

A Comparison of Apologetics –and a Personal View

by Mark Bergemann

Many of my beloved WELS brothers and sisters in Christ use the “True Science” creation apologetic. I, however, use the creation apologetic with the opposite view of science. We are all concerned with the great temptation of evolution, which claims that there is no Creator God. We all proclaim the same Gospel message, in the hope of bringing lost souls to eternal life. We differ on what science is. We often proclaim the same message to those burdened by the temptation of evolution, but sometimes we proclaim messages from two opposing views. This is because we see science from two opposing positions.

Bypassing the Means of Grace

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.¹ We must avoid encouraging people to look past these Means of Grace to support their faith.

You might be thinking that my worry about the “True Science” apologetic bypassing the means of grace is an overreaction, but some WELS advocates of “True Science” actually make such a claim. For example, the following WELS quote (published twice by NPH) claims that the “True Science” definition of science removes the difficulty of accepting through faith the biblical teaching of creation. Can this quote be understood in any way other than as Calvinistic rather than Lutheran?

When the Christian separates the facts of true science from the false theories of modern evolutionary teaching he sees that there is no conflict and he has no difficulty in accepting, through faith, the Scriptural account of man’s creation.²

Here is another example. A WELS high school science teacher actually states that faith can be strengthened through “True Science”:

When a person with a new faith learns of the contradiction that creation is of evolution, his faith is shaken, but when he learns that science has erred about evolution and that true science agrees with God’s Word about creation, his faith is strengthened. ... 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 this 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.³

¹ E.g., “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17, NIV’84).

² Robert W. Adickes, “Man Distinct from the Animal,” Werner H. Franzmann, ed., *Is Evolutionism The Answer? The Christian Response To Evolutionism* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1967), 64. Previously published in *The Northwestern Lutheran*, 1965-1966.

³ David Golisch, in a widely circulated letter to Martin Sponholz, (October 1, 1978), points 41 and 44. The parenthetical statement “True science... negate Scripture” is in the original.

Here a WELS author says that he “thoroughly understood God’s Word” as soon as he heard that there is no scientific proof for evolution.

“My eighth-grade brain came up with a solution. I was pretty sure that each of the days of creation was really a billion years. I wondered why no one had thought of this before. Today I know that the human brain will naturally harmonize two conflicting ideas unless one of them is specifically pointed out as not having any proof. I struggled years with this concept until attending a bible class addressing the subject and then thoroughly understood God’s Word.”⁴

Others in the WELS also warn against bypassing the means of grace. The Rev. Dr. Richard Gurgel, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, talks about the creation science danger to faith in a Q&A discussing *This We Believe*, an official doctrinal statement of the WELS:

At the same time some of the conclusions and analysis of creation science may be as flawed as those of evolution. In addition, Christians may begin to base their faith on human research instead of God’s revelation.⁵

Another Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor, Rev. Dr. John Brug, talks about the “abuse of science in defense of the faith”:

Although there is solid agreement on the biblical doctrine of creation in our midst, there has been and continues to be considerable discussion and debate in our circles about the validity of certain specific arguments proposed by creation-science. ... There is also an ongoing concern about the use and abuse of science in defense of the faith.⁶

A WELS high school science teacher warns against bypassing the means of grace.

“My condemnation is not against apologetics; it is against bad apologetics. You see, I am convinced evolution is so bad that all Christians readily recognize it as that. But the wolf in sheep’s clothing, the Calvinist drawing a soul away from faith to reason, is to be warned against. ... I speak against using creationist materials without first teaching faith alone. I speak against using creationist materials without first teaching the uncertainty with any and all scientific methods. A faith leaning on science will collapse when the crutches are removed.”⁷

⁴ Stan Bauer, “From the Development Office,” in *Principal’s Notes*, 33:7 (April 2011) 2. Mr. Bauer is the development director at Evergreen Lutheran High School. http://www.elhs.org/home/140001978/140001978/docs/principal-ap0ss%20notes%20for%20april%202011.pdf?sec_id=140001978 (accessed January 21, 2014).

⁵ Richard L. Gurgel, *This We Believe: Questions and Answers* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2006), 62.

⁶ John F. Brug, review of Darrel Kautz, “The Origin of Living Things,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 86:3 (Summer 1989), 235.

⁷ Martin Sponholz, “Idols Of The Market-Place,” October 25, 1978, 32-35. (paper written in response to a critical letter from David Golisch regarding Sponholz’s paper, “Teaching Creation And Science”).

Logical Fallacy

A basic premise of the “True Science” apologetic is a logical fallacy.⁸ 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.

