

# Creation Apologetics Used in the WELS

*Transcript of a video presentation by Mark Bergemann*

*Modified for use in the MLC online course Creation Apologetics 101 (SCI9001) beginning October 16, 2017. Presented to the WELS SEW Shoreland Pastors' Conference, May 9, 2017. Previously presented to the WELS SEW Metro-Milwaukee Pastors' Conference, October 10, 2016. Mark Bergemann, a retired electrical engineer, holds a B.S. from UW-Milwaukee. He serves as president of the Lutheran Science Institute (LSI) and editor of its LSI Journal.*

*Gray highlighted sections in this transcript are not included in the video.*

This video explores the various creation apologetics used in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). We will learn that WELS pastors, teachers, authors, and laity are not only concerned that we should address the temptation of evolution, but they are also concerned about HOW we address evolution. We will examine the great diversity of creation apologetics used in the WELS, and see that several of those apologetics present opposing claims.

This presentation is based on my five year study of creation apologetics used in the WELS, including talking with hundreds of called workers, reviewing more than a thousand articles and books they have written, and studying the results of a fall 2015 creation apologetics survey taken by nearly 1,000 WELS called workers. This presentation heavily draws from Lutheran Science Institute articles I have written during that time.

**My prayer is that we will come to realize that the WELS needs a synod-wide discussion of creation apologetics. That discussion must be held in an atmosphere of brotherly love, and with respect for WELS brothers and sisters holding opposing positions.**

The Lutheran Science Institute (LSI) has encouraged synod-wide discussion of creation apologetics for several years. The April 2014 Lutheran Science Institute's LSI Journal begins with these words,

God has blessed the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) with something rare, doctrinal unity. We like to say we are united in mind and thought. That said, we do disagree on some things. One of those areas is creation apologetics. This issue of the LSI Journal is dedicated to discussion of creation apologetics in the WELS. The article *"Two Creation Apologetics"* introduces the topic. Some "Personal View" articles present several sides of this issue.

It is the hope of LSI that each of us evaluate our personal thinking on this topic, and carefully consider the words of brothers and sisters in Christ holding alternative positions. LSI invites you to ask questions and participate in a loving brotherly discussion. LSI will attempt to be an impartial discussion facilitator. LSI can provide answers on this topic from multiple viewpoints, since we understand both sides and several intermediate positions.

My friends, this continues to be the desire of the LSI Board, and we are not alone. Leaders in all areas and all levels of the WELS are looking to better understand the situation, and to define a Confessional Lutheran creation apologetic.

## A Confusing Situation

Our creation apologetic situation can be very confusing. A teen may hear from her WELS pastor at a youth group Bible study, "There is NO evidence for evolution," and the next day be taught at her WELS high school, "There IS evidence for evolution." An article in *Forward In Christ* magazine proclaims that evolution is not science,<sup>1</sup> while several other *Forward In Christ* articles argue the opposite.<sup>2</sup> One Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) book tells us "evolution is not scientific,"<sup>3</sup> while another published that same year, says the opposite.<sup>4</sup> Christlight proclaims that "The Bible and true science never contradict each other,"<sup>5</sup> while students in the Earth Science course at Luther High School are taught the opposite.<sup>6</sup>

What is happening? Two creation apologetics, with opposing views of science, are being taught in the WELS. If pastors, teachers, and authors were aware that two competing creation apologetics are regularly taught in the WELS, they might mention this, as they teach their preferred creation apologetic. If students and laity were aware of this situation, they could better understand why they hear conflicting teaching, and be better able to form their own view around one apologetic or the other.

## Desire to Define a Confessional Lutheran Creation Apologetic

Leaders in all areas and all levels of the WELS are looking to better understand the situation, and to define a Confessional Lutheran creation apologetic. WELS high school science and religion teachers regularly express their thanks to me for the work LSI is doing, since they see the importance of creation apologetics. Every year I man an LSI display at our seminary's Missions and Ministry event. In recent years nearly all our seminary professors have stopped by, and most took the time to express their support for LSI and our creation ministry. Through private discussions with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) professors, Martin Luther College (MLC) professors, and synodical leaders, I have found amazing support for LSI and for a synod-wide discussion of creation apologetics.

The WELS Conference of Presidents (COP) desires that a Confessional Lutheran position on creation apologetics be developed. As a result of that desire, *Forward In Christ* (FIC) and our seminary's *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (WLQ) each recently published two articles on creation apologetics. Now FIC publishes an article on creation apologetics every few years, but to my knowledge these are the first WLQ articles devoted to any kind of apologetics over the past 65 years.

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<sup>1</sup> "Darwinian evolution is a religion, not genuine science." Allen Quist, "Questioning Evolution," *Forward In Christ*, Feb 2010.

<sup>2</sup> "Evolution, as an answer to the question of the origin of the universe, is science ... Good science is whatever a majority of scientists say it is at any given time." Vernon Gerlach, "Reflections On Creation Science," *Forward In Christ*, Nov 1987.

Also "Biologists already have found it necessary to modify Darwin's theory of evolution. Nothing in human science remains the same for very long." Ronald A. Buelow and Ryan C. MacPherson, "A Lutheran View Of Science" *Forward In Christ*, Jan 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Jon D. Buchholz, *Basic Bible Certainty: A Study in the Truths of the Christian Faith* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2010), 8

