

Apologetics

O5ST530/01

Reformed Theological Seminary - Houston

Spring 2016

APOLOGETICS - O5ST530/01

“It is true that the best apologetics can be given only when the system of truth is well known. But it is also true that the system of truth is not well known except it be seen in opposition to error. Systematic theology itself has been developed, to a large extent, in opposition to error. The two disciplines are therefore mutually dependent upon one another.” (Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. William Edgar [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007], 18)

I. Course Description

- A. Students are introduced to a distinctively Reformed apologetic methodology and are equipped to engage a variety of objections to the Christian faith in a way that honors the risen Christ in methodology and content.

II. Course Details

- A. Dates: Feb 12–13, Mar 25–26, April 29–30 (2016)
- B. Times: Friday, 6:30 PM–9:30 PM; Saturday, 8:00 AM–3:00 PM
- C. Place: RTS-Houston campus at Christ Evangelical Presbyterian Church
- D. Instructor: R. Carlton Wynne, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Theological Seminary
- E. Contact: cwynne@wts.edu

III. Course Goals

- A. To exhibit a deeper love for the absolute and personal triune God, His word, and His church.
- B. To grasp the biblical and theological warrant, principles, content and method of a Reformed apologetic.
- C. To develop the ability to apply a Reformed apologetic method to a selection of intellectual, philosophical, and pastoral challenges to the Christian faith.

IV. Philosophy and Purpose of the Course

- A. The task of defending the faith is one that is mandated in the Word of God. As a biblical mandate, it is something that every Christian must be concerned to learn and to follow. As Christians training for (pastoral) ministry, it is crucial to understand the task and function of apologetics so that, as you minister, you might be able to help others fulfill that task. It is also important for ministers of the Word to be able to communicate the gospel in a way that answers the challenges that come to the Christian faith. Therefore, understanding the task and goal of apologetics will enhance the communication of the gospel.
- B. How we think about apologetics will determine its content and its goal. In this course, we will follow an approach to apologetics that has been called, most generally, “presuppositionalism,” a method often associated with former Westminster Theological Seminary professor Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987). While the term “presuppositionalism” is not particularly helpful today (Dr. K. Scott Oliphint, one of Van Til’s heirs, has helpfully proposed “covenantal

apologetics” as an alternative moniker), nor hero worship our ambition, the biblical and theological warrant, principles, content and method of Van Til’s approach will be set forth in this course.

- C. Any single course of this nature has to be fairly general and selective. We cannot cover the whole terrain of apologetics in one semester. We will not be able to cover the history of apologetics or explore other apologetic methods in detail. Instead, our primary aim will be to unfold from Scripture and the Reformed tradition a God-honoring apologetic method that, by the power of the Spirit working by and with the Word, is able to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:5).
- D. By the end of this course, you should have some of the most basic tools needed to develop a Christian approach to defending and commending the faith. Hopefully, the groundwork will be laid for years of fruitful reflection and service in Christ’s church, to His glory!

V. Course Requirements

A. Attendance and Class Participation

- 1. All registered students are expected to attend class lectures. Though much of the lecture material will be independent of the reading, they are designed to supplement one another. There is no way adequately to cover an introduction like this simply by reading assigned texts and others’ notes. Since this course is offered over three intensive weekends, to miss a single day’s material is to miss a major section of the course.
- 2. Though the course will generally feature lecture format, class discussion and questions are welcomed and expected. Though because of time constraints, tangential comments should be reserved for outside of class time. If the need arises, we may set aside certain times for questions and discussions only.

B. Reading Assignments

- 1. Required:
 - i. Fisher, Alec. *Critical Thinking*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. **Ch. 1-9** (Note: While there is a second edition available, this is the first edition [2001], which is fine to use and much cheaper online. Because this reading assignment is designed to aid students who need to review basic concepts and skills of critical thinking, it is not imperative that every student read every page).
 - ii. Bahnsen, Greg L. *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1998. **PP. 1-41, 69-77, 82-116, 120-143, 144-156, 194-203, 220-246, 250-260, 261-287, 292-317, 405-431, 433-460, 461-529, 726-730**
 - iii. Oliphint, K. Scott. *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2013. **ALL**
 - iv. Oliphint, K. Scott & Tipton, Lane G., eds. *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2007. **Ch. 1, 3, 4, 6, Appendix**

