BARRIERS AND BRIDGES TO FAITH DIALOGUE IN COMPOSITION SPACES

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RACHEL RAMER

DR. PAUL RANIERI - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PROJECT: Barriers and Bridges to Faith Dialogue in Composition Spaces

STUDENT: Rachel Ramer

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Discussion of religious faith in a secular classroom presents particular challenges for both students and professors. The intent of this study is to examine the barriers to such a dialogue and to explore possibilities for constructive, academic inquiry for students of faith and those who interact with them. The focus of this study is on the composition classroom setting where first year students often share their religious faith through writing opportunities and class participation. The spotlight is on Christianity, primarily, due to the high number of Christian students within United States universities, and the historically close relationship between Christianity and rhetoric/composition studies.

This assessment is designed to (1) assist religious students in understanding the nature of their audience in an academic, diverse setting, (2) alert professors to the complexity of the religious student’s challenge to be understood within the college classroom and (3) assist in building bridges for a dialogue problematized by many barriers.

This study concludes that the historical influence of Enlightenment-driven epistemology in academia, including positivist objectivity, certainty, Scottish Common Sense, and a dichotomous view of knowledge, has also shaped religious knowledge. The result is often a mischaracterization of religious epistemology and miscommunication.
This study posits that some of the religious/academic bifurcations are developmentally driven for college age students, and that productive dialogue is possible once the complexity of religious identity and epistemological constructs are identified and evaluated in light of educational priorities.
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BARRIERS AND BRIDGES TO FAITH DIALOGUE IN COMPOSITION SPACES

I. INTRODUCTION

A dialogue about “faith” is often unsettling, and a dialogue about faith in the context of secular higher education challenges both students and instructors at a profoundly personal level with enormous social and educational implications. A dialogue about how students express faith in the composition classroom invites concern and unease; yet, such a discussion includes bridge building possibilities which could set a tone for constructive, comprehensive, academic inquiry for students of faith and those who interact with them. Such a discourse could also serve the professors who teach them. The barriers to such possibilities, however, are many.

Since the composition classroom is often the first introduction to the university and in many ways sets the tone for future academic writing and scholarship, this topic of religious dialogue has far reaching implications for students throughout their college careers. A dialogue implies an ongoing exploration of ideas with reciprocity—with intent that participants will hear and consider various viewpoints—an opportunity, even, for oppositional learning.

The composition context includes a variety of influences: cultural norms, social proclivities, interpersonal relationship, academic considerations, textual formations, historical influences, and the generative nature of composition. For purposes here, the “composition classroom” is a location or “space” which may or may not be physical, but
which contains active intermingling of ideas with more potential for engagement than what might exist in other “spaces” in a university setting.¹ This setting is unique due to the fact that professors often provide more writing options and content flexibility than in other disciplines. These choices open the door for students to convey their religious beliefs in their writing and during class presentations. Additionally, since many composition classrooms include workshops in which students participate in peer editing and reviews, the chance for engagement is higher than for many other courses.

While various definitions for “faith” exist, there are also many faiths, in the sense of religious beliefs, to explore. Christianity is the particular focus of this assessment for four reasons: it is the faith of most of the religious students with whom I come in contact in my classes; it is the faith with the most historical influence on American rhetoric and composition; it is the faith which, because of the historical connectors and its ubiquitous nature in the United States, appears to be the most ominous within academic settings; and it is the faith with which I am most familiar. Readers may wish to apply the concepts discussed here to various other faiths and, for those readers, Christianity may become primarily a general example with a particularly broad and unique scope of influence on this topic.

While I have based this project on academic interest and endeavor, it is also personal. One of my early memories is of my father, a devout, traditionalist Mennonite, lamenting that a college education destroys the faith of young people. Ironically, his complaint was even more relentless against Christian universities because, to his understanding, they

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¹ A “classroom” is a space that is sometimes physical or electronic, but most importantly a space of intent. References to “composition classroom” throughout this project are particularly focused on aspects of intent for learning, invention, and bridge building, and may or may not include a traditional learning space.
gave the impression of preserving faith while luring students into skepticism and apostasy. This acrimony towards academia is often the Christian fundamentalist’s approach to education. It is not the fundamentalist’s only approach; yet, it fueled my personal perplexity about education and religious belief. Must faith and higher education be mutually exclusive? How might the intersection of religious faith and higher education be better understood and facilitated within the secular classroom where students must grapple with faith and reason, modernism and postmodernism, and the challenge of self expression?

The rift treks both ways. Not only do the dutifully religious suspect the academic world of distorting knowledge and obscuring truth, but those involved in higher education are often at odds with religious belief, not only in order to protect diversity and religious freedom for all students, but also to emphasize a real or imagined partition between reason and faith. The American university is uncomfortable with religious expression, in particular Christian religious expression. George Marsden, author of several books tracing the history of Christianity in America, including *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, refers to “the current suspicions of Christian perspectives in the academy [as] reactions—often understandable—to the long establishment of Christianity in higher education” (Marsden, *Outrageous Idea 14*). If the United States is to be a country that welcomes diversity, and the university is to respect alternative views, then the overshadowing of higher education by the Christian church becomes more than a cultural and historical fact, but looms as problematic, even invasive.

More specifically, history highlights the profound influence of Christianity on composition theory. In the eighteenth century, for example, the writings of Christian
ministers such as George Campbell of the Scottish Enlightenment, author of the comprehensive *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, were decidedly influential in rhetorical studies which had a direct impact on composition theory and practices. Besides this historical association, there exists a philosophical connection between some movements within Christianity and rhetoric—evangelicalism in particular—where apologetics and theodicy become essential components of religious expression. Not only do students hold particular beliefs about God, but they identify with a religious duty to become actively rhetorical and persuasive.

As mentioned, since Composition I is often a student’s first introduction to university coursework, the composition classroom contains primary opportunities for Christians even on nonsectarian campuses to express their faith. These students have not yet acclimated to the cultural norms within the university itself, and they may openly express their beliefs about God, at times seeing it as their opportunity to “share their faith.” Professors sometimes choose to discourage even the expression of atheism to avoid religious discussions, steering students away from ardent spiritual topics altogether, giving the impression from this initiation into higher education of a segmented approach to knowledge. However, for zealous students, religious or even atheistic beliefs serve as the hub for an agglomeration of viewpoints. They cannot compartmentalize their religious beliefs. Professors may reluctantly find that they need to accommodate, but may be less than enthusiastic to do so.

Elizabeth Vander Lei and Lauren Fitzgerald find that the tension within the composition classroom concerning issues of faith is widespread. They encourage Writing Program Administrators [WPAs] to address this issue—besides “race, class gender, and
sexuality… We want to suggest that WPAs consider another important influence on students, instructors, and programs: Religious belief.” They note two primary reasons: the reemergence of religious belief in public discourse in America, and because “in discussions of religion in composition studies, the work of writing program administrators… is strikingly absent” (Vander Lei & Fitzgerald 185). They add, “Instead, most scholars rely on a description of an uncomfortable encounter between a religious student and a secular instructor to define the conceptual boundaries of the conflicts involved” (185). They suggest that such ill-formed and uninformed encounters should not provide the baseline for interaction about religious topics.

Granted, these encounters have the potential to become aggressively confrontational. In order to sidestep conflict, or to bring to light who holds religious viewpoints, a professor may begin the semester by asking a revealing question such as “Who believes in absolute truth?” potentially setting a divisive tone between those who do and those who do not. On the other hand, Christian students sometimes resort to quoting Bible verses to make presumptuous points, also promoting a sense of “othering.” This type of religious assumption constitutes one of the most prominent objections to pious expressions in the classroom. Often, both students and professors walk away from these encounters with renewed prickly distance. Both may feel they have made their points well, in the face of difficulty, but they actually have not. Instead, they have solidified misunderstanding, even violated social boundaries, and disregarded objectives of the university: academic, immersive learning and critical thinking.

Catholic professor John Powell suggests that Christian students must become aware of the purpose of the university:
In college there is a new freedom and a new pluralism, and consequently this is a time of many doubts. The college experience itself is a course in criticism. The professor of English literature asks us to criticize poetry, the philosophy professor requests an evaluation of thought. The science teacher asks us to experiment, to work to a conclusion through trial and error. We are encouraged to question presuppositions in almost every field….The theology of memorized statements has to yield to a theology of questioning. Painful as it may be, each of us must ask himself if he really believes. Without posing the question, all answers will be meaningless. (Powell 165)

At the same time that students benefit from regarding the dialogical and provocative purpose of the university, professors could reconsider current trends. Vander Lei addresses the need for instructors to reexamine their approach to religious students:

While it seems that composition teachers are interested in accommodating students of faith (how can we not?), we’re less interested in accommodating the religion that shapes their faith. We might willingly accept religions and religious views that can cohabit with our literary and rhetorical theories or with our pedagogical goals, but we are likely to reject those that contradict them, or we might attempt to substitute religions we find more attractive for those we abhor. Such pedagogical inhospitality does not invite students to bring their religious faith to their writing nor does it encourage them to respond effectively to the religious faith they encounter in the public square. Ultimately, this is what we really hope for our students: not that they alter what they believe but that they learn to use tension between faith (their own or that or others) and academic inquiry as a way of learning more and learning better. (Vander Lei, “Coming to Terms” 8)
Maxine Hairston also notes this predicament for religious students in her article, “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing.” She states:

It’s worth noting here that religion plays an important role in the lives of many of our students—and many of us, I’m sure—but it’s a dimension almost never mentioned by those who talk about cultural diversity and difference. In most classrooms, in which there is an obvious political agenda, students—even graduate students—are very reluctant to reveal their religious beliefs, sensing they may get a hostile reception…. But a teacher who believes in diversity must pay attention to and respect students with deep religious convictions, not force them too into silence.

(191)

Lizabeth Rand focuses specifically on evangelical students with these comments:

I contend that religious belief often matters to our students and that spiritual identity may be the primary kind of selfhood more than a few of them draw upon in making meaning of their lives and the world around them…. I believe that it would be useful for us as writing instructors to explore more fully the ways that religious identity shapes the kind of texts that we sometimes receive from students in the composition classroom. In order to respond more effectively to those who write about religion, we would benefit from extended conversation of the ways that faith is “enacted” in discourse and sustained through particular kinds of textual and interpretive practice.

(Rand 350)

In nearly every composition class I have taught, I soon became aware that some students hold strong religious views. Before one of my classes (Composition I), I noticed that members of The Gideons, an organization that distributes Bibles, were on campus
passing out New Testaments. In class, students brought up the fact that these Bible distributors had approached them and asked if they wanted a New Testament. Some thought that the university should not allow this organization which places Bibles in public places such as motels and prisons on campus. Even Christians in that classroom hesitated to support what others classified as a violation of the separation of church and state. A discussion ensued: Should groups promoting a particular religion be allowed to distribute religious material on campus? Had they not been escorted, on occasion, off campus grounds? And were they not relegated to sidewalks?

I asked if the distributors had been rude, or had violated students’ personal space or freedom of choice. In the end, all students including a possible Buddhist, skeptics, atheists, and Christians all agreed with the sharing of ideas, even about religion. Their one prevailing stipulation centered on respect for personal space; they stated that if another person did not want to continue an encounter, then the discussion must end. That point of concession by everyone in the classroom allowed for both atheists and Christians to express their viewpoints unhindered by animosity for the rest of the semester.

However, other barriers exist, deeper than resting on civility alone. In another composition class, one student had difficulty writing about or talking about any theme except his conversion to Christianity. All topics led back to his assertion, expressed through religious clichés, that Jesus Christ is the answer to every situation and the center of every topic, supported by Bible references and his personal experience. After his presentation for his final persuasive project, he stayed after class to tell me that others did not appear offended by his religious “witnessing.” I asked him if he thought it was persuasive to members of other religions and if Muslims could persuade him by
appealing to the Qur’an to support their assertions. He admitted that he would not be convinced by a Muslim’s reliance on a source in which he himself did not place his faith. I then repeated to him some of what we had previously covered in class—understanding audience and establishing credibility. I explained that he may have actually harmed his intent to promote Christianity by bringing it into every discussion and every paper, not simply as his pervasive worldview, but as a redundant focal point. Instead of being convincing, he may instead have undermined his own position because of his unbridled fixation.

On the other hand, insisting that students not include their beliefs in their writing also has objectionable outcomes. Lauren Fitzgerald relates a story about a student from the Soviet Union who came to the United States. Fitzgerald advised her “not to write about her religious conversion in the public setting of an academic institution. The outcome was to effectively silence a student whose family had immigrated during the dissolution of the Soviet Union probably in part because the United States famously guarantees freedom of expression” (Vander Lei & Fitzgerald 186). In an attempt to separate religion from a secular setting, Fitzgerald had inadvertently minimized a student’s experience and marginalized her within an academic and within even a national setting.

Yet, more than issues of discourtesy and neglected respect, or of non-persuasive attempts at persuasion, the barriers exist at still higher levels. They include distorted definitions, neglected nuances, a failure to address objections, and seismic shifts in epistemological underpinnings. In this research project, Section II addresses some of the immediate barriers that hinder dialogue before the conversation reaches significant depth. If professors and students cannot hurdle those barriers, they will not be able to adequately
address more complicated obstacles. Section III explores the relationship between Christianity and rhetoric, and how Christianity’s historical influence on composition theory complicates current misunderstandings and serves as an example of how religion and rhetoric are intricately intertwined. Section IV addresses the barriers created by both modernism and postmodernism, and Section V investigates definitions for faith and the bifurcation of faith and reason as they impact the intersection between academia and religion. Section VI investigates ways to overcome barriers and build bridges between students of faith, professors, and other students in composition spaces. These bridges must be erected in such a way that they address legitimate tensions with respect within a faith dialogue, while at the same time empowering participants to strive for comprehensive academic inquiry and a truly diverse community.
II. BARRIERS

A few obvious and immediate barriers hinder constructive dialogue, including but not limited to: 1) avoiding evocative content in the classroom, 2) overextending the concept of church and state separation, 3) dismissing the significance religious abuses have on faith discussions, 4) sacrificing education to evade crises, 5) practicing the art of sophistry or posturing, and 6) being motivated by fear or disdain to shut down discussion. When dialogue spaces include these barriers, learning is inhibited.

Avoiding Meaningful Content

Some educators assert that English professors should keep to a minimum any consequential content or material that evokes strong reactions, for example: content related to political or religious positions. They favor a focus on mechanics, format, and rhetorical technique within writing courses. Such educators do not promote open or egalitarian dialogue when the content may overshadow methodology instead of the other way around. Stanley Fish, for example, in *Save the World on Your Own Time* states:

All composition courses should teach grammar and rhetoric and nothing else. No composition course should have a theme, especially not one the instructor is interested in. Ideas should be introduced not for their own sake, but for the sake of the syntactical and rhetorical points they help illustrate, and once they serve this purpose, they should be sent away. Content should be avoided like the plague it
If content takes over, what won’t get done is the teaching of writing…. (Fish 44-45)

Fish makes a cogent point about the importance of teaching rhetorical analysis, and professors who use the classroom for indoctrination in favor of their own personal political and religious leanings create an atmosphere hostile to dialogue. Conversely, instructors, like everyone else, are not capable of being entirely neutral and objective, and any attempt at a sterile learning environment, free of content that is in any way influential or persuasive to those participating, is wasted time. The nature of the content used does not impede the teaching of writing skills, syntactical or otherwise as he suggests; rather, content provides substance which grammar and rhetoric serve to enhance and which is essential to dialogue. How can content be separated from teaching composition? Format should be content-driven instead of taking precedence over content.

Fish’s concept of instructors (indirectly this applies to students as well) “saving the world on their own time” reflects what Vander Lei and Fitzgerald highlight as one of the secular ideologies of religion, the “notion that religion is a private matter, not appropriate for public disclosure” (186). Fish, of course, was referring to political agendas permeating classroom discourse; yet, this can apply to faith discussions as well. Many students keep their religious views private by choice, but when students wish to bring their religious views into their writing and into classroom discussion, the “gutted content” barrier as legitimate pedagogy plays a role to keep that from happening.

Vander Lei states:

By excising that which they believe to be at best outside the academic realm or at worst anti-intellectual, teachers risk creating not a neutral space but a sterile place
where learning is safe from ideas that are potentially community-shattering, such as those regarding gender roles or environmental responsibility. (Vander Lei, “Coming to Terms” 5)

She recognizes that all sides lose in the end when instructors shelve important issues. Indoctrination towards religious views in the classroom is problematic, and allowing meaningful content suggests at least the possibility of chaos or a non-sterile messiness. Yet, it is a bizarre idea to insist that content is a distraction from educational objectives. The answer is not an unrealistic attempt at neutrality, nor is it regulating content with teacher-controlled themes or, as Fish suggests, relegating content to a person’s “own time.” It is impossible to filter substance from learning rhetorical methodology. Rather, the blending of techniques and content creates true rhetorical and composition spaces.

Occasionally, I have steered entire classes away from frequently used topics such as abortion and stem-cell research. The reason is not because these are controversial or religious laden topics, but because they are so commonly used that I suggest that students research less popular topics in order to expand their education. However, when students do choose these topics, the tendency is to censor some of the information. For example, in one composition class, when a group of students reported their research on abortion, they mentioned three ways that medical doctors abort fetuses. Even though their position on the topic was a pro-life position, they were hesitant to state the three abortion procedures, so I encouraged them to explain their research discoveries about the procedures to the class.

Another student in the classroom became agitated and demanded that I not allow them to state the procedures. She petitioned the class for a show of hands to indicate their
personal positions on the abortion issue in order to see who would support her protest and help prevent hearing the information. I intercepted her question, stating that no one in the class should be under obligation to reveal his or her position on the topic and that some students may wish to remain quiet about their views on abortion. Yet, it was also acceptable in an educational setting for students to state what they found in their scholarly research. She responded that I should give students the option to leave the room if they did not wish to hear the procedures; she then walked out.

After class she returned to again state her position that I should not allow such graphic material in the classroom without warning students so they could choose whether or not to hear it. I responded that if students presented a video of the procedures, that could be considered graphic (although I had have students do that in other classes without negative feedback), but simply stating research findings was a matter of sharing information in an academic setting. The medical information was neither pro-life nor pro-choice. I supported her personal choice to leave the room, and conveyed that her actions would have no adverse affect on her grade or how I viewed any further interaction between us. Interestingly, students in the same class had no negative reaction to the showing of graphic slides of a disturbingly disfigured victim of a drunk-driving incident.

Emotional responses to issues of religion, ethics, values, and politics are inevitable. That does not mean, however, that students need to avoid these topics in the classroom as long as they are shared respectfully for educational purposes.

*Overextending Church and State Separation*

Another of the “secular ideologies of religion” noted by Vander Lei and Fitzgerald is “the idea that the Constitution, specifically the First Amendment, regulates what can and
cannot be said about religion in the academy” (186). Vander Lei clarifies in *Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom* that “one of the basic assumptions that writing teachers must interrogate is the presumption that it is probably unconstitutional and potentially unethical for teachers to allow religious faith into the writing classroom” (Vander Lei, “Coming to Terms” 9). The distinction between establishing a religion in a state-funded university and allowing religious views to be expressed in that same arena needs to be properly nuanced. If educators cannot themselves identify the dissimilarity, they cannot expect students to make the distinction well.

What the Constitution of the United States actually states in relationship to this issue is found in Article VI and Amendment I. Article VI states: “No religious test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” Amendment I states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (*Constitution*). The Constitution allows for freedom to speak about religion favorably or unfavorably, and states nothing about avoiding religion as a topic within public spheres. While, of course, the Constitution protects those colleges and universities associated with organized religions, it extends beyond that to ensure the right to dialogue about religious views, even to the point of not prohibiting the exercise of religious practices.

