A DEFENSE OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS AND ITS PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to help Christians on university campuses recognize that the objections to their faith are often caused by underlying presuppositions that are fundamentally different from their own. This paper will seek to understand how Frame distinguishes between different presuppositions, and to apply Frame’s presuppositional apologetic to the predominant forms of unbelief at universities today. The subject is of great importance because believers often miss the role of presuppositions all together. Even when a person is unaware, her presuppositions shape her worldview and understanding of the meaning of life. Our worldviews are in fact a collection of our presuppositions and beliefs about metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. The worst kind of presuppositions are those that are nonbiblical, and they are often held subconsciously by believers as well as unbelievers. As Frame regrets, “many enter institutions of higher education thinking they may honor God on Sunday, while accepting all the standards of secular scholarship in their daily studies . . . not bringing every thought captive to Christ.”¹ Specifically, this leads many Christians in academia to reason unfaithfully in the name of autonomy and with the false notion of neutrality.

Furthermore, Reformed apologists have some of the most well thought through answers to the questions asked on university campuses. But there have been deep divisions between Reformed apologists that diminish their effectiveness and influence. Many of these

¹ John Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” Five Views on Apologetics, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 209.
divisions arise from mere misunderstandings. This paper attempts to clarify common misunderstandings of presuppositional apologetics by providing a new paradigm for understanding and applying its tenets, namely, the four types of presuppositions.

When a Christian encounters objection to Christianity from an unbeliever, the argument between them is often controlled by their fundamentally different presuppositions. Believers should not miss this insightful aspect to their discussions with unbelievers. Presuppositional apologetics offers the astute apologist a ready insight into how a person interprets and evaluates experience and evidence. Christians need to be equipped to see below the surface of unbelief, to embrace for themselves the Bible’s commands to make Christ Lord over all our thinking.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The challenge of unbelief on public university campuses has never been greater for the Christian campus minister. It is generally assumed at educational institutions that the spiritual life should be kept separate from the intellectual life, and that faith in God is inferior to knowledge in academia. Unbelieving worldviews confront Christian college students daily. Believers struggle to apply Christ’s Lordship in their thoughts and interactions with unbelievers. Perhaps the apostle Peter’s challenge is more appropriate on the university campus than anywhere else in the U.S.: “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:14b-15).

Strategy

After suggesting a quadrant diagram to help understand Frame’s different types of presuppositions and modifications of TAG, I will give special attention to these questions: 1. What is the biblical basis for using presuppositional apologetics? 2. How can presuppositional apologetics be effectively applied to the challenges to belief on public university campuses? Here I will examine two different manifestations of unbelief in universities today—Naturalism and Postmodernism—and I will offer examples of

1 Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from the Bible are from the English Standard Version (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2008).
transcendental arguments against these worldviews. 3. Using Frame’s four types of presuppositions as a framework I will then evaluate the strengths and limitations of these arguments as well as other arguments from different schools of apologists as they apply to the challenges on the public university campus. Finally, I will propose that presuppositional arguments are superior to a strictly classical approach to apologetics, and demonstrate how John Frame’s presuppositional apologetic based on Cornelius Van Til’s transcendental argument can be integrated with classical apologetics to make arguments more biblical, cogent and effective in addressing the obstacles to belief on public university campuses. I will end by considering what areas still need to be developed.

Terms

Apologetics is commonly defined as a discipline that provides a defense of the truthfulness of the Christian faith. It is closely related to evangelism but with a different role in attempting to convince unbelievers, while also removing doubts and encouraging faith in believers. A common definition for “presupposition” is a fundamental conviction, commitment or criterion of truth by which we measure and evaluate all other sources of knowledge. The noun refers to a person’s ultimate authority, and the verb “presuppose” often means to imply or demand a specific idea and can be used of people or arguments themselves. A belief can be called a presupposition when “that belief is so warranted that it is an intrinsic defeater of any potential defeater.” When referring to “traditional arguments” for the existence of God, we normally have one of these four types in mind: 1. The cosmological argument refers to causes which point to God as the ultimate cause. 2. The teleological argument refers to the purposeful designs of the universe which point to God as
the ultimate designer. 3. The ontological argument refers to the greatness of existence which points to God as the ultimate greatness. 4. The moral argument refers to our sense of right and wrong which points to God as the ultimate moral source and judge.

**Literature Review**

The argument of this paper has been framed by the helpful insights and discussions of several writers. The exposition of presuppositional apologetics with its epistemological and methodological distinctions reflects the ideas of Cornelius Van Til in *Defense of the Faith*, John Frame’s *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* and Greg Bahnsen’s book, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*. The biblical defense for presuppositionalism is aided by John Polhill’s studies on *Acts* and James Brooks’ on Mark both in *The New American Commentary*, along with F. W. Grosheide on *First Corinthians*, Ronald Fung on *Galatians* and Philip Hughes on *Second Corinthians* within *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, and the exegetical essays edited by Scott Oliphint and Lane Tipton in *Revelation and Reason*. The examples of apologetic arguments with presuppositional weight to address worldviews on college campuses mostly come from the work of Francis Schaeffer in *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*. Finally, the application to and integration of presuppositional principles with the ideas and critiques of classical apologetics includes the thoughtful apologetics of John Frame in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Alvin Plantinga in *Warrant and Proper Function* and those of the Ligonier ministry: John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, and R.C. Sproul in *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*. 
CHAPTER 2

BRIEF EXPOSITION OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

Cornelius Van Til revealed a deeply motivating goal in his essay “My Credo,” saying, “I have learned something of what it means to make my every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, being converted anew every day to the realization that I understand no fact aright unless I see it in its proper relation to Christ as Creator- Redeemer of me and my world.”¹

John Frame has sought to follow this priority in his own thinking and apologetics. Frame’s epistemology and apologetic methodology reflect Van Til’s radical realization of the prominence of presuppositions and the relation between these presuppositions and the Creator God. Frame has verified, clarified and sometimes modified Van Til’s apologetic to proliferate awareness of presuppositions and increase our commitment to making them obedient to the whole of God’s Word. Perhaps Frame’s greatest legacy will be how he taught every apologist to set apart Christ as Lord this way in both their epistemology and apologetics. His influence will be evidenced as young and old apologists instinctively ask, “what is the presupposition here?” and “is the presupposition biblical?” We see there are four types of presuppositions at the center of Frame’s apologetic: 1) Unconscious-Biblical, 2) Unconscious-Nonbiblical, 3) Conscious-Nonbiblical and 4) Conscious-Biblical.

Every non-believer has some knowledge of God (Rom. 1:21). God has revealed himself to everyone in creation (Ps. 19; Rom. 1:18–21) and in man’s own nature (Gen. 1:26ff.). Frame explains, “In one sense, the unbeliever knows God. At some level of his consciousness or unconsciousness, that knowledge remains.” And he adds, “Sometimes psychological repression, a person relegates the truth to some subconscious level of the

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mind. Frame distinguishes this knowledge, of course, from the Christian’s knowledge of God, and he admits that there is some psychological complexity here. The unbeliever knows God and what God requires of him, but he doesn’t want that knowledge. Originally, God made man to:

think with the Christian-theistic worldview as their presupposition. And at one level of their consciousness, they do think that way.

Jomo Johnson shares this example in his fictional letter from C. S. Lewis to Cornelius Van Til:

on one side of the coin [naturalists] say that all moral judgments are apparitions, but yet on the other you find them exhorting the masses to work for posterity, to promote education, and to live and die for the good of the human race. This reality plainly suggests to me that naturalists do not truly act according to what they propose to presuppose.

The unbeliever sometimes acknowledges the truth in spite of himself while trying to suppress it. As we will see, these inconsistencies are often a good starting point in apologetic conversations. We will now move from presuppositional epistemology to presuppositional methodology.

Unconscious-Nonbiblical Presuppositions are Irrational Beliefs

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3 Ibid.

4 John Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” Five Views on Apologetics, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), Chapter Four.


6 One benefit of the quadrant diagram is that it illustrates the teaching of Rom. 1 that unbelievers suppress the knowledge of God. We can visualize from their location in the diagram that these biblical presuppositions are being held down.
Van Til maintained that every unbeliever is both rationalistic and irrationalistic at the same time. According to Frame, when a person rejects the truth of God’s word, they often do so under the semblance of rationality while unaware of the irrationality of their presupposition. In one sense, these are the same as the previous nonbiblical presuppositions, for every idolatrous belief is by definition irrational. But we talk about these presuppositions separately here because a person is often unaware of their disastrous effect. As Frame says, they are “never conscious of the contradiction into which they have fallen.” This is referred to as the rational-irrational dialectic of nonbiblical thinking, for whenever someone suppresses the truth (as we will soon discuss), the result is irrationality.

William Edgar gives us an example with postmodernist, Jean-François Lyotard, stating:

The most serious flaw in Lyotard’s presentation, however, is the deep rooted contradiction between his claims to do away with metanarrative and his own program, which is suspiciously like a metanarrative of another kind. . . . Is his intolerance of absolutes not a veiled absolute?

The irrational nature of nonbiblical belief is sometimes discussed under the topic of the noetic effects of sin. Van Til insisted that the whole person is affected by sin:

We take it that the Scriptures are very explicit in their statements of the gruesome effects of sin. The noetic effects are generally summed up by the term ‘darkened.’ The understanding has been darkened. The Westminster Confession says that sin, ‘wholly defiled our faculties.’ That is a splendid and comprehensive phrase. It takes the faculties together.

Van Til describes how the unbeliever is unaware of the foolishness that comes from rejecting God’s word:

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7 Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” *Five Views on Apologetics*, 212.


When at first Noah claimed that God had given him a word of warning which men reject only to their own peril, they were nevertheless sure that they could dispose of such claims in terms of their own wisdom. . . . But when the last men were drowning they saw themselves and their wisdom for what they really were, namely, foolishness.  

Frame give this frank illustration: “the paradigm of irrationality is Satan himself [who] knows more about God than any of us [but] . . . persists in his rebellion anyway.” As we’ll see in this next presupposition, the irrationality, evil and contradictions are often a result of “knowledge suppressed.”

Conscious-Nonbiblical Presuppositions are Idolatrous Beliefs

When a person rejects the truth of God’s word, they commit themselves to what can be called “idolatrous presuppositions.” Where biblical presuppositions reflect reality, idolatrous presuppositions reflect illusions. Van Til said:

children of Adam . . . have always made and continue to make the effort required to cover-up the truth about themselves and God. They see every fact as other than it really is. By means of their literature—drama, poetry, and philosophy—they try to prove to themselves that the world is not the estate of God and that they are not made in his image. Both Jew and Gentile have blinded themselves to the true state of affairs about themselves and their world—about their past, their present and their future.

These biases can occur in both believers and unbelievers.

The most common word used by Frame to describe the source of these presuppositions is “autonomy”. He explains this as the root:

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10 Van Til, Jerusalem and Athens, 7.

11 Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” Five Views on Apologetics., 212

12 Van Til, Jerusalem and Athens, 7.
the unbeliever’s problem is first ethical, and only secondarily intellectual. His intellectual problems stem from his ethical unwillingness to acknowledge the evidence. Unbelief distorts human thought.  

In other words, there are no religiously neutral notions. And because of this, we are to repent from all idolatrous presuppositions and embrace Christian presuppositions:

True Christianity is the alternative to the conventional wisdom, to the consensus of philosophers, religionists, liberal theologians, and popular thinkers. Our time is one in which everyone seems to claim autonomy, the right to ‘do your own thing.’ God calls that foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18–2:5); he says that it comes from the devil (2 Cor. 4:4).

Many apologists acknowledge the role of idolatrous presuppositions even though they do not call themselves presuppositionalists. Gary Habermas argues that there are no brute historical facts, but that the presence of sin pervades all of what some consider neutral notions. William Lane Craig borrows the term “magisterial” from Martin Luther to describe how human reasoning will autonomously serve idolatrous purposes verses the gospel. The Ligonier group describes secularism as an example of this type of presupposition, calling it a “conscious rejection of the Christian worldview. . . [which] supplants the Christian consensus with its own structured view of reality.”