2. Required for Argument Analyses
 - i. Martin, Michael, ed. *The Impossibility of God*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003.
 - ii. Russell, Bertrand. "A Free Man's Worship," *The Independent Review* 1 (Dec 1903), 415-24; available at <http://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/courses/264/fmw.htm>
 - iii. Russell, Bertrand. "Why I am Not a Christian," lecture delivered to the National Secular Society at Battersea Town Hall on March 6, 1927; available at <http://www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html>
 - iv. Mark Ray Schmidt, ed. *Constructing a Life Philosophy: Opposing Viewpoints*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven, 2002.
3. Required (but not tested):
 - i. Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity and Liberalism*. New ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. **ALL**
 - ii. Clowney, Edmund P. "Preaching the Word of the Lord: Cornelius Van Til, V.D.M." *Westminster Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (1984): 233-53. **ALL**
 - iii. (Note: These two assignments are meant to be for your own edification and enjoyment. They combine the best of scholarship with some very practical and central ideas that should help you see how much of what you are learning here, and in your other courses, relates to your own growth and ministry. I will ask you on the final exam if you have read these works, along with the other assigned reading, and if you have not it will affect your overall grade).
4. With regard to a reading schedule, if you have a method that works best for you, great. But the following is my strong suggestion (the plan here front-loads the reading, but averages ~110 pp./week):

Feb 12 (CLASS WEEKEND) – Fisher, pp. 1-78 (Ch. 1–5); Bahnsen, 1–41, 69–77; Oliphint, 1–28	March 25 (CLASS WEEKEND) – Bahnsen, 88–116; 120–143, 144–156
Feb 19 – Fisher, 79–137 (Ch. 6–9); Bahnsen, 82–87; Oliphint, 29–85	April 1 – Oliphint, 161–224; Bahnsen, 194–203
Feb 26 – Machen, 1–46; Oliphint/Tipton, 13-40	April 8 – Oliphint, 225–62; Bahnsen, 220–246, 250–260
March 4 – Machen, 47–98; Oliphint, 87–122	April 15 – Oliphint/Tipton, 279–303; Bahnsen, 261–287, 292–317,
March 11 – Oliphint/Tipton, 59–94; Machen 99–132	April 22 – Bahnsen, 405–431, 433–460
March 18 – Oliphint/Tipton, 115–130; Machen, 133–152; Oliphint, 123–60	April 29 (CLASS WEEKEND) – Bahnsen, 461–529, 726–730; Clowney,

C. Midterm Argument Analyses

1. You must **choose two (2) essays** from among selections of Michael Martin's *The Impossibility of God* and essays by Bertrand Russell (see the essay options listed below) and write an argument analysis for each essay. **NB: Please choose one (1) essay from the selections from *The Impossibility of God*; one (1) essay by Bertrand Russell; for a total of two (2) essays.**
2. In each analysis, (1) summarize the author's main argument, or one of the author's main arguments, in your own words (1-2 sentences). In a separate section, (2) lay out the premises of the argument numerically, or simply walk through the author's rationale step by step. Be as specific and as concise as possible, showing the connections and flow of the argument (or lack thereof). Pay special attention to "argument indicators" such as "so," "because," "since," "therefore," etc. Refer to Fisher's *Critical Thinking* for help identifying the premises and their logical relations. The goal is to accurately reproduce the author's argument such that he or she would say, "Yes, you've correctly understood my argument. Congratulations."
3. Then, in a third section, (3) identify the key premise(s) and *briefly* explain why they are problematic from a Reformed, covenantal perspective. To do this you must try to get over onto the ground of the view you disagree with, in order to show **from within** how it fails to live up to its own claims. I.e., please do not critique your author's argument simply by stating that he/she does not believe the Bible or that he/she is reasoning autonomously. Instead, you might explore whether the author has misrepresented some aspect of the Christian worldview; whether a premise in the opposing argument manifests inconsistency, arbitrariness, or equivocation; or (especially) how the unargued assumptions behind some aspect of the argument (e.g., the mind is operating normally, God's attributes may be understood properly apart from Scripture, denial of the Creator-creature distinction, arbitrary appeal to authority, etc.) undermines key claims of the argument, itself. In short, identify where you would exploit a weakness and briefly explain why. No need to give a full-blown internal critique of the argument or the essay as a whole.
4. Each argument analysis should be 2-3 pages in length (12-point font, double-spaced).
 - i. Page numbers in the top, right-hand corner of each page (no page number for the title page).
 - ii. Stapled pages.
 - iii. A title page containing all of the following: your name, the name and year of the course; your mailbox number; the professor's name.
 - iv. You will be penalized if you do not observe the requirements and guidelines above.
5. **DUE DATE: MARCH 25-26, 2016** (turn in to professor in hard copy form)
 - i. Your assignment grade will be docked ½ letter grade for each day it is