Within nonsectarian universities this may take on many forms, such as providing adequate space for Muslim prayers, but it does not exclude dialogue in the learning process of rhetoric and writing. If the academy is seen as establishing a religion by allowing religious dialogue in the classroom, and that is barred, then the second part of the Constitutional statement must also be respected, that religious dialogue should not be
prohibited. Kristen Hansen suggests that it also means that “government cannot prefer non-religion to religion” (Hansen 27). To do so is an infringement executed by many university professors who openly privilege non-religion. It is not that professors can be expected to be neutral in matters of religion; rather, it is a matter of openness to religious commentary by both non-religious students and religious students.

Adam Kotsko acknowledges that the separation of church and state issue is particularly difficult because Christianity is ubiquitous in America. “Those in minority religions or no religious affiliation are constantly reminded of Christianity’s power in the United States, and even many secular agnostics or atheists either had a Christian upbringing or have parents who did….it’s with Christianity that the doctrine of the separation of church and state really takes on its existential heft” (Kotsko). His comments were focused specifically on teaching about Christianity as a topical discussion (not simply about student expression in composition classes) and he notes that there is an understandable reluctance about teaching Christianity in particular, but concludes, “It is very difficult to see how a historically rigorous and broad-based approach to teaching Christian intellectual history could fail to meet academic muster or violate our country’s well-established commitment to the separation of church and state, even in a public university” (Kotsko). This openness to information of a religious nature should likewise be applied to student expression in composition.

Religious Abuses

Another significant barrier to constructive faith conversations on college campuses concerns the issue of religious abuse. When Christians think of Christianity, they reflect on positives such as grace, redemption, and service. When non-Christians think of
Christianity, what is often uppermost in their minds is—abuse. This may surprise some Christians and this disconnection between the differing perspectives creates a considerable obstacle to dialoguing about faith.

Examples of abuse throughout history readily come to mind: the Christian Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and abuse of power in hindering advancements in science such as the condemnation of Galileo for his views about astronomy. More current objections to Christian expression are in response to the protests against and murder of abortionists such as George Tiller, votes against the equal opportunity for gays to marry, the support of capital punishment, and the reaction to embryonic stem cell research which would help those suffering from maladies such as Parkinson’s disease. This subject also invokes stories which many Christians embrace as inspired by God, such as those found in the Old Testament which condone violence and practices such as slavery and discrimination against women.

Unfortunately, abuses also exist currently within religious communities. In order to have an honest dialogue about faith, participants must be both informed and perspicacious about how abuses impact perceptions of religion. In *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, Christian counselor Jeff VanVonderen and pastor David Johnson refer to an abuse specific to religion. They state, “Too many experiences…have taught us that spiritual abuse really does exist, that it is far-reaching and that it can be as wounding as other forms of abuse” (Johnson & VanVonderen 29). Besides obvious issues of sexual abuse within churched populations, they identify several pernicious characteristics which become evident within religious communities: learned powerlessness, manipulation,
authoritarianism, shaming and rules that mirror other abusive systems (Johnson & VanVonderen).

Educational environments cannot ignore the instances of sexual abuses and scandals within both Catholicism and Protestantism, nor can they ignore the problem of spiritual abuse. Sometimes these abuses have direct or indirect connections to theological positions. Rebecca Merrill Groothuis points out that “the statistics, in fact, confirm that the second-best predictor of sexual abuse in a family (after alcohol and drug addiction) is the family’s acceptance of conservative, religious teaching on rigid, hierarchical gender roles” (Groothuis 240).

When Christians wish to insert the topic of faith into a discussion, they cannot expect non-Christians to ignore these facts. This barrier is sometimes simply too colossal to overcome without acknowledgement and at least some measure of projected resolution. While such an acknowledgement should not serve to silence students of faith who themselves did not participate in the mistreatment of others, the association of hypocrisy and violation with religion is still a significant wall to overcome within a faith dialogue.

A much more difficult issue for Christians is the acceptance of biblical stories which translate to non-Christians as abuse, but which Christians feel compelled to defend. Christians may condemn the Church’s involvement with the Spanish Inquisition, but be hard-pressed to explain the slaughter of people groups by the Israelites under the Hebrew God’s command. How might they elevate the Bible as inerrant and a source of hope and truth when much of the content is offensive to non-Christian sensitivities? Christian religious students discover that they feel compelled to engage in apologetics which include a large measure of theodicy. These are difficult endeavors within limited
composition spaces and often leave the dialogue disjointed. Exploring cultural norms in the ancient world and anachronistic standards may shed some light on this highly contested topic. William Webb suggests a “redemptive-movement” hermeneutic which allows for cultural influence through an ancient- to-modern trajectory (Webb). This allows Christian students to trace, for example, the cultural changes in attitudes towards slavery even within the Scriptures and how segments of the church historically continued the trajectory in leading the abolitionist cause.

Avoiding a Crisis

Educators who exclude religious discussion may simply wish to avoid confrontation within the classroom. This is a barrier which attempts to divert another unwelcome obstruction to learning: antagonistic confrontation. It may also be an attempt to deflect a confrontation for the university. A few years ago, faculty where I teach received an email from the university stating that a Christian student in a literature class requested an alternative text to read because the assigned text contained swearing and this insulted his religious sensibility. The university was hesitant to tell the student that since he chose a secular university for his education, he could expect secular course material which may include offensive language. Concern for religious discrimination accusations caused the university to proceed with caution. While this particular issue would most likely not end in litigation, more critical yet similar issues may result in legal follow-through.

A professor may also wish to avoid religious content as a way to circumvent challenging someone’s religious convictions. While foul language in literature may seem to the non-religious an issue for derision, to at least one religious student this matter was a sober one, enough to risk ridicule and some measure of confrontation with a professor.
More serious still, challenging students on their views of abortion, inspired revelation, moral hypocrisy, or the church’s treatment of women or gays may create an unwelcome crisis simply by the nature of academic inquiry in a setting where students begin to wrestle with advocating for their beliefs.

Attempting to address the credibility of religious texts is difficult for many students of faith. They are obliged to tackle hermeneutics and application; the scope of this task is taxing and disquieting. William J. Webb, professor of New Testament at Heritage Theological Seminary, and author of *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*, states, “I must confess that, as I have grown in my understanding of what is actually contained within the pages of Scripture, I have had to rethink my hermeneutic” (56). For many students, the answers they heard in their religious communities no longer erase doubts or provide comprehensive fortification in light of rigorous academic inquiry. John Powell, writing to the religious community, states:

We lose sight of the fact that faith can mature only because of these crises. We forget that no one can say a meaningful “yes” of commitment until he has faced the alternative possibility of saying “no.” The most destructive thing we can do to those passing through periods of crisis is to attempt to silence these legitimate doubts and encourage their repression. (Powell 148)

While the professor’s job is not to antagonize religious students, nor posture themselves as adversarial in order to bring about reflection and observation, the professor’s prerogative is to prompt contemplation of alternative views. As Marcia Baxter Magolda in her article, “The Evolution of Epistemology: Refining Contextual
Knowing at Twentysomething,” states, “Educators hope that college graduates will experience a transformation from reliance on authority to complex ways of making meaning in which they are able to integrate multiple perspectives and make informed judgments” (Magolda). Inside an educational environment, some change will occur within the religious student. An attempt, by a professor, to avoid a crisis is a valid deliberation in isolated situations where a particular circumstance or student is volatile. Yet, as a pedagogical approach to religious content, avoidance serves mostly as a barrier to helpful dialogue and hinders both religious students from grappling with their beliefs, and non-religious students from contemplating beliefs—not as a means to force positive or negative religious catharsis, but as an educational endeavor.

*Posturing*

One of the most common barriers to a constructive faith discussion within the classroom is the issue of posturing—the use of unscrupulous sophistry to undermine communication and legitimate inquiry. In *How to Stay Christian in College*, J. Budziszewski comments concerning intellectual debate, that “it’s only partly a search for truth. The other part is an intellectual game in which the players pretend to be searching for truth but are really more interested in hiding from it” (56). This statement both exposes posturing and participates in posturing. On the one hand, he points to the insincerity of some who engage on the topic of religious faith in order to undermine communication, for example, as a way to embarrass or humiliate Christian students. On the other hand, his statement suggests that participants must “search for truth,” a concept that already has religious or Platonic overtones within particular epistemological frameworks. This implies that either they search for truth or they are insincere. Yet, non-
religious students may not “search for truth” in the same way or by the same means as religious students, or they may not engage in truth searches at all within a sincere discussion. Perhaps they are searching for community or making attempts to understand diverse views. Perhaps their epistemological paradigm, as is the case with social-epistemic theorists, does not embrace the concept that truth can be discovered in a hermeneutical search. To assume that the goal of everyone is to search for truth begs the epistemological question.

Budziszewski does point to legitimate problems with professors who at least appear hostile to religion. They may ridicule, display partiality in how they moderate class discussions, or show a bias in grading (152-154). While these situations may be rare, they do exist, particularly the subtle partiality during discussions where religious students are at the mercy of the professor’s orchestration.² Dismissing input from religious students, for example, in an intellectual discussion because abuses exist within faith communities is a specious form of arguing. (A concern for these abuses and/or questioning the connection between belief and practice is not.) The use of fallacious forms of argumentation champions pretentiousness, and such attempts to sabotage faith dialogues do not advance valid objectives towards academic learning and diversity.

Posturing hinders debate on any topic, but seems to be perfected for dialogues about faith for all participants. Vander Lei recognizes, “the imprudent and uncivil ways that religious faith has been put to argumentative purpose in the public square….” (Vander Lei, “Coming to Terms” 9). Being religious does not necessarily include a sense of fair play. On the other hand, sometimes atheist or skeptical students feel a sense of ethical

² Abby Nye’s book Fish Out of Water: Surviving and Thriving as a Christian on a Secular Campus written from a conservative Christian perspective includes stories of perceived antagonism and posturing by some college professors in response to Nye’s beliefs.
superiority in light of religious hypocrisy, yet may themselves also participate in fallacious arguments.

“Begging the question” is one common example of spurious religious reasoning. When the very proposition presented for debate is implicitly or explicitly assumed in the premise of an argument, a person is engaged in begging the question such as in Budziszewski’s entire book *How to Stay Christian in College*. Budziszewski continually posits Christian assertions for which he does not provide support. While his intended audience agrees with his warrants, and sharing assumptions with an audience is an acceptable rhetorical approach, the book is about addressing an environment which does not share those same assumptions. His audience is entering a setting intended for rigorous deliberating—college. Telling his readers to simply stand their ground is to teach them that inflexibility trumps open inquiry. As long as he is able to keep his audience believing his premises while those very premises are under extreme scrutiny, he has accomplished what his book title claims, yet this approach says little about benefiting from the rigor of the academic queries. His chapters about academic deliberations offer meager and simplistic answers that will not contend well in a scholastic context. The title gives the impression that the primary goal is to preserve belief at the expense of scholarship. Begging the question fails as a valid approach for serious students and it does not advance dialogue about faith.

On the other side of the faith debate, former Christian fundamentalist turned atheist Dan Barker engages in comparable tactics when he discusses contradictions in the Bible. He ridicules explanations as simplistic while he provides little room for literary techniques and cultural or epochal variables in standards of accuracy. He engages in the
use of a modern, literalist approach to accuracy in order to dismiss the text, while
criticizing the fundamentalists’ modern, literalist approach to the same text. This false
dilemma approach to critiquing sacred texts is also fallacious and dismisses religious
views for reasons that are defective.

Academic students must avoid adopting fallacious techniques when participating in
faith dialogues in order for there to be dialogue with the intent of education and
understanding. Bridges to understanding require that participants focus on the best
arguments presented. Once the discussion is tainted by posturing, productive dialogue is
lost.

Fear

The element of fear in the construction of each of the above barriers is a powerful
motivator for both sides of the religious debate. As noted in the introduction, some
elements of the religious community have a near debilitating fear of secular education.
Educators are also anxious about religion. For example, as noted earlier, Stanley Fish
fears that conservatives (political and/or religious) will admit content into the classroom
beyond the purpose of learning proper format and technique in composition, as a way to
subject others to their agenda. To eliminate that possibility, in his view, the composition
classroom is to be content free. He conveys his unease:

Whether or not conservative activists believe in this deconstruction of received
authority (and by and large they don’t), they are clever enough to appropriate it for
their own purposes. If liberal polemicians can defend gay marriage by challenging the
right of a church or a state to define what marriage is, why, the argument goes, can’t
Intelligent Design proponents demand equal time in the textbooks and the classroom
by challenging the right of Ivy League professors or journal editors to say what
science is? (Fish 129)

He continues with an analogy between Holocaust deniers and Intelligent Design
proponents, “Intelligent Designers and Holocaust deniers, despite the differences between
them, play the same shell game; they both say look here, in the highest reaches of
speculation about inquiry in general, and not there, in the places where the particular,
nitty-gritty work of empirical inquiry is actually being done” (131). He questions their
motives about open debate for purposes to promote their religious views.

He is not alone. A New York Times article (about DynamicBooks and instructors’
ability to alter these textbooks electronically) included reference to a textbook author’s
fear of religious content being inserted into the textbook. Theoretically, this could include
altering content about evolution to include content about creationism (Rich). The concern
for indoctrination exists on both sides. Yet, regarding the insertion of content based
solely on promoting religion, Adam Kotsko states:

It is in fact very difficult for me to see how any kind of proselytizing could take
place in a secular academic environment at all. Basic tolerance is the bedrock of the
contemporary American educational system. In fact, in my experience my students’
commitment to keeping an open mind and valuing others’ opinions is so strong that
it’s often difficult to convince them to express straightforward disagreement with
each other. We all of course want to avoid the nightmare scenario of a professor who
grades on the basis of agreement and attempts to “indoctrinate” students on that
basis, but even such a person would most likely wind up doing a disservice to his
cause by definitively turning students off to Christianity due to their very healthy aversion to closemindedness. (Kotsko)

Today’s students are, in fact, discerning. The concern about a religious view creeping in to a science textbook is speculative in terms of impact. Students are not so gullible that they cannot assess when they are being led. They easily spot religious views, give them a quick assessment unless they already hold those views, and then scrutinize the person who attempts to peddle them, instead of buying into the position itself. Students are already constantly evaluating not only textbooks but people and various perspectives. Fear of the university stripping students of their religious views, or fear of religious professors’ indoctrination of their students keeps faith dialogues on the periphery in academia. Concern is valid, but fear tends to stifle inquiry and critical thinking. While it seems to restrain harmful aspects of manipulation and control in order to assist learning, fear itself becomes a control and a manipulation.

These common barriers are some of the more obvious hindrances to dialogue. When they are invoked, true discourse is essentially over. Yet, less immediate but more significant hindrances remain which serve to undermine informative faith dialogue in academic settings—the epistemological schism between modernism and postmodernism which affects both the church and the academy, and the problematic division between faith and reason. A historical assessment is helpful in order to understand these barriers.
III. COMPOSITION THEORY AND CHRISTIAN HISTORY

The history of rhetoric and the development of composition theory are undeniably intertwined with Christianity. This association, in turn, impacts current interaction within religious discussions in the context of writing instruction. Some of the more recent changes in composition theory significantly impair this relationship, as the traditional search for truth is replaced with social epistemic concerns for making meaning instead of discovering truth. Many students interested in seriously pursuing their religious beliefs do not fully comprehend the paradigms that influence their own epistemological perspective, leaving them ill-equipped to address contemporary issues in a way that impacts their intended audience.

In turn, professors often do not interact with religious students with a well-developed, informed understanding or with a motivation to assist students in closing the epistemological gap. Tracing the development between Christianity and rhetoric/composition illumines some of these misinformed perceptions and highlights how rhetoric and religion can complement each other in ways that provide an invisible reinforcement for religious views.

Ancient Rhetoric and Christianity

Most Christians think of Christianity as primarily influenced by Judaism and, of course, this is true. Jesus, as described in the Gospels, and the majority of the New Testament writers were Jewish with a largely Jewish audience, with specific Hebraic
concerns during a particular era in Jewish history. Yet, the Christian New Testament was written in Greek by Greek speakers and, as George Kennedy, author of *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, points out, “Many [of the authors] were familiar with public address in Greek and had been educated in Greek schools. They thus employ some features of classical rhetoric combined with Jewish traditions and are modified by beliefs and values of Christianity” (143). This assessment is confirmed by Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman in their apologetics handbook, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, as they describe the Apostle Paul’s approach to the Athenians, recorded in the Book of Acts, chapter 17. Paul uses a philosophical address similar to the Stoics and Cynics (unlike Paul’s communications to Jewish audiences). The reaction to this event significantly mirrors “the charge against Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*, which strongly suggests that Luke sees Paul’s speech here as a Christian counterpart to the Socratic apology” (Boa & Bowman 26). The authors inform that the Apostle Paul and the Apostle John freely employ Greek rhetorical terms in their writings to convey Christian meaning. This merging of Greek influence with the birth of Christianity links ancient rhetoric and Christian belief—specifically in how New Testament writers and early Christians not only communicated and promoted their beliefs but even in how they thought about the concept of “belief.” Phillip Sipiora refers to *kairos* as specifically Greek and significantly Christian, an important concept in the formation of Christianity. *Kairos* is the first noun, recorded in Mark 1:15, attributed to Jesus, “The time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near” (Sipiora 114). The “fullness of time” and the “discerning the time” *kairic* concepts connected to the Jewish Messiah are repeated throughout the New Testament.
Christianity did not necessarily abandon the Hebrew tradition and means of communication. Kennedy notes that the rhetorical technique used in much of the Old Testament Hebrew Bible was “assertion by authority.” This assessment is in reference to Aristotelian nonartistic proofs that extend beyond the artistic proofs of ethos, pathos, and logos. “Authority is a nonartistic analogy to ethos in classical rhetoric. It is confirmed by miracles and bolstered by pathos.” Kennedy adds:

In its purest form, Judeo-Christian rhetoric…claims to be the simple enunciation of truth, uncontaminated by adornment, flattery, or sophistic argumentation; it differs from philosophical rhetoric in that this truth is known from revelation or established by signs sent from God, not discovered by dialectic through human effort. However, like Greek philosophical rhetoric, Judeo-Christian rhetoric gradually came to use features of classical rhetoric to address audiences educated in rhetorical schools, which appeared in Palestine following Alexander’s conquest of the East. Judaism in the Hellenistic period already shows some influence of classical rhetoric, and early Christians gradually adapted features of classical rhetoric to their needs. (Kennedy 138-9)

Demonstrating the Athenian influence, Boa and Bowman relate that Justin the Martyr (ca. 100-165) converted from Platonism to Christianity and that he was the first post apostolic writer to associate the Apostle John’s reference to Logos with Greek philosophy (30). Kennedy notes also that of the early Latin Church Fathers, five out of eight taught rhetoric: Tertullian, Cyprian, Arnobius, Lactantius, and Augustine, and the other three: Ambrose, Hilary, and Jerome had been well trained in rhetoric (167). Kennedy does not leave Jesus out as an adroit rhetorician, “Jesus is described in the

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3 Often referred to as “Justin Martyr.”
gospels as adept at argumentation. His encounters with the Pharisees show an ability even at dialectic (for example, Matthew 15:1-9 and 22:15-22)” (145).