Philosophers like Parmenides, Spinoza, and Hegel expressed their autonomy in the form of rationalism by holding human reason is the ultimate standard of truth. Most students of philosophy agree

13 Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” *Five Views on Apologetics*, 210-211.

14 Frame, *Apologetics*, 49.


16 Craig ventures that it was reasoning in this idolatrous role that inspired Luther’s attacks on reason as “Aristotle’s whore.” Ibid. 36-37.

that these men failed to build a lasting epistemology. As we will now see, this is because of
the irrational nature of all nonbiblical presuppositions.

Conscious-Biblical Presuppositions
are Christian Beliefs

The final type of presupposition that Frame describes is what we might call
“Christian presuppositions”. These are biblical commitments that a person is aware they have
chosen. These presuppositions could also be called “knowledge” because they presuppose
reality and what is true.

Frame emphasizes in many places the importance of a Biblical epistemology. Van
Til said that apologetics starts at the same place as theology . . . with Scripture. Contrary to
the beliefs of many apologists, the Bible says a lot about issues of knowledge, as we will
soon see. In epistemology, as well as in every area of life, the truthfulness of God’s words
should be “our most fundamental conviction, our most basic commitment . . . our most
ultimate presupposition.”18 No one adequately understands any fact without accepting its
relation to God.

Frame explains what is sometimes unclear about this type of presupposition in Van
Til’s writings:

Van Til uses the term presupposition to indicate the role that divine revelation ought
to play in human thought. I don’t believe that he ever defines the term. I define it for
him as a ‘basic heart-commitment.’ For the Christian, that commitment is to God as
revealed in his Word. While we maintain our ultimate commitment, we cannot accept
as true or right anything that conflicts with that commitment.19

18 Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” Five Views on Apologetics, 209.
The WCF instructs all Protestants to embrace Scripture’s testimony of itself on its own authority. “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.”\(^{20}\) This is the essence of a Christian presupposition.\(^{21}\)

### Apologetic Methodology: Frame’s Presuppositional Method

#### Appealing to Suppressed Presuppositions

As mentioned above, man suppresses his knowledge of God and presupposes God in ways that he is unaware. Presuppositionalists often start their apologetic here strategically, appealing to this suppressed knowledge, and then moving “clockwise” on the diagram of presuppositions.\(^{22}\) In doing this, Van Til, Frame and other presuppositionalists will sometimes use the verb “presuppose” in a slightly different way than previously discussed.

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\(^{19}\) Frame, *Apologetics*, 9.


\(^{21}\) William Lane Craig is not a presuppositionalist, but illustrates this type of presupposition in his personal testimony:

> I remember well one of my theology professors commenting that if he were persuaded that Christianity were unreasonable, then he would renounce Christianity. . . . I could not make the [same] confession of my professor— if somehow through my studies my reason were to turn against my faith, then so much the worse for my reason! . . . If my reason turned against Christ, I’d still believe.


\(^{22}\) Frame describes three elements of apologetics: (1) proof by rational confirmations for faith; (2) defense by replies to criticisms; and (3) offense by bringing criticisms against unbelieving ideas. Ibid. 214-215. Here, we are talking about the first of the three: apologetics as confirmation.
Frame explains that Van Til used this lesser aspect of the word as an important part of the presuppositionalist’s method:

In a few instances in Van Til’s writings, he uses the term differently. For example, he urges the apologist to show ‘the non-Christian that even in his virtual negation of God, he is still really presupposing God.’ Clearly, when the unbeliever presupposes God in this sense, he is not acknowledging God as his ultimate commitment. Van Til’s point here is that in assuming the intelligibility of the world, the unbeliever implicitly concedes the existence of the God that he explicitly denies. This lesser sense of presuppose is related to Van Til’s more common use of the term, but it is somewhat different. For the unbeliever to presuppose God in this context is for him to think, say, or do something, contrary to his own inclination, that indicates at some level of his consciousness a recognition of God’s reality and significance.23

To argue with this suppressed knowledge in mind is sometimes called arguing transcendentally. Kant argued that we don’t have to prove that knowledge exists because we presuppose it and already depend on it. In a similar way, the Christian argues that non-believers presuppose God by depending on Him. Unbelievers depend on God for every word they breathe, so even their argument presupposes God in one respect.24 This insight is valuable to the apologist who can learn to articulate and confirm the knowledge of God that a unbeliever already has from creation. Van Til explained it this way:

The Reformed apologist... appealing to that knowledge of the true God in the natural man which the natural man suppresses by means of his assumption of ultimacy, will also appeal to the knowledge of the truth method which the natural man knows but suppresses. The natural man at bottom knows that he is the creature of God... that he is responsible to God... that he should live to the glory of God... that in all that he does he should stress that the field of reality which he investigates has the stamp of God’s ownership upon it. But he suppresses his knowledge of himself as he truly is. He is the man with the iron mask.25

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23 Frame, *Apologetics*, 9-10, emphasis added.

24 Van Til writes in a couple places a popular illustration of how a child who slaps her father is still dependent on her father by sitting on his lap.

Frame gives another instance:

If we can agree that the sky is blue, for example, how is it that such agreement is possible? If the world is a world of chance, how could anybody agree on anything? Agreement presupposes a world made by God, designed to be orderly and designed to be known by rational minds. You can see that this kind of argument is presuppositional.26

But if the unbeliever is committed to suppressing the truth, masking even true knowledge of himself, the Christian might ask of what value is this argument to the unbeliever. “How can a Christian ask a non-Christian to believe in Christ on Christian presuppositions?” The answer is: God made humans originally to think with the biblical worldview as their presupposition. Frame explains:

we may ask the unbeliever to think on Christian presuppositions, because in one sense he already does. Our plea is that he drop the unbelieving presuppositions that dominate his thought and give heed to those principles that he knows but suppresses. . . . The apologist should appeal to the part of the unbeliever that acknowledges God in spite of himself . . . and require the unbeliever to reason on Christian presuppositions. But this demand may be made in subtle ways.27

We see Frame doing this in his “Sketch of an Apologetic,” after which he says:

The above is not exactly a proof of God’s existence; it is rather an analysis of how we usually think. . . . To my mind, these assumptions show that we actually know God and don’t need proof at all.28

Van Til emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as we argue transcendentally:

we present the message and evidence29 for the Christian position as clearly as possible. . . . In so doing, we shall, to a large extent, be telling him what he ‘already knows’ but seeks to suppress. The ‘reminding’ process provides a fertile ground for the Holy Spirit, who in sovereign grace may grant the non-Christian repentance so that he may know him who is life eternal.30

28 Ibid. 227.
29 Notice here that, contrary to many of Van Til’s critics, he supports the use of evidences, as we will discuss later.
In this way, the presuppositional method can build the confidence and expectation of the apologist.

Our actions reveal things about us: “Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright” (Prov. 20:11). The apologist must pray for discernment of how the unbeliever’s actions presuppose God and display his dependence on God for everything.

Exposing Irrational Presuppositions

All nonbiblical presuppositions are in a sense irrational. But many people are unaware of the irrational nature of their nonbiblical beliefs. The apologist should seek to expose the untenable character of anti-theism philosophically. This work is mostly in negative forms of transcendental arguments.31

Van Til says:

The Christian, as did Tertullian, must contest the very principles of his opponent’s position. The only ‘proof’ of the Christian position is that unless its truth is presupposed there is no possibility of ‘proving’ anything at all.32

According to Bahnsen, Van Til would show that on the unbeliever’s assumptions, science is impossible; knowledge in any field is impossible; all things are meaningless. Therefore every fact clearly proves the truth of Christian theism.33Van Til asks us to imagine a man made of water, sitting in a sea of water, trying to climb out of the water on a ladder of water.

31 Of Frame’s three elements, here we are referring to apologetics as criticism.


33 Greg Bahnsen makes this point in *Van Til’s Apologetic*, referring specifically to Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 266-267.
“So hopeless and senseless a picture must be drawn of the natural man’s methodology.”  

Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Van Til expressed this in a critique:

What the anti-theist should have done is to show that even upon a theistic basis our conception of creation involves self-contradiction. We must therefore give our opponents better treatment than they give us.  

Frame advises the apologist to follow Van Til’s example by agreeing to consider the unbeliever’s presuppositions “for the sake of argument” in order to show these commitments are unconsciously irrational with no basis for truth or reason. The apologist should later ask the unbeliever to consider the Christian presuppositions “for the sake of argument.” The question on the table is whether the unbeliever can “get along without God.” All non-believers have said in essence that human categories are ultimate. The apologist should ask how the more ultimate questions of philosophy might be answered on the basis of these categories. Antitheistic thought is insufficient to furnish the unity that binds together the diversity of existence. Van Til refers to Aristotle and more sophisticated discussions about plurality and unity to make his point that antitheistic reasoning cannot work.  

Rejecting Idolatrous Presuppositions

Van Til urges the apologist to reject unbelieving thinking as idolatrous. He refers to the example of Acts 17:  

Paul . . . tells them that their so-called ignorance is culpable, for God is as near to them as their own selves. He tells them, therefore, to repent of their worship of idols,  

34 Ibid. 124-125.


36 Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” Five Views on Apologetics, 218.

to turn to the living God, lest they stand without the robes of righteousness before the resurrected Lord Christ on the day of judgment.\textsuperscript{38}

As discussed earlier, these idolatrous presuppositions are the result of conscious choices. As such, they require intellectual and moral repentance that turns to the true God.\textsuperscript{39}

Frame often warns of two common enemies: the sin of autonomy and the illusion of neutrality. Human reasoning is not in some realm of neutral indifference. The unbeliever’s ideas are not neutral, but idolatrous. Frame is against the notion of neutrality for at least two reasons: 1. Neutrality does not really exist, and 2. Autonomous human reasoning is at the heart of idolatrous presuppositions. “The very idea of neutrality is at the heart of Satan’s deception of those who are lost. . . .\textsuperscript{[and]} we expose the true nature of unbelief, not as a neutral or unbiased attempt to account for experience, but as a flight from the God we all know.”\textsuperscript{40}

Bahnsen elaborates:

An apologist must not ignore the fact that believers and unbelievers work (outwardly anyway) with espoused sets of presuppositions that are contrary to each other. The notion that their argument with each other could be pursued in a “neutral” fashion is naive and thoroughly misleading. The Christian’s commitment to Christ as his Lord leads him to see everything in the light of who Christ is and what Christ has revealed in his word…. The unbeliever’s commitment to himself as his own autonomous authority leads him, by contrast, to spurn the light of Christ and see everything according to his own patterns of interpretation, observation, reflection, or experience; his reasoning and evaluations are subject to his own intellectual authority.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} Van Til, \textit{Jerusalem and Athens}, 7.

\textsuperscript{39} As the Christian exposes the idolatrous nature of attacks from unbelieving worldviews, he engages in Frame’s second aspect of apologetics as defense by replies to criticisms.

\textsuperscript{40} Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” \textit{Five Views on Apologetics}, 218.

\textsuperscript{41} Bahnsen, \textit{Van Til’s Apologetic}, 462.
Practically speaking, the Christian should beware of ways he may reinforce the unbeliever’s autonomy.\textsuperscript{42} Van Til warns Christians against “appealing to the reason of the natural man as the natural man himself interprets his reason, namely as autonomous.”\textsuperscript{43} Frame is not against finding common ground with the unbeliever, only against identifying with the conscious-nonbiblical presuppositions of the unbeliever. The common ground, as we’ve already seen, is found in the unbeliever’s suppressed knowledge of God. Nor is Frame is against using arguments such as William Lane Craig’s argument from causality, but Frame warns us, “We should not suggest that the unbeliever can assume some secular philosophical concept of causality (like those of Aristotle, Hume, or Kant) and reason from that. Causality itself is not a religiously neutral notion, a common ground between believing and unbelieving worldviews, from which Christian conclusions can be reached.”\textsuperscript{44} He says elsewhere, “When I oppose neutrality, what I oppose is appealing to something other than God’s revelation as the ultimate standard of truth.”\textsuperscript{45}

As we will see later, these statements cause many to accuse presuppositionalists of circular reasoning. But Wayne Grudem explains:

The words of Scripture are ‘self-attesting.’ They cannot be ‘proved’ to be God’s words by appeal to any higher authority. For if an appeal to some higher authority (say, historical accuracy or logical consistency) were used to prove that the Bible is God’s Word, then the Bible itself would not be our highest or absolute authority: it would be subordinate in authority to the thing to which we appealed to prove it.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{42} Frame cites the example of Joseph Butler, who said, “Let reason be kept to: and if any part of the Scripture account … can be shown to be really contrary to it, let the Scripture, in the name of God, be given up.” Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” \textit{Five Views on Apologetics}, 221.