late (Sunday excepted).

6. Essay Options:

- i. From *The Impossibility of God* (CHOOSE ONE):
 - a. Mackie, J.L. "Evil and Omnipotence." In *The Impossibility of God*, 61–72. Edited by Michael Martin. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003.
 - b. Bradley, Raymond D. "A Moral Argument for Atheism." In *The Impossibility of God*, 129–146. Edited by Michael Martin. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003.
 - c. Kretzmann, Norman. "Omniscience and Immutability." In *The Impossibility of God*, 198–209. Edited by Michael Martin. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003.
- ii. From Bertrand Russell (CHOOSE ONE from either Russell or Schmidt):
 - a. Russell, Bertrand. "A Free Man's Worship," *The Independent Review* 1 (Dec 1903), 415–24; available at <http://users.drew.edu/~jlenz/br-fmw.html#nstar>
 - b. Russell, Bertrand. "Why I am Not a Christian," lecture delivered to the National Secular Society at Battersea Town Hall on March 6, 1927; available at <http://www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html>
- iii. From *Constructing a Life Philosophy* (CHOOSE ONE from either Russell or Schmidt):
 - a. Ross, Nancy Wilson. "Hinduism Explains That All Ways Lead to God." In *Constructing a Life Philosophy: Opposing Viewpoints*, 107–13. Edited by Mark Ray Schmidt. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven, 2002.
 - b. Miller, Donald E. "Liberal Christianity Finds Many Ways to Seek God." In *Constructing a Life Philosophy: Opposing Viewpoints*, 86–94. Edited by Mark Ray Schmidt. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven, 2002.
 - c. Zindler, Frank R. "Religion is Not Needed in Moral Decisions." In *Constructing a Life Philosophy: Opposing Viewpoints*, 160–69. Edited by Mark Ray Schmidt. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven, 2002.

7. The purpose of the two argument analyses is to equip you to enter into an unbelieving argument in order to expose its internal weaknesses from a Reformed perspective. This is a skill that is indispensable to, but not exhaustive of, the covenantal apologetic method. These essays will also provide you with the "steel beams" of your apologetics paper (see next).

D. Course Paper

1. Description: For your final paper, **choose one (1) of the essays from your argument analyses** and write a thoughtful, well-structured apologetic paper that incorporates your previous analysis.
 - i. **You should begin working on your paper as soon as you complete your argument analyses.**
 - ii. The paper is to consist of an apologetic argument with the author of the essay you choose. You must address the issues and the underlying presuppositions of the philosophy set forth. You must strive to be