The shift by the Apostle Paul in Acts 17 towards Greek rhetorical style to fit his non-Jewish audience is often seen as a model for Christian apologetics: incorporating adjustments to accommodate audience. Yet, this concept of audience for rhetorical purposes had to compete in the church with the ongoing distrust of secular methods and content. Just as there is tension for Christians today between the message and acceptable methods of delivery, similar concern arose within the early church. How much should Christians depend on rhetorical technique to advance their message, or was that similar to dependence on the “traditions of men” looked at in Scripture as an unfavorable association? Yet, while early Christians overtly distanced themselves from Greek philosophy and questioned rhetorical methods, elements of Greek rhetoric became a vital part of Christian proclamation and even Christian doctrine yet remain largely invisible to modern Christians. Kennedy refers to a study by James Kinneavy concerning the Greek word *pistis*:

Somewhat surprisingly…the early church adopted the Greek word *pistis* to mean “Christian faith.” In classical Greek, the meanings of *pistis* range over the spectrum of “trust, belief, persuasion”; it was, however, the word used by Aristotle for proof in rhetoric, and this usage became standard among teachers of rhetoric. The acceptance of *pistis* to mean “Christian faith” by the early Church implied at the very least that faith came from hearing speech, and provided a future opening for the acceptance of classical rhetoric within Christian discourse. (146)
The significance of the use of *pistis* should not be underestimated, and will be revisited in Section V along with the discussion of faith and reason. Noted here is the fact that it highlights not just the acceptance of a Greek rhetorical term, but the depth of the rhetorical Greek meanings behind it which, Kinneavy suggests, is remarkably different from that of Old Testament concepts of faith or belief. While Kennedy acknowledges that the gospel of Mark, considered the earliest gospel, relieves heavily on “authority with little appeal to logical argument” (147), the gospel of John, consistently viewed by historians as the latest gospel, appeals frequently to proofs and evidences. The very divergence of the New Testament teachings in contrast to the Old Testament assertions relies on a strong element of persuasion, and the New Testament writers depended on various means, not simply on authority in the thoroughly religious environment of that culture. In other words, in order for the New Testament writers to be convincing to their Hebrew audiences, they had to employ more than an appeal to authority since the most respected authorities in their culture rejected their message. Although they did rely heavily on references from the Old Testament, the merging of Greek culture and Greek language with Hebrew understandings provided both a non-Jewish and a Jewish formation of dialogue to augment early Christianity.

Nevertheless, Kennedy explains that Christian exegesis in the successive centuries included the supposition that the Scriptures were intentionally obscure, understood only with divine assistance. Some believed that God purposefully hid understanding from those who were spiritually unresponsive (Kennedy 151). Whether the message was intentionally obscured, or whether it needed faith as an ingredient, distrust for rhetoric as
a means to convey spiritual understanding arose. Kennedy notes Jerome’s hesitation to recognize the value of rhetoric:

Of all the fathers, Saint Jerome (ca. 348-420) was the one most torn between a feeling for style or love of eloquence and a belief that the art of rhetoric is a worldly product, at best of no true importance for the Christian and possibly inimical to the Christian life. (168)

Appealing to evidence and reason, however, is not entirely a modern phenomenon for Christians. Kennedy wrote concerning the rhetorician Lactantius (ca. 250-320) who took an antithetical view and began to address intellectuals with arguments based in Greek and Latin evidences instead of only on the Bible. It concerned him that non-Christian intellectuals would reject Christianity because the Scriptures and appeals to prophecies and revelations seemed absurd to them (169). The result was Lactantius’ treatise in seven books titled *Divine Institutes*, compiled around A.D.313.

Later, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), as noted by Boa and Bowman, contributed to significant change within the church by integrating Christian philosophy with Aristotelian logic. He constructed arguments for the existence of God, but “the proofs were apparently offered not as a refutation of atheism (which was not a serious option in Aquinas’s day), but to show the coherence of Christianity with Aristotelianism” (35). Many modern Christian apologists seek Aquinas as a model in place of Augustine since Aquinas set forth an apology that connected Athens with Jerusalem in a way that focused on proofs and audience.

Yet, even with some interest in persuasion beyond references to Scripture, with the revised focus on Plato and Aristotle, style and teaching, not persuasion, remained the
center of ecclesiastical rhetoric, particularly in the Renaissance and Reformation. Not until after the Enlightenment did Christian apologetics begin to employ evidence and reason to a much larger degree and, in particular, with the Scottish Enlightenment, persuasion became a significant consideration for those Scottish ministers who also championed rhetoric. In the early church, of the traditional five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery, style played the predominant role (Kennedy 203). The lofty regard for Scripture encouraged Christians to speculate that there was little new to say or discover. Accordingly, certain aspects of rhetoric’s role diminished and morphed to fit the religious environment. Even Augustine’s fourth book, *On Christian Learning*, exploring his view of rhetoric, highlighted the importance of style. Kennedy continues concerning that early time period, “Even Christian exegesis is more strongly influenced by the factor of style than by reasoning, since much exegesis involves the interpretation of figurative signs” (181).

While Greek rhetorical terminology and meaning influenced the early church, the connectors became invisible except in the form of reaction to what did not appear to be spiritual. With the predominance of the church in Western society and the lack of significant outside challenges to the formation of ecclesiastical knowledge, rhetoric stagnated into assumptions about style. The ambiguity, displayed in both absorption and reaction towards rhetoric, lasted through the Enlightenment when persuasion and evidence took a predominant role as the church faced new challenges from intellectual and scientific stimulation.

*The Enlightenment and Christian Rhetoric*
The early religious ambiguity concerning rhetoric continues to frustrate religious students even today as various branches of Christian apologetics reflect a spectrum of choices which often appear to oppose one another in terms of where to start, what to emphasize, and even what to expect from dialogue. Not only are Christian students dealing with the pressures of communication in a secular environment, they also must absorb the mixed messages they receive within their own religion in relationship to rhetoric. This was complicated particularly by the Enlightenment which provided yet another opportunity for both absorption and reaction.

The Enlightenment produced a catastrophic shift in the affiliation between rhetoric and Christianity. As the West centered on rationalism, the church followed. During the Middle Ages, the East took more of an interest in Greek philosophy and rhetoric than the West and as a result, Kennedy notes, by the end of the fifth century until the time of the Renaissance, no civic rhetorician obtained significant recognition in the West, unlike the situation in the East (205). During the Renaissance, the medieval forms of proclamation within the church diminished as classical models became more prominent especially after 1450. Yet, the focus on style continued: “Considering the uses of rhetoric by the humanists and their successors and by Renaissance preachers and letter writers, not surprisingly style, rather than invention, seemed to many the most important part of the discipline” (Kennedy 228).

While style maintained this position of prominence with the church, there was movement in the area of rhetorical theory. Erasmus (1469-1536), besides his well-known *Praise of Folly*, wrote several other works including one on the topic of preaching, *Ecclesiastes sive de Ratione Concionandi*, “which turned back from late medieval
preaching theory to classical rhetoric and homiletics” (Kennedy 245). Thomas Wilson’s *Arte of Rhetorique* (editions from 1553-1585) added a “Prologue to the Reader” in 1560 in which he reviews Cicero’s opening for *On Invention* in a Christian format in order to highlight theory concerning eloquence—how God provided eloquence for use but it became lost to mankind. In his theory, it was later ‘repaired’ by God in the art form of rhetoric. Wilson’s explanation of rhetoric is defined by Cicero’s traditional, classical focus on invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery (248).

As the Renaissance shifted to restore classical philosophy, rhetoric also became a fresh concern with classical overtones. Yet, not everyone was moving in the same direction or at the same pace. Peter Ramus (1515-72) greatly hindered much of the return to classical rhetoric during the Renaissance. Ramus, who joined the Protestant movement, used a dialectic mirroring that of Puritan ideologies concerning preaching practices and plain, cerebral rationalism. Harvard College (founded 1636) provided a course in rhetoric permeated with the Ramist approach (252) and this methodology eventually influenced the early American rhetorical atmosphere as those educated through Harvard favored an unadorned, common sense rationalism and simultaneously became early leaders in the newly forming government based largely on rational Enlightenment principles.

The Enlightenment brought new challenges for education, rhetoric, and Christianity. Kennedy explains the influence of the writings of Descartes and Pascal:

The effect of these works was to challenge traditional rhetoric. Put in an extreme form, the new logic claimed that the only sound method of inquiry is that of geometry, proceeding from self-evident axioms to universally accepted conclusions. The “topics” of dialectic and rhetoric are useless in discovering truth or in
demonstrating it. The role of an orator seeking to dominate communication is inappropriate, and to stir the emotions of an audience is unacceptable. The positive side of the new logic was the establishment of a method of communication needed for the emergence of modern science; its negative side was its apparent ignorance of psychological realities in politics, law, and religion, and of the existence of a special kind of rhetoric evident in philosophical and scientific writing in contradiction to its claims of certainty and objectivity. (261)

This dismissal of emotion, intuitive knowledge, and psychological realities reinforced the invisibility of rhetoric in relationship to religious knowledge and allowed for a fresh reaction to both rhetorical and spiritual influences. In order to accommodate the explosion in scientific knowledge, Enlightenment thinkers mistakenly either dismissed other philosophical and psychological aspects of reality, or they extended their search for certainty too far, attempting to force all knowledge into a rationalistic mold. Other disciplines either must submit to the rationalistic grid or must take a back seat in terms of importance. Since for religious people, religion is top priority, the result was to either embrace the rationalistic approach or dismiss it as priority. The former avenue created a massive outpouring of apologetic material. The latter created a bigger rift between secular education and religion.

Kennedy explains further:

The relationship of rhetoric, as understood at the time, to the new science was much debated in the seventeenth century. [Francis] Bacon had acknowledged a valuable role for rhetoric in human affairs. Descartes, in pursuit of philosophical certainty, was more doubtful. In Part I of Discourse on Method (1637) he speaks of his early esteem
for eloquence and his subsequent conclusion that those with the strongest powers of reasoning, and who most skillfully arrange their thoughts to render them clear and intelligible, have the best power of persuasion even if they have never studied rhetoric. His adoption of a mathematical model of knowledge caused him to reject probable argument, and thus both dialectic and rhetoric as traditionally understood. In practice, however, like many philosophers, and with some apparent embarrassment, he found it necessary to utilize rhetorical methods to communicate with a general audience. (269-270)

Thomas Hobbes also came to see rhetoric in a negative light, “He attacked metaphorical language in particular as senseless, ambiguous, and a cause of contention, sedition, or contempt” (Kennedy 270). Augustine saw metaphorical language as signs and, as a Christian, wrestled with the literal and figurative aspects of such language in the Scriptures. But with the Enlightenment, those elements took a subordinate role to discovery of truth through science. This was a time of the development of reason, the scientific method and the “new logic,” and symbolic meaning was called into question as indefinite and not quantitative—even within the religious community. Religious meanings based on such methods were suspect and a rhetorician’s attempt to explain such symbolism became suspicious.

This suspicion is reflected in the writing of John Locke: “It is evident how much men love to deceive and be deceived, since rhetoric, that powerful instrument of error and deceit, has its established professors, is publicly taught, and has always been had in great reputation” (Locke 371). Kennedy states concerning Immanuel Kant’s attitude towards rhetoric that he “describes oratory as exploiting the weakness of hearers and dismisses
the art of rhetoric as worthy of no respect” (275). This Platonic view of rhetoric as sophistry in the sense of inherent manipulation and deceit still clings to the term “rhetoric” in popular understanding. It echoes Plato’s distrust of the Sophists and what he saw as their rhetorical trickery. Moderns distrusted rhetoric as a means to finding fact which they thought they would discover through science. They narrowed their methods to science and rationalism in search of certainty.

Not every branch of the Enlightenment saw persuasion as an unnecessary or unimportant component. The Scottish Enlightenment included Christian ministers such as George Campbell, Hugh Blair, Richard Whately, and John Witherspoon, referred to as the New Rhetoricians. Nan Johnson, author of Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America, records the far reaching legacy of Campbell, mirroring Augustine, whose “rhetorical techniques are linked directly to affective intentions (to enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passions, and influence the will)....” (Johnson 66-67). This recognition of the affective through the eyes of the Enlightenment did not include a generative rhetoric, or invention, which remained subdued in ecclesiastical circles. It did include persuasion, and remained focused on style as well. Johnson states:

By redefining invention as the management of rhetorical evidence and the selection and arrangement of types of arguments, Campbell and Blair maintain a Ramistic view of rhetoric and logic as closely related but distinct disciplines; however, it is obvious in The Philosophy of Rhetoric that eighteen-century reformulations of the canon of invention were also the consequence of the philosophical context that directed the revisionist efforts of the New Rhetoric in general....Although the New Rhetoricians
treated principles comparable to ethos and pathos, these appeals were considered qualities of discourse relevant to style and the selection of materials, not as invention modes in and of themselves in the Aristotelian sense. (Johnson 47-49)

James Berlin concurs:

The rhetoric based on the new logic can be seen most clearly in George Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) and Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783). The old distinction between dialectic as the discipline of learned discourse and rhetoric as the discipline of popular discourse is destroyed….An equally significant departure in this new rhetoric is that it contains no invention system. Truth is to be discovered outside the rhetorical enterprise—through the method, usually the scientific method, of the appropriate discipline, or, as in poetry and oratory, through genius. (Berlin, “Contemporary Composition” 770)

The New Rhetoricians did not reject the Ramist influence of earlier years and, especially within the work of Hugh Blair, maintained a concern for form and style and an elitist perspective for later composition. This tapped into the Christian mindset of “right” thinking and correct procedure which still strongly influences religious students in their attempts to convey meaning. Christian apologists reinforce this attachment to a large degree, and also seek to discover Truth through non-rhetorical means. This search fans out in a range of approaches from Presuppositionalism to Evidentialism.

As evidence of the type of connection between rhetoric and Christianity during that time period, Kennedy notes, concerning Richard Whately’s *Elements of Rhetoric* that it is “predominantly an ecclesiastical rhetoric. Whately has nothing to say about civic rhetoric; the chief business of rhetoric in his view is to arm a preacher for the task of
conveying the indisputable doctrines of Christianity to his congregation and to arm the Christian controversialist to defend the evidences of religion against the attacks of agnostics and deists” (Kennedy 286). This lack of true engagement with civic or secular elements of society contributes to further crippling the Christian student in public discourse as these approaches were passed down through attitudes within the church.

The Scottish intersection of rhetoric and Christianity was transported to the United States with influence in both education and politics. Kennedy notes that “Puritans introduced Ramist rhetoric to the Harvard curriculum in the seventeenth century” (286), but the influence came not only through Harvard. John Witherspoon (1722-1794), like Blair, was a Scottish Presbyterian minister who became president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton) in 1768. More theologically conservative than Blair, he had an extensive influence on American politics, having trained James Madison and other Revolutionaries. He also was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. John Quincy Adams, the first to hold the Boylston Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard, referred back to a focus on classical rhetoric, but this emphasis was soon forgotten. “Later nineteenth-century reference to classical authority by American teachers of rhetoric is often window dressing” (Kennedy 288).

This odd mixture of rationalism, Puritanism, and Common Sense would come to fuel Christian certainty within the framework of Christian fundamentalism and evangelicalism. George Marsden reports that in the mid-1800s many university presidents were still ordained ministers, and highlights the importance of Enlightenment thinking in education during that time, “Two premises were absolutely fundamental—that God’s truth was a single unified order and that all persons of common sense were
capable of knowing that truth. The implications of these assumptions were carefully worked out by the philosophical school known as Scottish Common Sense Realism” (Marsden, American Culture 14).

Marsden adds:

Common Sense philosophy continued to appeal to Americans into the nineteenth century also because it provided a first foundation for a scientific approach to reality. In a nation born during the Enlightenment, the reverence for science as the way to understand all aspects of reality was nearly unbounded. Evangelical Christians and liberal Enlightenment [sic] figures alike assumed that the universe was governed by a rational system of laws guaranteed by an all-wise and benevolent creator. The function of science was to discover such laws, something like Newton’s laws of physics, which were assumed to exist in all areas…. [Francis] Bacon’s name inspired in Americans an almost reverential respect for the certainty of the knowledge achieved by careful and objective observation of the facts known to common sense. Whether the subject was theology or geology, the scientist need only classify these certainties, avoiding speculative hypothesis….The [pre-fundamentalist] evangelical educators had taken the lead in shaping the opinions of the nation. The Bible, of course, revealed the moral law; but the faculty of common sense, which agreed with Scripture, was a universal standard. According to Common Sense philosophy, one can intuitively know the first principles of morality as certainly as one can apprehend other essential aspects of reality. (Marsden, American Culture 15)

This approach to religious certainty was no longer centered primarily on revelation or authority. The Enlightenment brought with it an assurance based in science and reason.
At a time when the educated challenged religious revelation and authority, it seemed reasonable to respond as Lactantius had in the 300s A.D. and Thomas Aquinas had in the thirteenth century — find the common thread between religion and reason, and use the rhetorical means of persuasion as a way to, as Campbell stated: enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passions, and influence the will.

Marsden further explains Christian understanding during the time of the Enlightenment:

More importantly, this Common Sense account of reality was considered to provide a sure base for the rational and scientific confirmation of the truths of the Bible and the Christian faith. The Bible, it was constantly asserted, was the highest and all-sufficient source of authority…. The Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity, or plain meaning, of Scripture provided a further basis for the belief that the common person could readily understand Biblical teaching. Common Sense paralleled this doctrine with its insistence on the perspicuity of nature. In an age that referenced science, it was essential that this confidence in Scripture not be based on blind faith alone. (16)

Within this context, the unintended result was that “faith” became suspect, adopting a personified blindness or an active “leap.” The prevailing philosophies relegated faith to a position of irrationality, an antithesis to reason and rationalism. In order to maintain credibility, and in genuine appreciation for science and reason, Christianity welcomed the new logic as a way of confirmation. Boa and Bowman note that at the time of the Enlightenment, with the advent of the skepticism of Scottish Philosopher David Hume, Christian apologetics were forced to respond with reason (38) at the expense of a focus
on faith. For example, George Campbell’s *Dissertation of Miracles* was in direct response to Hume.

Marsden also clarifies that the Enlightenment’s priorities merged with Christianity within the universities as an impetus for freedom of inquiry, and as a Protestant reaction to Catholic authoritarianism as an added incentive. This, of course, would later shift to a secular motivation for free inquiry. Yet, for that time period, Marsden notes:

American universities were defined as havens for free scientific inquiry. The science which would be the model for most of the disciplines would have to be free from appeals to supernaturally based authority. In effect, science would have to be defined purely naturalistically. This sharp limit on the bounds of authoritative academic inquiry was not viewed by the university founders as in opposition to Christianity....Naturalistic inquiry, furthermore, could be supplemented by humanistic moral ideals that also emphasized freedom and would advance Christian and democratic civilization. (Marsden, *Outrageous Idea* 14-15)

Before long, a division developed between Christians in control of academia and those who desired a more distinctive Christian message based on revelation. Within the university Christianity became relegated to theological studies, and increasingly distanced from areas of science which claimed objectivity.

This scientific framework influenced other schools such as Wheaton College which still maintains its distinctly Christian focus today. Marsden wrote about Jonathan Blanchard, influential at Wheaton College: “Blanchard’s assumptions, grounded in Scottish Common Sense, were that God had built into the universe a system of law, essentially moral law, and had created the minds of people so that reason and moral sense
could apprehend that law” (Marsden, American Culture 28). This shift towards science, on the one hand distanced religion from other educational disciplines, but on the other hand, especially within Christian colleges and universities, science and natural law became the rigorous focus parallel to religious studies as they attempted to gain back ground perceived lost to secular interests in society.

The Scottish Enlightenment concept of perspicuity also influenced the exegetical approach to Scripture and became a significant influence in the development of Christian fundamentalism with the focus on the “plain meaning” within the text. This hermeneutical method chose a literal interpretation to Scripture as of primary importance, thereby dismissing other possible meanings if the literal “plain” meaning was coherent. Ironically, this approach to Scripture also continues to influence atheists’ frameworks for criticism of Christianity (fundamentalism in particular). Once Christians recognize this hermeneutical stance as a part of Enlightenment Common Sense, they can better address their own epistemological assumptions and hermeneutic framework, and that of their critics as well. The Christian who quotes Bible verses in the context of a secular classroom has a trust in both the authority and the plain meaning of Scripture, thus mixing varied rhetorical and hermeneutical approaches but without an informed assessment of audience.