Two Views of Science

Tables 1, 2, and 3 compare the definition of science used in these two apologetics. 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 using the exact words of individuals using these apologetics. Some people take a middle ground by advancing some claims from each column. Others may hold to a variation not covered in either column. I hold to Apologetic B.

TABLE 1

Apologetic A ("True Science")	Apologetic B
Science leads to Truth.	Science leads to temporary “truth,” which is often not truth and is replaced.
God created nature. Man discovers the laws of nature and calls them the laws of science. So God created the laws of science. The laws of science are Truth.	God created nature. Man uses his flawed intellect to study nature. Man created the laws of science. The laws of science are flawed and incomplete explanations of nature.
Science and the Bible <u>ARE</u> in harmony, when both are properly understood. 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.	Science and the Bible sometimes are <u>NOT</u> in harmony. 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.

⁸ A logical fallacy is an error in reasoning.

Who Decides What Science Is?

The scientific community overwhelmingly supports evolution as science. If scientists decide what is and what is not science, then evolution is science and it has evidence. If scientists do not define science, then who does? If God or Scripture defines science, then can an atheist do science, or can only Christians do science?

Science is mankind's attempt to explain nature. This very basic definition can be tightened and refined in many ways, such as by adding the ability to test and/or falsify, or by adding that a body of knowledge is accumulated, but it is still about people trying to understand and explain the world around them. Science is a human activity, not an activity of God. It is an attempt to explain and not a final certain truth. The truth in science, such as its theories and laws, is often revised or completely replaced as new discoveries are made. Science is a body of knowledge which must be communicated to others. Finally, science is a study of nature, NOT nature itself. This definition conforms with that taught at our WELS high schools and colleges, and with that taught by the National Academy of Science.⁹

TABLE 2

Apologetic A ("True Science")	Apologetic B
Science is defined by God and Scripture.	Science is defined by the greater scientific community.
Evolution is <u>NOT</u> 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.	Evolution <u>IS</u> science, because it is accepted as science by the greater scientific community.

Evidence for Evolution

I personally find the evidence for evolution amazingly poor, because I am aware of the many holes and unsupported presuppositions in the evidence for evolution. In my opinion, the scientific evidence for creation is so much stronger. We need to proclaim that message! That said, there is evidence for evolution, and many people, both Christians and non-Christians — including many scientists — find that evidence compelling.¹⁰

⁹ Mark Bergemann, "True Science": A Bad Apologetic Method Rejected in the WELS, an unpublished research paper prepared for discussion by the Lutheran Science Institute (LSI) Board (March 13, 2013; updated April 22, 2013), 4,5. Copies can be requested from the author at MarkBergemann@yahoo.com.

¹⁰ Bergemann, see pages 9 and 10 for examples of evidence for evolution.

TABLE 3

Apologetic A ("True Science")	Apologetic B
Evolution has <u>NO</u> evidence. Evidence is certain solid proof. There can only be evidence for something true, like creation. There can be no evidence for something false, like evolution. If something is evidence for both creation and evolution, then that is evidence for neither.	Evolution <u>HAS</u> evidence. False things, like evolution, often do have evidence. While the evidence for evolution often seems very weak to a creationist, that evidence is seen by many as very compelling.
Evolution can be proven false using science alone.	Evolution is overwhelmingly accepted by the scientific community as valid, based on the evidence.

“True Science” Rejected in the WELS

I searched online databases and my personal library, finding well over 1,000 WELS articles, essays, books, and statements addressing science issues (some as the main theme, some as a side comment). I examined these for “True Science” statements similar to those listed above, and for statements making an opposing claim. Multiple methods (some listed below) were utilized to examine over 110 quotes from over 60 WELS authors. Each approach concluded that the “True Science” apologetic has been overwhelmingly rejected in the WELS for the past 30 years. I presented these findings to the LSI Board at its March 13, 2013 meeting, in the form of a 57 page research paper.¹¹

Quotes from WELS high school and college teachers made use of the “True Science” apologetic (supporting that apologetic) prior to 1982 (11 to 3), but since then their quotes have opposed the “True Science” apologetic (24 to 1).¹²

The leaders of workshops at Martin Luther College, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and of other WELS workshops, chose presenters whose message included opposition to “True Science.” Over the 62 years covered in this study, 15 workshops were found to have presentations opposing “True Science” and no workshops were found to have presentations supporting “True Science.”¹³

The leaders of pastoral conferences and teacher conferences chose presenters whose message included opposition to “True Science.” Since 1979, 14 conferences had presentations opposing “True Science” and no conferences had presentations supporting “True Science.”¹⁴

¹¹ Bergemann.
¹² Bergemann, 56.
¹³ Bergemann, 55.
¹⁴ Bergemann, 55.