- persuasive, and not simply enunciate your disagreements. In order to accomplish this, it is important to answer the authors in such a way as he or she would say, “Yes, you’ve understood my position all right.” More than that, you must try to “sympathize” with the view you disagree with. Beyond this, though, the key is that in your refutation, you strive to apply the “transcendental approach” as you will have learned it in the course. After applying this critique to your author’s essay, you will be in a position to address the issue(s) briefly from a Christian perspective, organically leading to a call for repentance and faith in the gospel.
- iii. Because this paper is not your standard “research” paper, you should want to do enough research (and relevant footnoting) beyond your chosen essay, itself, that will help you (a) explain your selected author’s case against God (e.g., Is he/she drawing on other works or philosophical ideas? If so, what are they? Have others dealt with this issue before?); and (b) present your own apologetic response (e.g., Are there any historical or theological resources that helpfully support your critique and response?). The library and ATLA database are, of course, your best resources. Again, the nature of this assignment requires that you do enough research to provide a well-informed analysis and critique of your chosen essay. However, you will likely do more “standard” research in papers for other classes. NB: Please use a recognized scholarly style for citations (e.g., Chicago/Turabian, SBL).
2. Length and Format: 2300–2700 words (~8–10 pp.), including footnotes. 10-pp. max (hard upper limit!)
 - i. **Any paper over ten pages (not including a cover page) will be deducted one letter grade per extra page (11 pages gets a “B” on an “A” paper, a “C” on a “B” paper, etc).** Part of learning to write well includes not only what to say, but how much to say. You have ten, and only ten, pages to say what needs to be said.
 - ii. Double-spaced, with 12-point font in “Times” or “Times New Roman” font.
 3. Structure: Your paper should include all of the following:
 - i. A clearly defined thesis statement.
 - ii. A brief but clear explanation of your author’s argument that demonstrates your understanding of its various dimensions.
 - iii. Most importantly, an analysis and critique of the author’s argument using a Reformed (i.e., Van Tillian) apologetic methodology.
 - iv. You may choose to cite only the essay under review. However, should it serve to enrich your analysis and argument, you may choose to cite course readings/lectures and/or other academic sources related to your argument.
 - v. Page numbers in the top, right-hand corner of each page (no page number for a title page).
 - vi. Stapled pages.
 - vii. A title page containing all of the following: your name, the name and year of the course; your mailbox number; the professor’s name; the title

of the paper; and the *exact word count* for the main text of the paper (obtained from your word processor's word-count feature)

- viii. The following statement at the end of your paper and signed by you: *I understand and have not violated the Seminary's position on plagiarism.* (For a brief explanation of what plagiarism is and is not, please refer to <https://www.rts.edu/site/academics/students/policies.aspx#22>).
- ix. You will be penalized if you do not observe the requirements and guidelines above.

4. **DUE: May 13, 2016**

- i. Your paper grade will be docked ½ letter grade for each day it is late (Sunday excepted).

E. *Final Exam*

1. The final exam will be scheduled, administered, and submitted according to the RTS-H policy. It will cover all aspects of the course, but will focus primarily on the lecture material and key readings (Bahnsen/Oliphint). You may use an English Bible, without notes or helps, on your exam.
2. *NOTA BENE: It is a violation of the Honor Code to use past exams, including exam 'blue books,' to study for this exam. No past papers, exams, etc. may be consulted.*
3. If you think it would be useful to your growth in Christ (see Phil 2:14), I am happy to discuss your paper or exam grade with you.
4. The final exam will be 50% of your grade. Reading credit will factor into your final exam grade.

F. *About Paper Grades*

1. In this course, a B is considered a standard, good grade. It means you have fulfilled the assignment and have respected the basic principles outlined here. An A- means the work is of better-than-normal quality. An A means it is exceptional, and with some work could be worthy of publication. C means it is OK but needs some work. D means it is acceptable, but needs significant work.

G. *Course Grade:*

1. *Midterm Argument Analyses: 20%*
2. *Course Paper: 40%*
3. *Final Exam: 40%*

Recommended Reading

Anderson, James N. *What's Your Worldview? An Interactive Approach to Life's Big Questions*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.

Bedau, Hugo Adam, and St. Martin's Press. *Thinking and Writing About Philosophy*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002.

Cowan, Stephen B., ed. *Five Views on Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000.

- Edgar, William. *Reasons of the Heart*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1996.
- Packer, J. I. "Introductory Essay." In *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, by John Owen, 1-25. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967.
- Kelly, Stewart E. *Thinking Well: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*. Boston, et al.: McGraw Hill, 2001.
- Mackie, J. L. *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God*. Oxford New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Naugle, David K. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids, Michigan\Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- Jason, Gary. *Critical Thinking: Developing an Effective Worldview*. Australia, et al.: Wadsworth/ Thomson Learning, 2001.
- Seech, Zachary. *Writing Philosophy Papers*. Third ed. Belmont, et al.: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2000.
- Smith, George H. *Why Atheism?* Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000.
- Van Til, Cornelius. *The Defense of the Faith*. 4th ed. Edited by K. Scott Oliphint. Phillipsburg, NJ. Presbyterian and Reformed Co., 2008.
- . *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969.
- . *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*. Vol. II, In Defense of the Faith. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969.