<sup>4</sup> "The only way to integrate science and Scripture while also maintaining scientific respectability is to revise one's interpretation of Scripture when a new consensus among scientists emerges—such as the consensus reached during the late 19th century in favor of evolution. If one does not want to be stuck in the position of having to revise one's interpretation of Scripture in light of science, then one would be wise not to try and integrate science and Scripture in the first place." Ryan Cameron MacPherson, "The Church and Science Through the Ages: Seven Key Questions From the History of Science," in *Here We Stand—A Confessional Christian Study of Worldviews*, ed. Curtis A. Jahn, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2010), 208-209.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald Kastens, *Course 5 Teacher's Guide—Reading the Bible: The Focus, Lesson 1* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 4. <http://online.nph.net/SampleFiles/Print/746091E.PDF> (accessed Oct 2, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> "Other dangerous philosophies sneak in such as attempting to find the 'true' science that lines up perfectly with Scriptures. Since even the science of Christians is a human endeavor, it is a mistake to think that a true science exists in a sinful world." Greg Schibbelhut, Earth Science webpage, Luther High School <http://www.lutherhigh.org/academics/course-webpages/earth-science> (accessed Oct 2, 2016)

## Creation Apologetics Used in the WELS

The various creation apologetics used in the WELS have so much in common. WELS adherents of each apologetic method hold to the same Biblical doctrines. They all believe that only the Gospel in Word and sacrament can create and sustain faith, and that their apologetic reflects that belief. They all believe the Bible is inerrant in all it says about every subject, including history and science, and that their apologetic reflects that belief. They all point out that evolution is incompatible with the Christian faith.

*Our creation apologetic methods vary regarding two points:*

1. To what extent and for what purpose should arguments from reason be used?
2. What is and is not “science?”

Keep these two questions in mind, as they can help you better understand the diversity of creation apologetic positions taught in the WELS. In most cases, where you stand on these two points forms your creation apologetic. These points capture most, but not all, the creation apologetic diversity in the WELS.

## Creation Apologetics – Minority Views

### Unimportant Issue

A minority of WELS pastors and teachers minimize the need for the church to address the temptation of evolution. They still use one or more of the following creation apologetics methods, they simply do not place importance on addressing evolution.

While most of our WLS professors have expressed their support for the ministry of the Lutheran Science Institute (LSI), one asked me, “Mark, is creation apologetics really that important?” In a recent LSI creation survey, a WELS pastor answered the question about how the church should address evolution “By assigning it a fairly low priority. We have much bigger fish to fry. I don't like the idea of being part of the ‘anti-evolution’ denomination (or the ‘anti-gay marriage’/ ‘anti-scouting’/ anti-anything denomination). I want my denomination's identity to be based on the grace of God and the person of Jesus.” Another WELS pastor wrote, “I have never had an adult enrolled in instruction class ever refuse to join the church because they accepted evolution and could not accept a 7-day creation in 35 years.”

### Scripture Only

A minority of WELS pastors and teachers feel that we should address evolution ONLY by quoting from and making arguments from Scripture. For example: We should not use arguments from science or history to defend creation. Some would also say that we should not use arguments from science to question evolution. A subset of these “Scripture Only” advocates allow arguments from reason (such as from science) when speaking with Christians, but not when speaking with unbelievers. Another variation was proposed in a recent WLQ article: It is proper to question the *assumptions* of evolution in our apologetic,<sup>7</sup> but we must never use a scientific model to attack evolution or defend creation.

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Eggert, *Creation, Science, and Our Approach in Apologetics*, Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, v. 112, no. 4 (fall 2015), 277.

### Created Fossils

A sizable minority of WELS pastors and teachers say: "It is likely that God placed dinosaur bones in rock layers during creation week." 7% of pastors and 16% of teachers agreed or somewhat agreed with that statement in our 2015 LSI survey. Some have developed this thought more extensively. They propose that fossils and the sedimentary rock layers containing them were created by God during creation week. God created these fossils as a witness to Adam and Eve (and potentially to their sinless children if the Fall Into Sin had not happened) that if they sinned they too would die. They assert that these rock layers and fossils were preserved during a tranquil Noachic Flood, which was not violent enough to damage the fossil containing rock layers. Some also propose that dinosaurs, trilobites, and some other creatures found as fossils never existed as live creatures.

### **Creation Apologetics – Predominant Views**

This leaves the two predominant creation apologetic methods used in the WELS. Nearly everyone using one of the previous minority apologetic views, use one of the following two predominant views in addition to their minority view. These views differ in how they understand "science" and "evidence." Both views agree on creation. Some on each side strongly oppose the views of the other, to the point that some see the other side as denying an article of faith.

#### Science and Nature are Different

A large portion of WELS pastors and teachers see nature and science as different. Science is seen as mankind's flawed and incomplete attempt to describe nature. Nature is an activity of God. Science is an activity of people. Evolution is considered to be scientific and evolution is seen as having evidence.

#### "True Science"

A large portion of WELS pastors and teachers tend to see science and nature as the same. They use a non-standard definition of "science" so that science is always in harmony with Scripture. This apologetic is referred to as "*True Science*," since that phrase is commonly spoken by those using this apologetic. This apologetic refuses to accept as science any physical laws or theories which violate the teachings of Scripture, rejecting them as "false science," while accepting scientific laws and theories which are demonstrably true and which do not violate the teachings of Scripture. Evolution is considered to be unscientific and evolution is seen as having no evidence at all.

#### Predominant Views Compared

Let us compare how these two apologetics view science and nature. There is variation on both sides, so many will say these tables do not exactly reflect their personal beliefs. These tables list some of the more common claims I have heard from each side, often with the exact words of individuals using these apologetics. Some people take a middle ground by mixing claims from each column.