\textsuperscript{43} Van Til, \textit{Defense of the Faith}, 124.

\textsuperscript{44} Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” \textit{Five Views on Apologetics}, 220.

\textsuperscript{45} Frame, \textit{Apologetics}, 8.

Van Til criticizes the traditional method of apologetics, perhaps too much: “The traditional method had explicitly built into it the right and ability of the natural man, apart from the work of the Spirit of God, to be the judge of the claim of the authoritative Word of God.” But Frame says, “There can be no objection to mentioning extrabiblical data in apologetics, as long as those data are not presented as ‘counsel of God’ on the same level as Scripture.” He instructs the Christian “to show how the errors of non-Christian worldviews arise not merely from logical mistakes or factual inaccuracy, but from religious rebellion.” The Christian must learn to distinguish between reasoning on Christian presuppositions and reasoning on unbelieving ones in order to avoid giving the impression that principles of reason advocated by secular philosophy may judge the truth of Scripture. As long as the Christian does this, she has freedom to use different arguments reflecting the nature of apologetics as “person variable.”

Embracing Christian Presuppositions

Now we come full circle to the goal of apologetics–biblical presuppositions. As we will see, transcendental argumentation can be described as a spiral. We described earlier Frame’s priority of a biblical epistemology. Frame writes extensively on the importance of the apologist setting apart Christ as Lord by viewing all the world through the Bible, through

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47 Van Til, Jerusalem and Athens, 11.

48 Frame, Apologetics, 18.

49 Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” Five Views on Apologetics, 222.

50 Frame uses this term and cites George Mavrodes from Belief in God, Ibid.

51 Just as with appealing to suppressed knowledge, this step of embracing Christian presuppositions also describes Frame’s first of the three elements: apologetics as proof by rational confirmation for faith.
what Calvin called “the spectacles of Scripture.” Whenever we think with biblical presuppositions, we are thinking the way God created us to think. How can a Christian ask an unbeliever to believe in Christ on Christian presuppositions? Frame answers that, first, faith is a demand of God. The role of the apologist is to present the truth, trusting that God will plant faith when he wills. Second, the apologetic argument is based on biblical presuppositions in order to convey truth “and certainly the work of apologetics is to communicate truth.”

There are two important conclusions that come from recognizing God’s authority in our apologetic. The first is concerned with the centrality of Scripture. Van Til wrote,

> to engage in philosophical discussion does not mean that we begin without Scripture. We do not first defend theism philosophically by an appeal to reason and experience in order, after that, to turn to Scripture for our knowledge and defense of Christianity. We get our theism as well as our Christianity from the Bible. . . . It is therefore the system of truth as contained in Scripture which we must present to the world.

Some Christians trip up on Van Til’s language here as if he requires us to follow a chronological order. But Bahnsen points out:

> Two crucial things about Van Til’s presuppositionalism must be observed here: (1) Any adequate apologetical argument must function (even if only implicitly) within a broader philosophical framework, and rests ultimately upon it. (2) The Christian gains his philosophical presupposition, not abstractly or by speculation, but concretely and directly from the Scriptures at the very outset.

Christ’s Lordship means that our apologetic arguments should also center on biblical presuppositions. Frame emphasizes the seriousness:

> Our argument must be an exhibition of that knowledge, that wisdom, which is based on the ‘fear of the Lord,’ not an exhibition of unbelieving foolishness. . . .

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54 Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 35.
apologetic argument, as in everything else we do, we must presuppose the truth of God’s Word. We either accept God’s authority or we do not, and not to do so is sin.\textsuperscript{55}

The second conclusion is concerned with presenting Christianity as a whole. Van Til criticized classical methodology for crafting arguments only for specific needs while neglecting to defend Christianity as a whole. Just as our attack is against the non-Christian philosophy of life, so should our apologetic present the Christian philosophy of life.\textsuperscript{56}

Understanding the central role of Scripture guides the apologist to defend Christian theism as a unit. For Van Til:

\textit{theism is not really theism unless it is Christian theism. The Protestant apologist cannot be concerned to prove the existence of any other God than the one who has spoken to man authoritatively and finally through Scripture . . . the entire debate about theism will be purely formal unless theism be taken as the foundation of Christianity.}\textsuperscript{57}

According to Frame, the apologist must avoid arguing for God as a mere conclusion, but instead as the source of all that we know and see. The apologist should not only embrace a biblical epistemology, but also present it.

Presuppositional apologetics will often involve “showing your cards” by admitting one’s biblical presuppositions on the front end. As Van Til put it:

\textit{To argue by presupposition is to indicate what are the epistemological and metaphysical principles that underlie and control one’s method. The Reformed apologist will frankly admit that his own methodology presupposes the truth of Christian theism.}\textsuperscript{58}

This was part of Van Til’s transcendental method. He was clear to distinguish this from Kant’s transcendental method. Kant did not find his final reference point in God, but was

\textsuperscript{55} Frame, \textit{Apologetics}, 8.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. 1,2.

\textsuperscript{57} Van Til, \textit{Defense of the Faith}, 127-128.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. 121-122.
limited to temporal categories. Only the biblical Christian interprets reality with eternal categories because his final reference point is the biblical, self-sufficient, eternal God.\footnote{Van Til expands on this in \textit{Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God}, ed. William Edgar, 2d ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J: Presbyterian And Reformed, 2007).}

Because God is an absolute God, the only argument that is sufficient is a transcendental argument.

We end this section by introducing one more important point in Van Til’s presuppositionalism. He explains that his transcendental method is not circular, but spiral. To help explain the meaning of his transcendental method, Van Til says,

\begin{quote}
The process of knowledge is a growth into the truth. For this reason we have spoken of the Christian theistic method as the method of implication into the truth of God. It is reasoning in a spiral fashion rather than in a linear fashion. Accordingly, we have said that we can use the old terms of deduction and induction if only we remember that they must be thought of as elements in this one process of implication into the truth of God. If we begin the course of spiral reasoning at any point in the finite universe, as we must because that is the proximate starting point of all reasoning, we can call the method of implication into the truth of God a transcendental method. That is, we must seek to determine what presuppositions are necessary [Christian presuppositions] to any object of knowledge [especially suppressed knowledge] in order that it may be intelligible to us.\footnote{Van Til, “A Survey of Christian Epistemology,” 173-174.}

The point is that presuppositional apologetics is centered on biblical truth, from beginning to end. One might say it starts and ends with biblical presuppositions. In the next chapter, we present a biblical defense of presuppositional apologetics.
CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL DEFENSE

The Bible Teaches That Unbelievers Have Knowledge

A key component of presuppositional apologetics is understanding that all people have knowledge of God, and that we should appeal to that knowledge. The Bible makes it clear in the Old Testament and New Testament that unbelievers have a knowledge of God that leaves them without excuse for not believing. Scripture says that God has revealed himself to all people from outside evidence as well as evidence they view about themselves.\(^1\) In Romans 1:18-32, Paul makes it clear that mankind has an inner sense of God’s existence. In 1:18, his wording implies an inner preference for falsehood, and irrationality caused by their sin:

The word ‘suppress’ means ‘to hold firmly,’ and it can be used both in a positive sense, as in ‘let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering’ (Heb. 10:23) and negatively ‘to hold down, resist or suppress.’ In secular Greek, the word was used to describe a helmsman ‘holding’ the course as his boat battled through wind and current. Paul was careful in using the word to convey the sheer determination on the part of mankind to stand firmly against truth and to hold rigidly to this position of opposition to the truth.\(^2\)

In 1:19, “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.” Paul uses the Greek aorist tense for the words translated ‘has shown’ to indicate a definite act of God giving knowledge of Himself in the inner being of man. In fact, the

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attributes of God “have been clearly perceived” to the point that rightfully they are without excuse (1:20). Paul says their lack of thankfulness is culpable because they “knew God” but did not honor him. In 1:25 Paul describes their internal exchange of the truth for a lie, implying rejection of the knowledge they held about God. In fact, the strong willfulness of sinful man is emphasized by the active verb “exchanged” used three times (1:23, 25, 26).

Briscoe explains the significance of v. 23: “and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”

The similarity between the lists of idols Paul gave and the branches of creation described in Genesis 1:20-25 is not accidental. Neither is the obvious link between Paul’s use of the words ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ and the well-known verse ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . .’ (Gen. 1:26). The thrust of Paul’s words is inescapable. From earliest times man has not only suppressed the truth and rejected God as God, but he has totally reversed the divine order by making God in how own image after his own likeness and then, to add insult to injury, has stooped to the point of making God in the image of the lower echelons of creation.³

The Psalms reveal the evil in man’s heart that leads him to reject the knowledge of God. In Ps. 10:3–4, the wicked person “curses and renounces the LORD” and all his thoughts are “there is no God”. David says it is the fool who “says in his heart” that there is no God, who in corruptness denies their sense of God (Ps. 14:1; 53:1). God has been faithful to reveal himself to all mankind through what he has created. In addition to people’s inner sense that God exists, clear evidence is heard in Scripture and in seen in nature. Paul says that knowledge of God has been “clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (Rom. 1:20). The general wording for “things” implies that all of creation gives evidence to God in some way. In Gen.1:26 and following, we see that mankind is the greatest evidence of God, being made in His image. As C.S. Lewis reminds us in the Weight of Glory, “the dullest

³ Ibid. 46-47.
most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship." David in Psalm 8 says:

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

The truth that we are the image of God and the conviction that all people have innate dignity led Francis Schaeffer to worship God.⁴

There is further evidence of God in nature as Paul and Barnabas testified to in Acts 14:17. The “rains and fruitful seasons” and “food and gladness” we all experience give us proof of God. David says in Ps. 19:1–2:

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

Everyday people are reminded of God’s goodness and power by simply looking into the sky. Wayne Grudem comments, “This wide variety of testimonies to God’s existence from various parts of the created world suggests to us that in one sense everything that exists gives evidence of God’s existence.”⁵ The multitude of evidences are all valid proofs for the existence of God, and when some people reject them, we see the magnitude of the poor judgment.

Man Knows More Than The Mere Existence of God

Man not only has a knowledge of God’s existence, but specific knowledge of his character. In Rom. 1:32, Paul shows that even unbelievers without the written Word still

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⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 127.
have in their consciences some knowledge of God’s ethical demands. Wicked people who practice sin know God’s decree and that those who sin this way deserve to die. In this way, unbelievers know that their sin is wrong to some degree. Later in Romans 2:14-15, Paul talks about the conscience in Gentiles who “show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them. . . .” Because all people know something of God’s laws, we can appeal to the suppressed righteousness in everyone’s hearts. Grudem rightly adds:

The knowledge of God’s existence and character also provides a basis of information that enables the gospel to make sense to an unbeliever’s heart and mind: unbelievers know that God exists and that they have broken his standards, so the news that Christ died to pay for their sins should truly come as good news to them.6

Their knowledge of God is not a saving knowledge. But it’s a real knowledge for which they are accountable. When Copernicus discovered that the earth was not the center of the universe, perhaps he was reluctant to publish his findings partly because he knew the desire of man to be at the center.7

The Unbeliever’s Knowledge is Fallen

The Bible’s teaching on the unbeliever’s knowledge is not as cut-and-dry as we would like. In describing how and what the unbeliever knows, it does so in an ambiguous, paradoxical manner. Gaffin discusses this “dialectic” in Romans 1 and elsewhere in Scripture.8 According to Romans 1 as discussed above, unbelievers know God. In one sense

6 Ibid. 121-143.

7 This illustration is used by Briscoe, The Communicator’s Commentary, 41.

8 Gaffin seems to limit the scope of the unbeliever’s knowledge to things of know-how, such as “building highways, brushing their teeth, writing textbooks on logic, etc.” Richard B Gaffin, “Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16,” The Westminster Theological Journal 57, (1995): 119.
they understand, but in another sense they do not. The truth is suppressed (or repressed, v. 18) such that their thinking is futile and their uncomprehending hearts darkened (v. 21). As presumably wise (cf. “wise and understanding,” Luke 10:21; “wise κατά σάρκα,” 1 Cor 1:26) they are in fact foolish. What they believe is God’s truth exchanged for a lie (v. 25), and their minds are corrupted and worthless (αδόκιμος, v. 28).⁹

The heart is “foolish,” that is, literally “without understanding” (ασύνετος), lacking comprehension (v. 21). “Heart” brings the individual into view as a whole. Sometimes it makes sense to distinguish between the intellect, will, emotions, etc. but they are always and ultimately functions of the heart, directed either toward or against God. The sinful rebellion and moral insensitivity of unbelievers involves “the futility of their mind” (νοός) and their “darkened understanding” (διάνοια). Gaffin says:

All told, what Paul ascribes to unbelievers is ‘knowledgeable ignorance,’ ‘uncomprehending understanding.’ The unbeliever both knows and does not know, and there are no categories for neatly distinguishing the one from the other.¹⁰

Which warns us against oversimplifying the distinctions between the four presuppositions in an attempt to categorize every presupposition that one faces. But apart from the working of the Spirit, the unbelievers’s knowledge in no way alleviates human sinfulness.