Tentative Course Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. What Matters Most?
 - B. Definitions of Apologetics
- II. The Biblical Warrant for Apologetics
 - A. Old Testament Warrant
 - (1) Genesis 1-3
 - 1. Adam as Covenant-bound Creature of God
 - 2. Adam as Image of God
 - 3. Adam as Apologist
 - (2) OT "Holy War" (Theocratic Apologetics)
 - B. New Testament Warrant
 - (1) The Inaugurated Kingdom of God
 - (2) The Wilderness Pilgrimage as Apologetic Paradigm
 - (3) The *Locus Classicus* – 1 Pet 3:15
 - (4) Other Passages – 2 Cor 10:1-6
- III. The Theological Basis of Apologetics
 - A. Apologetics and Theology Generally
 - (1) Organic Relation Between Scripture, Theology, and Apologetics
 - (2) Blockhouse Method
 - 1. Thomas Aquinas
 - 2. William Lane Craig
 - B. The *Principia* of Theology
 - (1) Philosophical Background and Definition
 - (2) *Principium Essendi*
 - (3) *Principium Cognoscendi*
 - 1. Archetypal and Ectypal Knowledge
 - C. The Doctrine of Revelation (*Principium Cognoscendi*)
 - (1) The "Covenantal Coordination" of General and Special Revelation
 - (2) The Essence of Scripture
 - (3) The Attributes of Scripture
 - 1. The Necessity of Scripture
 - a. The Necessity of General Revelation
 - 2. The Authority of Scripture
 - a. The Authority of General Revelation
 - 3. The Sufficiency of Scripture
 - a. The Sufficiency of General Revelation
 - 4. The Perspicuity of Scripture
 - a. The Perspicuity of General Revelation
 - D. The Doctrine of God (*Principium Essendi*)
 - (1) Divine Absoluteness
 - (2) Divine Triunity
 - (3) Divine Personality
 - (4) Implications for a Christian Worldview
 - E. The Doctrine of Man
 - F. Common Grace
- IV. The Covenantal Apologetic Approach
 - A. Van Til's "Transcendental" Method
 - (1) Philosophical Background

- (2) Misconceptions and Clarifications
- B. Rational-Irrational Dialectic
 - (1) Description
 - (2) Theological Rationale
- V. The Covenantal Apologetic Approach Applied
 - A. Examples
 - (1) Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethic*
 - (2) Bruce Kuklick's "Critical" Historiography
 - (3) Alex Rosenberg's Evolutionary Naturalism
 - (4) Richard Dawkins's Atheistic Ethic / the Problem of Evil
 - B. Paper Test Case: James Lang's Argument for the Impossibility of God

Sample FINAL EXAM

This sample shows format only. DO NOT study this for the final.

Part 1 (25 points) - Define or identify thirteen in two or three sentences. With proper names state their significance for apologetics and the approximate date. Allow one hour (approx. 5 minutes each). ANSWER ONLY THIRTEEN.

1. Joseph Butler
2. Presupposition
3. John Locke
4. Two Senses of Knowing
5. Hylozoism
6. Verifiability
7. Evil as privation
8. The Evangelical Enlightenment
9. Fundamentalism
10. Ockham's Razor
11. Honest to God
12. Albrecht Ritschl
13. Rosemary Radford Ruether
14. A.J. Ayer

Part 2 (25 points) - Answer four in three or four paragraphs. Do not try to be exhaustive, but show your familiarity with the issues. Allow one hour (~15 min. each). ANSWER ONLY FOUR.

15. What were David Hume's and Charles Darwin's criticisms of the teleological proof for God's existence?
16. What is the relationship between philosophy and theology? What relevance does this have for apologetics? Defend your answer.
17. Explain the presuppositional approach to apologetics. Contrast it with the approach of Thomas Aquinas.
18. How would you answer the logical positivist who says that the statement, God exists is cognitively meaningless?
19. Discuss the ontological proof for the existence of God. Include Anselm's argument, the gist of Gaunilo's reply and Aquinas problem with Anselm's formulation. Include also reactions to this argument by Descartes, Kant and Norman Malcolm. Evaluate the argument in light of a transcendental approach to apologetics.

Part 3 (50 points) - Write two well-organized essays in which you draw elements from various parts of the lectures and readings together. Be as thorough as you can be. (~1 hr.)