Marsden mentions Arthur T. Pierson, a leader in the Christian dispensationalist movement, who stated, “I like Biblical theology that does not start with the superficial Aristotelian method of reason, that does not begin with an hypothesis, and then warp the facts and the philosophy to fit the crook of our dogma, but a Baconian system, which first fathers the teachings of the word of God, and then seeks to deduce some general law
upon which the facts can be arranged” (Marsden, *American Culture* 55). In other words, within the Enlightenment paradigm, Pierson assumes that all discoveries will lead back to his Christian understanding through a means he equals with empirical certainty. Marsden adds:

> Whatever one might think of the accuracy of Pierson’s claim to be true representative of the method of the early seventeenth-century champion of the objective empirical method, his appeal to Francis Bacon sounded a note that still rang true to many American Protestants. At least throughout the first two thirds of the nineteenth century “Lord Bacon” was the preeminently revered philosopher for many Americans, especially those of the dominant evangelical colleges. This popularity of Bacon, in turn, was built on the strong support for the Baconian tradition in Scottish Common Sense Realism. (Marsden, *American Culture* 55)

Christians had found, within this framework, a new source for truth, and they began to embrace it with religious fervor. Concerning fundamentalists (dispensationalists in particular), Marsden commented on the nature of their understanding, “They were absolutely convinced that all they were doing was taking the hard facts of Scripture, carefully arranging and classifying them, and thus discovering the clear patterns which Scripture revealed” (56). This exemplified a scrupulous dependence on modernism’s discovery method. Priscilla Perkins notes, that “the reading practices of lay fundamentalists are stubbornly rational, unmoved, at their most extreme, by metaphor, by ambiguity, or by the interpretive insights offered by personal experience. As [Lesslie] Newbigin writes, the fundamentalist ‘way of understanding the Bible can and often does lead to a kind of hard rationalism that is remote from grace....’” (Perkins 594).
While today many people think of Christian fundamentalists as moved by emotion, fear, faith, and assumption, the foundation of fundamentalism rests on Enlightenment rationalism. And while at first Christian fundamentalism was an attempt to unite Christians against the critiques of higher criticism, it eventually turned on itself to create divisions, varied denominations, and introspective self-assessments with rationalistic overtones and careful attention to detail that mimics scientific scrutiny.

In 1919, Jonathan Blanchard’s son, Charles, wrote the first doctrinal statement of the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association. The Main fundamentalist doctrines include:

- inerrancy of Scripture
- the Virgin Birth of Christ
- Christ’s substitutionary atonement
- Christ’s bodily resurrection
- authenticity of miracles
- premillennialism (in some lists)

Inerrancy of Scripture, while rooted in early church writings, is the most modernistic in its support. Marsden explains, “‘Inerrancy,’ which was to become a code word for much of the fundamentalist movement, had a scientific quality that was related to the view of truth as directly apprehended facts. It was vital to the dispensationalists that their information be not only absolutely reliable but also precise” (57). This set the stage for exact numbers and codes the dispensationalists found in Scripture to determine the times and interpret prophesy. While dispensationalism as a doctrine has declined to some
degree within fundamentalist/evangelical circles, the inerrancy concept remains as a benchmark for solidarity.\footnote{This has been recently challenged by the rise of postmodern thought in some Christian circles.}

Those who today refer to themselves as Evangelicals have taken up many of the concerns of Christian Fundamentalism. Technically speaking, they are Neo-Evangelicals, since those American Christians prior to Fundamentalism were also referred to as Evangelicals. Current Evangelicals are so closely connected to Fundamentalists that many in the media treat them as identical, particularly because of their mutual stance on issues such as abortion and authority of Scripture. Yet, (Neo)-Evangelicals, take a softer approach to interaction with secular culture and allow some flexibility within the movement on peripheral issues instead of attempting to unify all aspects of Christianity. They still embrace the fundamentals as laid out by the fundamentalist movement, but with more individuality and emotional freedom. In fact, the rise in popularity of Dwight L. Moody and Billy Graham is an indicator of the importance of individual decisions to be “saved” in contrast to a focus on church authority, without rejecting ecclesiastical authority. These evangelicals are more likely to be a part of composition classrooms in secular universities than are fundamentalists. They also may replicate a more expressivist proclivity toward writing, a composition approach which sprang up in the 1970s. Composition theorists recognize a reflection of this individualism in expressivist theory. Lizabeth Rand explains:

\begin{quote}
Our professional conversations have implied that older and less postmodern theories often sound too evangelical and therefore should be scorned. Probably the most vilified group in composition studies, the “expressivists,” helps to illustrate this point.
\end{quote}
Some theorists have seemed embarrassed by the religious nature of this school of thought. (Rand 354)

With the rise of social-epistemic theory and the rejection of expressivism, the religious student may feel further marginalized without understanding why.

Berlin clarifies this further when he explains his view that expressivism is Platonic, “Truth is conceived as the result of a private vision that must be constantly consulted in writing…as an expression of one’s unique voice….The purpose is to get rid of what is untrue to the private vision of the writer, what is, in a word, inauthentic” (Berlin, “Contemporary Composition” 772). This Neo-Platonic emphasis on truth and certainty through a subjective means of apprehending it is similar to evangelicalism. One could argue that it is Gnostic in a pre-Christian sense, but that connection is largely lost for both secular theorists and Christian students. Berlin states, “It should be noted that no member of this school [expressivism] is a relativist intent on denying the possibility of any certain truth whatever. All believe in the existence of verifiable truths and find them, as does Plato, in private experience, divorced from the impersonal data of sense experience” (772). Likewise, Evangelicals do not deny absolute truth, but they find it within individual “personal relationship” with God as well as through Scripture. Both Evangelicalism and expressivism imply universals. This is how God is apprehended, and this is how writing is apprehended, through the process of self-reflection and self-expression, which leads to a certainty and tends to objectify subjective truth by universalizing the process—everyone comes to God through introspection, or everyone has a writing voice that expresses the authentic self. For evangelicals, this is promoted through a “born again” experience; for expressivists, it happens through a “freewrite”
which captures the true, authentic voice. Put simply, the expressivist wants to promote a helpful or heuristic process for the individual or the classroom and the subjective writing experience connects with a universal understanding of what “rings true” which readers and other writers may apprehend. In the same way, Evangelicals “witness” to those around them in order to help others apprehend God in a similar way. This individualist, religious approach to composition further alienates the Christian within the composition classroom that has embraced a social theory of rhetoric and composition. This is not an inherent or inevitable result, but it is increasingly the situation in many composition classrooms.

Berlin (773-4) summarizes the historical changes within rhetoric and composition theory by first clarifying that Classical Rhetoric finds truth through rational means, or the dialectic approach. The early church struggled to recognize the classical approach as more than a focus on style. Positivist Rhetoric, such as that stemming from the Enlightenment, depends on accurate observation and understanding of sensory impressions. Religious students still manifest an overlay of positivist certainty particularly through the Fundamentalist movement but extending to Evangelicalism. A Neo-Platonic Rhetoric mirrors the finding of Truth when the individual discovers what rings authentic. Berlin insists that expressivists who rightfully critiqued and tweaked Current Traditional theories in the 1970s did not go far enough. He states, “In each case knowledge is a commodity situated in a permanent location, a repository to which the individual goes to be enlightened” (Berlin, “Contemporary Composition” 774).

Berlin explains his preferred theory, “Social-epistemic rhetoric views knowledge as an arena of ideological conflict: there are no arguments from transcendent truth since all

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5 His thoughts reflect a traditional definition of Classical Rhetoric.
arguments arise in ideology” (Berlin, “Rhetoric and Ideology” 489). Students of faith currently struggle against this relativistic, social-epistemic environment that breaks away from what is considered compatible with traditional religion. Social construction theory embraces a postmodern antifoundationalism and while some Christians value aspects of postmodernism, particularly those who experienced the recent rise and decline of the emerging church movement, many see postmodernism as an attack on Christianity. Christian students are caught between epistemological differences as they attempt to express their views within the university.

Since Christian thought and rhetoric have been so embedded in modernism, this shift is particularly difficult for Christians to maneuver leaving religious students frustrated and disconnected from their intended audience. Lizabeth Rand expresses concern over what the shift does for these students:

Because so many of our claims in composition studies have developed from postmodern theories of knowledge that often trouble those who argue from a Christian perspective, it will be useful to begin by taking into consideration the kinds of questions being raised by religious scholars and how we might gain a better understanding of their concerns. Their worries about the postmodern academy point to central tensions that surround public expression of faith—including the place of religious rhetoric in the classroom. Many of these scholars contend that postmodernists ignore religious identity: thus, in the name of “diversity” an entire subculture often gets silenced. (Rand 351)

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6 The emerging church (or Emergent church—the distinction is not critical to this discussion) promoted a focus on praxis, on spiritual story instead of doctrinal divisions, and embraced a postmodern critique of modernism’s reductionist influence on the church. Recent decline (as recent at 2009) indicates doctrinal and epistemological hurdles that hindered the movement once the first stages of change gave way to categorizations and doctrinal reformulations.
The silencing of students need not be a part of postmodern diversity. The next section examines modernism and postmodernism more closely within the classroom and their impact on both a Christian religious and a liberal secular perspective.
IV. MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM IN CHURCH AND ACADEMY

Modernism

In 1929, John Dewey’s *Reconstruction in Philosophy* described four changes that characterized modernity in contrast to pre-modern cultural traits:

- A focus on the natural instead of the supernatural
- A movement away from ecclesiastical authority in favor of individual observation to find truth
- A belief in progress, that the world is getting better
- A focus on experimental study and science to bring about progress (Middleton & Walsh 14)

With advances in medicine, such as Louis Pasteur’s vaccinations; with advances in technology, displayed in modern inventions such as the telegraph and soon to follow telephone; with advances in astronomy such as sending men to the moon, the veneration of science which produced these results seemed not only valid but the answer to all questions. Science could solve the problems of humankind; the evidence was overwhelming. The modern man “knows what he knows and he knows it with certainty because he knows it scientifically…all he needs is the courage to follow his reason” (Middleton and Walsh 14).

This positivism proved that the human race could progress with astonishing achievements. The world was becoming a better place, not through religion, but because
of the scientific method—touted as objective, reliable, shrouded in “common sense,” and independent of religious notions about revelations and spiritual content. Educators adopted an estranged stance toward religion, and in many cases education dissolved its previous academic connections to religious roots. The university became a place for professors to challenge religious ideas in a manner beyond the promotion of inquiry; they saw religion as adversarial to education. Religion is not science; therefore, it is not academic. Unlike the universals of scientific discovery, religious views could no longer be accepted as universally true.

Problems within the religious communities justified this disaffection. Similar problems produced by science—failed experiments, the use of the “good” of science to harm others—were viewed as mistakes or problems to be overcome as progress continued; while troubles within religious communities were seen through the lens of past abuses, overextended authority, and lack of scientific rigor. Since the church and the concept of progress did not appear to mix well, there seemed to be no rational room for religious views within modernity.

George Marsden recognized that this attitude solidified a chasm beyond simply trivializing religious views:

The negative treatment of religion in mainstream academic life is more substantially based, however, than the term “trivialization” suggests. Some of the rules of the academic game were shaped directly by the desire to exclude most religious perspectives. The reason was that Christianity had long been used as an instrument of rule in higher education; in order to reform education in the late nineteenth century Christianity had to be disarmed. (Marsden, *Outrageous Idea* 20-21)
He adds that one way this distancing was accomplished was through the Ninth Edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “This knowledge would be based on the uniform application of scientific method to all areas of inquiry….Scientific knowledge was universal and nonsectarian. Religiously based belief was parochial, sectarian and divisive” (21). He explains that at first the religion departments were to treat religion as a “source for inspiration going beyond science” while at the same time to examine religion as a “special field for scientific study.” This latter approach especially led to an ecumenical assessment of religion and allowed “little room for more traditional versions of religion” (21), eventually leaving those students who held traditions views marginalized.

Philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche who promoted a “God is dead” idealized reality, along with deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, became prominent in academia. As a result, within this environment, traditional Christianity responded with various apologetic approaches to address the new skepticism, atheism, and deconstructionism which threatened religious belief and minimized conventional religious views.

In light of the de-emphasis on the supernatural and church authority, modernism and religion appear to be on opposite ends of a knowledge spectrum. In fact, many clergy spoke out against modernism, seeing it as in opposition to, or in competition with, Christianity. Modernism became associated intrinsically with advancement in technology and reliance on human knowledge. Education ignored the supernatural, undermined the church’s authority, defined progress outside spiritual context, and made claims that undermined the Bible. Mankind was not going to hell after all; men were going to the moon.
Yet, if we define modernism with implied objectivism, along with embracing Common Sense Realism and a sense of proving what is true through rational means, we more easily observe Christianity’s close affiliation with modernity. Enlightenment philosophy became entrenched in both the Western secular and the Western religious worldviews; it rippled through both education and the church, producing a distorted, circus-mirror effect between church and academy.

This conservative Christian reverence for Cartesian rationalism is evident in the apologetics of John Mark Reynolds, professor of philosophy at Biola University. In his lecture “Christianity and the Problem of Popular Culture” he refers to the importance of thinking linearly in order to convert to Christianity. He proposes that engineers are the easiest to convert because of their rational approach to knowledge, and he states, “The simple gospel message actually depends on a highly complex socialized ability to follow an argument from ‘a’ to zed.” He adds, “We must do an entire pre-evangelism, almost a training in logic, before we can expect people to truly come to Christ” (Reynolds).

While not all Christians state this reliance on linear logic as explicitly as Reynolds does, Christian apologists seek to provide a counterpart—a cogent apology based on reason—to the modern academic interest in naturalist confirmation, and to show Christianity as consistent with the foundation of science. Darwin’s theory of evolution became prominent in secular education and heightened a religious interest in geology as it relates to creationism and the deluge recorded in the book of Genesis. This Christian rejoinder includes an interest in the relatively young science of modern archeology in order to confirm biblical references about ancient locations, societies and individuals.

The rational apologetic approach also employs a common sense component, expressed by
apologists such as C.S. Lewis who used it in his opening argument in *Mere Christianity* in which he appealed to the sensibilities of all humankind (although I will argue that Lewis’ writings show early postmodern characteristics as well⁷).

Evidentialism, an apology positioned on confirmation of facts, includes not only rationalism and science but also discovered evidence consistent with the Bible and Christianity. While involving archeology and geology, evidentialism has a particular interest in a judicial approach concerning reasonable proof, similar to the complexity of the modern justice system. Law Professor John Warwick Montgomery along with Josh McDowell, author of *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, promote this approach. First published in 1972, McDowell’s compilation of material from scholars and archeologists supports the Christian Scriptures. The title and approach are anachronistic, depending on a modern, court-room style precision; yet, this collection of research set the stage for an evidentialist and rationalist advancement in Christian apologetics; reinforced Enlightenment understanding within Christianity; and popularized rhetorical and apologetic efforts for the average conservative Christian.

Conversely, an apology grounded in revelation, called Presuppositionalism, employs evidences and reason but with a certainty grounded primarily through accepting revelation, not based on the probability of rhetoric or evidence. Cornelius Van Til, the primary name associated with Presuppositionalism, sparked criticism from other apologists insisting that his apology is based on circular reasoning; yet, presuppositionalists are quick to point to a priori assumptions for any foundation. This position embraces the Common Sense Realism of modernity instead of the positivistic

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⁷ Some of the apologists mentioned are neither fundamentalist nor evangelical but they still managed to have a significant impact, particularly on the evangelical movement. C.S. Lewis is one of them, as is Francis Schaeffer.
science of modernity. Proponents believe that Christian presuppositions are evident to all who do not suppress these truths. Van Til rejected any rationalistic approach based on probability such as Evidentialism; yet, his level of certainty matched, and even surpassed, that of other modern, positivist thinkers.

A defense based on faith, or Fideism, promotes personal confirmation of Christianity apart from reason, a position advanced by Sören Kierkegaard and Karl Barth who rejected modern rationalism and as a result were heavily critiqued by apologists such as Francis Schaeffer, who criticized their existentialism in his writings such as *Escape from Reason*, first published in 1968.

Some apologists attempt to integrate these various approaches, but they still remain under the umbrella of modern apologetics with Enlightenment underpinnings. Boa and Bowman put Schaeffer in the category of integration, possibly because of his interest in a holistic approach to culture, and his pursuit of inquiry and dialogue across ideological lines, but these apologists are generally unable to cross over to postmodernism, as Kierkegaard and Barth, and some of C.S. Lewis’ works, are able to do.

In the area of rhetoric and composition, modernism revealed itself within the arena as “Current-Traditional Rhetoric” or “Positivist Rhetoric” and later as “Expressivism.” Within these modernistic frameworks the focal points became proper grammar, correct format, and a finished end product which then morphed into process theory that exemplifies linear progress and self expression, as noted earlier. The appeal to credible, credentialed sources emphasized scientifically stimulated knowledge. James Berlin complains:
Current-Traditional Rhetoric truth is empirically based and can only be achieved through subverting a part of the human response to experience. Truth then stands forever, a tribute to its method, triumphant over what most of us consider important in life, successful through subserving writer, audience, and language to the myth of an objective reality. (Berlin, “Contemporary Composition” 777)

Much Christian education still operates within the Current-Traditional rhetorical or positivist mindset while many secular professors and classmates function within a social epistemic paradigm. Christian students may appeal to modernistic apologetic approaches which no longer hold the authority or sway which they once did. Until Christians acknowledge and address this underlying difference, the composition classroom becomes a place for frustration and disconnection concerning faith issues.

While Budziszewski and other Christians assume that nearly everyone is searching for truth in either an honest or a dishonest endeavor (as noted in a previous section), those around them may currently see language as epistemic within social constructs and as attempting not to seek truth as much as to make meaning through rhetoric, composition, and dialogue. One of the social constructs they may recognize and categorize is Christianity influenced by Cartesian thought. While Christians refer to the certainty of the truth they hold, looking to the Scriptures as authoritative and confirmed, as Bacon attempted, through discovery, others around them see certainty as a myth, and operate within a heightened understanding of probability with a particular awareness of other paradigmatic constructs.8

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8 This probability does not have the same focus as the evidentialist or scientific probability with certainty as the just-out-of-reach goal, but rather recognition of the myth of certainty.
The critique of Christianity within modernity from outside Christianity, however, is also hindered by misunderstandings. One of the provocative assessments of this topic of rhetoric and Christian fundamentalism is Sharon Crowley’s book, *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*, published by the University of Pittsburgh in 2006. Crowley creates an incomplete distinction between the liberal left as logical and focused on reason, facts and neutrality, while she sees the fundamentalist Christian Right as emotional and centered on belief/faith, appealing to revelation over reason.⁹

James Berlin agrees with Crowley’s assessment that liberalism is a child of the Enlightenment: “the unified, coherent, autonomous, self-present subject of the Enlightenment has been the centerpiece of liberal humanism” (Berlin, “Poststructuralism” 18). Neither seems to identify Fundamentalism as a related child of rationalistic Enlightenment thought. Even Presuppositionalism, which Crowley uses as an example of how Christian thought is based on deductive reasoning, is a modern construction. She states, “Conservative Christian theologians have long preferred deductive argument as a means of reasoning…Van Til, who died in 1987, was among a small group of influential American theologians whose beliefs about faith and reasoning undergird contemporary Christian fundamentalism” (Crowley 142). She does not acknowledge the competitive apologetic branches within Christianity that criticize such an a priori approach, and where inductive reason is particularly privileged. Her analysis misses Presuppositionalism’s dependence on modernism’s Common Sense and subsequent appeal to reason to support their presuppositions. Her comments suggest instead that they are Fideists. Crowley also inflates the influence of the

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⁹ Crowley does identify herself as an outsider to Fundamentalist Christianity and acknowledges that she may be returning the “favor of misrepresentation” (ix-x) to fundamentalists.
presuppositionalist approach on the conservative Christian movement. This gives the mistaken impression that fundamentalists and evangelicals are dependent on faith-based deductive reasoning. This dependence on faith is then viewed as lacking rigorous scholarship, or as being emotion-focused—an evaluation that relegates religious belief to a modernized inferior status.

Crowley continues: “In this deductive model of knowledge God stands in the place occupied by the individual subject in liberal thought, and he enters consciousness through the heart rather than by means of sensory experience, which is the ground of knowledge posited by liberalism” (144). While Crowley distances herself from modernistic liberalism in terms of a dependence on sensory experience, she maintains a modernistic liberal critique of conservative Christianity as do many of her colleagues.

