

Episode 162 Apologetics in Strasbourg France

This transcript has been edited for clarity and space.

Craig Parton

This is Craig Parton, the United States Director of the International Academy of Apologetics, Evangelism, and Human Rights centered in Strasbourg, France.

David Capes

Craig Parton, welcome to The Stone Chapel Podcast. Great to see you.

Craig Parton

Great to see you.

David Capes

Yes, you're there in your home in California. But you're talking about going to France. That sounds like a lot of fun!

Craig Parton

Suffering here in Santa Barbara, David.

David Capes

Oh, listen that is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. I've been there briefly, at Westmont College a few years ago.

Craig Parton

Yes, it's a blessing. People often ask why I live in California? Well, I live in Santa Barbara. That's why!

David Capes

Were it someplace else, maybe not! Now you introduced yourself earlier. But I want people to know more about you than that, simply. So, for those who don't know you, who is Craig Parton?

Craig Parton

Well, I'll tell you my short background. I became a Christian in college through people taking the initiative to come out and find me, lost as I was and present the evidence for Christian faith. And it's that evidence that I've been studying my entire life as a Christian. I'm also now a trial lawyer. I've been that for 35 years at the same firm I started with when I was second year in law school.

I am the United States Director of the International Academy of Apologetics where we emphasize training and equipping the next generation to present Christ crucified and to deal with the objections that non-Christians have to Christian faith. And using evidence to do so. Not just my heart feels this way about it. Your heart can sometimes be, as scripture says, desperately wicked. It's not a reliable thing.

David Capes

Or feelings can be fickle, as my Catholic priest friend likes to say, how we feel about things.

Craig Parton

Yes, it's exactly right. So, I spent seven years on staff with Cru, which then was called Campus Crusade for Christ. And then went to law school after that. I got a master's in Christian Apologetics. And from there, I got together with John Warwick Montgomery, and we started this Academy of Apologetics, 26 years ago.

David Capes

Were you with him when he started this?

Craig Parton

Well, I was there when it was an institute of jurisprudence. It was essentially a law institute for secular law students. And we taught them jurisprudence, which they got credit for when they went back to their law school, wherever it was. Then it came time that Montgomery was required to retire in England, at his university. And I will take credit for this because my wife assures me this is true.

But I just thought, you know, it'd be a shame to lose the kind of knowledge that John Warwick Montgomery has about the defense of the Christian faith. Why don't we do an apologetics institute. Do it right here in Strasbourg, and we'll see who has an interest in it. And that first year, 26 years ago, we had five people, three of which were Pentecostals and two of them were Calvinists.

David Capes

Interesting!

Craig Parton

It is! But this is foretelling of what the diversity of the Academy would have. And so, we've gone through the process, without formally at least, paying for advertising. I've gotten advertising for free from people, but we have spots for 20 people, and they fill up rapidly now and have for the last 20 years. We've been full essentially every year.

David Capes

This is in a sense, an institute, a summer study, an opportunity that's only available to 20 people every year. Is there any reason why it's 20 people, Craig? Could it have been 30 some years or 40 some years?

Craig Parton

I don't usually tell this, but we've had overflow to 23. Or one year, we had 25. Because people had to come that year, or they'd never be able to come again to the academy. So, sometimes we do but to answer your question, David, we're very interested in promoting discussions around meals. And we take a bus tour on Bastille Day. 20 seems to fit.

Getting more than 20 makes it difficult for people to get all their questions answered when there's a lecture going on. And we really emphasize questions and answers, getting your questions answered, participating in the social life of the academy. The meals are together and trying to go to a restaurant in Strasbourg with more than 20 people is an effort. Let's put it that way.

David Capes

I can imagine. You're not going to probably find one table that can accommodate a group of people. So, for those who've never been to Strasbourg, it's a beautiful city. It's located right on the border of France and Germany. And it has been contested property for the longest time. But it is one of the most beautiful cities around. And there is a significance to that city for what you're doing. Right? Tell us about why Strasbourg?

Craig Parton

Yes, well, Montgomery has a home there. That's number one. Number two, we like to get people out of their comfort zone. It's healthy for us to get out of how comfortable we are in the way America operates. To get out and get into a foreign culture for a period of time. And the European Court of Human Rights is in Strasbourg. We have a human rights element to the academy.