***Many on each side of the issue cannot make any sense out of some positions advanced by the other side. Those positions seem illogical, even when carefully explained through lengthy discussion.***

*Apologetics Compared*  
***What is Science?***

<b>"True Science"</b> Apologetic	<b><i>Science and Nature are Different</i></b> Apologetic
Science is defined by God and Scripture.	Science is defined by the greater scientific community.
Science leads to Truth.	Science leads to temporary "truth," which is often replaced with new "truth."
<p>God created nature.</p> <p>Man discovers the laws of nature and calls them the laws of science.</p> <p>Therefore God created the laws of science.</p> <p>Therefore the laws of science are Truth.</p>	<p>God created nature.</p> <p>Man uses his flawed intellect to study nature.</p> <p>Man created the laws of science.</p> <p>The laws of science are flawed and incomplete explanations of nature.</p>
<p>Science and the Bible <u>ARE</u> in harmony, when both are properly understood.</p> <p>What our Creator reveals in nature (what God reveals in science) is always in harmony with what that same God reveals in Scripture. God does not lie.</p>	<p>Science and the Bible sometimes are <u>NOT</u> in harmony.</p> <p>Nature and science are not the same. Science is mankind's flawed and incomplete attempt to understand and explain nature. Scripture is never in error, science is sometimes in error.</p>
<p>Evolution is NOT science. Evolution is false science, not true science. True science (science correctly understood) is science that is demonstrably true and also does not violate Scripture.</p>	<p>Evolution IS science, because it is accepted as science by the greater scientific community.</p>

***Apologetics Compared***  
***Evidence for Evolution***

<b>"True Science"</b> Apologetic	<b>Science and Nature are Different</b> Apologetic
Evolution has <u>NO</u> evidence.	Evolution <u>HAS</u> evidence.
Evidence is certain solid proof.	Evidence is any claim (solid or weak) put forth to support your position.
There can only be evidence for something true, like creation. There can be no evidence for something false, like evolution.	False things, like evolution, often have evidence.  While evidence for evolution may seem weak to a creationist, that evidence is seen by many as compelling.
In a courtroom, both sides present evidence. Evidence for creation and evolution is NOT like that.	In a courtroom, both sides present evidence. Evidence for creation and evolution IS like that.
If something is evidence for both creation and evolution, that is evidence for neither.  The 4 appendages example is evidence for neither side.  Any one evidence MUST be for one side ONLY, not for both sides.	Some evidence supports both creation and evolution.  <u>Many animals have 4 appendages.</u> Creation: Evidence of common design. Evolution: Evidence of common descent.
Evolution can be proven false using science alone.	Evolution is overwhelmingly accepted by the scientific community as valid, based on the evidence.

**Not Just a Definition Difference**

The difference between these two creation apologetic views is far greater than the need for complete word definitions and detailed statements. Carefully worded statements would help in some cases, but the main disagreements would remain. I have found that our people, no matter what their apologetic view, can usually come to agreement on a formal definition of "science." Various definitions generally include an accumulating knowledge of conclusions derived from repeatable observation and testing. There is also a wider and narrower definition of science. The very narrow definition of "science" is often used by evolutionists: "That which is published in peer-reviewed science journals." The very wide definition of science is "knowledge." The narrow definition will often work for understanding my writings, but I also use a wider definition which would include scientific conclusions which are not published. The very wide definition of "knowledge" is not applicable to this paper or to anything else that I write.

## Diversity in Each Category

Things are not as cut and dried as the above apologetic categories may infer. There is a great diversity of views in each of these categories. In addition, most individuals hold to views from two or even three categories.

One can think evolution is a rather unimportant issue for the church, yet still have a particular creation apologetic. Another can say it likely that God created fossils, yet still believe that evolution is unscientific. Some even hold to what may be seen as contradictory views taken from several categories.

Because of this diversity, is there any value in attempts to describe apologetic categories? Yes, there is great value. It would be rare for two individuals to hold the exact same views on any complex issue. If you wish to even begin to understand the views of 5,000 individuals, it would be best to study a limited number of general categories, while always keeping in mind that most individuals will not cleanly fit into any category. In our case of creation apologetics used in the WELS, most of our pastors and teachers emphasize one of the above categories in their personal apologetic, even though they may also adhere to portions of another category.

## My Biases

I am one of the rare individuals who falls solidly into only one of the above apologetic categories. I see the evolution story as science and believe it has evidence. I reject all other categories above as being incorrect. You should keep this in mind, as we all have biases and I am no exception. While I have carefully listened to others and tried to understand their views, it is always dangerous to describe the views of others, as I do in this presentation.

## Two Articles in the WLQ

In fall 2015 and summer 2016 the WLQ published separate articles devoted to creation apologetics, *“Creation, Science, and Our Approach in Apologetics”*<sup>8</sup> by Arthur Eggert, and *“The Narrow Lutheran Middle Road for Creation”*<sup>9</sup> by Mark Bergemann, your presenter today. A brief overview of these articles will demonstrate some aspects of creation apologetics used in the WELS. First let’s list some of the many positions on which these two authors agree.

Dr. Eggert and I both use the common definition of “science.” Therefore we both oppose the *“True Science”* apologetic which uses a special definition of “science.”

In his WLQ article, Eggert writes under the section title, “Rejection of the Redefinition of Science,”

To claim that one is practicing “science” when one is, in fact, using different methods and assumptions than those of the scientific societies is fraud. It is an attempt to deceive. We therefore reject any efforts to appeal to scientific methods and definitions which are any different from those in common usage.<sup>10</sup>

My WLQ article did not specifically address the definition of “science,” but I have previously written against the *“True Science”* apologetic on many occasions. The many problems I see with this apologetic include,

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<sup>8</sup> Eggert.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Bergemann, *The Narrow Lutheran Middle Road for Creation*, Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, v. 113, no. 3 (fall 2015), 277.

<sup>10</sup> Eggert, 275.

I worry that Christians who embrace “*True Science*” thinking may look to science and reason to support their faith. The Bible teaches that only the Gospel in word and sacrament has the power to create and sustain faith. We must avoid encouraging people to look past these Means of Grace to support their faith. ... A basic premise of the “*True Science*” apologetic is a logical fallacy. We can claim “Nothing in science contradicts the Bible’s creation account,” because we have defined science as that which does not disagree with or negate Scripture. The “*True Science*” apologetic commits the “No True Scotsman” fallacy, in which a person uses biased word definitions to protect his argument.<sup>11</sup>

Both WLQ articles suggest using arguments from reason in our apologetic by pointing out the *assumptions* of evolution.<sup>12</sup>

Both WLQ articles present Christianity and creation as at times being humanly illogical.