In contrast, Kristen Hansen argues for a greater awareness of philosophical liberalism grounded in modernity, in relationship to rejecting religious expression in the classroom:

We have inherited from the founders of our nation a language that is no longer adequate for conducting our political affairs. This language, often called the discourse of philosophical liberalism, is inadequate because it does not allow for the expression of particular religious beliefs, which are, for many people, the basis for some important political decisions. Philosophical liberalism is the product of eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideals propounded by John Locke and others, who taught the separation of private and public, of subjective and objective knowledge. According to these ideals, objective knowledge is that which is universally available through the application of rational methods of discovering truth…these methods are basically scientific and mathematical; they are favored because, in theory, they produce
knowledge that is objective, or knowledge that can be quantified and reproduced.

(Hansen 27-28)

Hansen explains the value that the founders saw in using rationalism to make laws in a diverse country such as the United States. However, since they separated the public and private, and they saw science as objective and religion as subjective, the result was an eventual trivialization and even disqualification of religious views in public discourse. Now, with modernism in question, the ideal of objective truth or objective law is also in question. Hansen adds that religious students should not need to “disguise their moral convictions” or be asked to put them into words that please their secular counterparts (29). The liberal distinction between fact and value should now also be seen in its historical context in which science is viewed as the producer of fact and religion is wishful thinking.

Essentially, religion depended on subjective knowledge before the Enlightenment, and although there is significant value in rational religious exploration, educators must now recognize as valid other means of knowledge. If fundamentalists or other religious students are embracing the “heart” as Crowley suggests, why is this not a point for positive recognition? Many professors who have moved beyond modernistic liberalism still operate with an Enlightenment view of the separation of religious belief from public discourse; yet, shouldn’t this be reconsidered? While accepting the view that objectivity is a myth, the tendency of many is to still manage classrooms with a perspective that religious views must be hierarchically subjugated to other views. Concerned that religious students do not engage in marginalizing others, some instructors marginalize religious students while claiming objectivity towards religion.
In contrast to Crowley’s view that Christian fundamentalism is centered in the emotions, those more familiar with Christianity find that fundamentalists and evangelicals may experience what Leanne Payne refers to as a split between the head and the heart, in which an emphasis on rationalism can isolate the Christian from the heart.\(^\text{10}\)

Payne identifies the propositional approach of modernism as problematic for the Christian:

As twentieth-century Christians, we live in a materialistic age in which our systems of learning have long based their conclusions on scientific truth alone. The presuppositions of such systems have misled many generations of students…. Because of these intellectual blocks, we moderns have more difficulty with invisible realities…. Most Christians today suffer to one extent or another from the “post-Enlightenment” mindset—the Cartesian-Kantian split between thought and experience. (Payne 131)

She purports that modern Christians, because of their profound focus on reason (such as Reynold’s linear approach to knowledge), have difficulty integrating intuition and imagination with the more revered rationality (133). This assessment of fundamentalist thought contradicts Crowley’s secular appraisal concerning fundamentalists by recognizing the rationalistic foundationalism within the religious movement as a comparable equal to secular rationalism.

Although Schaeffer and others refer to integrating Christian thought, in contrast to Payne’s observations, they deplore what they saw as the “lost art” of reason. The lack of rational rigor in the church which disturbed apologists is only one side of the religious

\(^{10}\) While Crowley does not fully define “heart,” Payne uses the term to refer to emotions, imagination, intuition, symbolism, and subjective experience; in contrast to rationalistic, linear logic seen by moderns as “objective.” This definition appears to fit Crowley’s comments as well.
mindset. In contrast to this tendency by Crowley to conflate all religious thought into a non-rational view of knowledge, Payne recognizes the use of hyper rationalism within the religious community and laments the emotional and spiritual fallout. She identifies the need to include, even return to, intuitive knowledge. Integration in this framework is about restoring a holistic approach to religious knowledge instead of isolating reason as superior. Although Schaeffer’s book *Escape from Reason* identifies the problems of existential thinking, instead of integrating reason the result has been an escape to reason and a sacrificing of intuitive knowledge. Within modernity, the privileging of reason and the vacating of faith by redefining it was so prevalent that the religious community failed to recognize that while backing away from one cliff, they fell over another.

Secular modernists have spent significant amounts of time analyzing religion with this incomplete assessment from both theorists such as Crowley and Christian apologists such as Schaeffer. In understanding the problems of modernism as it impacts religious belief, it helps to realize that modernists base their critiques of religious concepts such as miracles on the ideal that science is the appointed critic, the examiner, the standard of evaluation. These assessments need to be reevaluated, and new appraisals considered in light of postmodern thought without the privileging of science.

In his book, *Losing Faith in Faith*, former Christian Fundamentalist turned atheist, Dan Barker, inadvertently displays how modernism falters as an effective base for evaluating certain types of knowledge. Barker collapses a fundamentalist religious view into primarily an emotional response instead of a rational one, as does Crowley. Baker’s book is centered on his own experience within Christian Fundamentalism, submerged within a positivist paradigm where reason appeared to be downplayed in comparison to
the rigorous analysis he discovered through modern atheism. In analyzing his own former experience, Barker includes a critique of what he now concludes is an irrational mindset. While attempting to expose contradictions in his chapter “Square Circles,” he inadvertently highlights the relationship that both Fundamentalism and his form of atheism have with modernity. He states:

To demonstrate my point I will often ask a Christian to produce a statement for me that is contradictory, just so we will know what we are talking about when we use the word “contradiction”…. For example, “This circle is a square” seems contradictory. But I have learned from Christians many ways to interpret a phrase to make sense. It could mean a circle of squares, or a square of circles. Or, in the original language the word “square” was used to refer to any bounded geometric object. Or, the circle is functioning in the place of a square temporarily….Or, the word “circle” is actually used in the general sense of “circling around” or encompassing, which is what a square can do…Or, the word “square” doesn’t really belong in this sentence; it goes chronologically with a previous sentence. Or, the term “square” is symbolic, like “the four corners of the earth.” (Barker 163)

While this sardonic approach holds humor for anyone who has witnessed equivocation, it fails to recognize the paradigm of Barker’s own perspective. This type of either/or rationalism is limiting instead of informative, often creating false dilemmas.11 As Marsden states, in recognizing the modernist’s standards in evaluating religious beliefs,

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11 The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy set forth by Evangelicals in 1988 includes a section on Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Interpretation in which they attempt to explain variables to address objections based on anachronistic assessments.
“It is as though, so far as religion is concerned, we are still at the high noon of the Enlightenment faith in science” (Marsden, Outrageous Idea 26).

Barker’s analysis mirrors the distrust often associated with hearing a rhetorician’s attempt to explain, mischaracterizing the sophist, by definition, as having underhanded motives. It also resists a holistic, scholarly approach to exegetical and hermeneutical possibilities in ancient manuscripts, and it does not take into account the intricacies and nuances unique to the ancient, Eastern paradigm. Nor does it recognize rhetorical techniques and literary devices within various cultures or languages or the degree with which the ancients were comfortable with exactness or the lack of precision. As Aristotle stated, “Precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions” and that “it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs” (Aristotle). A modernistic analysis of an ancient document must apply the level of precision common in that culture and the literary genre. Barker’s attempt to discredit what he formerly held to be true reveals that in order to critique Fundamentalism in this manner, he must remain within the same Enlightenment paradigm which embraces an absolutist either/or mentality along with a fastidious evaluation of Scripture, as mentioned earlier by Marsden as a characteristic of Fundamentalism.

Christian postmodernist Brian McLaren describes what he calls the “closed agnostic” as holding to a rationalist faith:

In a strange way, the closed agnostic exercises a fascinating kind of faith: faith in the unprovable hypothesis that religious faith is bunk, and faith that his preferred form of
rationalistic (i.e., arising from within the mind, with no outside revelation), empirical (i.e., knowable by one of the five senses) knowledge is the best, or only medium to be used to know anything worth knowing in the universe—another unprovable hypothesis. (McLaren 103)

J. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, authors of *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, note this same phenomenon—rationalism as faith: “Modern people have characteristically claimed to have entered a new stage in cultural evolution that left the childishness of faith behind. Nevertheless, the progress ideal [Dewey’s characteristic] functions as an article of faith…it bears striking resemblance to the role that ‘myths’ (or founding stories) play in premodern societies” (Middleton & Walsh 15).

Once this myth of progress is identified, it levels the philosophical playing field in the composition classroom. If religious students are using rationalism (as well as faith), and secular professors and fellow students are using faith (as well as rationalism), the dialogue can be formulated with that equivalence in mind. No longer depending on the justification that religion is subjective and secular sources of knowledge are objective, the secular classroom can allow the dialogue to reach new levels of interaction and consideration.

Additionally, this egalitarian reality and the myth of progress as a faith foundation are concepts which religious student recognize. They sense that their secular counterparts are equally enmeshed with faith in their own presuppositions. When secular students or professors do not recognize this similarity, students’ religious experiences are marginalized.
The above mentioned unexpected mix of rationalism and faith, from both a conservative Christian paradigm and a liberal or atheistic paradigm, is not the same as an integrated “head” and “heart.” Rather, this mix has traditionally created an antagonistic relationship, not only between the intuitive and the rational, but between the believer and the non-believer. This inadvertently spills into the composition classroom when religious students attempt to compose their thoughts as extensions of their beliefs, and professors and others critique them, and vice versa.

Non-Christians think of Christians as irrational; Christians think of non-Christians as irrational. Christians seem to operate on faith, yet it is often a diminished faith, focused more on belief in abstract propositions or doctrines with a modernistic certainty. Non-Christians also have faith of which Christians are well aware, but which don’t seem self-evident to non-Christians. These assumptions cloud communication, yet neither party is able to fully address them within the composition context, due to time constraints, and the still prevailing modern ideal of the separation of the “objective” and the subjective.

When McLaren reads the same Scriptures that Barker reads, but from a Christian postmodern perspective, he steps away from a rationalistic lens that attempts to force the text into an Enlightenment paradigm. As a result, he asks questions which will help both religious students and instructors see religion through a more social epistemic lens. He suggests:

If God is indeed having a real story unfold through history, then of course, the story has to 'happen' with freedom, and the reports of it have to come to us in their raw, unedited forms, warts and wrinkles, bizarre twists and unpredictable turns. And even if God were to edit the stories into a more 'acceptable' form, for which audience
would God edit them? For scientific, college-educated rationalists? (McLaren 231-232)

Instead of assuming, as Barker does, that rationalism is the measuring stick, McLaren identifies it as one lens for viewing the Scriptures (he mentions other lenses as well). Once rationalism is introduced as a lens, the conversation allows for other lenses, and the dialogue is no longer dependent on linear reasoning or on stale and outdated responses.

*Postmodernism*

Middleton and Walsh identify that “the onset of postmodernity could be described as the loss of enthusiasm in the grounding convictions of modernity” (11). This disillusionment with what modernism actually delivered—an uneasy uncertainty instead of the sought after assurance, a science that produced atomic bombs, medical complications from advanced agriculture technology—reached a saturation point. Process, objectivity, and the certainty of modernism were all myths. This prompted people to not simply look elsewhere for truth in yet another attempt to find a more accurate belief, but to abandon truth altogether. Kenneth Gergen confirms this in his book, *The Saturated Self*, where he states concerning the construction of self:

To the Modernist it seems utterly obvious that rationality guides most human action. In large measure these beliefs derive their credibility from the assumption that they are objectively true (or, in principle, can be proven so). We are not dealing here with doubts regarding claims about the truth of human character, but with the full scale abandonment of the concept of objective truth. The argument is not that our descriptions of self are objectively shaken but that the very attempt to render accurate understanding is itself bankrupt. (82)
In postmodernity, not only are philosophers mistaken about what is true; they have been mistaken about the nature of truth itself. Beyond this dislodgement of truth, postmodernism is divergent from modernism in that it no longer looks to science and reason for progress. Objectivity is dead, and common sense is no longer common. With considerations for global diversity, common sense differs depending on culture and other variables. Postmoderns live with a shaken certainty.

Postmodernism is, of course, not the opposite of modernism. It is also not necessarily post, or after, modernism. Middleton and Walsh explain that postmodernism can even be considered a hyper-modern or even an ultramodern extension of Baconian autonomy (Middleton and Walsh 41).\textsuperscript{12} Middleton and Walsh use the analogy that modernism was “the greatest show on earth” while postmodernism is “nothing but sideshows” (43). This dispersement can be traced through both the church and the academy. Postmodernism resists definition, but does maintain relative characteristics such as:

- A hermeneutic of suspicion (recall the confidence of Adam Kotsko that students today are not gullible).
- A relative or epistemic view of truth (which renders hermeneutics obsolete)
- The dethroning of certainty (replaced with modest probability)
- The suspicion of progress
- A focus on social construction instead of individualism
- The embracing of technology as a social dynamic, beyond a “tools” mentality

Berlin explains the influence of postmodernism in terms of current composition theory:

\textsuperscript{12} Some, such as Alan Kirby, claim that postmodernism is deceased, replaced with pseudo-modernism (Kirby).
Rather than truth being prior to language, language is prior to truth and determines what shapes truth can take. Language does not correspond to the ‘real world.’ It creates the ‘real world’ by organizing it, by determining what will be perceived and not perceived, by indicating what has meaning and what is meaningless. (Berlin, “Contemporary Composition” 775)

Middleton and Walsh explain this problem which stems from the certainty construct and the digression from modernity to postmodernity:

Although modernity has never been simply an intellectual movement, the modern project was predicated on the assumption that the knowing autonomous subject arrived at truth by establishing a correspondence between objectively “given” reality and the thoughts or assertions of the knower. To the postmodern mind, such correspondence is impossible, for we simply have no access to something called “reality” apart from the way in which we represent that reality in our concepts, language, and discourse….we can never get outside our knowledge to check its accuracy against “objective” reality. Our access is always mediated by our own linguistic and conceptual constructions….whether reality is mediated to us by our perspective or is purely a human construct, the naïve self-assured realism of modernity is impossible to the postmodern mind.

But not only is reality a human construct, it is more particularly a social construct. It is always someone’s or some group’s construction of reality that ends up being the dominant construction that guides social life. (31-33)

James Smith describes why there is a hermeneutic of suspicion: “There is no claim to truth that is innocent; there is no knowledge that simply falls into our minds from the sky,
pristine and untainted. What might be claims as obvious or self-evident is, in fact, covertly motivated by other interests—the interest of power” (Smith 86).

Within the modern church—just as in areas of science and psychology, where study becomes increasingly specialized—theologians also dissect and scrutinize, look for principles, weigh proof. As they became more dogmatically certain within their differences, an uneasy uncertainty emerged. Instead of finding objective Truth (the greatest show on earth), both church and academy became carnivalized into a spectacle once society realized just how much perspective, bias, culture, and a myriad of variables played important roles in what people thought of as Truth. This created a multitude of side shows, such as with the many Protestant denominations (which is evident within the nondenominational movement as well). As religious communities struggled to be the sole bearers of truth, those outside looking in saw the chaos, confusion, and inflated claims.

Gergen explains:

Modernism, then, served as an incubator for the multiplication of competing perspectives. And as perspectives become self-convincing, expansionary, hierarchical, and predatory, who was to declare the “really real”? Who could be trusted to rule among the antagonistic voices, and in whose terms was such a ruling to be justified? (87)

Postmodernism deconstructs objectivism and certainty, challenging progress and the reign of science; yet, it is a tentative construct itself. Postmodernism is a “critiquing vulture” but the minute it attempts to “land,” it takes on modernistic characteristics. Even

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13 Comparably, even with the disciplines of science, where academicians and experts attempt to control variables, truth can be too particularized to be universal.
deconstructionist Jacques Derrida noted, “[Deconstruction] cannot be radical because the value of radicality itself must be deconstructed…If one associated the value of radicality with deconstruction, it would do away with itself, would destroy itself, or would destroy all the securities we still need” (Derrida 15-16).

Elizabeth Flynn explores an important distinction between postmodernism and what she refers to as antimodernism—an attempt to establish the opposite of modernism. She does acknowledge the role of an antimodernist approach as a significant challenge to modernity’s authority and certainty. She states, “[Antimodernism] focuses attention on experience and nature, and thus provides alternatives to scientific and rationalistic ways of knowing….” Yet, she adds, “It is limited, though, by its relativism and its inability to generalize beyond the individual or the particular language community” (Flynn 543). She points out, however, that such a view does not remain relative and limited. Although promoting relativity, postmodernism begins to morph into a universal, and to declare certainties and progress in an attempt to defeat modernism. When this happens, an antimodern posture takes over. Antimoderns, in contrast to postmoderns, attempt to gather the multiple side shows into a different, even reactionary, “greatest show on earth.”

In contrast to a binary antimodern approach, postmodernists, Flynn states, “Often emphasize that there is no clear boundary between modernism and postmodernism….“ (544). She adds, “Postmodernism is valuable because it problematizes modernism and antimodernism without repudiating them entirely. It explores the limitations of rationality and empiricism and of irrationality and relativism and attempts to provide alternatives to them” (544). Postmodernism critiques, but refuses a claim. James Smith suggests that
“the best reading of [Michel] Foucault is to read him as a kind of closeted Enlightenment thinker; in fact, later in his work Foucault ‘comes out’ on just this point” in his lectures, *The Politics of Truth* (Smith 98).

Flynn further critiques the antimodernist approach:

Constructing postmodern composition as the binary opposite of modern composition…can result in either/or representations of work in the field….A recognition that modernism’s opposite is antimodernism rather than postmodernism allows for a conception of postmodernism as critiquing and questioning modernism and antimodernism rather than opposing them. (546)

Many religious students are caught in a vortex between modernism, antimodernism, and postmodernism. No longer are they in a world of competing truth-claims—and yet they are. But the disagreement is about the very nature of truth. Coupled with this, is the fact that much of what educators promote in the universities is not postmodernism, but anti-modernism. Educators often look at modernism as the folly they hope religious students soon outgrow. Yet, these students identify problems with postmodernism (or rather with antimodernism posing as postmodernism). The contradiction is not lost on religious students who can identify the overarching metanarrative of the antimodern perspective that claims to have no metanarrative. How can antimoderns, who are themselves socially situated within subjective perspectives, decide such a universal? In fact, religious students may simply and quickly dismiss what is referred to as postmodernistic critiques as self-contradictory.

Middleton and Walsh mention an additional problem with postmodernism:
A characteristic feature of postmodern debate in a variety of cultural arenas is the insistence on the hearing of alternative voices….Although this might at first appear to be a healthy opening up of our culture in such a way that the voiceless are finally heard, this opening up is something of a double-edged sword. When all those who were voiceless under modernity begin articulating their claims in a postmodern situation, the result is a bewildering cacophony. Psychologically, this cacophony can be confusing, disorienting and frightening. (13)

Westphal refers to this disorientation as the vertigo of relativity (Westphal, “Whose Community” 43). This is particularly difficult for religious students to understand when they are, on the one hand, told implicitly or explicitly that their views are not welcome, while at the same time told they must welcome all views. A new category of the “voiceless” emerges. The tendency of academia in such an environment is to remove an absolutist view—seen as intolerant—out of circulation entirely. In response, religious students may increase efforts linked to modern methods in order to avoid being further removed from the conversation as not having a valid view. They are often caught in the vortex as clinging to modern apologetic methods in order to provide validation and to avoid this relegation to the sidelines—this dismissal of their views. They inadvertently defend not only their religious views, but the very modernistic foundationalism currently rejected by academia.

Because the Christian community fails to see the intricacies of this dilemma, they compensate by providing blanket objections to postmodernism. For example, J. Budziszewski supplies this summary of postmodernism:
A postmodernist thinks truth is fragmented. He doesn’t believe in a truth that’s the same for everyone, he believes in “stories” or “narratives” or “discourses” that are different for every group. One race tells a story about pioneers carving out civilization from the wilderness; another tells one about another race taking over their land. One religion tells one about God saving man; another tells one about man saving himself. It you try to ask, “But shouldn’t we find out whether any of these stories is true?” the postmodernist will mutter something about “people who want to impose their stories on others.” (52)

This kind of Christian dismissal of postmodernism leaves students in a psychological bind. They see the problems with the statement that all truth is relative as a self-refuting position, but they also see universal subjectivity. Additionally, they may become increasingly aware of the value of stories, narratives, and discourses, once they begin to recognize the reductionist nature of modernized Christianity. The Bible is filled with stories, narratives and discourses. Why reduce these to the points of fundamentalism and miss the characteristics that postmodernism attempts to recover as significant components of knowledge development?

