many will hear it in order to justify cheap grace (Rom. 6:15ff.). Just as the appropriate preaching of the law or gospel is not the problem or evil (Rom. 7:12-13; Gal. 3:21), so

it can be said of sound apologetics. Though many misconstrued or ignored the evidence of miracles, that did not stop Jesus, Philip, Peter, and Paul from presenting the evidence (John 6, Acts 8 and 14).

Are there times not to use apologetics? Of course: when the senses and reason are not what they will be (as in the case of infants and children) or when they are no longer what they once were (among those afflicted with dementia or other mental challenges). It also does not have to be used where there is a common epistemology and the person asks, "What does God's Word say?", and all that is possibly needed is the gospel undefended (but even here it is important to remember the apostles used apologetics with believers to confirm the truth and comfort of the gospel – 1 Cor. 15:1-11; 2 Pet. 1:16-21; 1 John 1:1-3). At the same time, we *are not required* "to give a defense" if nobody asks us anything. We *are required*, however, when we *are* asked: "always being prepared to make a defense to *anyone who asks you* for a reason for the hope that is in you." (1 Pet. 3:15). But even in non-asking settings, it is not inappropriate to "put a stone in his shoe" with the hope that maybe he will ask us why we believe what we believe. If we never engage our quiet and seemingly content neighbor, we will never know where he stands in the balance of eternity and he may never hear the gospel.

We should never not use apologetics because we think it is implicitly harmful or dangerous or because we are afraid the hearer will end up thinking he can by his "own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit will do his work when and where he pleases (John 3:8).

Still, we do need to guard against a misuse of apologetics in our preaching, teaching, and evangelism, for the sake of our hearts and those under our care, for the *opinio legis* is ever present. We do so by taking heed to the whole counsel of God, including the careful study and meditation of Holy Scripture and our *Confessions*. We also need to watch our practice carefully, making sure the pure gospel predominates and the sacrament is rightly and regularly administered (the more regular the better). This sends a message to and distinguishes us from the pro-apologetics but anti-sacramental churches (not to mention the great benefit of offering every-Sunday communion for us and our members).

But we also have to guard against an underuse of apologetics. Here we can plead guilty. Here we have let non-Lutheran churches take the lead (and have been scared off by them at the same time). One of the reasons C.S. Lewis, G.K Chesterton, Josh McDowell, Lee Strobel, Tim Keller and others have been read and listened to is because they have tapped into something that resonates with the nature of man: who and what God has created him to be. Man is an aesthetic, moral, rational, thoughtful, fulfillment-driven, eternity-longing creature. Though corrupted and unable to grasp how and in whom these God-given attributes will be truly satisfied, they still reside within man (Eccl. 3:11). We should not be surprised that the Creator somehow uses these unique human aptitudes to point us to his Son in whom they are and will be perfectly fulfilled.

Those who do not believe, teach, and confess the complete fall into sin and the pure means of grace will fall into and encourage the misuse of apologetics. But those who view apologetics merely as law preaching or as that which somehow only falls under the category of the law, will probably end up encouraging its non-use and fail to recognize this most valuable platter on which the gospel can be placed.

When I was moving my belongings into the dorm of Bethany Lutheran College as an agnostic freshman, one of the professors who watched me said to himself, "O boy, what do we have here!" Among the usual, I was also carrying the stuffed head of a collie (stolen from a house I had broken into) which I put on display in my room. It said something about me. I took a course from that same professor my first semester called "The Case for Christianity." I was amazed by what was taught and my worldview was challenged. Could I be that off base? Could these strange students and professors be right who took the Bible at face value? I would discuss and even argue with students, my girlfriend, and professors. At the same time the law was pressing harder and harder upon me, for I had been enjoying and justifying a number of sins. I still remember being alone one evening when other students were at the midweek Lenten service. I was walking around what was then the football field for the Catholic high school (now Bethany's soccer field). I was thinking about the cross of Christ. Especially the cross for one wretched sinner in particular. I was brought back to my baptismal grace I had received as an infant. The cross alone did it. And yet I cannot deny what the evidence was pointing me to all along.