The Bible Teaches the Rational-Irrational Dialectic in Nonbiblical Thinking

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⁹ Gaffin points out “this passage does not describe the actual experience of every unbeliever, particularly at the level of conscious psychology.” This is another example of the subjective nature of the conscious/unconscious plane, which reminds us not to label presuppositions as firmly as we might like. Richard B Gaffin, “Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16,” The Westminster Theological Journal 57, (1995): 119.

The Bible teaches that unbelieving presuppositions are irrational. Foolishness comes from thinking unbiblically. But the unbeliever is often unaware of his irrationality. In several places, the one who rejects the knowledge of God is called a fool. In Proverbs 1:7, we’re told that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” Those who do not fear the LORD all called “fools” and they do not merely lack wisdom—they “despise wisdom and instruction.” C.G. Barth emphasizes that this knowledge gained by the fearing the LORD refers to an “internal instruction . . . enlightening the conscience.”11 So by this reasoning the fool is conversely darkened in his knowledge. Paul says in Romans 1:22 of the wicked, “Claiming to be wise, they became fools.” Jesus explained in Matthew 7:26 that “everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.” Unbelief itself is foolish (Ps. 14:1; 1 Cor. 1:20). We see in Proverbs 14:8 that “The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way, but the folly of fools is deceiving.” And we’re told of a man who is wise in his own eyes in 26:12, “There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

In Acts 17:23, Paul makes a play on words with the concept of ignorance. To worship an unknown god is in essence to admit one’s ignorance. Paul referred to ‘what’ they worshiped, not ‘who’ they worshiped. Worshipping a thing shows their irrationality. Polhill points out that there is a strong emphasis here on ignorance—on not knowing. For Greeks, ignorance was unacceptable, as the greatest virtue was in pursuing the divine reason within oneself. Not to live in accordance with reason, to live in ignorance, was folly. Paul accused them precisely of this ignorance as sin and would return to this theme in his call to

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The presuppositionalist should also confront his audience with the irrationality of their idolatrous presuppositions.

We see irrationality in demons and Satan himself where James 2:19 describes that “Even the demons believe—and shudder!” and yet they persist in rebellion against God. Satan’s work is described in 2 Corinthians 4:4 as having “blinded the minds of the unbelievers.” We see the irrationality of man who strives only for this world “under the sun” in Ecclesiastes 1:2-3. Solomon says:

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

Ultimately, the reason man is irrational is because he has rejected Christ, who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Man is warned throughout Scripture of his own capacity to fool himself. One reason is that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) And “every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart” (Prov. 21:2). Jesus warned that one can be so preoccupied with others as to not notice a log in his own eye (Matt. 7:3). Grosheide points out that even the apostle Paul did not know enough about himself to be able to judge himself in 1 Corinthians 4:4:

I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.\(^\text{13}\)

Christians should be humbly aware that they also can be blind their own sin.

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There is a sharp divide between biblical and nonbiblical presuppositions. The Bible makes it clear that people are culpable for holding wrong beliefs. Sinful autonomous choice is at the root of these presuppositions—not innocent ignorance. Nonbiblical presuppositions are held by both unbelievers and believers, but there is a sharp distinction between the knowledge each of them is said to possess (what Van Til called “antitytes”). As we look in Scripture, we see several aspects of this sharp division.

Revelation is Necessary

In Luke 10:21 the words “you have hidden” connects with “you have revealed” (cf. “chooses to reveal,” v. 22). This word for revelation (ἀποκαλύπτω) in the NT is primary for the idea of making known what has been unknown. Here also, what is revealed remains hidden from “the wise and the intelligent” (σοφών καὶ συνετῶν; the latter word may also be translated “learned” or “having understanding”). What is revealed is beyond all human capacity and competence. Jesus asserts the absolute necessity of revelation.14

The aspects are cognitive, described as those “having understanding.” The need for revelation is highlighted by the subjects, “infants” and “little children” in contrast to the “wise and intelligent.” This reference recalls what Jesus teaches elsewhere: the necessity of repenting and becoming like a little child (Matt 18:3-4) and the necessity of receiving the kingdom like a little child (Mark 10:15). And so we see that the necessity of revelation also involves the necessity of faith.

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The Scope of God’s Kingdom Is Everything

What is revealed in Luke 10 is described as “these things” (ταύτα, v. 21) and “all things” (πάντα, v. 22). The word ταύτα hints back to the “things” (miracles) done by Jesus in Matt 11:20-24 and Luke 10:13-15. So “these things” are the things of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is the central message of Jesus during his earthly ministry. And according to the NT, nothing in all creation is outside the domain and interest of His kingdom. Nothing falls outside the rule of Christ. Paul says that God “placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church” (Eph 1:22). There is no area or dimension of human knowledge that is outside the scope of what God is said here to have revealed. And again, those who receive it depend totally on revelation. To be truly “wise and learned”, one must become a “little child” and receive the revelation of God in Christ. According to Jesus, revelation is the norm for human knowledge. And the wisdom of God is not *ultimately* cognitive but personal. The controlling point of reference is Christ, who is himself “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24; cf. Col 2:3). When Paul resolves “to know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2) he’s telling us that Christ is his ultimate presupposition and epistemic commitment.

The Knowledge of Believers Is Distinct from That of Unbelievers

The antithesis of wisdom and foolishness is eschatological in its dimensions. We read in 1 Corinthians references to “the disputant of this age” (1:20) and “the wisdom of the world” (1:20,21). In 2:6 the wisdom (τέλειοι) spoken to believers is “not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away.” We are reading of the contrast between two aeons. The plain implication, then, of 2:6,7,9 is that “God’s wisdom” granted to believers, is
of the aeon to come. It is eschatological wisdom, with 2:8 making the negative point: “none of the rulers of this age understood, for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” The rulers of this age are representative of impressive achievements of the present world, measured by human standards in unbelief; examples of the most that this world has to offer.

It is supposed to sound striking that Paul disqualifies the rulers of this age, especially because this disqualification comes for epistemological reasons: they do not understand the gospel! So their failure is not only moral but cognitive. There is a huge epistemological difference between believers and unbelievers. They exist in separate “universes.” Specifically, in terms of the gospel, there is no point of contact epistemologically between believers and unbelievers. Again, v.10a states “but God has revealed it to us.” God’s wisdom is revelation (as in the Matt 11 /Luke 10 passage) and so it’s not just another way of arriving at knowledge. Calvin wrote of Psalm 111:

all the wisdom of the world, without the fear of God, [is] vanity or an empty shadow. And, indeed, all who are ignorant of the purpose for which they live are fools and madmen.\textsuperscript{15}

God’s wisdom-revelation, seen in the cross of Christ, is beyond human capacity to grasp through reason, intuition, observation, or feeling.

The Central Problem is Idolatry

Polhill says of Paul’s message in Acts 17:24-25:

on the basic premise there was no compromise. There is but one sovereign God, Creator of all. To know him they must abandon all their other gods.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} John Calvin, \textit{John Calvin: Commentary on the Psalms Volume 1}, n.d.

\textsuperscript{16} Polhill, \textit{Acts}, 373.
Their rationalism was idolatry, as the Stoics firmly believed that through the proper discipline of reason one could come to a knowledge of divinity. As in 17:30-31, unbelievers are called to repent. Polhill points out, “Only one course was open—repentance, a complete turnabout from their false worship and a turning to God.” In Mark 12:24, even the people of God are responsible for the nonbiblical presuppositions they hold. James Brooks exhorts believers:

Note well the two errors Jesus pointed out: not knowing the content and/or proper interpretation of their own Scriptures and not having personally experienced the power of God in their lives. Christian readers need to realize that such deficiencies are not limited to Sadducees or other Jews.

Proverbs 15:25-32 is framed by a contrast: the Lord opposes the proud but is near those who act in humility, born out of the fear of the Lord. The pride of the wicked is represented in their thoughts (v. 26a), harmful speech (28b), and refusal to listen to reproof (v. 32a). The opposite was sometimes called being circumcised by ear. Lange associates “humility” with “agreement” as in Luke 1:38, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” There is an illusion of neutrality which attempts to hide the great divide. But Jesus said, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” (Matthew 12:30)

17 Ibid. 376-377.
Biblical Epistemology Teaches Setting Apart Christ as Lord

The most popular passage concerning apologetics is 1 Peter 3:14-16. Scott Oliphint and Lane Tipton observe a three-step progression.¹¹

We Must Resolve In Our Own Minds That Jesus Is Lord

The apologetic section of this passage begins in 1 Peter 3:14 where Peter refers to Isaiah 8:12–13:

Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

This passage calls the Lord’s people to fear him instead of those who persecute them. There is equivocation in the word “fear”. We are not to fear the Lord in the same way that we might fear those who persecute us—we are to fear him as the one who is holy with reverence and awe. This changes our focus from the persecutors and to the Lord. Note in Isaiah 8:13 that it is Yahweh whom we are to fear. Peter refers this to Jesus Christ himself, whom we are to set apart as Lord in our hearts. The verb “sanctify” is an imperative. The focus of the command is on our responsibility to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts for the apologetic task.

Apologetics Can Only Be Done By Relying On Scripture

Dependence on Scripture takes our apologetic beyond proving mere theism to the centrality of Christ. To set Christ apart as Lord is here part of how we ready ourselves. And we are always ready to give an answer, a defense, an apology which is a technical legal term for a defendant’s rebuttal against charges in court. One of the primary ways to ready ourselves for apologetics is to study Scripture. We might also desire to study philosophy or some other area to strengthen our defense, but if we neglect Scripture, then we have not adequately prepared ourselves. Even in Athens, “every statement Paul made was rooted in Old Testament thought” (Acts 17:24-25).22

Reality Is Our Friend

We should not be threatened if we remember who is really in control. Peter is reminding us that the lordship of Christ is a present reality and future hope. This confidence empowers us to answer unbelievers with gentleness and respect. The hope of those suffering is that Christ is coming to judge the quick and the dead. Peter reminds us that the invisible things are eternal, permanent, and essentially “real”. This is the nature of all Christian presuppositions. They are real. Apologetics is a discipline that has as its content and context, not bare theism, but the gospel of Christ. And it is our task and privilege.

Scripture speaks about our Christian presuppositions in several other ways. We’re told several times that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Psalm 111:10, Prov 9:10) meaning the source of knowledge is in “all religious worship of him, inward and outward, private and public.”23 Barth explains this refers to “he who shews his fear of God

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22 Polhill, Acts, 373.

by the keeping of his commandments.”

Jonathan Edwards wrote that one reason God’s word and works are mentioned together in Psalm 111 is to emphasize the importance of remembering. We see in 2 Corinthians 4:2 that “Paul’s ministry was one in which the truth was manifested, openly displayed, outspokenly proclaimed.” In 2 Corinthians 13:5-7, Paul appeals to their self-knowledge for them to “examine themselves,” which of all knowledge is the most intimate and indisputable.