In the face of the modern/antimodern/postmodern vortex, James Smith established postmodernism as complimentary to Christianity. Smith, influenced by Francis Schaeffer’s L’Abri Fellowship where intellectual pursuits were encouraged within social dialogue, disagrees with the often negative Christian critique of postmodernism. He claims, “while postmodernism may be the enemy of our modernity, it can be an ally of our ancient heritage” (Smith 23). He sees Derrida’s deconstructionism as a way to

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14 Smith renders “thanks and honor to Schaeffer’s legacy—even if I might take that legacy in directions that Schaeffer would not” (Smith 12). He states that it is “necessary to confront a latent modernism in Schaeffer’s own construal of Christian faith as a ‘system of truth’” (27).
embrace community as interpreter of Scripture. He lauds Lyotard’s “incredulity toward metanarratives” as a reminder of the “narrative character of Christian faith, rather than understanding it as a collection of ideas.” Foucault’s “power is knowledge” is a reminder to the church of the “cultural power of formation and discipline” (Smith 23). In contrast to Reynolds’ appeal to linear logic, Smith expresses concern that, within modernity, “Christianity becomes intellectualized rather than incarnate, commodified rather than the site of genuine community” (29).

He suggests an alternative perspective to Budziszewski’s:

Christians who become skittish about the claim that everything is interpretation are usually hanging on to a very modern notion of knowledge, one that claims something is true only insofar as it is objective—insofar as it can be universally known by all people, at all times, in all places. (Smith 48)

Smith explains that this focus on objective truth misses the focus on the gospel narratives found in the New Testament. Modernized Christianity sees the gospel as “objectively true and thus capable of rational demonstration. (Classical apologetics buys this epistemology, or theory of knowledge). If we say that the gospel is an interpretation, then it is not objectively true in the traditional or modern sense of being self-evident or universally demonstrable” (48). He continues, “If the interpretative status of the gospel rattles our confidence in its truth, this indicates that we remain haunted by the modern desire for objective certainty” (51). As stated earlier, within this confusion about objective and relative truth, students may be caught defending a modern construction of their religion instead of dialoguing from their religious position. Even if religious students hold to a universal metanarrative, within the context of the conversation with
secular counterparts, they can speak from their paradigm into the dialogue as long as they are given that permission to speak and as long as they do not hinder someone else's opportunity to speak. Tolerance of people is not the same as embracing their ideas. Education encourages the ability to fully examine thoughts without necessarily accepting them.

Budziszewski adds this additional objection concerning certainty, “Just as most people don’t mean it when they say there isn’t any truth, most people don’t mean it when they say that it might exist but can’t be found. What they’re usually trying to say is that it can’t be found with certainty—that no matter what someone thinks, someone can always doubt. That’s true but so what?” (Budziszewski 86).

Yet, the “so what” does become critical for religious students (his readership) attempting to communicate in a secular environment. One of the strongest objections to religious views is the certainty that exaggerates reality. Merold Westphal provides another perspective: “Postmodern philosophical theology can serve the life of faith as theology in general aspires to do when it understands itself as ‘faith seeking understanding’ which is not the same as faith seeking security by going beyond itself to absolute knowledge” (Westphal, “Postmodernism” 127).

Augustine’s “faith seeking understanding” provides a bridge inside the classroom for Christian students within a secular environment. This supplies the rough, tentative framework of a bridge for dialogue. This is not unlike social-epistemic theory in which meaning is created through community. Too often an absolutist mentality serves to frustrate dialogue, and works against recognition of the filters that we all experience. Faith seeking understanding positions religious students within their faith, not asking
them to dismantle their beliefs at the university doorways, yet it allows for a bridging of the divide between them and their professors and other classmates.

But first, the issue of faith will be explored further in relationship to reason since both religious communities and academic communities cling to a modernist concept of faith. This then impacts religious students as they attempt to straddle both worlds. While postmodernism provides a helpful critique of modernism and opens a space for the voiceless to be heard, the inclusion of religion into composition spaces for dialogue is incomplete. Instead of welcoming religious dialogue, the tendency is to make it invisible, similar to modernism’s dismissal of religion as too subjective in light of “objective,” academic knowledge. Now, religious views are considered too absolutist to be included in the epistemic, paradigmatic shifts.

Exploring the epistemology of faith welcomes the religious student, even those who still have a proclivity for modernistic foundationalism, to further embrace faith as a valid means of knowing. The topic of “faith” also provides a chance for the secular participants to reevaluate their modernist tendency to dismiss religion and faith from the dialogue, and to begin seeing religion as a contributor to knowledge for many students. Science and reason are no longer viewed as objective; should religious faith still be subjugated to a lower hierarchical position? Yet, composition spaces must reflect this new understanding, and a discussion of faith is a place to begin. From that discussion, students and professors may better build bridges without some of the hindrances to mutual understanding.
V. FAITH AND REASON

One of the ramifications of passing through the Enlightenment is that both religious students and secular educators carry away from that passage some confusion about the relationship between faith and reason. For those particularly immersed in Cartesian rationalism, the concept of faith is not easily comprehensible or valued; faith becomes an enigma. If reason, and by extension scientific inquiry, is the hermeneutical foundation for finding truth or staking truth claims, as it became during the Enlightenment, faith converts to a weak substitute, even an absurd endeavor. Such a position characterizes faith as blind, illogical, against the evidence, a reassurance for the uneducated. For religious students in educational settings who are attempting to preserve what they call their “faith,” the challenge is to hold on to faith on the one hand, and watch it being leveraged against by all that they are learning on the other hand.

Vander Lei and Fitzgerald identify another of the “secular ideologies of religion” as “the assumption that religious faith and intellectual pursuits are at odds with one another” (186). This is not unlike the attitude, coming from fundamentalism, towards education. Neither side is currently engaged in bridge building.

Educators, even those with no religious affiliation, could benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of faith for the purpose of better serving religious students. In order to accommodate issues of faith in the lives of students in the classroom, some understanding of faith is essential. They may also identify the overlap of faith in secular
ideology. There is, as mentioned earlier, a certain faith in reason. Yet, viewing reason without the invisible faith component is not problematic for a society saturated with rationalism. Educators often have an adequate grasp of reason, but faith is considered outside the realm of academia. As implied by Hansen earlier, this separation is a tenet of modernism. She highlights the fact that eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideals “taught the separation of private and public subjective and objective knowledge.” Modernists thought of objective knowledge as universal and, through rational means, could become available to everyone. Yet, on the other hand, “Religious knowledge is consigned to the realm of the private because it is not obtained through the application of rational methods, but rather through divine revelation, from sacred texts and sanctioned authorities. Moreover, religious knowledge is apparently not universal, or else all would have the same religious beliefs” (Hansen 27-28).

This dichotomy of objective/subjective knowledge is particularly pronounced when approaching the faith issue. The false distinction of objective and subjective knowledge, and the minimization of the subjective in relationship to faith becomes problematic for both religious students and those addressing religious inquiry. As shown through the discussion of apologetics, religious academia strives to provide an objective foundation, the same foundation as secular knowledge. Instead, with the foundation shattered, educators must also reconsider the miss-application of foundational critiques to religion.

A post-Cartesian distinction must be made between religious beliefs thought by adherents to be objective, and a fair evaluation of religious beliefs. In other words, even though much of Christianity’s expression remains as terminology shrouded in objective belief, this does not give permission for dismissing or marginalizing students’ expression
of those beliefs even in modern terms. Even though religious knowledge is no longer viewed as universal, so also is all knowledge no longer viewed as universal. While most religions believe in a metanarrative, imposing another metanarrative to religious views is an absolutist critique. If the playing field is leveled by postmodernism, religious faith can no longer be relegated to the subjective other. The attempt to subjugate religious views is a marginalizing approach to faith and to students of faith.

In referring to faith, a distinction between faith in terms of dogma, and faith in what the dogma represents is essential. For example, some refer to “my faith” as a set of beliefs such as (in Christian terms): belief in the Trinity, belief that Jesus is the Son of God, etc. Faith may also be all-encompassing or holistic, more than “beliefs about” something, but a “participation in.” Faith becomes intertwined within the believer, in addition to the propositional faith of dogma.15

Elizabeth Vander Lei, in her article, “Coming to Terms with Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom” flirts with this distinction in explaining why she refers to the issue of “faith” instead of “religion” in the classroom:

Because religion, while it may shape the practice of academic institutions, doesn’t enter most of our classrooms—personal faith does. Faith comes in with the people who populate a composition class, and they carry faith in a variety of ways.

She then broadens the usual understanding of how faith enters the classroom and who brings it in:

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15 I am not attempting to make the distinction between students who are religious and students who are spiritual. While the distinction has some value, there is a tendency to think of those who hold traditional religious views as not being truly spiritual, just dogmatic. Instead, I believe we should consider that those students also may be spiritual. Here, I make a distinction between faith as a set of beliefs (dogma) and faith as active and intuitive.
Some carry faith as unexamined warrants. Some bring faith as a skeleton in their psychological closet, one they’d rather not acknowledge but can’t quite seem to escape. Some bring faith as an acknowledged and well-developed worldview that shapes the claims they make and the goals they set for their writing. For some, faith is a set of nagging questions or haunting suspicions. For others, it registers most strongly as doubt or vilification of particular religious dogmas or religion in general. Religious faith for some functions as a self-imposed filter, a safeguard against “damaging” or “corrupting” ideas or maybe against change of any kind at all. (6-7)

With this analysis, she does not actually neutralize faith as much as she exposes it as a factor that influences and shapes even secular educators and students. The current attitude, however, is that secular individuals are allowed to bring their faith views into class while religious students are not. Recognizing this disparaging attitude invigorates the longing for new and better dialogue bridges.

*Defining Faith*

What exactly is faith? This question matters in the composition classroom because students refer to faith in their writing and in their conversations. Religious students refer to it with credibility in mind. They see it as some sort of substantial aspect, and even as “evidence” of what is true. Sometimes it becomes simply the trump card for believing what they believe.

We can also observe that some, in an attempt to define faith, mix reason with even the definition. Marsden, in describing Scottish Enlightenment Common Sense, quotes Mark

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16 I use the word “religious student” repeatedly in this project to imply that much of what is proposed here about Christianity can apply to other religions and other religious students as well. I do not use it as a contrast to the concept of “faith” as does Vander Lei, though I believe her distinction is valid as well.
Hopkins as saying, “Faith—that is, the faith of the New Testament—is not simple belief. It is confidence in a person, and that confidence is never given except on rational grounds” (Marsden, *American Culture* 17). In this way, Hopkins mixes in rationality as essentially foundational to faith in a person. Apologist Kenneth Boa states, “Faith in the biblical sense is not based on our feeling and opinions or on those of others but on the authority of divine revelation.” Then he switches to reason, “Since the heart cannot rejoice in what the mind rejects, it is important to understand that biblical faith is not a leap into the dark but a step into the light. It is a faith founded on fact, and there are credible answers to the intellectual barriers that are often erected against Christianity” (Boa 260).

This attempt by religious apologists to provide a rational foundation for faith is effective to some degree but it tells us more about reason than about faith. As noted earlier, in answering modernistic critics of religious faith, apologists find a way to preserve faith through rational and evidential means. Yet, to define faith by falling back on the foundation of reason, is really not defining faith but rather avoiding a definition.

It is no wonder, with this enigma about faith and reason, that Christian students face a confusing and exhaustive task if they attempt to discuss their beliefs and positions at the university or through their writing. While they may not be completely aware of the intricacies of these dilemmas, they do sense the difficulty of their situation. Some feel compelled to share their beliefs, yet also feel ill-equipped to do so.

J. Budziszewski, reminds us that faith is a component in every position. “The plain fact is that unless you have *some* faith, you can’t reason even an inch. Unless you have *some* trust, you can’t even decide what to doubt. You have to believe something in order
to know anything. *Even atheists have faith.* They take it on trust that matter is all there is. I think that’s an error—but it’s faith” (84-85).

At least we can conclude, in place of a definition of faith, that if Christians are illogical, so are atheists. If Christians enjoy a blindness, atheists are similarly blind; if they trust in something other than reason as a way to apprehend reality, so do atheists. They may not all be jumping off at the same side but they are all jumping off the cliff—making the leap. Yet, implicit in this critique, helpful as far as it goes, is the idea that faith, in our current climate, is inferior no matter who engages in it.

Dictionary definitions reveal that the word “faith” requires classifications ranging from trust, allegiance or loyalty, to belief in religious dogma to believing in something without proof. How the term is used requires particular distinctions in the secular classroom. If religious students are using the term to mean trust or dogma and professors and other participants are using it with a connotation of believing in something without proof, confusion and misunderstanding are natural byproducts.

For the Christian student it seems logical and reasonable to rely on the definition of faith found in the book of Hebrews in the Christian New Testament. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV). Matt Slick provides a translation from the Greek as, "Now faith is the reality of things being hoped for, the proof of things not being seen" (Slick).

Renowned biblical commentator Matthew Henry (1662-1741) supplied this commentary of Hebrews 11:1, “It [faith] is a firm persuasion and expectation, that God will perform all he has promised to us in Christ….Faith proves to the mind, the reality of things that cannot be seen by the bodily eye.” (Henry). Like other commentators, Henry
moves quickly from a definition of faith to what faith is supposed to do, yet neither referring to faith as a firm persuasion nor as a proof to the mind is fully satisfying. The first requires only an acceptance that something is true, a proposal prompting a multitude of rational objections. The second, a reference to “proof” is an offense to the modern mind which demands evidence and significant examination and controlled observation. It also puzzles the postmodern mind which scoffs at an attempt at proof.

Ray Stedman presents a more recent commentary, published by InterVarsity Press, a Christian publishing house specializing in material for college campuses. Stedman states, “Faith, according to the NIV text, is always two things: (1) a sense of assurance within us (being sure of what we hope for) and (2) a certainty that there are realities which we cannot see with our physical eyes (certain of what we do not see)” (Stedman, italics in original). This commentary provides a more nuanced interpretation that takes into account more current concerns. This reference to assurance is not the same as modern proof, and the attempt at certainty carries an implied possibility. While it does nothing to prove Christianity for modernity, it allows for the reasoned admission that there could be a reality that we cannot see, that there is a possibility of assurance outside the realm of science and evidence—a reality not detectable through our usual means of verification. This approach to faith is where both religious students and those engaged with them can find a place for conversation. It rejects the notion that faith is about dogma, and accepts possibilities beyond Baconian or evidentialists proofs. Stedman connects the dots between the visible and the invisible: “The statement what is seen was not made out of what was visible constitutes a scientific truth which modern physicists recognize: behind everything
visible is invisible energy. Faith in God’s revelation is a way of grasping reality, without necessarily comprehending all the steps that may be involved” (Stedman).

The problem with using this verse in the book of Hebrews to explain the meaning of faith today is that the context of the writing of the New Testament was far removed from a western paradigm. How can faith be substance, evidence, or certainty in a culture which thrives on reason (modernism) and uncertainty (postmodernism)? It must be noted that “certainty” and “evidence” in the New Testament are not the same as our concepts of certainty and evidence today. Yet, students’ hasty reliance on a definition from a source not recognized by others in the classroom, from a time period disconnected to current cultural nuances, may be perplexing without further cultural connectors. Understanding the original context reveals distinctions that may not transport well from the New Testament to today’s context, without exploring epistemological differences.

As mentioned earlier, the Greek rhetorical term for “persuasion” and the Christian word for “faith” are the same: *pistis* (Kinneavy 3). James Kinneavy concludes:

The fact is that of the six component meanings that *pistis* had in the Greek rhetorical tradition, all six are incorporated into the Christian concept of faith. These six are the categories used in the classifications of the rhetorical situation: Faith is a free decision change (a conversion), faith embodies a measure of uncertainty, faith is a belief in the credibility of the source of the message (ethical argument), faith is a belief engendered by a promise of some good or threat of some evil (pathetic argument), faith is a belief engendered by a rational cause (logical argument), and faith can be a belief engendered by an outside cause (extrinsic argument). Across the entire New
Testament, there is no doubt that the concept of faith generally carries these component meanings. (134)

Instead of a modernized dogma, faith in the particular Christian sense is a rhetorical composite. Brian McLaren goes further in attempting to define faith for postmodernity where a hermeneutic of suspicion leaves faith in a negative light: “Faith is a state of relative certainty about matters of ultimate concern sufficient to promote an action” (McLaren 31). Yet, he adds clarifying distinctions between “good faith” and “bad faith.” He explains bad faith as:

- Based solely on unquestioned authority
- Based on pressure or coercion
- Often the result of psychological need for belonging
- Appeals to self-interest and base motives
- Arrogant and unteachable
- Dishonest—for example, protects religious corruption
- Apathetic—beliefs without action
- A step backwards—into a superstitious version of religion

Many non-religious people make the assumption that all faith contains at least some of the above characteristics of bad faith. Besides a rationalistic stance against faith, these elements of bad faith cast faith dialogue into such a negative light that the barrier is enormously difficult to overcome. Yet, McLaren also includes characteristics which he describes as good faith:

- Humble, teachable, and inquisitive—not focused on being “right” but on learning (faith seeking understanding)
- Grateful—for what is understood and for the learning process
- Honest—about various levels of certainty in a faith journey
- Communal—recognizing our limited understanding outside of community
- Active—faith is expressed through actions, helping others, etc.
- Tough—does not cave in to adversity
- Relational—instead of proposition focused (McLaren 34-41)

McLaren challenges a linear, dogma-centered faith. He states, “Some concepts or theories can be entered into via linear argument, from A to B to C, and so on. But some conceptual frameworks—we could call them worldviews or paradigms—are systems unto themselves, and in that way, they do seem circular from the outside. One can make an approach from the outside, but the only way in is to jump in (hence the phrase, “leap of faith”) and test them out from the inside” (41-42). While this explanation is not accepted in the empirical modernistic approach to reality, since the gaps in that approach are now obvious, this sort of faith leap does not seem so preposterous or foreign to those for whom rationalism has its own limits.

Chris Anderson defines faith as “intuiting the inexplicable and of making a leap that cannot be justified to anyone who hasn’t made that leap” (Anderson qtd. in Williams 107). While the modernist resists this kind of non-foundational approach, postmodernism reminds us that there is no true rational foundation and we all view the world through various lenses. Faith becomes a different lens without dependence on rationalism as the determinant lens.

M. Jamie Ferreira explores the idea of “leap” in the article “Leaps and Circles: Kierkegaard and Newman on Faith and Reason” in an attempt to show the similarities
between Sören Kierkegaard and John Henry Newman in relationship to faith. Ferreira states, “Kierkegaard’s idea of the ‘leap’ may be just another idiom for Newman’s idea of the informal reasoning preceding religious assent” (Ferraira 379). Ferreira questions the use and misuse of the concept of a “leap in the dark” and refers to this idea as a misreading of Kierkegaard. Evidentialists often argue along the lines that faith is “not a leap in the dark, but a step into the light,” a primarily rational position with support, as Boa shows earlier. Ferreira quotes Newman for further explanation about what leads to religious transition or conversion:

It is by the strength, variety, or multiplicity of premises…by objections overcome, by adverse theories neutralized, by difficulties gradually clearing up, by exceptions proving the rule, by unlooked-for correlations found with received truths…by all these ways, and many others, it is that the practiced and experienced mind is able to make a sure divination that a conclusion is inevitable, of which his lines of reasoning do not actually put him in possession. (Newman qtd. in Ferraira 385)

Newman refers to this as a “critical threshold,” similar to a boiling point, and the result of “trained imagination” (386). Ferraira goes on to state, “This alerts us to the kind of continuity at work, the way in which the qualitative shift is nevertheless anchored in what precedes it without being its cumulative automatic result” (386). Instead of the cumulative, quantitative evidence (although that is an aspect), or the presuppositions from revelation (although they may be in play), Ferraira explains, “The qualitative shift is explicitly attributed to imagination: it is the ‘trained imagination’ (315) which can see all that is embodied and implied in what is nevertheless an incomplete proof according to…

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17 Both Kierkegaard (a Lutheran) and Newman (a Catholic) addressed the problem of rationalism as a foundation.
demonstrative or purely logical standards.” Thus, it is described by Kierkegaard as a leap. Ferraira continues, “This concurs with his [Newman’s] conclusion that certitude ‘does not come under the reasoning faculty; but under the imagination’” (Ferraira 383).