Apologetics Writers' Workshop

You are an “apologetics writer” if ...

- ... you seek to steer wayward conversations on social media back toward biblical truth.
- ... you write a church newsletter including advice for navigating among conflicting worldviews.
- ... you incorporate apologetics in your preaching or teaching.
- ... you write a “Q & A Leading to Christ” flyer, distributed by the Board for Home Outreach.
- ... you write an apologetics article for the *Lutheran Sentinel*.
- ... and many other examples ... plus, of course, the few among us who write books on apologetics!

Which questions should apologetics writers address?

- Questions about **truth**: What is truth? How can we know the truth? Can we ever be certain?
- Questions about **God**: Does He exist? Who is He? Which religion describes God correctly?
- Questions about **ourselves**: Where did we come from? What is our deepest need? What happens when we die? What's the difference between male and female? Are races real?
- Questions that lead to the heart of one's **worldview**: Reality? Truth? Origins? God? Human nature? Distinguishing good and evil? What's the solution to evil? How will the world end?
- Especially questions about **Jesus**: Is He really God? Did He rise from the dead? What difference should that make to me?
- ... including any of the hundreds of questions the Center for Apologetics and Worldview has on file for developing future “Q & A Leading to Christ” flyers.

How should apologetics writers address those questions?

- Listen for the questions that people ask—both the question that they state and the question behind that question, the unstated question within their heart.
- Consider how those questions align with the chief parts of the Christian faith (Small Catechism).
- Consider how prevalent assumptions in our culture lead people toward the wrong answers.
- Review the Bible passages that provide the correct answers.
- Now, reply to the question by “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15):
 - Get it straight: “I hear you’re wondering about..., is that what you’re thinking?”
 - Build a bridge: “I can see why you might be led to conclude...but did you ever think about...?”
 - Shine some light: “Actually, that common view is based on a false assumption about....”
 - Offer hope: “If instead we recognize...then we’ll see how God is at work to bless us with....”
 - Offer relevant “reasons” (1 Peter 3:15) that show why the wrong answer is false and why the correct answer is true:
 - reality (common experience, natural knowledge, the conscience)
 - well-established facts (history, archaeology, science, etc.)
 - the impossibility of living consistently with false assumptions (law of noncontradiction)
 - the general coherence of the biblical worldview (...even while allowing for some paradoxes and higher mysteries—the Two Natures of Christ, the Trinity, etc.)
 - Point to Christ’s death and resurrection for the forgiveness and salvation of all people.
- Avoid retreating to “faith” as if it’s merely your personal opinion.
- Present **Christian faith** as the Holy Spirit’s gift of a firm trust in Christ for salvation on the basis of (*and through the means of*) the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, which include eyewitness testimonies of the life, death, resurrection, and teachings of Jesus Christ.
(For example: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” 2 Peter 1:16)

Planning Your Lunch Break for Thursday

Off-Campus Dining (all within 5 to 10 min. of campus):

- **Madison Ave.** (from Bethany, drive east on Marsh St., then turn north onto Dane St., and finally turn east onto Madison Ave.): McDonald's, Wendy's, Taco Bell, Panda Express, Chipotle, plus Grizzly's and Red Lobster
- **Front St.** (from Bethany, drive south on Division St., then turn west onto Glenwood Ave., keeping to the right to merge onto Cherry St., and finally turn south onto Front St.): La Bamba Mexican, Pub 500, Pagliai's, Ummies, Pita Pit, WYSIWYG

Bethany Bookstore (Old Main, directly across the campus green from the gymnasium):

- John Warwick Montgomery, *History, Law, and Christianity*
- Craig Parton, *The Defense Never Rests*
- Allen Quist, *Evidence That the Bible Is True: The Apologetics of Biblical Reliability*
- Allen Quist, *The Reason I Believe: The Basics of Christian Apologetics*
- David Thompson, *What in the World Is Going On?: Identifying Hollow and Deceptive Worldviews*
- Curtis Jahn, ed., *Here We Stand: A Confessional Christian Study of Worldviews*
- ... and more!