Eggert writes,

Because biblical Christianity is a religion which is illogical in human terms, we cannot seize the intellectual high ground by arguing that evolutionists are unreasonable in their claims. Humanly speaking, we too are unreasonable in what we believe.<sup>13</sup>

I wrote in the WLQ,

By faith Lutherans accept unreasonable and even seemingly absurd things which God reveals to us in Scripture. Lutherans confess with Lawrenz and Jeske, “What God says is true whether it seems reasonable or not.”<sup>14</sup>

So Dr. Eggert and I agree on using the common definition of science, we agree on attacking evolution by pointing out its assumptions, and we agree that the Christian faith is at times illogical. While Dr. Eggert and I agree on these points, there are some in the WELS who disagree with us. Many in the WELS reject the common definition of science, and some reject the use of arguments from reason in their apologetic.

There is though, one central difference between these two WLQ articles. It is how one answers the question, “Is it proper to use science in our apologetic?” My answer is “yes,” it is not only proper but desirable. Dr. Eggert’s answer is “no,” it is sinful to use science in our apologetic. Eggert writes,

The scientific method requires that one must accept the potential falsifiability of what one postulates, and we are not willing to do this because it would place our teachings about creation under human standards. Making scientific arguments, therefore, gives the false impression that we accept scientific proof for the things written in the Scriptures when we do not do so. That is deceptive and therefore sinful.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Bergemann, *A Comparison of Apologetics –and a Personal View*, LSI Journal, v. 28, no. 2 (April-June 2014), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Eggert, 277, and Bergemann, *Middle Road*, 173-174.

<sup>13</sup> Eggert, 277.

<sup>14</sup> Bergemann, *Middle Road*, 170-171.

<sup>15</sup> Eggert, 270.



## Important Observations

These two WLQ articles are good examples to study, as they reveal several important aspects of creation apologetics used in the WELS.

1. The various creation apologetic methods used in the WELS present opposing claims.
2. Some of us are strongly opposed to the creation apologetic positions of others. Dr. Eggert writes in the WLQ that using scientific arguments in our apologetic is sinful, a strong claim leveled against a large portion of our called workers, since so many of our called workers use science in their apologetic. My WLQ article did not mention any Lutherans in the ditches along the side of the road, but I worry that each ditch I describe contains some WELS pastors and teachers. Clearly my “Ditch With No Place For Reason” would contain many of those in the WELS who advocate the “Scripture Only” apologetic.
3. The various creation apologetic methods used in the WELS are prominent and everywhere. In this case published in the WLQ. Conflicting creation apologetics are taught throughout the WELS, in our schools, in congregational adult Bible studies, in BIC classes, in NPH publications, in LSI publications, in Forward-In-Christ, literally everywhere. Because of this situation, we need a synod-wide discussion of creation apologetics.

Too many of us do not realize this creation apologetic diversity exists in the WELS, even though it is prominent everywhere, and is very important to some. We need to learn about these diverse apologetic methods and discuss our concerns regarding them. This must be done in a loving atmosphere and with respect for those holding other positions.

## History of WELS Creation Apologetics

During the 1950s, 60s and 70s statements by WELS authors supporting the “*True Science*” apologetic predominated WELS publications and conference papers, while statements supporting the “*Science and Nature are Different*” apologetic were rare. Between 1979 and 1981 that situation completely reversed and has remained that way to this day.<sup>16</sup>

What happened? Why for 30 years did WELS authors overwhelmingly prefer a creation apologetic declaring evolution unscientific and without evidence, and then a sudden switch to 35 years of the opposite, declaring that evolution is science and has evidence? There may have been multiple reasons for such a rare and rapid reversal, including the retirement of editors supporting “*True Science*” at both the WLQ and the Northwestern Lutheran. In my opinion, the primary reason is that several called workers began to individually present conference papers strongly condemning the “*True Science*” apologetic. Prominent in this group was Martin Sponholz.

In the late 70s Sponholz was chairman of the science department at Luther High School. In October 1977 he presented a paper at the Wisconsin State Teachers' Conference, “*Teaching Creation and Science –The Role of Faith and Reason for a Christian Student of Science.*” This paper was a condemnation of the creation science movement in general and the “*True Science*” apologetic in particular.

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Bergemann, “*True Science*” – A Bad Apologetic Method Rejected in the WELS, unpublished research paper, 2013, [www.LutheranScience.org/TrueScience](http://www.LutheranScience.org/TrueScience) (accessed Oct 2, 2016)

Sponholz writes,

But the inference of a hope in science, or the appeal to reason to combat evolution, defend the Bible, and confirm creation is a tragic error. ...We dare not boast of our ability to distinguish between true science and "superstition". I believe in this regard that science is like the tare infested wheat field. As teachers of science we must continually remind ourselves as well as our students that science is entirely a human endeavor. Its laws are intellectual models of artistry. The laws of science are men's laws. They are not God's ordinances. ... It has never been our call to show the world correct science. Nor must we fall into the creation science trap of trying to get creation on an equal footing with evolution.<sup>17</sup>

Copies of Sponholz' paper were evidently circulated at a teachers' conference the following spring. In response, David Golisch, at the time a science teacher at Huron Valley Lutheran High School and president of the Lutheran Science Institute, sent a letter to Sponholz with a 54 point "apology" about Sponholz' paper.

In his letter and in point 44 of his apology (parenthetical statement in original) Golisch states,

When I first read this paper I was infuriated because I took it as a personal attack. As an active member of the creation science movement I see it as both valuable and important to our Christian young people. ...Many of the attempts of the creation science leaders are not valid. But their basic purpose and philosophy is sound. ...I don't intend this as an attack of Marty but rather as an attempt to point out our differences and to open up discussion of them. ...44. There is no confrontation between creation and true science. (True science is defined as that which does not disagree or negate Scripture.) However there is a big confrontation with the pseudo-science of evolution. The battle is lost with the new believer if he doesn't learn of the True Science but instead is left with the conflict of pseudo-science and the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

Sponholz then wrote "*Idols of the Market-place*," in response to Golisch's letter.