Christian presuppositions are the “ought” of our apologetic. And presupposing Biblically is our choice to “bring every thought captive to the obedience to Christ…” (2 Cor. 10:5) This informs us to present God as He really is: the sovereign Lord over all. The WCF instructs all Protestants to embrace Scripture’s testimony of itself on its own authority:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

We are commanded to keep an awareness of the truth (1 Tim. 4:16, Rom 12:3, Lam. 3:40, Gal. 6:3). Calvin says of 1 Peter 3:15:

But it ought to be noticed, that Peter here does not command us to be prepared to solve any question that may be mooted . . . Peter had in view no other thing, than that Christians should make it evident to unbelievers that they truly worshipped God, and had a holy and good religion. And in this there is no difficulty, for it would be strange if we could bring nothing to defend our faith when anyone made inquiries respecting it.


27 Ibid. 480-481.


29 John Calvin, *Calvin’s Complete Commentary, Volume 8: Philippians to Jude* (Delmarva).
Presuppositional apologetics urges the believer to make the lordship of Christ clear in the conversation.
“There is no greater mission field than the university campus.” Dr. Phil Bishop

Every good story involves a struggle. The thrill of victory requires the context of a battle. Alvin Plantinga agrees with Augustine, that human history is the arena of a great contest between two opposing forces: The City of God and the City of the World. Abraham Kuyper later described this battle as an antithesis between Christian belief and unbelief. Plantinga applies this to modern times, describing Western academia as “a battleground or arena in which rages a battle for men’s souls.”¹ And though the unbelieving force is often a mix of ideologies, not manifesting in one pure, identifiable form, Plantinga recognizes two worldviews as the dominant opponents to the Christian worldview today: naturalism and postmodernism.² Any attempt to form an apologetic on today’s university campus must take these two dominating schools of thought into consideration.

Naturalism

According to this perspective, there is no God. There is only nature, and there is nothing outside of nature. Ultimately, human beings are only part of a cosmic machine that moves forward without significance or purpose. Proponents of this view include Thomas


² What Plantinga calls “perennial naturalism” will be simply be called “naturalism” here, and what Plantinga refers to as “Enlightenment Humanism or Creative Antirealism” will simply be referred to as “Postmodernism.”
Hobbes, Baron D'Holbach, Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, Willard van Orman Quine and Wilfrid Sellars. Their fundamental explanations for the complexities of humanity are in terms of our relationship with nonhuman nature. How are we to explain knowledge, beliefs, and all cognitive functions? Humans are said to hold beliefs which can cause them to act in certain ways with a mechanistic causality. How do we explain art, humor, music and religion? Evolution is the most common explanation. Human diversity and creativity are results of random mutations which are continued and preserved by natural selection. The notion of love can be explained as an evolutionary product which arose through some variable source and was perpetuated for its survival value. Science, mathematics and morality are to be understood in terms of impersonal, mechanistic natural forces. This is an ever-present mentality on the university campus, particularly within the sciences. Dallas Willard describes that on the university campus there is a “warfare” between science and theology:

There is a special burden of unbelief . . . the idea that it is unscientific to believe that God could speak to us or guide us. Today it is simply assumed that scientific knowledge excludes the presence of God from the material universe, of which we human beings are supposed to be a pitifully small and insignificant part… The social institution of higher education, the university system, stands in world culture as the source of unquestioned authority so far as knowledge is concerned. Without going into detail, we must acknowledge that it currently throws its weight behind a picture of reality without God, a picture in which human beings are entirely on their own. Regardless of what the recognized system of education might say of itself for public relations purposes, itpresumes in its processes that you can have the best education possible and be ignorant of God.  

Plantinga states, “It is hard to overestimate the dominance and influence of perennial

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naturalism in our universities.”

But the second enemy of the Christian worldview is perhaps just as dangerous.

**Postmodernism**

Postmodernism is difficult to summarize because of the vast diversity of its thinkers. But it’s possible to characterize the ideology accurately in general, evidenced by the many (for and against) who have understood its tenets well enough to debate its strengths and weaknesses. According to this point of view, and in sharp contrast to Naturalism, human beings are responsible for the structure of the world. We are the architects of the universe. How can we receive credit for such things as mountains, horses, planets and stars? The postmodernist asserts that their existence and structure have been conferred upon them by the conceptual activity of the human mind. Even foundational forms such as space and time, truth and falsehood, possibility and necessity are not to be found in the world as such, but are somehow created by our own mental activity. We *impose* them on the world; we do not *discover* them there. Naturalism and Postmodernism are related in a reversible way, because where Naturalism *underestimates* the ultimate value and purpose of human beings in the universe, Postmodernism vastly *overestimates* our role and ability to create our own reality. In Naturalism, human beings are essentially machines with no real creativity. In Postmodernism, human beings take the place of God. The implications of such a view may at first appear crazy, because if there were no human minds, according to this view, there would be nothing. But this way of thinking has inspired other ideologies like Existentialism,

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which says that each of us creates our world by way of our own decisions. Proponents of versions of Postmodernism include Nelson Goodman, Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty, all of which hold that we human beings are responsible for mentally creating the structure of the world as it is.⁶ And the influence of Postmodernism stretches beyond philosophy. We see its effect in literature, where Don Cupitt writes in *Creation Out of Nothing* that the world is continually created as our language pours out of us. We see its effect in physics, where there is no reality until we make the required observations. We see it in ethics, where no moral law can bind me unless I set it. And the natural overflow of postmodern thought is relativism and nihilism.

In relativism, objective truth does not exist. One person has her version of reality caused by how she has structured things in her mind, and another person has his version of reality. J. P. Moreland writes about this challenge of postmodernism:

Postmodernism is primarily a reinterpretation of what knowledge is and what counts as knowledge. More broadly, it represents a form of cultural relativism about such things as reality, truth, reason, value, linguistic meaning, the self, and other notions. On a postmodernist view there is no such thing as objective reality, truth, value, reason, and so forth. All these are social constructions, creations of linguistic practices and, as such, are relative not to individuals but to social groups that share a narrative.⁷

Allan Bloom famously stated, “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”⁸ But there is another thing a professor can be certain of: almost every


⁷ Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, eds., *Passionate Conviction: Contemporary Discourses on Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 599.

⁸ Bloom comments on the presuppositional nature of this relativism:

The students, of course, cannot defend their opinion. It is something with which they
academic who holds to such postmodern nihilism will be unable to stand firm on any intellectual commitment. McIntyre observed about this lack of commitment, “seeing through the pitiful self-delusion of commitment is rampant in academia.”

According to Postmodernism, even the tenets of Postmodernism cannot be objectively true. It is not possible in the scope of this paper to fully present even one detailed argument for Christianity. The goal here is to provide a broad outline indicating one direction that might be taken in such an endeavor. Other presuppositionalists may take different approaches altogether. We will first critique Naturalism using a transcendental methodology through Frame’s four presuppositions, considering three philosophical topics as starting points: ethics, epistemology and science. Then we will offer a similar critique of Postmodernism.

Transcendental Critiques of Naturalism

Naturalism and Ethics

Appealing to Suppressed Presuppositions

Even Naturalists have values. Every time atheists state that coffee, a movie or a joke is good or bad, they betray their values. Sometimes they make more objective value judgments, like if they say that exercise is good, or cancer is bad. More importantly, they often make value judgments about what is right or wrong morally. They believe that some actions are good and right, like helping others, while other actions are bad and wrong, such

have been indoctrinated.


As quoted by Plantinga, who also says, “To ‘see’ this point, however, is, in a way, to see through any sort of commitment with respect to intellectual life,” Plantinga, “Augustinian Christian Philosophy,” 305.
as child abuse. When they affirm that what the Nazis did to the Jews was wrong, they mean that it’s absolutely wrong regardless of personal preferences or culture. And so often without knowing it, the atheist assumes some moral standard that transcends human cultures and societies. These objective moral judgments presuppose some absolute standard. A standard or criterion of judgment is implied by the simple act of judging. And this standard has to be outside of themselves, independent of themselves, otherwise the standard would be subjective and not truly objective. Any time that a Naturalist declares that someone’s actions were “absolutely wrong”, they presuppose that something is absolutely and transcendentally right. Every day, the Naturalist takes for granted his ability to value things as good or bad, right and wrong, without recognizing that this implies the existence of an ultimate standard. What we will see is that these presuppose the existence of God.

Exposing Irrational Presuppositions

The Naturalist faces real problems explaining the existence of values and moral judgments. If the universe evolved randomly from nothing, how can something be objectively good or bad, right or wrong? If everything reduces to material particles, what basis is there for absolute ethical judgments? The atheist may try to explain that morality comes from the culture, practicality, happiness, pleasure or the least pain. But when they affirm with the Christian that child sacrifice is wrong, they mean that it is objectively wrong

10 As Francis Schaeffer said, “All men have this sense of moral motions.” Francis Schaeffer, He Is There and He Is Not Silent, 30th Anniversary ed. (Tyndale House, 2013), 794.

11 John Frame gives the hypothetical situation where a Christian addresses a Naturalist’s frustration (at how an airline handled his briefcase) to illustrate how morals exist and obligate, which in turn points to personal absolute beginning. John M Frame, Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2015), 208-211.

12 Anderson explains, “It’s precisely this problem which has led many Naturalists to deny that our objective value judgments have any meaningful connection with reality.” Ibid, 1081.
regardless of cultural traditions or preferences. So they still have the problem, because Naturalism says that the universe has no ultimate meaning or purpose or basis for right or wrong judgments. Laws of physics exist, but they are not the same as laws of morality. How can a Naturalist ever get angry at someone’s behavior as wicked? How does the atheist determine what is right and wrong? She might explain that the answer is “her conscience”, but the conscience is only a human sense of right and wrong, not the creator of right and wrong. There is something objective and obligatory about morals, but the Naturalist has no basis for explaining why. Physics alone does not create or allow for “shoulds.” How does a Naturalist allow for loyalty in relationships? Loyalty is a moral value. If the world is only material, where does any sense of loyalty to one’s spouse, friend or country come from? It is unreasonable to believe that the universe is created and maintained by strictly impersonal forces. With an impersonal beginning, our values and morals are just a form of metaphysics. So why do so many people believe this?

Confronting Idolatrous Presuppositions

Why do so many Naturalists accept these irrational beliefs? Why do so few reflect on why they believe them? One reason is that humans want moral autonomy. We want the authority to decide what is good or bad, and autonomy to determine what is right or wrong. If a Naturalist begins to believe that there is a personal and ultimate God of the universe, that will mean a change in who calls the shots. If God is the real and ultimate authority, He gets to make moral demands of us and hold us accountable. And by nature, we don’t like that, no matter how rational it is.

Embracing Christian Presuppositions

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13 Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, 638.
The Naturalist has no basis for universal, objective values and morals, but the Christian does not face this problem. There are transcendent moral laws because there is a transcendent moral lawgiver. God is absolutely good which explains and satisfies our need for an absolute standard of goodness by which to judge things. We can rightly judge actions as good or right to the degree that they reflect the character of God. He is the definition of good, the source of good and the standard of good. In this way, ethics demands the existence of God. The Christian worldview makes sense of our moral laws. And God gives us these moral laws for our good.

Naturalism and Epistemology

Appealing to Suppressed Presuppositions

Naturalists presuppose God in their use of reason. The atheist takes for granted her ability to judge between truth and lies without stopping to consider the basis of this ability. Every day the unbelieving intellectual studies and evaluates data to decide what’s logical and what’s illogical. Consider all the rational functions a person uses each day: thinking, observing, interpreting, evaluating, understanding, reading and communicating. Cognitive faculties also include the senses of seeing, hearing, feeling, etc. The mind is at work in all of this in ways beyond mere physical means. The turning point for many sci-fi movies is when the computer wired for artificial intelligence finally gains self-awareness, or self-consciousness. This is a human function and a gift that enables us to distinguish truth from illusion. The Naturalist does not recognize how he contradicts his own understanding of the world every time he uses his mind.

Exposing Irrational Presuppositions
Naturalism cannot account for human reasoning for at least six reasons.

1) Origins: The Naturalist believes that the world came from only non-reasoning, physical matter. But how can a mind come from strictly physical forces? The Naturalist’s universe had no reason of its own.