Overall, WELS articles supported “True Science” (by making “True Science” claims) from 1950-1979 (19 to 6), and rejected “True Science” (by making opposing claims) from 1980-2013 (78 to 9).¹⁵

The WELS Conference of Presidents (COP) has at least partially rejected the “True Science” apologetic in an official statement. The “True Science” apologetic claims that science can prove evolution to be false. That claim is rejected by the COP with their words:

Pastors, teachers, and presenters [are] not to present as factual anything that goes beyond what Scripture says on any issue that lies in the realm of scientific observation and theoretical explanation ... there are scientific theories that do, in fact, violate statements of Scripture and must be rejected – not on the basis of science but on the basis of clear statements of Scripture.¹⁶

Science and Miracles

Modern science does not allow for miracles. This has worked very well in producing our technological world. As an engineer, I utilized science my entire career without once taking miracles into account (and I believe in miracles). All of science is based on natural causes, including medicine, weather forecasting, genetics, and all other branches of science. This also holds true when science is used to understand events from the distant past, such as the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius which destroyed Pompeii, or the conclusion that glacial ice sheets shaped the North American landscape.

When science alone is used to determine the origin of something which was a result of a miracle, science fails, because science does not allow for miracles.¹⁷ Christians who accept what God reveals in Scripture, know that God miraculously created every kind of animal, and that the universe is not billions of years old. Such Christians would never conclude that one kind of animal changed into a new kind, or that sedimentary rock layers were laid down over billions of years, because those conclusions go against Scripture.

Creationists and evolutionists use the same scientific process. They use the same science. The creationist allows his belief in the Creator God to guide his scientific observations and conclusions. The evolutionist allows his belief that there is no creator god to guide his scientific observations and

¹⁵ Bergemann, 50.

¹⁶ “The Conference of Presidents (COP) ... discussed how matters relating to creation and the flood are addressed in WELS publications and presentations. While scientific explanations are sometimes offered to explain or understand the biblical teachings regarding creation and the flood, the COP reaffirmed the importance of recognizing that these explanations are to be viewed as scientific theories only. The district presidents will be reminding pastors, teachers, and presenters not to present as factual anything that goes beyond what Scripture says on any issue that lies in the realm of scientific observation and theoretical explanation. The COP recognizes that there are scientific theories that do, in fact, violate statements of Scripture and must be rejected – not on the basis of science but on the basis of clear statements of Scripture. ... Our synod has entrusted the district presidents as the supervisors of doctrine and practice and has called them to serve as the pastors of their respective districts.” Mark Schroeder, “Presidents Discuss Creation, Other Issues,” *Together* (October 18, 2011), <http://www.wels.net/news-events/presidents-discuss-creation-other-issues> (accessed January 21, 2014).

¹⁷ “When science concludes that we have evolved by natural processes from chemical to mankind and were not created, it is wrong. This is a limitation of science; it can discover only natural causes.” Dawn J. Ferch, “Summary: Scientific Methods,” in *Discovering God’s Creation – A Guidebook to Hands-on Science*, ed. Paul Boehlke, Roger Klockziem, and John Paulsen (New Ulm: The Printshop Martin Luther College, 1997), pdf page 45. <http://mlc-wels.edu/divisions/math-science/discovering-gods-creation> (accessed January 21, 2014)

conclusions.¹⁸ Evolutionists use science to develop the best stories they can devise about origins without a creator god.¹⁹

The “True Science” apologetic attempts to redefine science, by making science conform to Scripture. Science that does not conform to Scripture is considered “false science.” This is a special non-standard view of science. Non-Christians, and even most Christians, use the standard definition of science, and in most cases have never even heard of this special Christianized definition of science.

We are all concerned that the temptation of evolution is pulling so many away from faith in Christ, but proclaiming a special Christian view of science is a bad apologetic.

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¹⁸ “The atheistic evolutionist chooses one interpretation because his presuppositions (not the evidence) cannot allow the possibility of a designer. The Christian chooses the other explanation because his presuppositions come from what Scripture says.” *WELS Topical Q&A*, in the evolution category, #3 of 38. Captured in an archive, http://arkiv.lbk.cc/faq/site.pl@1518cutopic_topicid73cuiitem_itemid10025.htm (accessed October 22, 2013)

¹⁹ “We should realize that evolution is internally logical in view of the presuppositions built into the current scientific paradigm. It is man’s best effort at a natural explanation of how we have come to be here.” Paul Boehlke, “Science: Philosophy & Objectives Based on Scripture” (paper presented at the School Visitors Workshop, Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, August 1-3 1978) 4. <http://www.wlssays.net/files/BoehlkeScience.pdf> (accessed October 22, 2013)