Sponholz writes,

Quite frankly I never anticipated this light paper, accepting the Bible as all-sufficient, even in a scientific age, would ever be so severely confronted. I never expected the need to write or speak in defense of this paper. I know now that this body, Secondary Teachers of Science of our Lutheran High Schools, is not in unanimity with the principles and concepts presented in "Teaching Creation and Science." Thus, I insist now to speak to you for the first time. I will now attempt to present such an apology. However, I may not be able to answer all the questions raised in a barely legible letter my school received. Proper protocol dictates at least an original copy of the questions to the author of the original paper. Nevertheless, this open letter I will accept. These principles and concepts should be openly exchanged, studied, and tested. ... I said before that far too much has been made of the creation science movement, creation science materials, and the development of creation science curriculums, and I still more strongly than ever stand by those words. There is something wrong. Underneath the movement is something that breathes a different spirit than a Lutheran. By the movement, I'm talking about most of its publications. Among our own people, some of you sitting here, exists a Lutheran Science Institute. LSI boasts "communicating true science." Several of our

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Sponholz, *Teaching Creation and Science –The Role of Faith and Reason for a Christian Student of Science*, Wisconsin State Teachers' Conference paper, October 27-28, 1977, 1, 8, 9, 10.

<sup>18</sup> David Golisch, letter to Sponholz dated October 1, 1978.

synodical schools in their course descriptions boast of an ability to distinguish between theories and the true laws of science. Among the many questions we will review today are words like “true science”, “correct science”, and “scientific evidence”.<sup>19</sup>

This exchange became known as the Sponholz-Golisch debate.<sup>20</sup> Copies of this exchange were widely circulated and have been quoted in several papers<sup>21</sup>. From 1977 through 1999 Sponholz wrote at least 16 papers, presenting them at pastor and teacher conferences and workshops. Many of these papers were presented multiple times. The overriding theme of these papers was against the “*True Science*” apologetic, instead proposing that nature and science are different. Some of Sponholz’ papers also spoke against the Lutheran Science Institute, which at the time generally advocated the “*True Science*” apologetic.

## Lutheran Science Institute

The Lutheran Science Institute (LSI) is a 42 year old WELS group dedicated to creation apologetics. Recently the nine men on the LSI Board spent three full years (2012 – 2014) discussing their conflicting creation apologetic views. This involved many meetings and hundreds of lengthy emails. Each of us was able to clarify and maybe somewhat modify our respective apologetic views. As a result we now have a fairly good understanding of each other’s apologetic views. We added a subtitle to our quarterly publication, “*LSI Journal – a forum for diverse views consistent with Scripture*.”<sup>22</sup> This means LSI will publish articles written from both the “*True Science*” apologetic and also from the “*Science and Nature are Different*” apologetic. In this way LSI is following the lead of NPH by publishing material reflecting both of the two main creation apologetics used in the WELS.

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<sup>19</sup> Martin P. Sponholz, *Idols of the Market-place*, in response to Golisch’s letter, October 25, 1978.

<sup>20</sup> Contact [mbergemann@LutheranScience.org](mailto:mbergemann@LutheranScience.org) to request a pdf of the entire “debate.”

<sup>21</sup> The story of the “debate” is recorded in: Ryan C. MacPherson, *On the Antiquity of the Earth: Episodes from the History of Science That Have Shaped People’s Perceptions of the Earth’s Age*; Presented to the Tenth Annual Theological Symposium, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 22 Sept. 1999, with minor corrections and revisions, 2005.) <http://www.ryanmacpherson.com/presentation-list/14-conference-papers/36-on-the-antiquity-of-the-earth.html> (accessed Oct 2, 2016). A short quote is also in: David A. Kipfmiller; *Fighting The Good Fight*; Presented to the pastors of the Capitol Circuit, meeting at St. Paul’s Ev. Lutheran church in Marshall, WI September 21, 1982; page 4. <http://www.wlsessays.net/handle/123456789/2516> (accessed Oct 2, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Motion approved unanimously by the LSI Board on Oct 11, 2014: Publishing Both Views of Science: WHEREAS 1) WELS members are united in their theology, but not necessarily in their view of science; and WHEREAS 2) Forward In Christ, NPH, and wels.net publish both views of science commonly used in creation apologetics by WELS members; and WHEREAS 3) It is desirable that there be only one WELS creation science group; and WHEREAS 4) That one WELS creation science group should reflect the Biblically sound views of science commonly used in the WELS, by allowing authors from each view to write articles; and WHEREAS 5) The LSI Board has already spent 30 months, and over 1,500 man-hours, researching and discussing the merits of each view of science commonly used in the WELS; and WHEREAS 6) The LSI Board should not continue to spend the majority of its time in discussing the merits of each view of science, and neglecting the rest of its ministry; and WHEREAS 7) The publishing of both views of science was first proposed at the LSI Board’s October 12, 2013 meeting, so the board has had a full year to consider this proposal; and WHEREAS 8) By publishing both views of science, we have an opportunity to educate our readership about both views and their many variations; and WHEREAS 9) By letting our readers know that LSI publishes both views, we have an opportunity to reach everyone (while rejecting one view would be a barrier to reaching those whose view LSI has rejected); therefore, be it Resolved, a) That LSI publish articles from each of the two views of science commonly used in creation apologetics by WELS members; and be it further Resolved, b) That LSI not reject content just because it reflects one of the two common views of science used in the WELS; and be it further Resolved, c) That LSI regularly inform its readers that it publishes diverse views which are consistent with Scripture; and be it finally Resolved, d) That a subtitle be added to the LSI Journal, “*LSI Journal – a forum for diverse views consistent with Scripture*,” and that this full name be prominently displayed on the front cover of every issue of the LSI Journal.