It's got a theological component. John Calvin was there pastoring a church. It went through the Reformation very early. Because of its independence status, it was an independent city under the Holy Roman Empire, which meant that Strasbourg had a lot more freedom in how it operated. So, when it went to the Reformation, it went all out. And there are today solid groups of reformation-related churches and pastors and Christians still in Strasbourg. So, it's got the theological component. It's got the human rights component, and it's just absolutely beautiful. We have classes in the Petite France. To me you feel like you're back in the 1560's.

David Capes

You do! I mean, I love climbing up the cathedral there in the city. And we climbed up the steps of the cathedral to look out upon the city and I tell you what, it's breathtaking to see it. Transcendent may be a little bit too much, but it's as close to transcendence as you can get, I think and still have your feet on terra firma.

Craig Parton

What's nice about it is it's very centrally located for people that fly in. They want to come from London, they want to come into Zurich, they want to go into Frankfurt. Everything is like a couple hours away from Strasbourg. And there's opportunities on the weekend that we have between the two weeks of classes. Students will often go to Switzerland, to Heidelberg, we've had them go to Wittenberg. Of course, they spent approximately 99% of the time in a car. There's just a wide variety of things to see.

David Capes

There's a different currency, there's a different language being spoken. There's a different look to the land, different diet. And that's such a great way, like you said, of getting people out of where they are. And saying let's plumb our psyches and our thoughts, and our intellects together into some of these key questions. Now we're talking to Craig Parton about the 26th annual European summer study session of

the International Academy of Apologetics, Evangelism, and Human Rights. The human rights thing is not just something you've added on right at the very end.

Craig Parton

No that's been integral to the development of the academy. You know, I think there's a perception, David, that human rights are the place where liberals go, and we complain about human rights not being protected. The right to life being the most basic of all human rights, the right of free assembly, the right to worship. These are not guaranteed. And we need a whole generation of people who are able to defend the basis for human rights. And we spent a lot of time, an entire course on the fundamental philosophical grounding for human rights in general. We've done that from the beginning of the academy, and we trade off different people who teach it.

Dr. Montgomery has written extensively on it, so he teaches it. I taught it last summer. Angus Menuge is teaching for us. He's a professor of Philosophy at Concordia, in Wisconsin, and is going to teach this next year. Everybody has a different spin on it. So, everybody in human rights, from a secular standpoint, wants to find universal human rights, ways to condemn certain activities based on some kind of moral code or natural law, or whatever it might be. We talk about what the efforts are to try and justify human rights, why they failed and what the answer is to them. And so, human rights is critical to the academy.

David Capes

You're one of the instructors and have been an instructor the entire time. And Angus Menuge. You mentioned he's a professor of Philosophy, at Concordia, Wisconsin. He's a regular contributor as well.

Craig Parton

He is. It's very interesting and says a lot for Angus that when he was already a professor of Philosophy at Concordia, he came to the academy as a student and learned apologetics. We taught him 10 years ago, and now he's one of the boys grown up! He's definitely a favorite of folks. He's got a wide repertoire of topics he teaches. And last summer we had Paul Copan, whom you know.

David Capes

Yes, Paul has been to the library before.

Craig Parton

Paul' is just wonderful. We've had Chad Meister, we've had Gary Habermas a number of times. We've had people from Biola, people from . . . you name it. We've pretty much had them.

David Capes

Let's talk about the tag of evidential apologetics as opposed to maybe cultural apologetics or aesthetic apologetics. When you say and when Dr. Montgomery talks about evidential apologetics, what do you mean by that exactly?

Craig Parton

We mean that you want to present the case for Christ as effectively and efficiently as you can in a secularized situation. And that involves giving people more than just what you believe. It's leaving them with something they can check out on their own. Evidential apologetics is based on the objectivity, the historicity, the reliability of the New Testament Gospels, the historical, factual nature of Christian truth claims. And focusing on what is necessary, like Mark says in his book *Atheism on Trial*. You go for what's necessary to win the case. And what's necessary is to get to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as efficiently and effectively, as evidentially as you can.