With this in mind, faith is not an irrational leap for at least some faith communities or individuals, but one that is supported by more than rationalistic notions of certainty. Faith is much more complex than the strawman characterized by both the religious and the academic worlds. Kennedy’s description of Origen’s approach to Christianity fits into this same understanding. He states:

The truth of the Christian message is seized by the soul without reasoning about it. This apprehension is then strengthened and explored by study of Scripture, where meaning exists at an immediate and logical level, but where there are one or more parallel higher levels of meaning that the Christian can hope to perceive. Such a view opens the floodgates of mysticism and allegory but is inconsistent neither with Christian rhetoric as it had earlier been defined nor with the use of myth in the works of Plato, which Origen knew well. Origen’s three levels of interpretation might be renamed the logical, the ethical, and the emotional. In that case, they can be thought of as hermeneutic counterparts of Aristotle’s logos, ethos, and pathos, the modes of rhetorical persuasion. Origen’s emphasis on seeking God’s intent in the text rather than in the literal meaning can be compared to that part of stasis theory in rhetoric that explored the issue of the intent versus the letter of the law. (Kennedy 159)

This focus on intent provides Christian students an alternative hermeneutic to the “plain meaning” associated with the perspicuity of the Scottish Enlightenment. The use of myth is revisited through the works of C.S. Lewis, professor of classical literature,
who likened Christianity as myth that became fact in the events recorded in the gospels. Duncan Sprague clarifies the difference between Lewis’ view of myth and fundamentalism’s view in “The Unfundamental C. S. Lewis: Key Components of Lewis’s View of Scripture”:

The interaction of myth with the imagination was particularly important to Lewis. This involved the belief that Myth in general is not merely misunderstood history…not diabolical illusion…nor priestly lying…but, at its best, a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination…. I would say that he views myth as a story that could be and might be true, but does not need to be historically or scientifically true because it is meant to communicate something bigger than history or science. (Sprague)

While Kierkegaard and Newman define faith as embodied imagination, it was C.S. Lewis who was able to demonstrate an apologetic of imagination. Lewis has often been referred to by Christians as the “apostle to the skeptic” \(^{18}\) but his contribution is more along the lines of imagination. As stated earlier, the gulf between the rational mind and the intuitive, imaginative “heart” is significant for many modern religious people. Lewis’ realization of the difference between thinking about a concept rationally and experiencing or knowing non-rationally the same concept “flashed a new light on my whole life.” He explains further: “As thinkers we are cut off from what we think about…you cannot study Pleasure in the moment of the nuptial embrace” (Lewis qtd. in Payne, Real Presence 149).  

\(^{18}\) In 1998, a Christianity Today poll named Lewis the most influential theological writer of the twentieth century. In 2001 the same publication referred to him as “the 20th century’s greatest Christian apologist.” While some of his apologetics have come under fire, it is his imaginative works that remain consistently influential.
Payne elaborates on Lewis’ views: “Plain, rational abstractions about truth are not truth” (149). This concept highlights the difference between faith as dogma and holistic faith. Fundamentalists and other religious moderns focus on the abstraction about truth, such as doctrine or scientific fact, which leaves both the religious and nonreligious floundering to understand while experiencing a chasm between the mind and heart. Lewis was not concerned with the “plain meaning” of the text and, like many postmodernists would later embrace, he saw the value of meaning through “story”; not simply meaning captured in the story, but meaning created by the story—or epistemologically. Lucy, the young girl in Lewis’ stories, was drawn into a book in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* from *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. Instead of simply reading the words linearly, she became a part of the story as it engulfed her and she began to experience the narrative (Lewis, *Voyage* 136).

*Perelandra*, Lewis’ second book of his science fiction trilogy is about a new world (Venus) and the newly created Green Lady, who is quickly discovering her surroundings. She approaches her discoveries in a non-analytical way. Though she is intelligent, a visitor from earth considers her to be an idiot (Lewis, *Perelandra* 55). Employing the use of imagination, Lewis is able to underscore the fallacies of an overly analytical mind as he describes rationalism as “walking alongside” oneself. The Green Lady, puzzled, tells the earthling, “I have never done it before—stepping out of life into the Alongside and looking at oneself living as if one were not alive. Do they all do that in your world?” (60). This assessment of the overtly logical returns throughout Lewis’ fiction in his formation of different characters. In this way, Lewis emphasizes the misrepresentation of reality centered on only one type of knowledge.
In Magolda’s study of the development of contextual knowledge for college age students, she relates how one of her subjects, Mark, describes his relationship with analytical knowledge:

I can see it [rationality, intellect] as a tool, a really sharp knife I can use to slice some things that are of importance to me. If you are using it constantly, 100%, you are cutting yourself off from yourself; you don’t really understand who you are, and then you can’t relate to others except the intellectual (sic). (Magolda)

He adds that in order to be relational and spiritual he must “let the knife of intellect slip from my hand” (Magolda). Instead of this admission indicating that the spiritual or the religious is not intellectual as Schaeffer addressed and other moderns had supported, it is recognition of what Lewis (who defended spiritual concepts intellectually) knew: rationality is a poor conduit for spirituality.

In the last book of the trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis portrays the character MacPhee as annoyingly rationalistic, yet Lewis includes in another character’s description of MacPhee the assessment that “he [MacPhee] is our sceptic; a very important office” (Lewis, *Strength* 184). Instead of the stance of anti-rationalism, he provides a measured inclusion of rationality. In *Till We Have Faces*, the much-loved, wise character of Fox is the embodiment of rationalism; Fox turns out to be both correct and mistaken at the same time in the wisdom he dispenses (Lewis, *Faces*). Similarly, the Green Lady, uncontaminated by the overtly rational, challenged secular and religious modernism—both distanced from imagination—by displaying intelligence and knowledge through the experiential reception of intuitive knowledge, which could also be described as faith. Lewis, throughout both his fiction and his nonfiction, skillfully moves
between the rational mind and the intuitive, inviting his readers to merge the two in order to follow his progress and as a way to capture integrated knowledge.

McLaren describes a schema for faith that passes through stages of simplicity, complexity, perplexity, and humility. In the first stage, simplicity, certainty is strong and beliefs are rigid. Complexity brings with it a mellowing with doubts, and perplexity embraces those doubts. Humility is a place to integrate experience, doubts, and complexity with belief. McLaren explains:

When a person begins to outgrow Stage 1 faith, it feels like doubt. Then, appropriating a Stage 2 faith feels like finding faith again—and that feeling of satisfaction and renewal lasts until Stage 3 is knocking at the door. Most people don’t know there is a more advanced stage waiting outside the door, so to them, this knocking feels dreadful, disloyal, dangerous. Most of us fight it and try to avoid answering the door as long as possible. It feels like the end of faith, not the beginning of a new stage, when the knocking of doubt begins. Even when Stage 4 knocks, Stage 3 usually only lets go after a fight. (McLaren 71)

This faith-wrestling that students, like anyone else, engage in should not be taken lightly or easily dismissed as simplistic thinking. This is a complex, complicated process that the university can aid or hinder. It is also not reserved for only religious students, but is the process that we each must face at some time in some capacity. Magolda notes that this type of process is similar to college age and post college age development. She identifies four dynamics in college graduates still in their twenties: “initial post-college success, dissonance, learning to listen to internal cues, and the need to act on internal cues” (Magolda) which mirror McLaren’s thoughts about the development of faith. She
suggests that college students are in the process of learning to “manage ambiguity, continuous change, and multiple interests in a collaborative way” (Magolda). If professors can recognize that religious students are facing the same development as other students, yet in a context which hinders them from exploring alternate views, some measure of understanding can more easily be extended.

Students may come into the classroom with a stage 1 faith. This provides a counterpart role for professors to either perceive that faith as simplistic and anti-intellectual, or to see this struggle as a part of a processing of faith and of personal growth. Instructors must not view their job as a means to shatter or disregard a parental-led or parental-fed faith in their students. Powell reminds us about such opportunities: “While his [the student’s] faith is modeled on the faith of his parents, it does in fact have its own genuineness. It is a fragile but real beginning” (Powell 156). Professors should provide opportunity for growth, even if the result is the growth of student-chosen faith, qualified by McLaren’s nuanced definition of “good faith” and in light of Magolda’s reference to developmental processes for the college and beyond age groups.

Lizabeth Rand clarifies this function and responsibility with the comments: “It is not our disapproval of oppressive Christian religious practices that I question: it is the way we call upon metaphors so precious to many devout people. We trivialize faith when we imply that to believe in sin or salvation just isn’t credible or that evangelicalism is so easily dismissed. Our options are then narrowed for thinking about this kind of religious expression in the classroom” (Rand 357).

Rand acknowledges the frustrations of accommodating religious faith: “Religious discourse in the classroom frequently seems to offend, or in its more benign state it
merely suggests a quaint naiveté. Compositionists have swapped stories of the Christian student who writes a testimonial about the saving power of Jesus Christ. Reactions include embarrassment, anger, and a refusal to even consider an essay based on what is termed ‘dogmatic,’ dualistic thought” (Rand 357). She suggests that we need to recognize just how difficult religious discourse and rhetoric is in the current environment.

Do we think these students are not engaged in juggling complex thought while maneuvering through stages of faith? I suggest that we abandon the dichotomous public/private, objective/subjective, reason/faith categories that we still cling to in relationship to students of faith and, instead, provide workable bridges within composition spaces.
VI. BRIDGES IN COMPOSITION SPACES

Building bridges in an arena with such a rich history of conflict is no easy assignment. Modernity’s split between the religious and the secular still has a strong grasp within the university. Extended religious authority from the past into education still overshadows tentative attempts at dialogue. Issues of certainty and epistemology complicate the discourse to such a degree that participants talk past one another without truly engaging. Apprehension about possible marginalizing or privileging for either side of the debate remains substantial, even crippling the dialogical progress.

Yet, continuing with the current situation is not idyllic. On the one hand, allowing religious students to dominate with unsupported truth claims for a disconnected audience is problematic. Likewise, the muting of religious students through social reaction, or even instructors’ inference that religious views are not welcome, does not accomplish the goals of most universities or composition classes. Hansen suggests that even if students are allowed to express their views but are required through social pressure to gut them of conviction, this is also problematic. She comments, including quotes from Stanley Fish:

If academic freedom allows religion to be a part of university life only “so long as it renounces its claim to have a privileged purchase of the truth”—which is, of course, the very thing that makes a religion a religion and not just an opinion—then it is asking those who are religious to “inhabit their moral convictions loosely and be
ready to withdraw from them whenever pursuing them would impinge on the
activities and choices of others.” (Hansen 30)

Marsden assesses the current situation:

Today nonreligious viewpoints hold the advantage in academia so that something
very much like ‘secular humanism’ is informally established as much as Christianity
was in the nineteenth century. The religious right does not help by suggesting, in
effect, that we go back to a Christian establishment. That is not the only alternative
and it is not a desirable one. Rather, we should recognize that we are dealing with an
over-correction and look for a way to restore a better balance among both religious
and nonreligious voices. (Marsden, Outrageous Idea 24)

Along similar lines, Vander Lei writes:

For many students, teachers, theorists, and administrators, religious faith is a
significant part of their private lives; it permeates, animates, perhaps haunts their
thinking. To press such writers into denying the effect that faith has on them and their
writing is to pressure them, in Stephen Carter’s words, “to be other than themselves,
to act publicly, and sometimes privately as well, as if their faith does not matter to
them.” (Vander Lei, “Coming to Terms” 4)

She continues:

What’s the effect of our asking students to keep their faith at home or lock it in the
car? It suggests to students that to succeed in our composition courses, they must
deny who they are; as a result, they may find little reason to engage with either the
writing or the other individuals in the composition classroom. Priscilla Perkins
describes writing classes that had successfully locked away the fundamentalist
Christian faith of the students and, in the process, failed to teach them much at all about the rhetorical power of writing. (4)

Vander Lei asserts that regardless of how intense our own beliefs are (either religious or secular) both students and instructors will come into contact with the religious beliefs of others. Students are expected to write effectively as social contributors to society. Instructors must assist them in understanding how religious faith influences and shapes both public institutions and civic arguments (6). To do otherwise is a disservice to students.

To give credit where due, the move to demote religious views to mere opinion is an attempt to protect those within the classroom who may feel particularly threatened by certain religious views, such as with gender alternative and gay rights issues, or as in the case of a student who may have experienced an abortion. The problem with relegating religious views to mere opinion is that anti-religious views also are demoted to opinion. (Both are actually religious views, some in support, and some in opposition). Instead, religious faith should be seen as a robust complexity, dependent on cultural dynamics, unique experiences, as well as intellectual and intuitive conclusions.

Marsden notes that to imply that making religious views invisible in the classroom does not diminish them is troubling. “One would not likely say to feminists, Marxists, neo-conservatives, gay advocates, and representatives of other viewpoints that the privatization of their viewpoints would not be a diminishment” (Marden, *Outrageous Idea* 52). If we endeavor to shut out religious dialogue, we will be promoting the phenomenon of the parallel universe where participants may hold diverse opinions, but where dialogue is nearly impossible. In that case, secular and religious people talk past
one another; they do not engage. They distrust one another and promote what Janet Emig calls the "governing gaze" in which participants assimilate concepts and information which match their current worldview, but reject the concepts and ideas which do not fit their paradigm, without fully examining them (Emig). Religious ideologies are notorious for this sort of governing gaze, with concerted effort towards a strong emphasis on "governing" and preservation. The fact is, though religious people have this strong focus on preservation, those who disagree with them have a similar, perhaps less overtly expressed, tendency. Religion feels disruptive and threatening to those who do not engage in a religious line of thinking or in a religious lifestyle—not necessarily in the conscience-pricking way religious people often speculate will happen, but in the way any expectation coming from outside our own paradigms seems disruptive. Retreating to reactionary thinking simply mirrors an “opinionated” response and does not advance rhetorical and educational goals.

*Rethinking Our Understanding of Religious Students*

Pedagogy should shy away from attempts to strip away what religious students are attempting to preserve. Dialogue, of course, is about listening as much as it is about articulating. Even when the message is offensive and foreign, in an academic setting the goal is to strive for understanding and to provide heuristic learning opportunities.

This is the goal even if the other party shows signs that he or she is not open to new ideas. Religious students may put preservation before open inquiry. If instructors discourage dialogue, this intensifies the tendency to preserve instead of inquire. Again, it is not the goal of education to break through the tendency towards preservation. Religious students can be motivated toward inquiry at the same time their sense of preservation is
not violated; inquiry and preservation are not mutually exclusive. Writing instructors can help facilitate this learning dynamic which does not attack identity.

In order to build structures that cross divides, instructors must consider rethinking how they view religious students. Rand believes religion should be considered an identity issue similar to race and gender, that, in fact, religious students feel marginalized as well as those within minority groups. She states:

I suspect that many composition scholars do not view religious faith as a primary identity that frequently restricts ways of being as do race, class, and gender. We may feel suspicion toward religion—particularly Christianity—as a cultural and social force that has been used too often to oppress and dominate people. The point remains, however, that many Christian theorists feel that the academy rarely welcomes faith-related expression. (Rand 351)

Even those in academia who reject the idea that religion should be considered equal to race and gender may be able to see the similarities between religion and class. Donna LeCourt, in writing about the struggles of working class students in elitist and middle class universities, states, "Working-class discourse becomes synonymous with habitus, an already established way of valuing, interpreting experience, and making meaning that students bring to the classroom with them. This habitus is then analyzed as in conflict with the more middle-class habitus of the composition classroom...." (LeCourt 33). In a similar way the habitus, within the classroom, like Emig’s governing gaze, becomes invisible. LeCourt states, "In reality, universities don't just reflect class identities. They actually produce class divisions" (34).
LeCourt notes that members of the working class should not have to change their identity, their social connections and their sense of self. Similarly, the religious student should not feel the need to adjust identity, even if the particulars of the religion are not palatable to the rest of the class or to the professor. If instructors can see religious views as complex, intertwined with identity, similar to the way working class students carry that identity—complete with both potential and limitations—instructors may begin to help create the opportunity for mutual discourse.

LeCourt states concerning a false binary view of the working class, "If we assume that academic and working class discourses are separate, not interacting at all, and encode radically different experiences and meaning-making, then we are perhaps left with the [undesirable] hyperbolic quandary…either assimilate working class students or give up" (LeCourt 32). There exists, however, another option for embracing those differences. I propose that just as LeCourt sees the messiness of class distinctions within the classroom as opportunity to change the way academicians view each other within their specific identities, religious faith also provides opportunity for change. Instead of seeing the situation as dichotomous as described above, or as oppositional, the composition space becomes a place to view religious students with a different lens, one in which the new lens may invite some measure of mutual understanding.

LeCount expresses concern that professors should not ignore the "home" language of working class students, or discount their experiences or ways of making meaning by the types of assignments given. In this same way, instructors should be careful that the assignments are not inherently anti-religious, or that "religious talk" is not discounted as nonacademic and unwelcome. LeCourt states:
No matter how well intentioned, the presumption of conflict and of the need to abandon home language for academic language sends an insidious message: "We write a different 'English' here"....As working-class pedagogies highlight, a focus on initiation [or assimilation] sends the message to "forget what you know".... A pedagogy focused only on conflicts with "home" languages sends an equally problematic message: stay on your side, write about the conflict, don't worry about negotiating it; we'll take care of that for you by offering you critical tools we presume you do not possess. (LeCourt 34)

Writing instructors should not fail to notice the similarities between the working class identity and the religious student identity in terms of how their language is perceived in the classroom. Instead of the traditional idea of an alternate dialect, religious students may use phrases such as the "word of God" or "saved." When instructors take on the role to initiate students into academic language and academic thought, the tendency is to indicate to religious students that they should forget what they know.

Rand comments on this kind of strong religious-language identity in her article about evangelicals:

In order to truly understand evangelical identity and the discourse of the religious writer, we must take a closer look at what the Christian faith asks of its followers....‘Witnessing talk’ is the kind of faith-centered discourse about which writing instructors complain most frequently and is the location from which we borrow in our criticism of other theoretical positions within composition studies. (358-359)
Inviting students to consider alternative word choices to describe experiences and positions should be based on audience analysis instead of on attempts to reformulate components of their identity.

LeCourt states, "We do our students a disservice, I think, when we construct pedagogies assuming their subjectivities are any less complicated than our own" (LeCourt 43). While obviously she speaks of working class students, this same disservice is offered to religious students. The frequent attitude in the academy is that a religious view of reality is simplistic and home-grown. Yet, within their subjectivity, religious students still formulate a complicated view of reality. If instructors are unfamiliar with their religious context, or familiar with it only through short, underdeveloped essays or papers, the full complexity is significantly unknown. Students are in a position where their thoughts and writing will be critiqued by the professor and often also by their peers. At the same time, they are in the process of developing their writing skills within the constraints of academic expectations. To assume that what students produce on paper or in class indicates simplistic thinking is to engage an unfair assumption.