## LSI Creation Apologetics Survey

Nearly 1,000 WELS pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and lay Sunday School teachers completed a creation apologetics survey in fall 2015. One purpose of this survey was to gather information on how much support various creation apologetic methods have among our called workers and Sunday School teachers. A larger purpose was to encourage a synod-wide discussion of creation apologetics.

4,169 survey invitations were emailed between September 3 and November 28, 2015.

The survey was taken by:

406	pastors
419	teachers
57	other called workers
96	laity – mostly Sunday School teachers

A complete survey report can be downloaded at [www.LutheranScience.org/survey](http://www.LutheranScience.org/survey).

The survey consisted of agree/disagree statements and one essay question:

### **How Should the Church Address the Temptation of Evolution?**

735 respondents (75% of respondents) answered this question.

The words of a high school teacher seem to summarize what so many of our called workers answered, “Confront it head on using first God's clear Word and how the world began at creation. Secondly, allow science to be the support for God's Word, not taking the place of the Word.”

A pastor also provides a good summary, “With Scripture, with science, with apologetics, with honest discussion.”

70% of those answering this question specifically mentioned the Means Of Grace. 32% advocated using reason or science. A large portion mentioned both, as do the two preceding quotes.

A pastor answers, “Aggressively, because this continues to be one area where young Christians really develop doubt and uncertainty about the trustworthiness of the Scriptures.”

Another pastor writes, “We can't bury our head in the sand and hope our children get through their formative years without too much confusion on the matter. We need to discuss the teachings with openness and honesty. ...I think our children should be able to clearly articulate the position of an evolutionist before they go to college and at least some of its scientific weaknesses. ....

I think our children should also be able to clearly articulate the position of a young earth creationist and some of the apparent scientific weaknesses of this position as well. ...Finally, clear instruction on the incompatibility of God's Word and the theory of evolution (and any ‘Christian’ concession or spin-off of it).”

**Christian schools should teach a few of the scientific problems evolution faces.**

973 answered this question and are tabulated below. 5 did not choose an answer (not even marking "skip.").

Q #22	AGREE	SW AGREE	SKIPPED QUESTION	SW DISAGREE	DISAGREE
PASTORS	88 %	10 %	1 %	0 %	1 %
TEACHERS	73 %	21 %	2 %	1 %	3 %
TEACH H.S. OR COLLEGE	83 %	15 %	0 %	1 %	2 %
TEACH SUNDAY SCHOOL	77 %	16 %	4 %	1 %	2 %
LAITY	77 %	13 %	4 %	2 %	4 %
ALL	79 %	16 %	2 %	1 %	2 %

The comments of at least 150 respondents advocated teaching evolution to our students. Almost no one spoke against it. This correlated well with the above response rates. A common comment was to suggest we teach more than a few problems faced by evolution.

**Science and the Bible always agree when both are properly understood.**

973 answered this question and are tabulated below. 5 did not choose an answer (not even marking "skip.").

Q #18	AGREE	SW AGREE	SKIPPED QUESTION	SW DISAGREE	DISAGREE
PASTORS	57 %	16 %	6 %	5 %	15 %
TEACHERS	38 %	16 %	7 %	14 %	25 %
TEACH H.S. OR COLLEGE	44 %	17 %	6 %	11 %	22 %
TEACH SUNDAY SCHOOL	43 %	14 %	7 %	11 %	24 %
LAITY	36 %	17 %	3 %	15 %	29 %
ALL	46 %	16 %	6 %	10 %	22 %

This question and its many variations are common statements made by those using the "True Science" creation apologetic. People making such statements are using a non-standard definition of "science" where millions of years is not true science, but is instead pseudoscience, false science, or so-called science.

Overall, 62% of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed, thereby supporting the "True Science" apologetic. 32% disagreed or somewhat disagreed, thereby opposing the "True Science" apologetic. Based on this question one might infer a 2 to 1 preference for the "True Science" apologetic over the "Science and Nature are Different" apologetic.

Only one number on this chart shows a majority with the exact same response. No other number comes close. 57% of pastors (231 pastors) agreed with this statement. Some might think that these 231 pastors who agreed are making science into a Means Of Grace, but 172 of those 231 pastors also agreed that "Science does not in any way increase the effectiveness of the Gospel in bringing souls to faith." Only 12 of those 231 pastors disagreed with that Means of Grace statement. This is essentially the same response rate as all 402 pastors to that Means of Grace statement.

*Science and the Bible always agree when both are properly understood.*

%	agree	somewhat agree	RATIO	somewhat disagree	disagree
pastors	73		3.7 : 1	20	
teachers	54		1.4 : 1	39	
laity	53		1.2 : 1	44	

This is one of several questions showing a large difference between pastors, teachers, and laity as to how they view science in relation to faith. Here is the ratio of those who agree or somewhat agree, versus those who disagree or somewhat disagree. Note that pastors are far more likely to agree with this statement than teachers or laity. Therefore our pastors are far more likely to advocate the “*True Science*” apologetic than our teachers or laity. Note that teachers and laity are essentially the same in their response rates.

A pastor comments, “True science will always support the Bible; however, not all of the things that are called science today are true science.”

A teacher comments, “Science is a man-made thing that can never be perfect. It will not totally agree with the Bible because it is done by sinful human beings.”

***Evolution is science, because evolution is accepted as science by the greater scientific community.***

969 answered this question and are tabulated below. 9 did not choose an answer (not even marking “skip.”).

Q #19	AGREE	SW AGREE	SKIPPED QUESTION	SW DISAGREE	DISAGREE
PASTORS	5 %	7 %	5 %	9 %	74 %
TEACHERS	7 %	13 %	7 %	13 %	60 %
TEACH H.S. OR COLLEGE	8 %	13 %	7 %	13 %	59 %
TEACH SUNDAY SCHOOL	8 %	11 %	7 %	12 %	63 %
LAITY	9 %	14 %	11 %	16 %	51 %
ALL	7 %	10 %	6 %	12 %	65 %

This question is a statement made by those using the “Science and Nature are Different” creation apologetic.