2) Perspective: According to Naturalism, our world is a product of blind forces. But conscious minds involve an awareness of self, not blindness. Where did the amazing sense of self-awareness come from?

3) Distinction: Mental qualities are vastly different from physical qualities. The Naturalist cannot explain how the conscious mind could be generated by mere chemical and electrical processes of the brain. Atheists are right to recognize a relationship between the physical and mental, but wrong to equate participation with causation.

4) Advantage: The evolutionary process is given credit for our reasoning because such a quality gives us an advantage for survival. But this confuses process for production. Evolutionary processes are said to only work on what already exists.

5) Purpose: Evolution is not truth-driven, but survival-driven. But without this goal of truth in the development of reasoning, how can the Naturalist explain his rationale for believing his mind isn’t tricking him?

6) Intentionality: Human thought manifests “aboutness”. We can think about physical things as well as conceptual matters. The Naturalist’s problem is how to explain how a

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14 Anderson points out one distinctive feature of the mind is the ability to see things from a first-person subjective perspective. Anderson, Why Should I Believe Christianity? 1171.

15 Ibid. Anderson adds: Most of the organisms on this planet survive and reproduce perfectly well—far more efficiently than humans!—without the slightest ability to reason. If evolution is driven by natural selection, as Darwin’s theory dictates, then evolution doesn’t care a whit for what an organism believes. It only cares about how an organism behaves.
strictly material process can be about something intentionally.\textsuperscript{16} Even atheist, Alex Rosenberg, admits:

Ultimately, science and scientism are going to make us give up as illusory the very thing conscious experience screams out at us loudest and longest: the notion that when we think, our thoughts are about anything at all, inside or outside of our minds. . . . Thinking about things is an overwhelmingly powerful illusion.\textsuperscript{17}

So in light of these philosophical problems, why does the Naturalist continue to hold onto this worldview?

Confronting Idolatrous Presuppositions

The atheist makes a continual, concerted effort to push down his knowledge of God. He might say that he is rationally committed to thinking truthfully, but when it comes to spiritual questions, he’s committed to forming his own conclusions. His fallen nature results in a profound independence that leads him to ignore rationality or destroy it, leading him to “rationalize” his desires. The Naturalist might say that their problem with Christianity is that it lacks evidence and “stands on shaky ground,” but their fundamental problem is internal, not external. Indeed, only the Christian faith makes sense of these questions.

Many times, the atheist will not be ready to hear these truths so directly and need a more subtle confrontation. A helpful exercise could be to draw a circle on a napkin representing all the knowledge in the universe, and then ask the Naturalist to color in how much knowledge they hold. Most Naturalists will draw a faint dot and admit that their


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{17} Alex Rosenberg, The Atheist’s Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions (W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 162-163.}
knowledge in the vastness of the universe is limited. In light of this, the Naturalist should give honest consideration to the Bible’s claims.\textsuperscript{18}

Embracing Christian Presuppositions

The same problems are not an issue for the Christian. The Christian worldview understands God as the source of all logic. As with morality and goodness, the principles of logic and rationality are simply reflections of his character. How can we be content to explain our conscious experience as an illusion? For the Naturalist to think about her own beliefs is by her own definition an illusion. But the Christian understands that one aspect of being created in God’s image is our ability to reason and think about things. God is the source of all rationality and logic.\textsuperscript{19}

Naturalism and Science

Appealing to Suppressed Presuppositions

Both Naturalists and Christians agree that there are many incredible benefits of science. The subject is a good starting point because the atheist embraces so many biblical presuppositions concerning science without knowing it. Some of these commitments in

\textsuperscript{18} John Frame sometimes uses probable language to address the irrationality of the atheist, saying, “Therefore, we should give careful consideration to the Bible and assess its truth on the assumption that a personal God may have inspired it.” Frame, Apologetics, 91.

\textsuperscript{19} Frame explains:

For if God is our transcendental presupposition, then without him arguments both for and against the existence of logic are meaningless. . . . So there is no logically possible world in which God does not exist.

Frame, Apologetics, 72-73.
Science involve the ethical and rational functions discussed earlier, such as how the scientist’s work takes for granted the need for excellence and integrity in research, and how their work depends on the scientist’s ability to make accurate observations and inferences. Science also carries biblical presuppositions about the external universe, often without the scientist knowing it. There are at least four ways that science does this.

1) Uniformity: When scientists form theories about the laws of nature (like gravity) they assume those laws will apply in the same way across the whole universe.20

2) Consistency: They also assume that those laws will hold as true in the future as they have in the past.21

3) Compatibility: Scientists often take for granted the fact that the order of the universe is compatible and comprehensible to their human reasoning faculties.

4) Origin: Naturalist scientists have learned from the laws of thermodynamics that the universe had a definite beginning.

Exposing Irrational Presuppositions

Again, Naturalists face many problems explaining the existence of these things to which science holds. If there was no order in the beginning of the universe as they claim, how do they explain why the earth reflects and acts in such order? How did it happen that this orderly universe would align to our mental faculties is it does?

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20 John Frame clarifies that science does not presuppose an absolute uniformity of nature; “indeed, modern science allows for areas of randomness in the universe. There are exceptions to this uniformity, because God is after all a person and, like human persons, works according to his personal intentions, not according to rigid patterns. … These unusual occurrences we normally call miracles.” Ibid.

21 John Frame explains the theological explanation of scientific regularities as expressions of God’s covenant with Noah to keep the seasons regular “while the earth remains” (Gen. 8:22). Ibid.
Confronting Idolatrous Presuppositions

Science has the reputation of being unbiased, but the scientist cannot be totally objective. Instead of coming to the table to observe the evidence with an open mind, the Naturalist comes with the intention of unbelief. Their predisposition is to doubt and their decision in advance is to not believe. The solution is not thoughtless acceptance or credulity, but sincerity. It mostly goes unnoticed that the vast amount of a scientist’s assumptions find no basis in a Naturalistic worldview. This is largely due to the devastating ability of all sinful humanity to deceive ourselves (Jer. 17:9). We fool ourselves when we claim to be open-minded, but never sincerely read and consider the Bible’s perspective.

Embracing Christian Presuppositions

Christianity is perfectly compatible with the laws and observations of science. Just as with ethics and rationality, the God of the Bible is the one who makes all science possible. The universe reflects order because of the perfect order of God. He is the definition and source of all order. He made mankind in his image with minds compatible with the orderly universe he created. In this way, we can say that science demands the existence of God. There is no basis for assuming any order without God. Because of this, the Naturalist scientist must presuppose the Christian God in order to account for his own scientific accomplishments.\(^{22}\)

Transcendental Critiques of Postmodernism

Postmodernism and Ethics

\(^{22}\) Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 125-126.
Appealing to Suppressed Presuppositions

Like the Naturalist, the Postmodernist also talks in terms of “right” and “wrong” in his everyday life. He values some things more than others. He makes value judgments about bad referees and good coffee. He also makes moral judgments. Many Postmodernists understand the importance of loyalty to one’s spouse, friends or family. Relationship loyalty is a moral statement about how someone “should” think and behave toward another person. Every day the Postmodernist takes for granted the importance of these and other ethical statements, without reflecting on the basis of such ability. The Postmodern worldview simply gives no foundation for the ethical standards they live by every day.

Exposing Irrational Presuppositions

A Postmodernist needs to consider this: if laws are simply a projection of the mind, then no objective moral laws really exist or can hold any sway on a person unless she allows it. The Postmodernist has no basis for objective right or wrong. The relativism inherent in Postmodernism means that one person has their own versions of right and wrong and another person has their own. Objective morality cannot exist, because objective reality can not exist. Each person’s version of reality is caused by how he structures things in his mind.

How can the Postmodernist explain his sense that some laws universally obligate? And if right and wrong are my own inventions, why should anyone else care about them? But the postmodernist does think that others ought to care, which, also, is a moral judgment. It is irrational to believe that the basis of human moral obligation is a mental fabrication. It is more rational to explain ultimate morals coming from of a personal ultimate being like the
Bible says. Moral values depend on personal relationships. Absolute and objective moral standards presuppose loyalty to an absolute person.\textsuperscript{23}

The Postmodernist who doesn’t believe in a personal infinite God has no basis in himself to determine right from wrong because he is finite.\textsuperscript{24} He can describe what is antisocial or what a society likes and doesn’t like, but he cannot discuss what is really right or really wrong. He cannot have morality. And because of this, he has no real grounds for fighting evil, or for feeling anger when he watches the news.\textsuperscript{25} How is that the Postmodernist can hold onto his worldview when it doesn’t provide him the grounds for feeling angry when he watches the news or basis for fighting evil?

Confronting Idolatrous Presuppositions

The Postmodernist replaces God with himself. Man is said to be the creator of the universe. Here we see the most vivid expression of the autonomy of the intellect. Frame discusses a need for repentance of pride being common in intellectuals, who often relish in the willful autonomy of intellect. This could also apply to Naturalists or any other unbelieving worldview, but is especially visible in the almost supernatural role that the Postmodernist gives to the mind.\textsuperscript{26} If this person is sincere about investigating Christianity

\textsuperscript{23} John Frame makes this points in several ways in Frame, \textit{Apologetics}, 72-73, 127, 208-211.

\textsuperscript{24} Torres notes how acknowledging the determinative power of philosophical presuppositions strengthens the argument against the Jesus Seminar, citing Michael J. Wilkins, \textit{Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

\textsuperscript{25} Francis Schaeffer makes this point in \textit{He Is There and He Is Not Silent}, 632-637.

\textsuperscript{26} It’s interesting to note that Dr. Rosaria Butterfield claims that the first thing God convicted her of after her conversion was not her homo-sexuality, but her pride. Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, \textit{The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor’s Journey into Christian Faith} (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Crown & Covenant, 2012).
but hasn’t read the Bible very much, they owe it to themselves to humbly approach the Scriptures with an open mind.\cite{27}

It is ironic that the Postmodernist gives so much credit to the brain and its ability to “create”, but doesn’t seriously consider if his own brain might be deceiving him about the truthfulness of Postmodernism. As discussed earlier, the fallen human mind has an amazing capacity to deceive itself.

Embracing Christian Presuppositions

The Christian does not face the same problem when he gives the basis for universal, objective values and morals. The existence of ultimate moral laws is explained by the Biblical God who is our ultimate law-giver. God is good, meaning He is the source and definition of good for us, as there is no separate qualifying value of “good” by which his goodness is measured. . . he is the measure. He is the explanation for why can rightly judge things as good or bad, or actions as right or wrong, to the degree that all things reflect the character of God or fail to. In this way, ethics demands the existence of God. The Postmodernist should embrace the Christian worldview as the only system that makes sense of morality.

Postmodernism and Epistemology

Appealing to Suppressed Presuppositions

\cite{27} Anderson addresses unbelievers’ self-deception with a challenge to read God’s word with an expectant attitude, noting that “most people who reject Christianity have never actually taken the time to read the Bible for themselves.” \textit{Why Should I Believe Christianity?}1160.
Postmodernists are right to believe that all claims to knowledge are biased. They agree with the Presuppositionalist that no one is “neutral.” This is a profound truth that is embraced by both worldviews. They take for granted this ability to reason and observe these biases. The Postmodernist judges between truth and lies without considering the grounds for doing so. In all his literary analyses, he reads, thinks, interprets and understands. But he does not recognize a contradiction to his worldview every time he uses his mind.

Exposing Irrational Presuppositions

Not only is the certainty of ethics without grounds as we’ve seen, but also the certainty of knowing. The Postmodernist has no way to say that something is true or false. With her presuppositions, everything could be an illusion. She has no categories that allow her to distinguish what is real from what is only in her head. This worldview also makes interpersonal relationships impossible, but we have no grounds for truly knowing someone. Francis Schaeffer said, “A couple can sleep together for ten or fifteen years, but how are they going to get inside each other’s heads to know anything about the other person as a person, in contrast merely to a language machine?”