20. What is the relationship of metaphysics to apologetics? From reading and lectures, evaluate the contributions of Parmenides, Aquinas and current discussions in light of a Christian approach to metaphysics. Include also a discussion of analogical knowledge.

The Honor System
(taken from a previous Student Handbook at WTS)

A cherished aspect of community life at Westminster is the honor system. The responsibility for maintaining all aspects of this system lies directly with each member of the community.

The honor system is, of course, based upon the entirety of Scripture, but it finds its roots particularly in the eighth and ninth commandments (Exodus 20: 15-16) as those commandments are expounded and applied in the Westminster Larger Catechism, Questions 140 - 145 (copies of the Westminster Standards are available in the Seminary Library, in the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, in the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, or upon request).

The eighth commandment requires that we honor the property of others, whether that property be material possessions or copyrighted ideas. Stealing, destroying, misusing, and even borrowing without permission the property of others are among the sins prohibited by the eighth commandment. Active effort to preserve the property of others, as we would wish our own property to be preserved, is the essential duty required by the eighth commandment.

The ninth commandment requires that we honor the truth. Presenting as our own the ideas of others without full and appropriate documentation, failure to abide by the legitimate directions of our positional superiors without communicating to them what we have done, speaking against another person unfairly, and “speaking the truth unseasonably” are among the sins prohibited by the ninth commandment. Zeal for our neighbor’s as well as our own good name, keeping of all commitments, and a diligence to be exactly what we seem to be are among the duties required by the ninth commandment. Two specific expressions of this honor system are the pledges required on all examinations, papers, and projects at the Seminary.

Students are asked to affirm the following statement for all examinations and tests and may be asked to sign this pledge on the cover or first page of examinations:

I pledge my honor that I have neither given nor received verbal or written assistance during this examination beyond that specifically permitted by the instructor in charge.

Students are asked to write out and to sign this pledge at the end of every paper, project, thesis, and dissertation:

I understand and have not violated the Seminary’s position on plagiarism.

All members of the community are asked and expected so to uphold and protect this honor system that “we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness,” which “is good and pleases God our Savior” (I Timothy 2: 2 - 3).

STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM

One of the most critical and complex applications of Westminster's Honor System has to do with the Problem of plagiarism. Because we wish to do all that we can to clarify this issue, we have developed the following explanation.

Customs and norms of behavior differ from culture to culture and sometimes significant differences exist even within the same culture. It is important both to recognize the diversity and to understand the norms and expectations of the society within which, at a given point in time, one is living. This becomes particularly critical when the matter of academic expectations is involved.

Since ideas and their communication are one of the most important ingredients in an academic institution like Westminster, it is most important that we, as a community, make abundantly clear our expectations with regard to the sharing and transmission of ideas. We think it essential that no one ever present as his own the academic achievements of another. Certainly the intellectual contributions of others may be utilized, but whenever they are, full credit must be given to the one whose ideas they are. In a word, plagiarism must be avoided at all costs.

Plagiarism

But the exact definition of plagiarism varies from society to society and from context to context within any given society. Therefore, we have provided below an extensive description of what plagiarism is and what it is not. With plagiarism understood in the manner defined by this statement, the policy of the Seminary in dealing with cases of plagiarism will be as follows:

PLAGIARISM IS A SERIOUS INFRACTION OF THE LAW OF GOD AND IS
PUNISHABLE BY MEASURES DETERMINED BY THE FACULTY UP TO
AND INCLUDING EXPULSION FROM THE SEMINARY.

The following discussion of plagiarism is taken from *Prose Style: A Handbook for Writers*, pp. 253-258, by Wilfred Stone and J. G. Hill (Copyright, 1968, 1972, by McGraw-Hill, Inc.). It is used with permission of McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Plagiarism is literary burglary. At its worst it involves an outright intent to deceive, to pass off another's work as one's own. More often, it is the result of carelessness or ignorance. But whether intentional or unintentional (the distinction is often hard to draw), plagiarism is always an error, and a serious one.