Overall, 77% of respondents disagreed or somewhat disagreed, thereby supporting the “*True Science*” apologetic. 17% agreed or somewhat agreed, thereby opposing the “*True Science*” apologetic. Again like the previous question, an overwhelming support of the “*True Science*” apologetic was indicated.

*Evolution is science, because evolution is accepted as science by the greater scientific community.*

%	agree	somewhat agree	RATIO	somewhat disagree	disagree
pastors	12		1 : 6.9	83	
teachers	20		1 : 3.7	73	
laity	23		1 : 2.9	67	

This is another question showing a large difference between pastors, teachers, and laity. Here is the ratio of those who agree or somewhat agree versus those who disagree or somewhat disagree. Note that pastors are much more likely to disagree with this statement compared with teachers and laity. Therefore our pastors are far more likely to advocate the “True Science” apologetic than our teachers or laity.

## Support for “True Science.”

Responses to the above two questions show an overwhelming support of the “True Science” apologetic, which claims evolution is not science. Yet for the past 35 years, WELS authors have overwhelmingly opposed that “True Science” apologetic. For instance, all four 2015-16 creation apologetic articles in Forward In Christ and in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly used the “Science and nature are different” apologetic, which proclaims the opposite message of the “True Science” apologetic.

### There were many comments claiming evolution is NOT science

For example: A teacher states, “Evolution is not science ... there is no true scientific evidence to prove the theory in its entirety.” A pastor comments, “Help our people realize that there is no true science behind evolution.”

### There were many comments claiming evolution IS science

For example: A teacher states, “Evolution is considered part of science.” Another teacher comments, “Science is man's interpretation of God's creation. Clouded by sin, our minds will make errors in that interpretation.”

## **Science can strengthen our faith that God created the world.**

970 answered this question and are tabulated below. 8 did not choose an answer (not even marking “skip.”).

Q #24	AGREE	SW AGREE	SKIPPED QUESTION	SW DISAGREE	DISAGREE
PASTORS	34 %	15 %	1 %	9 %	41 %
TEACHERS	49 %	17 %	2 %	7 %	26 %
TEACH H.S. OR COLLEGE	37 %	16 %	1 %	7 %	38 %
TEACH SUNDAY SCHOOL	46 %	16 %	3 %	9 %	26 %
LAITY	46 %	23 %	7 %	8 %	16 %
ALL	43 %	17 %	2 %	7 %	31 %

Here we see many of our pastors and teachers agreeing that science can strengthen faith. Many would ask, how can someone who correctly limits the Means Of Grace to the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, agree that “Science can strengthen our faith that God created the world?” The answer is in how they define the words of this statement. Many respondents explained their reasoning in the comment fields. Some took this statement in light of Romans 1:18-20 and understood it to mean that observing nature (science) can show believers that God created. Others define “science” in a non-standard way, so that science always agrees with Scripture.

Science can strengthen our faith that God created the world.

%	agree	somewhat agree	RATIO	somewhat disagree	disagree
pastors	49		1.0 : 1		50
teachers	66		2.0 : 1		33
laity	69		2.9 : 1		24

This is another question showing a large difference between pastors, teachers, and laity as to how they view science in relation to faith. Note that pastors are evenly split on this question. Teachers and laity are much more likely to agree with this question than are pastors.

**Science can help believers better understand spiritual truths.**

972 answered this question and are tabulated below. 6 did not choose an answer (not even marking "skip.").

Q #25	AGREE	SW AGREE	SKIPPED QUESTION	SW DISAGREE	DISAGREE
PASTORS	30 %	26 %	3 %	10 %	30 %
TEACHERS	24 %	24 %	6 %	12 %	35 %
TEACH H.S. OR COLLEGE	28 %	23 %	4 %	16 %	29 %
TEACH SUNDAY SCHOOL	29 %	23 %	5 %	13 %	30 %
LAITY	31 %	14 %	13 %	18 %	25 %
ALL	28 %	24 %	5 %	12 %	31 %

This question is somewhat similar to the previous question, "Science can strengthen our faith that God created the world." I personally see that previous question as making science a Means of Grace, so I strongly disagree with that previous question. I do not see this question, "Science can help believers better understand spiritual truths," as making science into a Means of Grace, so I agree with this question. I also reasoned that anyone who agreed with the previous question would agree with this question too, plus some who disagreed with the previous would agree with this question. I was wrong. 60% agreed or somewhat agreed with the previous question, while 8% fewer (52%) did so with this question.

***Science can help believers better understand spiritual truths.***

%	agree	somewhat agree	RATIO	somewhat disagree	disagree
pastors	56		1.4 : 1		50
teachers	48		1.0 : 1		47
laity	45		1.0 : 1		43

This is another question showing a large difference between pastors, teachers, and laity as to how they view science in relation to faith. Note that teachers and laity are each evenly split on this question. Pastors are more likely than teachers to agree.



**Science does not in any way increase the effectiveness of the Gospel in bringing souls to faith.**

973 answered this question and are tabulated below. 5 did not choose an answer (not even marking "skip.").

Q #26	AGREE	SW AGREE	SKIPPED QUESTION	SW DISAGREE	DISAGREE
PASTORS	76 %	7 %	4 %	9 %	4 %
TEACHERS	56 %	10 %	7 %	17 %	11 %
TEACH H.S. OR COLLEGE	61 %	9 %	7 %	14 %	9 %
TEACH SUNDAY SCHOOL	56 %	9 %	7 %	18 %	10 %
LAITY	43 %	15 %	10 %	18 %	15 %
ALL	62 %	9 %	6 %	14 %	9 %

%	agree	somewhat agree	RATIO	somewhat disagree	disagree
pastors	83		6.4 : 1	13	
teachers	66		2.4 : 1	28	
laity	58		1.8 : 1	33	

This question also shows a large difference between pastors, teachers, and laity as to how they view science in relation to faith. Note that pastors are far more likely to agree with this statement than teachers or laity.