Linguistic analysis is a dominant philosophy, but it reduces to an anti-philosophy being unable to explain objective meaning. J. P. Moreland describes the problem this way:

Postmodernists are preoccupied with power struggles that surround language and social practice, and they see themselves as part of a missionary movement to liberate powerless, oppressed victims from dominance. They often practice a “hermeneutics of suspicion” …and it creates anger by fostering relational suspicion according to which there is a victimizer under every linguistic tree.

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28 Schaeffer adds:

How do we have any categories to enable us to move into the other person’s thought world? This is the modern man’s alienation; this is the blackness that so many modern people face, the feeling of being totally alienated.

*He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, 1131.

Without objective norms there is no authoritative way of interpreting any piece of writing. The author’s intention is not even authoritative.\(^\text{30}\) Perhaps the ultimate irrationality of this worldview is that it is self-refuting.\(^\text{31}\) To reject objective truth entirely is impossible for them, so they must inevitably exempt their own writings from this kind of criticism.\(^\text{32}\) How can they justify their actions?

Confronting Idolatrous Presuppositions

The Postmodern thinker suppresses her knowledge of God. One reason is her commitment to intellectual autonomy, and another is her idolatrous stance as judge. The Postmodernist might say that her problem with Christianity is its bias toward power and control in the biblical authors, but the true problem is in herself. A more subtle challenge might be to ask the Postmodernist to consider the existence of her own biases and the possibility of these biases controlling her interpretation of the Bible’s claims.

Embracing Christian Presuppositions

\(^\text{30}\) Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” *Five Views on Apologetics*, 226.

\(^\text{31}\) J.P. Moreland adds:
Postmodernists appear to claim that their own assertions about the modern era, about how language and consciousness work, and so forth are true and rational; and they write literary texts and protest when people misinterpret the authorial intent in their own writings. In these and other ways postmodernism seems to be self-refuting.
Quoted in Copan and Craig, *Passionate Conviction*, 599.

\(^\text{32}\) Frame, *Apologetics*, 49.
The entire Christian worldview, with its emphasis on the existence of truth helps us address problems that Postmodernists cannot answer. “The Bible insists, over against Postmodernism, that there is one particular perspective that is objectively true.”

Christianity gives us a reliable epistemology. Bahnsen says that, unlike the Postmodern Worldview,

The strength of the Christian system — the acid test of it — is that everything fits under the apex of the existent, infinite-personal God, and it is the only system in the world where this is true. No other system has an apex under which everything fits. . . . Without losing his own integrity, the Christian can see everything fitting into place beneath the Christian apex of the existence of the infinite-personal God who is there.

Christianity alone provides a basis for philosophical and interpersonal knowledge.

Postmodernism and Science

Appealing to Suppressed Presuppositions

Like Christians, Postmodernists want an identity in this world. They want to matter and make a difference. They want to know that their choices matter. And they operate in such way that assumes their ability to make real choices and take free action. But they take these abilities for granted, not realizing that their actions presuppose and point to the existence of a personal, ultimate God who created us with identity in his image. The Postmodernist also rejects the strictly material universe of the Naturalist. Even modern

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34 Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 1450.
physics is beginning to embrace a world that looks less like a giant machine and more like a

Exposing Irrational Presuppositions

Without realizing it, the Postmodernist assumes a worldview that contradicts his daily
actions. J. P. Moreland explains the implications of postmodernism:

according to postmodernism, the self is a social construction, a creation of language,
and objectification of the first person pronoun I; and, as such, the self is a culturally
relative, historically conditioned construct. . . . there is no unity to the self and no
enduring ego. Rather the self is a bundle of social roles and relations that are
expressions of the arbitrary flux of the group. . . . Thus, postmodern thought is on a
collision course with important developments in psychological theory during the last
ten years which have emphasized the self as an active, free agent.36

Confronting Idolatrous Presuppositions

Again, we see the Postmodernist living with irrationality due to a desire for
intellectual autonomy. He rejects authoritative claims from all others because he wants the
authority to measure what is real. To fully follow their scientific presuppositions would
require living consistently a worldview that a personal and ultimate God created all things. If
God is real, then He is the authority. And by nature, the Postmodernist will not accept that.

Embracing Christian Presuppositions

The Christian worldview doesn’t reflect the same inconsistencies. According to the
Bible, God created all things and exists independently of the universe. So there is indeed an
absolute source of personality. He is the ultimate personality. Human personality and
relationships reflect the triune nature of God. And the Christian worldview makes sense of

35 Dallas Willard quotes Nobel laureate Eugene Wigner explaining a common notion between physicists that the
mental is primary to the physical: “It is not possible to formulate the laws of quantum mechanics in a fully
consistent way without reference to consciousness.” Willard, Hearing God, 1607.

36 Moreland in Copan and Craig, Passionate Conviction, 599.
our abilities to make real choices, because God created man with the ability to make real choices that matter, and for which man will be held accountable. The Christian worldview explains that God rules his people in the personal way language. The Ten Commandments were written first, and later the apostle Paul described Scripture as “breathed out by God.”

The Christian apologist should help the Postmodernist embrace the fact that like everyone else, she wants to have identity and purpose, and that her drive points to the existence of a personal God who created us with identity in his image. We turn now to evaluate how successful the presuppositional approach will be.
CHAPTER 5
EVALUATING THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL APPROACH

Strengths of Presuppositionalism

Transcendental arguments enable the apologist to present Christ as Lord.

The main problem on the university campus is this: Christ is not worshiped. The Naturalist stands condemned because she does not bow to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. One of the greatest strengths of presuppositional apologetics is that it aims to present a whole picture of God. The presuppositionalist is not content to argue for mere theism. If the university wants to be a place of learning, then it must come to recognize that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Recognizing presuppositions and arguing transcendentally informs our apologetic method to intentionally present God as He really is: the sovereign Lord over all. No one adequately understands any fact without accepting its relation to God.

Presuppositionalism sets before us the apologetic goal of a transcendental theology.¹ Our apologetic then combines biblical truths with the philosophical interests of the academy. In metaphysics, the apologist remembers the absolute personality of God, the distinction between mankind and his Creator, and the Lordship of Christ as the second person of the trinity. In epistemology, the Christian emphasizes the role of presuppositions, sola scriptura and natural revelation. In ethics, the apologist considers God as perfectly good and just (Gen. 18:25; Ps. 145:17) and as the ultimate criterion of truth.² In science, the believer

¹ John Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” Five Views on Apologetics, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 220.
recognizes and honors God as the source of all order in the universe, the one who holds all things together (Col. 1:17). The direction of the presuppositional argument always aims at Christian presuppositions as its goal. By presupposing God in this way the apologist makes a conscious choice to bring all ideas in conformity to God’s Word.

Presuppositionalism equips the Christian in academia to be “in the world but not of the world.”

The Christian professor or student on a public university campus might never face the same persecution for their faith that Christians face in eastern countries, but the pressure they face to blindly accept the unbelieving assumptions of the university can be just as anti-theistic. Some Christian students step on the university campus unprepared for the battle of worldviews they will face. Many Christian professors believe that their faith has little if anything to say about their field of study. When it comes to spiritual matters, many Christians on campus feel the pressure to their approach should come from a neutral standpoint. They believe the lie that there is such a thing as spiritual neutrality. And as mentioned before, it is simply assumed at the university that faith has nothing to say about science. A powerful benefit of presuppositional apologetics is how it equips the Christian academic to swim against this current. Alvin Plantinga says this:

Christian theism . . . is surely the minority opinion among our colleagues in Western universities. We must understand that there is a battle here, and we must know who and what the main contestants are and how this contest provides the various scholarly disciplines. We should not assume, automatically, that it is appropriate for Christians to work at the disciplines in the same way as the rest of the academic world. We should ask ourselves, to what sort of premises can we properly appeal?3

2 Several of these points are discussed in John M Frame, Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2015), 34.

Presuppositional apologetics informs the Christian that she can rightfully consider all that she knows as a Christian while working in her field. The Christian should find the relevance in her research and teaching for Christian presuppositions. The fact that God is ultimate and personal means that He relates to all knowledge, and the truth that man is made in God’s image is applicable for any human venture for understanding. For some, presuppositional apologetics can serve as vital exit ramp off the highway of assumption that all fields must be approached from a naturalistic perspective. Plantinga gives this encouragement:

> In an enormous number of such cases, what we know as Christians is crucially relevant to coming to a proper understanding. Therefore, we Christians should pursue these disciplines from a specifically Christian perspective.\(^4\)

The presuppositional apologetic exposes the unbeliever assumptions in the academic world while equipping the Christian to speak and act like a Christian.

Presuppositionalism involves the heart with the mind in apologetic conversations.

Apologetics is a popular tool for Christians at universities because it is more intellectually-minded, but apologetics cannot “stay on the surface” and deal strictly with theoretical issues. As we’ve seen, effective apologetics must go deeper to address the underlying presuppositions held by the unbeliever, both consciously and subconsciously. The presuppositional apologetic recognizes that often it is not enough to only argue by classical methods. Bahnsen argues:

> Unbelievers who oppose the truth of the Christian message, regardless of their level of philosophical sophistication or intellectual training, must be challenged to open up and critically evaluate their presuppositions about the process, standards, and possibility of knowing anything.\(^5\)

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4 Ibid. 24, emphasis added.

5 Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 471, emphasis added.
It’s very likely that the unbelieving college student has never before considered how his prior commitments shape his current judgments about spiritual matters. Presuppositional apologetics provides the basis for challenging the non-believer to consider deeply the importance of his hidden biases. But another reason apologetics must go deeper with the Naturalist is in order to address the *idolatrous nature* of his unbelieving thoughts and ideas. The desire for autonomy is perhaps the greatest stumbling block for the atheist. In *Apologetics*, Frame writes that Van Til’s critique of autonomy is “the foundation of Van Til’s system and its most persuasive principle.” In a footnote he adds:

> In my view, this point is both more important and more cogent than, e.g., Van Til’s view of the noetic effects of sin. . . . Autonomy is the more crucial issue, for Van Til’s analysis of it indicates that even if man had not fallen, he would still have been obligated to reason presuppositionally.⁶

Christian thinking, like all the Christian life, is subject to God’s lordship.

The atheist professor is ultimately guilty for autonomously worshiping himself as god, not merely for thinking incorrectly. A major virtue of presuppositional apologetics is that it calls on people to worship Christ and love Him with all their hearts and minds, so that they can say with the saints:

> Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Exod. 15:11)

> Presuppositional arguments allow special revelation to inform general revelation.

Van Til illustrates the importance of a Biblical apologetic, saying:

the Bible . . . stands before us as that *light* in terms of which all the facts of the created universe must be interpreted. All of finite existence, natural and redemptive, functions in relation to one all-inclusive plan that is in the mind of God. Whatever insight man is to have into this pattern of the activity of God he must attain by looking at all his objects of research in the *light* of Scripture.⁷

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Calvin wrote, “If true religion is to beam upon us, our principle must be, that it is necessary to begin with heavenly teaching, and that it is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture.” Because the Protestant apologist is committed to the Word of God as the infallible revelation of God to man, his arguments for theism should be specifically for Christian theism, and not for any other god than the One who causes his light to shine in our hearts. Presuppositionalism gives the apologist the tremendous ability and advantage to honor the supremacy of Scripture in his philosophical arguments. Apologetics must foundationally be a biblical discipline so that its points, principles and methodology are formed by Scripture. Throughout church history, apologetics has presented itself primarily as a philosophical discipline, mainly because believers fought on the battleground of philosophical objections to Christianity. As a result, one temptation is to lose one’s biblical basis for apologetics. One might begin to think that apologetics is done best by only those with philosophical training.

Presuppositional apologetics reminds the believer of the primacy of Scripture in answering all questions related to the creation and the Creator.

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9 Oliphint and Tipton explain how this line of thinking in the medieval period inevitably led to the need for a biblical reformation of those ideas and concepts developed by philosophers. Oliphint and Tipton, *Revelation and Reason*, Introduction, 2.
Criticisms of Presuppositionalism

Presuppositionalism has had many critics. Even in Reformed circles this apologetic has been considered controversial, to the point of being accused of undermining Christianity itself.\(^{10}\) We will consider here five of the most common critiques.