Whenever you borrow another writer's words or ideas, you must acknowledge the borrowing. The only exceptions are information in the public domain (Columbus landed in America in 1492; oxygen was originally called phlogiston; oranges grow on trees) and opinions within anyone's range (Hamlet is a great play; time flies). Many undergraduates have trouble with this problem. Some react with an overnice conscience and footnote

even dictionary definitions. Others change two or three words in a quotation and feel that they have somehow made it their own. The first practice is irritating, the second unethical. The right course is a generous and intelligent consideration of both the reader you are addressing (he will take 1492 on faith) and the writers you are using. When you use their words, their ideas, even their organization or sequence of ideas, say so - in a footnote or in the text, Claim as your own only what properly is your own.

The following examples may help to clarify the difference between legitimate and illegitimate borrowing. Here is a part of the paragraph on Thoreau from Vernon Louis Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought*:

At Walden Pond and on the Merrimac River Thoreau's mind was serene as the open spaces; but this Greek serenity was rudely disturbed when he returned to Concord village and found his neighbors drilling for the Mexican War, and when authority in the person of the constable came to him with the demand that he pay a due share to the public funds. The war to him was a hateful thing, stupid and unjust, waged for the extension of the obscene system of Negro slavery; and Thoreau was brought sharply to consider his relations to the state that presumed to demand his allegiance, willing or unwilling to its acts. Under the stress of such an emergency the transcendentalist was driven to examine the whole theory of the relation of the individual to the state.

The following examples will demonstrate some representative ways in which this passage, or parts of it, might be misused. (For simplicity we omit footnotes from the following discussion. A truly adequate acknowledgment to Parrington would of course include a footnote giving his name in full, the title of his book, the city and date of publication and the numbers of pages from which the writer's information is drawn.)

Inadequate Acknowledgment: Outright Theft

When Thoreau was at Walden Pond or on the Merrimac River he knew considerable peace of mind, but when he returned to Concord this peace of mind was rudely disturbed. He came back to find his neighbors drilling for the Mexican War, a war he thought wrong, and when the constable came to him and demanded that he pay taxes to support the war, he balked. The war to him was a hateful thing, stupid, and unjust, waged for the extension of the obscene system of Negro slavery; and Thoreau was brought sharply to consider his relations to the political state that presumed to demand his allegiance. In such an emergency just how did the individual relate to the state?

In this example the writer has rephrased Parrington's first and last sentences, using some of his own words and some of Parrington's. He has made enough other minor modifications so that no full sentence of the original remains intact. But these trivial exceptions apart, he has copied the original word for word. His intent to deceive is clear,

the more so from his inept camouflaging of the first and last sentences. Had the writer put the directly quoted portion in quotation marks (or made it a single-spaced insert quotation) and footnoted it, he would not be guilty of plagiarism. He would have made it clear that he was contributing nothing of his own to the discussion, but was simply inviting us to listen to Parrington. As it is, however, he is passing off Parrington's words as his own, pretending to a knowledge (and style) he doesn't have. This is an inexcusable moral error.

Inadequate Acknowledgment: Paraphrase

At Walden Pond and on the Merrimac River Thoreau's mind was calm as the open spaces; but this serenity was rudely disrupted when he returned to Concord and discovered his neighbors drilling for the Mexican War, and when the constable, representing authority, came to him and demanded that he pay his share of taxes for the war. He regarded the war as hateful, stupid, and unjust and waged to extend the slave system, which he opposed. This experience caused Thoreau to reconsider sharply the whole question of the relation between the individual and the state.

This example represents only a negligible improvement on the last. The writer has made more changes in wording than the outright plagiarist, but has contributed no more of his own thinking or wording. Every idea in his paragraph and most of the words and phrases are taken directly from Parrington without acknowledgment. Though the writer has avoided copying whole clauses word for word, he is plainly guilty of plagiarism.

But what is a writer to do in such a case? Clearly it is impossible to enclose a paragraph in quotation marks, for quotation marks may be used only where an author's words are reproduced exactly and completely. How then can plagiarism be avoided here? The best way is running acknowledgments in the text, as in the following example.

Adequate Acknowledgment: Paraphrase

According to Vernon L. Parrington, the "Greek serenity" of Thoreau's mind at Walden Pond and on the Merrimac River was rudely disturbed when he returned to Concord and found his neighbors drilling for the Mexican War, and when the town constable, representing authority, came to him asking that he pay his share of taxes for the war. Thoreau regarded the war as stupid, unjust, and designed to extend its effects, says Parrington, caused Thoreau to reconsider the whole question of the relation between the individual and the state.