**Concerns Expressed**

I am convinced that our pastors and teachers believe that the Means Of Grace is limited to the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. I have come to understand why many say that science strengthens faith. Even so, it still concerns me greatly that any of our pastors or teachers credit science with such ability. Many pastors and teachers share my concern. This is yet another reason we should have a synod-wide discussion of creation apologetics.

Large numbers of pastors, teachers, and laity commented about these Means Of Grace questions. Here are two of them:

A teacher pleads, "Your next 3 questions [Q #24, #25, #26] seem to be placing science on an equal plane with the inerrant Gospel. Please, please, please retain your Lutheranism and make science and reason subservient to the Gospel. The Holy Spirit will use the Means of Grace to bring souls to faith."

A pastor says, "The Gospel is the only means of grace, perfect, complete and powerful. That does not mean that we cannot use examples from nature and reason to give an always inadequate mental picture or example to try to demonstrate what God is saying in his perfect word."

***Jesus and the Apostles repeatedly used arguments from reason when speaking with unbelievers.***

974 answered this question and are tabulated below. 4 did not choose an answer (not even marking "skip.").

Q #27	AGREE	SW AGREE	SKIPPED QUESTION	SW DISAGREE	DISAGREE
PASTORS	47 %	34 %	2 %	8 %	8 %
TEACHERS	26 %	33 %	10 %	12 %	19 %
TEACH H.S. OR COLLEGE	33 %	38 %	7 %	8 %	13 %
TEACH SUNDAY SCHOOL	43 %	28 %	8 %	9 %	12 %
LAITY	44 %	22 %	9 %	8 %	17 %
ALL	38 %	32 %	7 %	10 %	14 %

%	agree	somewhat agree	RATIO	somewhat disagree	disagree
pastors	47	34	5.6 : 1	8	8
teachers	26	33	1.9 : 1	12	19
laity	44	22	2.6 : 1	8	17

This question also shows a large difference between pastors, teachers, and laity. Note that pastors are far more likely to agree with this statement than teachers or laity.

### **Misunderstandings About Science**

Creationists commonly include false statements about science in their creation apologetic. This is true no matter which creation apologetic is used. Making false statements about science (or anything else) discredits our entire message. If we make obviously false statements about science, are we also making false statements about the way of salvation?

Respondents to the 2015 LSI Creation survey made 11 false statements about science. Several of those false statements were made by numerous people. I have heard more than a few WELS pastors and teachers make incorrect scientific statements during adult Bible studies. We can all use creation apologetics, but we must be careful to stay within the boundaries of our scientific understanding. Do not present a particular scientific argument unless you are sure it is correct.

### **Never Make These Claims**

Some creationists incorrectly claim, "Evolution is ONLY a theory; it is not proven." This shows that they are unfamiliar with scientific terms. In science, the term "theory" denotes an explanation which is well accepted (overwhelmingly taken as true) by the scientific community. "Theory" is an end stage in science. Theories never become "facts" or "laws" as additional evidence is found. Scientific theories and laws are never proven with certainty. Any theory or law may be discarded and replaced tomorrow.

Some creationists incorrectly claim, "God created each species, and no new species ever develop." The modern term "species" is not the same as the biblical term "kind." Most biblical "kinds" of creatures include many different species. No new biblical kind will ever develop, but new species do develop within those kinds. All of our present day species of land creatures would not have been able to fit into Noah's ark, but all the Biblical kinds – including the dinosaur kinds – would easily have fit.

## **Listening to Others –Discussion in the WELS**

Presenting conference papers advancing our own creation apologetic, or condemning our idea of the creation apologetics held by others, will keep us in the same situation where we have been for the past 35 years. We must listen intently to those holding apologetic positions other than our own. We must ask them what they mean when they state this or that. We must ask them how they understand what we say, and then listen patiently as they explain. Ask and then patiently listen. This is not easily done. Listening like this takes significant time, patience, and loving concern for others. Those who do not see evolution as an important issue for the church, and those who do not have strong opinions about creation apologetics, may not see any need to listen and learn about the creation apologetic views of others. There are though many of us who strongly hold to one creation apologetic or the other, and we could greatly benefit by patiently listening to others.

I am convinced that WELS called workers hold a proper understanding of the Means Of Grace. Faith is created and strengthened only through the Gospel in Word and sacrament. Each believes their creation apologetic conforms to this Biblical position on the Means Of Grace and to all other doctrines. A common issue is seeing each other's creation apologetic as violating the Means Of Grace, inerrancy of Scripture, or other doctrines.

It is my opinion that the WELS would greatly benefit by having widespread discussions about creation apologetics. I have found that we all seem to have misunderstandings about what other WELS members believe regarding creation apologetics. Learning the views of others is beneficial and can sometimes even lead to revising your own view. Humanly speaking, simply reading an article or two rarely moves a person to revise strongly held positions. Changing such views often takes extended discussions over a period of time. Even if none of us revise our creation apologetic, we would all benefit greatly by learning what others actually believe, instead of assuming what others believe based on our misunderstanding of what they say.

Discussing creation apologetics will also help everyone avoid making incorrect statements about science. Anyone can learn solid and easy to make defenses of creation, while also learning which claims to avoid.

## **We Pray**

Lord, give us humble hearts, hearts that listen to the words of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Lead us to better understand the apologetic methods of others, and to evaluate our own apologetic methods in light of your Word.

Guide and direct your church throughout the world. Wherever two or three are gathered together, give them the desire to study your Word as Bereans.

Thy kingdom come. Today our attention is on those tempted by evolution and its attack on the very need for a Savior. May your kingdom come to the hearts and minds of everyone, including those caught in the deception of millions of years.

Amen