Because, as I say, I'd rather you lose an argument on the resurrection than win an argument on creationism. Because unfortunately, you can go to hell as a creationist. The scripture says the devil believes and shudders. The devil believes in theism. There's no question about that.

David Capes

He knows that it was all created by God to begin with.

Craig Parton

He knows it is all created by God. That's not the question. We're not about making theists. Now that may be part of the process for somebody coming from outside the main line, coming to theism, may be a very big move. But we shouldn't be satisfied with that only.

David Capes

It's not the final destination.

Craig Parton

Right. And I like to think in terms of what can I tell the person that they can go check out without trusting me and my recitation of what the evidence is. I point them to books and point them to read the book of John, or Mark, for that matter. I think we really lose sight of how straightforward and clear scripture is. And we can move people to try to read chapter two or three, read the book of Mark. And tell me if it hasn't the ring of authenticity. These are eyewitnesses. These are people that are close friends of eyewitnesses, and they paid the ultimate price to get their story right. You know lawyers are connected to evidence as Mark did in his lectures last year at the library. Evidence is everything to lawyers.

So, lawyers have been very attracted to the Christian faith. And one of the classes we have every year at the Academy, because we always have a few lawyers, is legal apologetics. This is the history of why lawyers have been attracted to the faith. They'd been attracted because Christianity, it just welcomes people to go for the jugular, which is to disprove the resurrection. And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ be not raised, the dead are not raised. Everything's over. Eat, drink and be merry. We're of all most to be pitied, because we've been deceived ourselves. And we've been deceiving other people.

David Capes

And that's why Gary Habermas, I think, has been so effective. Because people have grasped that if Jesus truly was raised from the dead, then that is an astonishing thing! An amazing thing! If that's true, then that changes everything. One of the things that we're partnering on and you mentioned Mark

Lanier's lecture last year. But we are, at the Lanier Theological Library, hosting the John Warwick Montgomery Annual Lecture in Evidential Apologetics. Now the man himself did the first lecture two years ago. And then last year, it was Mark Lanier, who gave his lecture, entitled "Atheism on Trial", which is associated with his book.

And this year, we've got John Lennox, from Oxford University, a retired Professor of Mathematics, who is talking on artificial intelligence and the future of humanity. When you think about that topic, that ties into that question of human dignity. The whole question of human dignity ties into what is going to happen to all of us, when artificial intelligence seems to be taking over. So that's going to be an exciting lecture. We've already got 700 people signed up for it. If you're listening to this podcast after October 21, 2023, then you can find the lecture on the Lanier Theological Library website, or you can go to our YouTube channel and watch it there.

It's going to be a great time. Craig, you've been with us a couple of times before, and we hope you can come back maybe next year. We have another exciting person who is going to be sharing with us during that time. But I really appreciate you being with us, Craig, to be a part of this conversation. For people who might want to know more about this Apologetics Academy, how can they do that?

Craig Parton

Yes, they should go to our website, which is www.apologeticsacademy.eu.

David Capes

EU means Europe, right?

Craig Parton

It means Europe. And that's the focus of the Academy. There is a wide variety of people that show up from all kinds of countries and places and professions. And they can go to the Academy website, to the frequently asked questions section. They'll learn, how to register, how to get academic credit, if they're interested in that, and just what the normal schedule of the academy is. It's a serious academic situation. We strive to get the best teachers in apologetics in Christendom to the academy each year.

David Capes

And you can get, as I understand it, academic credit for this as well. Right?

Craig Parton

Yes, through Concordia University Wisconsin.

David Capes

Okay, And academic credits can usually be transferred to another school. Even if you're not a student enrolled there. It's not uncommon to have academic credit moved from one place to the next. This has been a great project that you've been a part of for 26 years. We wish you the best. Dr. Craig Parton, thanks for being with us today on The Stone Chapel Podcast.

Craig Parton

Thank you, David.

A Nugget of Wisdom from Craig Parton

I love this quote by Luther. Man at his most righteous moment sins. I think what Luther is getting at is our condition outside of the perfect, imputed righteousness and holiness of Jesus Christ. We are in sin and lost. People who don't take their sin seriously, are to be watched with a lot of concern. Take sin seriously to get the gospel correctly. If you don't think you're a sinner, you're going to have a real problem understanding why the death of Christ is so critical and central to biblical revelation.