Bethany Admissions Office (across the hallway from the bookstore):

- Academic Programs
- Financial Aid Applications
- Etc.

Bethany Lutheran College provides Christian higher education in a challenging academic environment where personal mentoring guides students to pursue knowledge, truth, and discernment for productive and fulfilling lives.

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Coming Soon ...

- Continuation of a four-part series in the *Lutheran Sentinel* (lutheransentinel.els.org):
 - “Presenting Evidence for the Truth of Christianity” (March-Apr. 2021)
 - “Critiquing Worldviews that Oppose Christianity” (May-June 2021)
 - “Fortifying Believers with a Proper Interpretation of Holy Scripture” (Sept.-Oct 2021)
 - “Engaging Unbelievers in Conversations Leading toward the Gospel Proclamation of Forgiveness in Christ” (Nov.-Dec. 2021)
- Monthly “Q and A Leading to Christ” flyers distributed through the Board for Home Outreach
- Student Conferences at Bethany Lutheran College (2021–2022)
- The Fourth Annual ELS Apologetics Conference (June 2022)

How to Join in Our Work

1. **Learn more:** Visit www.blc.edu/apologetics and www.els.org/apologetics for video archives of past conferences and links to a variety of resources recommended or produced by the Center for Apologetics and Worldviews (CAW).
2. **Tell others:** Direct your friends and family to our apologetics resources. Talk to your pastor about using the “**Q and A Leading to Christ**” flyers produced by the Center for Apologetics and Worldviews in partnership with the Board for Home Outreach.
3. **Pray:** Ask the Lord to guide and sustain CAW’s efforts to present evidence for the truth of Christianity and critique worldviews that oppose Christianity. Ask the Lord to bless CAW’s efforts to fortify believers with a proper interpretation of Holy Scripture and to engage unbelievers in conversations leading toward the Gospel proclamation of forgiveness in Christ.
4. **Give:** CAW receives no funding from the synod or the college; it relies entirely on private donations. If you would like to assist in the continuation of the center’s work, please make your check payable to “**Center for Apologetics and Worldviews**” and mail your gift to:

Bethany Lutheran College
Advancement Dept.
700 Luther Dr.
Mankato, MN 56001

We thank you for your support.

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EVALUATION SURVEY

(Please detach this from your program and return it to the registration table before leaving.)

How did you find out about this seminar? Check *all* that apply:

- Poster/Bulletin Insert at Church
- Free Press* ad
- KJLY Christian Radio
- Facebook
- Synod Convention Info
- Personal Invitation
- Other: _____



Please rate this seminar:

	Excellent	←—————→			Poor
Presentations (topics, clarity, benefit)	5	4	3	2	1
Schedule arrangement (day, lecture lengths, breaks, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
Location, set up, accommodations	5	4	3	2	1
Registration procedure	5	4	3	2	1
Conference overall	5	4	3	2	1

Please rate each presentation:

	Excellent	←—————→			Poor
Why Does Moses Matter to Christians? / Moldstad	5	4	3	2	1
Is There Compelling Evidence...? / Petrovich	5	4	3	2	1
Apologetics Writers' Workshop / Discussion	5	4	3	2	1
Can Archaeology Teach Us Anything...? / Petrovich	5	4	3	2	1
Is Hebrew the World's Oldest Alphabet...? / Petrovich	5	4	3	2	1
How Can Believers Make Inroads...? / Panel	5	4	3	2	1
How Does Evidence Properly Serve...? / Thompson	5	4	3	2	1

Other comments or suggestions? (Feel free to use the back side if you need additional space.)

(continue on the back side as needed)

Suggested future topics and/or presenters:

(continue on the back side as needed)

Name and Email (to receive announcements about future conferences):