Circular Reasoning

Perhaps the most commonly heard criticism of presuppositional apologetics is that it involves circular reasoning. There are various reasons for this criticism, diverse theological schools between the critics, and distinct nuances to the actual complaints. The authors of *Classical Apologetics* are so concerned that they committed a whole chapter to the circular reasoning of presuppositionalists. Considering the bulk of writing, one of the clearest accusations of circular reasoning comes from Gary Habermas:

I think that Frame still argues circularly (in the sense of another informal logical fallacy). Let’s take a closer look at this specific case. Frame argues for the inspiration of Scripture, beginning with, “The Bible is the Word of God because it says so.” Two statements are involved here: (1) The Bible is the Word of God. (2) The Bible says it is the Word of God. Both are true. However, the Bible is not the Word of God because it says so. As an argument, this is a viciously circular statement. The problem is that Frame confuses truth itself with an argument for truth. In brief, while the two initial statements are true, one is not true because the other one says that it is so. He is right in his allegiance but mistaken in his grounds for the allegiance.\(^{11}\)


There are three main points in Habermas’ complaint. First, he states, “Frame argues for the inspiration of Scripture.”12 The perception is that Frame has written down the following line of thinking as a persuasive argument for the inspiration of Scripture. But according to Frame, this was not his intent. Frame explains:

I did not present this statement as an apologetic argument directed to unbelievers. Rather, I presented it as what I called a ‘narrowly circular’ argument and urged readers to avoid such arguments in practical apologetic situations.13 Habermas misunderstood the nature of Frame’s statement.

Second, Habermas says, “However, the Bible is not the Word of God because it says so.”14 Habermas does not disagree with the metaphysical nature of Scripture as inspired, but with the practicality and logic and reasonableness of proving so to the unbeliever by appealing to Scripture itself. In fact, he goes on to say that he agrees with Frame’s conclusion, but disagrees with Frame’s method. But again, this seems to be based on a misunderstanding of Frame’s purpose for making the statement mentioned above. In his response, Frame gives a more formal version of his statement and then says:

the conclusion is true because the two premises are true. We believe that the Bible is the Word of God because it says that it is the Word of God. . . . Moreover, for Christians, the argument expresses an important truth: As our supreme standard, Scripture is self-attesting.15

Frame’s concern seems to be embracing proper, Christian presuppositions, not making persuasive arguments to unbelievers.

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12 Ibid. emphasis added.


15 Ibid. 356-357, emphasis added.
Third, Habermas complains, “The problem is that Frame confuses truth itself with an argument for truth.” This seems to reveal the heart of the disagreement which surfaces in the writings of many other critics. At least part of the problem stems from the apologists’ nuanced definitions for “epistemology,” “metaphysics” and “apologetic argument.” We will not try to solve the problem here. More sophisticated philosophers show greater hope of doing so someday. The main point we observe here is that the charge of “circularity” at least partly seems to be based on a misunderstanding of the purpose of presuppositional statements. Nicholas Rescher clarifies the purpose of what presuppositionalists often refer to as “virtuous circularity,” stating:

the validated logic we achieve in the end should ideally turn out to encompass the very logic of which we have been making presystematic use. But there is nothing vicious or vitiating at work here; it is a matter of retrospective wisdom-of-hindsight reassessment.  

By him using the word, “presystematic” we see the relevance of having more discussion on the nature and importance of presuppositions.

Proclamation without Argumentation

In Five Views of Apologetics, Kelly James Clark offers what is labeled “A Reformed Epistemologist’s Response” to John Frame’s apologetic. The reader quickly hears a repeated theme:

we need an argument for this….again we need an argument….Here I would like to see an argument.  

16 Wayne Grudem quotes Rescher here and explains:
The process of persuasion is perhaps better likened to a spiral in which increasing knowledge of Scripture and increasingly correct understanding of God and creation tend to supplement one another in a harmonious way, each tending to confirm the accuracy of the other. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. Zondervan. 79-80, emphasis added.

Clark finds the same deficiency in other presuppositionalists. Bahnsen’s apologetic, which Clark calls wearisome, is simply repeating assertions, while Van Til had a “similar awkward tendency to prefer assertion over argument.” Clark says:

presuppositionalists are often long on assertion and short on argument. . . . Merely asserting these claims over and over, perhaps more loudly and more forcefully, is not sufficient. I often feel like presuppositionalists are trying to gain by theft what should be obtained by honest toil.\(^\text{18}\) 

There is some truth to Clark’s criticism. Frame agrees that one-on-one apologetic argumentation is not his forte. He even concurs with Clark in a sense when Frame clarifies a critical difference between his view of TAG and that of Van Til:

Now, you notice that Van Til’s formulation of TAG states a set of conclusions to be reached, but not an argumentative strategy for reaching those conclusions. Although Van Til calls it an ‘argument,’ it really is a conclusion rather than an argument.\(^\text{19}\)

To be fair, our strengths often determine our weaknesses. Much of Frame’s efforts go to presenting what could be described as “transcendental theology” or “Christian presuppositions.”

But Clark seems to be ignoring the examples of Presuppositionalists who do offer arguments. Frame, as we’ve seen, offers several specific arguments for how morality points to a personal and ultimate God. James Anderson and Greg Welty offer several arguments from the existence of logic.\(^\text{20}\) Both sides can learn from each other. But perhaps Clark has not read many presuppositional writers. And perhaps the tone of proclamation heard in

\(\text{\textsuperscript{18}}\) Ibid.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{19}}\) Frame, Apologetics, 134.

Frame (and other presuppositionalists) is due to the close connection in their minds between apologetics and evangelism. As Richard Pratt points out:

> It is helpful to view the difference between apologetics and evangelism as one of thrust or intention. Evangelism is directed toward the proclamation of the judgment to come and the good news of salvation .... Apologetics, however, is more concerned with the justification of these claims.\(^{21}\)

Both are necessary.

### Fideism

In *Classical Apologetics*, the writers say about presuppositionalism:

> “This school of thought has not suffered from a lack of nerve but has boldly rejected the traditional theistic proofs and Christian evidences. It has become the *ultimate form of fideism* riding under the banner of a super-rationality. . . . Thinking themselves able to do for God what only God can do for Himself (and for them), they make mockery of reason and substitute arrogance for piety.”\(^{22}\)

The Ligonier group mainly base their evaluation on this: that presuppositionalists condemn the autonomy of human reason, stating that by starting with man, one cannot end with God. But Ligonier’s analysis of the autonomy question reveals some confusion. The authors criticize Van Til for wanting to “start with” God, rather than with ourselves. Frame sheds light on the problem with this terminology:

> Now ‘start with’ is (like ‘precede’ and ‘priority’) an extremely slippery phrase in theology and apologetics. It can indicate a pedagogical order of topics, an emphasis, a method of study, a conviction about prominence or importance, a relation of necessary or sufficient conditionality, or a criterion of truth . . . one would expect the Ligonier authors to offer some analysis of this concept, to make some attempt to define it (both for Van Til and for their own system). But no such analysis is

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\(^{22}\) Gerstner, Lindsley, and Sproul, *Classical Apologetics*, 185, emphasis added.
forthcoming. The authors write as if the meaning of the idea were perfectly self-
evident.  

Bahnsen agrees that critics wrongfully accuse Van Til of fideism:

they misunderstood his point. Van Til insisted on the importance of reasoning, but explained that Christians and unbelievers mean different things when using the same epistemological terms. When the unbeliever uses the word “reason” they mean something different from when the Christian uses the word.  

Van Til taught that “reason” was not a neutral concept. We must see the difference between the unbeliever’s reasoning and the believer’s reasoning. Van Til wrote his *Survey of Christian Epistemology*:

In the first place, our discussion has brought out that we must clearly recognize the fact of the fundamental difference between the two types of consciousness. If we do not do this we argue in the blue. It does us no good to talk about reason in the abstract. Such a thing does not exist.

The charge of fideism seems to lose its credibility when we understand the presuppositionalist’s concern with autonomy. The concern is not whether a human “starts” reasoning with his own faculties or not, as the traditionalists frame the problem, but whether one recognizes God as the final authority and giver of all reason.

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24 Bahnsen makes this point in *Van Til’s Apologetic*.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Summary of Argument

We have suggested a quadrant diagram to help understand Frame’s different types of presuppositions and given special attention to the biblical basis for using presuppositional apologetics. We have observed two of the most prominent forms of unbelief on the university campus—Naturalism and Postmodernism—and the unique challenges that come with each. Then we have seen how presuppositional apologetics are effectively applied to these 2 challenges to belief from different philosophical starting points. We’ve considered the strengths and limitations of these arguments. The main critiques of postmodernism have been addressed, and apart from the need to provide more arguments, it would appear that the complaints against presuppositionalism are mainly based on misunderstandings. There is a great need for more understanding among Christians of the importance of presuppositions and their role in our thinking and our beliefs. Many people are unaware of how their presuppositions shape their worldview. When a Christian encounters objections to Christianity from an unbeliever in the public university environment, the differences between them is often controlled by their fundamentally different presuppositions. Strictly classical approaches to apologetics tend to ignore the role of presuppositions all together. Perhaps the most exciting feature of presuppositional argumentation is its ability to utilize arguments from different apologetic thinkers. This is the greatest reason that presuppositional arguments are superior to a strictly classical approach to apologetics. We have demonstrated
how John Frame’s presuppositional apologetic based on Cornelius Van Til’s transcendental argument can be integrated with classical apologetics to make them more biblical, cogent and effective in addressing the obstacles to belief on public university campuses.

Presuppositional arguments allow apologists to depend on special revelation to inform their use of general revelation. The apologist is enabled to present Christ as Lord, and to equip Christians at universities to be in the world but not of the world. And presuppositionalism helps the apologist avoid the trap of focusing on the mind to the exclusion of the heart. For these reasons, presuppositional apologetics are superior to traditional approaches to apologetics.

Areas for Future Work

This author hopes that the different apologetic camps will continue to work toward understanding each other. After reading William Lane Craig and Kelly James Clark on Frame’s Presuppositionalism, it appears clear to me that some of the differences are ones of perspective and approach.¹ But the sharpness of the criticisms offered makes it sound like their differences are in areas of vital biblical doctrines. Since the writers hold so much in common in the Christian faith (and in many instances even in Reformed tradition) I suggest we give each other a lot more grace and benefit of the doubt in humble acknowledgment that we might not fully understand the other person.

Both sides need to improve by not assuming negatively about each other’s’ motives. The evidentialist should not assume the presuppositionalist is against reason, and the

¹ I think the Ligonier group paints a false picture of a dying classical apologetic, and that they exaggerate the acceptance of presuppositionalism.
presuppositionalist should not assume the evidentialist is trying to win the respect of the intellectuals.

A second need for development is on a more humble and gentle apologetic. The context of 1 Peter 3 was the Roman persecution by Nero. Peter’s commands to set apart Christ as Lord and defend the faith were qualified by the imperative of doing so with gentleness and respect. That would be hard for Christians in the Roman empire. Scott Oliphint explains:

Not only had Nero divorced his first wife and married another, but when he was tired of his second wife, he kicked her to death and then married a woman whose husband he executed. It would not have been easy, to say the least, to be gentle in such circumstances, to have no fear of man, to be bold in defense. That, however, is our mandate; it is our duty. We are to be bold in our defense, yet gentle and meek in our manner of defense. As Cornelius Van Til used to say, ‘we must be suaviter in modo, fortiter in re’.

Christians facing persecution from peers and authorities on university campuses should find courage in the example of these early Christians.


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Luther, that “we are both correctives, not norms.”⁴ I think the apologetics of Van Til and Frame can serve as correctives for apologists today.

Finally, as already mentioned, Frame writes extensively on the importance of the apologist setting apart Christ as Lord. He states on different occasions that this lordship should be reflected in the apologists’ arguments. But Frame and other presuppositionalists offer few examples of what this might sound like in an apologetic discussion.⁵ I think more discussion is needed about how to apply Christ’s Lordship in our actual apologetic conversations and arguments. We need presuppositionalists to take on other unbelieving worldviews, create starting points for arguments by observing suppressed presuppositions, expose the irrational nature of the unbelievers’ biases, confront them lovingly and clearly on the idolatrous nature of their unbelief, and faithfully portray the Biblical worldview to be embraced.

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⁵ The emphasis seems to be more on ‘what not to say’.
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