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks also addresses class distinctions and the tendency to marginalize groups. She states:

Demands that individuals from class backgrounds deemed undesirable surrender all vestiges of their past create psychic turmoil. We were encouraged, as many students are today, to betray our class origins. Rewarded if we chose to assimilate, estranged if we chose to maintain those aspects of who we were, some were all too often seen as outsiders. (182)
In light of understanding identity formation, academicians can now see religious students in this same category. They come into the classroom knowing that their views are considered intolerant, antagonistic, outdated, sexist, homophobic, and domineering. Many are in the midst of processing their faith in light of new challenges. They are expected to assimilate while at the same time be persuasive on topics they find interesting and on values they hold as important. It is not too far-reaching to describe their situation also in terms of “psychic turmoil.”

Rand suggests that, beyond the frequent reactions to religious rhetoric, composition instructors might consider “the parallels that exist between this kind of rhetoric and that of our own field” (359). She identifies similarities between Christian concerns for social issues with the social justice of current composition theory. She adds, “Religion, rightfully understood, is a subversive force; thus, if writing instructors want to motivate evangelical students to reflect upon faith-centered identity, perhaps we should start from the premise that religious convictions (even those within conservative forms of Christianity) are considered by many to be ‘radical,’ and we should frame our questions in more evocative ways. This kind of inquiry would not assume that evangelical discourse is naïve or rhetorically unsophisticated” (361).

Rand adds that the rhetoric that accompanies religious conviction is similar to the “transgressive rhetoric of other groups and should be viewed as evidence that religious students, contrary to stereotypical constructs, have the ability to think and act in rhetorical complexity. She states, “Perhaps we have ultimately failed to see that for many Christians a declaration of faith in Jesus is far from being pious cliché or a sign of dull conformity. Witnessing talk does involve a complex interrogation of the self; it can in
fact be thought-provoking” (363). We should not quickly veer into an assumption that, if this is true, then religious students are planning to overthrow the government or even undermine the class objectives. Rather, recognition of the inner struggle of religious students as they attempt to self integrate their faith socially and intellectually with their college experiences, is an important consideration.

Some may disagree with Rand that religion should be considered a part of diversity, since it is a choice. But it is only a choice to a certain degree. If on the one hand the claim is that students are so influenced by their upbringing that they don’t think for themselves, then it must also be true that religious orientation is not completely a choice and should be considered a part of diversity considerations. The analogy of the working class identify, clearly an environment-driven issue, highlights how environmental religious formation should also be respected as shaping student identity.

**Rethinking Our View of Religious Differences**

Sharon Crowley attempts to address the differences academia has with fundamentalists. Her solution for a civil discourse with Fundamentalism (and I believe she would include Evangelicalism in this as well and even possible other religious views) is to creatively consider what ancient rhetoric has to offer in the areas of pathos and ethos, instead of a liberal, humanist dependence on logos. Crowley states, “Cicero suggests, then, that rhetorical effect is achieved by means of affect: the beliefs and behavior of audiences are altered not only by the provision of proofs but by establishment of ethical, evaluative, and emotional climates in which such changes can occur” (Crowley 58). She faults liberal rhetorical theory as disregarding emotion as irrational and “where
values are irrelevant” (58). She sees restoring ancient rhetorical concepts as a viable way to have “civil discourse,” the creation of a bridge, with fundamentalists.

Where Crowley’s analysis breaks down is that, as stated earlier, many fundamentalists are themselves champions of reason (faulty or otherwise) and common sense, along with revelation, at the expense of emotional deference. While she is correct that values are critically important to fundamentalists, these are more substantially based on reason than on affect. Fundamentalists also regard emotion as irrational. The situation is not a matter of focusing in ethos and pathos instead of logos; the paradigm hinges on a split between pathos on one side and ethos and logos on the other side. By ethos, I am referring to both the authority of Scripture and the moral authority of those disseminating truth. Instead of being in contrast to liberal Enlightenment thinking, Christian Fundamentalism emulates it.

Although some branches of Christianity place a high value on emotions, it is not necessarily in the way that Crowley imagines. The emphasis on reason and fact is in line with modernism and has contributed to the multiple splits within Christianity as Christian fundamentalists dissect and refine their understanding of theology and the Bible—including how they view emotion. Crowley does recognize a certain rationalism within fundamentalism. She states:

Fundamentalist Christians are certainly not without argumentative resources: within limits introspection and argument are endemic to conservative Christianity. Believers are trained from childhood to defend their version of Christianity against others. And so it might be said that conservative Christians have a good deal of experience with argument, perhaps more than those Americans who do not feel a recurring necessity
to defend their beliefs. Michael Warner notes of his childhood Pentecostalism that “religious culture gave me a passionate intellectual life of which universities are only a pale ivory shadow” (“Tongues” 40). A crucial difference is contained in that word passionate: fundamentalist religious belief is intimate, visceral: it resonates in the very bodies of believers. (191)

Crowley tends to view reason within Fundamentalism as subject to an emotional or passionate faith instead of the strange mix of being passionate for the logical reasonings. A similar construct exists within liberalism. It is important to make a distinction between views on the value of emotion and the experience of emotion. It is true that emotion may guide fundamentalists (and liberals) while they are, in theory, not embracing the concept of emotions as their guide.¹⁹

While Christians and any other religious students should be free to support their beliefs through reason and evidences, the lack of awareness concerning historical, theoretical, and epistemological shifts contributes to current miscommunications within rhetoric and composition, both from within Christianity and for those looking in from the outside. Once a broader understanding is established, religious students may better use rhetoric within shifting paradigms instead of maintaining one framework, a tendency which undermines credibility, misinterprets audience, and creates further barriers.

Likewise, secular academia might also strive for a more comprehensive understanding of religious differences. For example, the often used “wheel of faiths” or Sacred Wheel analogy promoted by Jim Kenney as a way to view each religion as a spoke in a wheel, all leading to a mutual understanding of God, is offensive to some

¹⁹ Crowley also places more emphasis on pop Christian writers such as Tim LaHaye than on more scholarly Christian works; this leaves academic discourse largely unexamined.
religious students. This analogy marginalizes some faiths as simplistic and exclusive, and collapses some religious beliefs into those held by other religions. Elliot Miller notes, after hearing Kenney present the Sacred Wheel at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1993:

By stating that as people progress down the “spokes” of their religions they will realize those differences seen at the “rim” are not insurmountable after all, pantheists like Kenney are in effect telling theists that they know what actually constitutes maturity on the theists’ own spiritual path. This position arrogantly dismisses the testimony of such theists as evangelical Christians....Kenney’s analogy is flawed because, while theists are supposed to progress from the rim where they view God differently from other religions down to the hub where they reach the common religious experience of “empty blue sky,” pantheists, such as his Zen Master, are already speaking of God as “empty blue sky” from the level of the rim. In other words, the alleged experience of the hub matches the pantheistic “rim” conception of God. Since the pantheists’ religious language does not suffer from the same problem that the theists’ allegedly does, it becomes clear that the analogy is actually a pantheistic model that attempts to subsume theism into itself. (Miller 12)

As Miller implies, this is not authentic bridge-building. The result is a disregard and diminishing of particular religious views in favor of others. Plus, the collapse of all religions into one main tenet is favorable to secular advocates who may wish to dismiss religious beliefs which hold exclusive positions.

*Foundational Bridging*
One way that professors may help religious students understand why their assertions are not readily accepted in the classroom is by using a method which highlights assumptions and the need for adequate support for an audience. I find the Toulmin Model of persuasion to be effective in the endeavor. Stephen Toulmin, observing that arguments made in the contexts of everyday life do not often follow a syllogism or formal logic, captured the use of variables and assumptions by setting forth a schema with a claim, grounds, qualifiers, rebuttal, warrant and backing (Toulmin). Simplified here, the components of the model, and how those components assist in a faith dialogue, are as follows:

- **Claim**—the assertion or thesis, what the speaker or writer wants to prove or support. For religious students the claim may be absolutist, yet this bold step may cause them to feel tentative as they assert a belief that could elicit a negative response.

- **Qualifier**—the adjustment of the claim to modify the scope of the assertion. If a writer, for example, makes a claim that acupuncture is the best medical procedure for a variety of illnesses, the claim lacks needed qualifiers. A much more realistic claim is that acupuncture is effective medical procedure for some arthritis patients. The claim has to be “qualified” to be more readily accepted by the audience.

A qualifier worked well for a student, recently, who decided that, instead of the usual polarizing positions of the abortion issue, she would qualify her persuasive paper to focus on the percentage not impacted by rape or incest in hopes of more influential results—some positional movement on the issue within that more limited scope. Qualifiers help absolutist religious students match their claim to what their audience can accept. This does not mean they have to alter their beliefs; rather, they may have to match their claim...
to what they can actually support. For example, instead of stating that the Bible is the Word of God, or the Bible is historically true, they may qualify that claim to state that there are historical confirmations which may not be well known. This does not overstate their claim and it does not contradict nor relativize their beliefs. Instead, it encourages dialogue since secular students are not offended by an overly-extended, unsupported claim, and may even be interested to hear what the support actually is for such a qualified claim.

- **Warrant**—the assumptions in the argument, often the unspoken component in an enthymeme. If assumptions are universally accepted by the audience then there is no need to address them. A warrant in an argument gives the writer or speaker permission to move ahead with a claim; it is an assumption that the writer shares with his or her audience. If the underlying warrant is that there are many paths to God, those religious students who hold to one path will be silenced by this assumption. At times a warrant is troublesome to the audience and needs explanation or backing. If the warrant requires substantial backing, then the arguer should reconsider whether or not to adjust the claim.

  For the religious student, qualifiers and warrants create problematic sticking points. If the student wants to make sweeping, universal claims; the professor or non-religious students may respond by interjecting qualifiers. For example, a Christian may state that Jesus is the only way to God, and the non-Christian will want that qualified to one of many possible options or avenues to God, as demonstrated by the Sacred Wheel. Yet, the non-Christian is also asserting a universal—that it is true universally that there are many paths to God. The Christian student will probably recognize this and, depending on the comfort level in the classroom, may address it. But often religious students avoid this step
of confrontation, and a disconnection between the Christian student and others in the classroom remains. Discussion of warrants is an appropriate time for professors to address religious and secular assumptions and request that students consider audience.

- **Backing**—this provides the support for the grounds or the warrants. For the acupuncture example, the backing should include credible medical sources, perhaps testimonials, or an examination of biased medical standards which unfairly excludes acupuncture as a valid procedure. For the religious student, backing is also important. When a Christian student quotes a Bible verse in a classroom, he or she must realize that the general audience of the classroom and the professor may not see the Bible as a credible source (backing). Then the backing itself becomes an issue and does not adequately support the claim for the targeted audience. Instructors can encourage students to adjust the claim with backing that better fits the audience. With a Christian audience that already accepts the Bible as credible, there is no issue with using it as a reliable source. But with a general audience where its credibility is in question, the writer must expend so much effort backing up this warrant that the claim is lost, and support is weakened. References to the Bible may, in such a case, serve as a supplemental commentary, an added cohesion between the topic and the fact that many do have religious beliefs that may augment and enhance the topic.\(^{20}\)

- **Rebuttal**—what the other side of a debate would assert as an objection. Students should be encouraged to include the best rebuttal they can find, in order to avoid presenting a strawman rebuttal, or to avoid engaging in posturing to make their own position appear stronger than it is. The focus of rebuttal should not be on winning an

\(^{20}\) On the other hand, Priscilla Perkins, while teaching a heavily Christian population in rural Oklahoma considered Bible references an “esteemed given” within that pedagogical context (Perkins 592).
argument as much as understanding the other side of a contested topic. Assessing a strong rebuttal creates dialogue bridges for any topic.

The value of the Toulmin model for religious issues in composition lies in the fact that it steers students away from a courtroom style debate mode and helps them recognize their assumptions, along with needed qualifiers. It accepts more than rational and evidential support, although it certainly recognizes those as well.

This model gives an instructor the chance to explain that assumptions, within social context, are not necessarily negative. Rather, the writer or speaker can assess the audience to match the warrant to the situation. This allows both religious students to rethink their grounds and backing, and it allows non-religious students to recognize their assumptions about religion. This does not mean that Christian students are hindered from bringing their faith into the classroom, or that they may not use the Bible at all in their essays or in dialogue. They can understand that simply because a source is not accepted by the audience does not necessarily discredit or weaken the source. Matching warrants with audience addresses the socially contextual concern for credibility.

Instead of relegating religious beliefs to mere opinion, these beliefs can be viewed contextually, which keeps intact both students’ choice of universal claims and the dignity to hold those views. The space between opinion and certainty is probability. While this does not satisfy absolutist religious fervor, it does not insult in the way an “opinion” label does, and it leaves space for realistic dialogue. This protects both the religious and the non-religious in dialogue and adds a sense of reality about persuasion as participants begin to listen to one another.
Janice Lauer in “Writing as Inquiry” helps to clarify why the objectivist view is so problematic for dialogue and why probability is the appropriate realm for rhetoric and composition:

This attitude [objectivism] polarizes “fact” and value, ignoring probability, the spacious ground between objectivity and faith or feelings. [Notice that this tends to put faith and feelings together on the opposite end of the spectrum from objectivity when they would be less minimized in an integrated middle.] In such an environment students find no encouragement to tackle the difficult search for unknowns or for good reasons to support probable judgments, even though most of the subjects they investigate inhabit the realm of probability in which Aristotle located rhetoric. A culture which extols certainty rewards instead the mastery of verifiable information marshalled in support of existing judgments. (Lauer 92)

Hooks refers to this objectivism as “essentialist notions” and suggests that instructors be “aware of the multiple ways essentialist standpoints can be used to shut down discussions” and that professors can “construct a pedagogy that critically intervenes before one group attempts to silence another.” She admits that “professors, especially those from dominant groups, may themselves employ essentialist notions to constrain the voices of particular students” (hooks 86). Keeping the dialogue in composition spaces away from certainties and into the realm of rhetorical probability creates a place where learning can flourish.

As Magolda noted, it is important to keep in mind the educational objective of guiding students towards complexity in making meaning, in which they can observe various perspectives and make informed assessments. She identifies the traditional age
group of college students as the time for “coming to terms with the core role of the internal self in facing ambiguity” and the importance of merging “epistemological and intrapersonal dimensions of development and the mature capacity to hold firm convictions” (Magolda). This type of firm conviction is not the dogmatism identified in McLaren’s first stage of faith, but rather the result of intellectual, emotional, personal, dialogical, and even spiritual growth in the last faith stage. Magolda adds, “Moving through the relativity of knowledge and choice to make commitments about what to believe and stand for represents the move to the mature capacity to hold a firm conviction in a tentative world” (Magolda). As religious students gain the ability to hold beliefs and probability in tension, dialogue is not only possible, but desirable and non-threatening. Yet, educators must first model this complexity of thought and interaction in order to provide opportunity without the frequent barriers to such a dialogue.

Basically, bridge building involves a change in attitude towards religious students and religious topics. It involves setting an atmosphere where probability is the focus instead of absolutism, which recognizes the adherence to absolutes from parties involved, including secularists, but which also avoids relegating views that class members hold as essential to mere opinion. Bridge building makes strides to provide a safe place for dialogue where those who hold religious views do not engage in proselytizing or insult, but are also not the recipients of marginalizing maneuvers by professors or other students.

Bridge building means an abandonment of a modernized pedagogy that separates public and private discourse that pressures certain students to leave their most important allegiance outside the classroom. Bridge building is honest about disagreements without attacking. It is heuristic in an attempt to learn through questions and exploration instead
of imparting to students the standard of who is allowed to speak on what topics and who is to be silenced. This approach stops protecting students, both non-religious and religious, from the ideas of others and allows them to grapple with dissonance of ideas and values in conflict, without themselves needing to engage in combative rhetoric.

Bridge building rejects a pedagogy which insists that “a religious reason is no reason at all.” With bridge building, empirical knowledge is no longer sovereign; intuitive knowledge, which includes faith-based assertions, provides a valid and valued lens for many students. Within a bridge building environment respect for views, even those that transgress our sensitivities, is primary, and personal attacks are not given the same autonomy that discourse about ideas enjoys.

Bridge building ignores barriers that tend to stop the dialogue before it begins, such as avoiding meaningful content for classroom dialogue, the over-extension of church and state separation, the overshadowing of religious abuses into the dialogue, attempts to avoid a crisis, the practice of fallacious posturing, and the debilitating engagement with fear. Educators must get beyond these barriers and begin to address those which cripple the conversation at an even deeper level. Bridge building must recognize epistemological differences in influential paradigms, and provide alternatives to dialogue-stopping paradigm differences. Bridge construction understands that religious students may express their faith through the lens of a particular paradigm, but that does not disqualify their views from the discussion.

Suggestions for Guidelines and Optional Assignments

Priscilla Perkins writes, “I believe that secular teachers and evangelical students can become both more sophisticated and more self-reflective. Given the epistemological
constraints that conservative Christian practice places on many students, however, teachers need to make the first move” (Perkins 586). With that in mind, the suggestions below are for instructors to consider ways to include religious ideas into assignments for those students who wish to express their religious views. These should not be used exclusively, nor should they overwhelm students with a religion-related focus for the classroom. Rather, they suggest possibilities for students who wish to allow religious convictions to play an influential and integral part of their coursework. I intend them to be heuristic instead of positional. In other words, the focus is on exploring and making meaning (even with a persuasive topic) instead of on pedantic and dogmatic expressions.

- Include religion in a list of possible topics for a humanities-based writing assignment. This grants students an often welcome permission to write about their religious views.
- Establish guidelines for assignments which do not exclude religious views, but which provide a standard of mutual respect for all participants.
- List non-obligatory options for approaching various topics to allow students the opportunity to accept or decline expression of religion by the choices they make for their writing.
- Encourage students to explain how their resistance to social norms shapes their experiences (Rand).
- Assign an ethnography with the option to write about their religious communities (Rand).
- Provide opportunity for religious students to examine how their faith is portrayed in anthropology texts and encyclopedias and to express their responses to such objectified, distanced overviews (Hansen 34).
• Assign audience analyses for persuasive writings to established warrants that match the intended audience.

• Invite students to express religious views through alternative rhetorical expressions such as music videos, then to write about their image choices.

• Suggest an examination of religious views through historical lenses such as ancient rhetoric, the Reformation, the Great Awakening, modernism, etc.

• Encourage a multi-genre approach to a religious topic including fictionalized dialogue, biographical sketches, science-fiction, etc. or to review religious literature from these genres.

• Include an option to examine how different genres interpret religious views and whether or not they are effectively persuasive.

• Invite students to explore a topic through various religious lenses, without collapsing all religious views into a simplistic oneness.

• Suggest students explore the epistemological underpinnings of religious teachings.

• Encourage students to attempt the use of the persuasive power of religious stories.

• Since religious students depend on stories in their “witnessing,” help them identify what makes story-telling effective, and what relegates stories to “that’s just your experience.”

• Encourage students to explore how ethos, pathos and logos are expressed through their chosen religion.

• Encourage a media analysis, an investigation of how the news “talking heads” and commentaries cast religious topics.
• Ask students to evaluate the separation of public and private for political figures in relationship to their religious views.

• Invite recognition of the complexity of belief by exploring the “tipping point” of religious conversion in place of implying that faith is based on modernistic certainty.

• Allow students to collect “faith images” by creating a collage of poems, pictures, religious symbols, etc. about which to reflect and write.

• Reflect on the power of the use of religious images and symbolism in their writing, either positive or negative.

• For those students who wish to write about a colossal topic such as “the existence of God,” suggest that they pare it down to something manageable such as evaluating one classical argument for the existence of God, or exploring the issue of miracles, etc.

• Model, in dialogue, respect for both religious and non-religious views.

  Rand states, concerning rhetoric and composition, “Our field clearly prides itself on acts of scholarly and political rebellion: we are the ‘Robin Hoods’ within English studies. But perhaps if we tried to collapse the binary between ‘rebelliousness’ and ‘religiosity’ (even evangelical religiosity), we would find new ways of talking about faith. This vocabulary might in turn be useful in our classrooms as we respond to students whose views diverge from our own” (Rand 356). Recognition that as students come into the composition classroom they do not shed their religious views at the doorway, provides renewed opportunity to avoid barriers to dialogue and to embrace bridge building options without privileging or marginalizing on the basis of religion.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