In the two sentences in which Parrington's name appears, it is clear that the ideas are his. But what about the other sentence? Has the writer slipped in something of Parrington's as his own? An argument can be made either way; but since in general the writer is being straightforward about his debt, there can be little difficulty about giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Decisions like this are not always easy, since too many phrases like “Parrington says” or “Parrington goes on to point out” make writing graceless. If the claims of honesty and grace conflict, be honest first, but try also to be as graceful as you can. Every last comma need not be acknowledged. In the passage above, for example, only one phrase was placed in quotation marks even though other words - among them stupid and unjust - were used by Parrington. Since it was inconvenient to quote stupid and unjust in the one set of quotations marks and unjust in another, the writer decided that honesty was adequately served by his two general acknowledgments to Parrington. We think he was right.

Inadequate Acknowledgment: Forgetfulness

When Thoreau returned to Concord, he was shocked to find his neighbors drilling for the Mexican War. It was still worse when the government asked him to pay taxes for a war he didn't believe in, a war he considered hateful, stupid, and obscene. At Walden and on the Merrimac his thoughts had taken on an almost Greek serenity; now he was confronted with the dilemmas of real life. He did not hesitate. Putting aside his transcendental notions, he plunged into an examination of what the individual may legitimately be said to owe the state.

This writer has clearly mastered his material and knows what he wants to say. He has abandoned Parrington's sequence of ideas; he has added his own emphases; and his phrasing is largely his own. But in questions of acknowledgment, “largely” is not enough. Three bits of undigested Parrington remain: “his neighbors drilling for the Mexican War,” “hateful, stupid and obscene,” and “Greek serenity.” The first of these phrases is neutral enough to make its borrowing forgivable. The other two, and especially “Greek serenity,” are not.

Given the writer's general performance, it seems likely that he has unconsciously drawn on his memory for the words in question, or perhaps that he has worked from slovenly note cards. He is nonetheless guilty of dishonest borrowing. At the very least, he should have put “Greek serenity” in quotation marks and acknowledged a general indebtedness to Parrington.

Adequate Acknowledgment: Mature Borrowing

There was a time when writers paid no attention to plagiarism. Chaucer and Shakespeare, for example, borrowed incessantly from other writers without acknowledgment, and never gave the matter a thought. But in the last century or so Western writers have taken an increasingly proprietary attitude toward their own work, and it is now considered common decency to give a writer credit for the use of his ideas, his words, or even the sequence in which his ideas are presented.

Many people who do not write much themselves feel that there is something natural or

inevitable in a writer's sequence of ideas - they might feel that Parrington, for example, starting with Walden Pond and ending with the state, was simply recording the sequence established by history. But of course he was doing no such thing. History is written by historians; the shape of past events is the shape of the minds that set down these events. And so it is with the Parrington passage: what makes it useful is not so much its individual ideas and phrases as Parrington's general authority and intelligence.

If, therefore, you begin with Walden Pond and end with the individual and the state - no matter what words you use in between - you must make a bow to Parrington somewhere along the line and thank him for his help. This is not only elementary honesty, but elementary courtesy. Here is such a passage:

Vernon Parrington pictures Thoreau at Walden as knowing a kind of "Greek serenity" that was rudely shaken when he returned to Concord and found his neighbors drilling for the Mexican war. Yet the more one studies Thoreau, the more one wonders whether this contrast between the serene recluse and the embattled citizen is a valid one. We are increasingly knowledgeable these days about the hostility implicit in an act, any act of withdrawal. Parrington implies that Thoreau was driven by events to take a political position, and in a sense he is right. But was there no political content in his move to Walden?

Here the writer has used Parrington, but not exploited him; Parrington has helped him, and he admits as much in the very act of taking issue with one of Parrington's ideas. Such a writer doesn't want to steal and doesn't have to. The words of others are not some sort of mask or false identity that he puts on to deceive the world; they are elements in his search for truth. Why not honor those who have gone before and done good work? We need all the help we can get. In the search for truth we have too few ideas, not too many; if we are honest men, we should let the world know what lights we are following and who lit them.