

Approaching Cults and World Religions from A Presuppositional Apologetic Perspective by Jeff Downs¹[1]

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A question was recently posed by John J. Johnson, which has ramifications for Christians who have devoted large amounts of time to cults and world religions. Particularly interesting is that the question comes at a time in which a number of published works²[2] have addressed the issue of methodology within the 'Counter-cult movement.'

Some of the discussion and criticism has had to do with scholarship. There have been accusations of not contending with current arguments from LDS apologists, refusing to listen to those outside³[3] the counter-cult community, and there have also been accusations of plagiarism and dishonesty within the literature.

One of the objectives of the counter-cult movement is to encourage Christians to be grounded in basic theology and apologetics and to be aware of false teaching. On the other hand, as a community of individuals seeking to reach people in cults and world religions, as time goes by we need to evaluate ourselves. Is our approach biblical? Are we winsome in our apologetic? Do we understand the group(s) and/or individual(s) we are writing about and trying to reach? Could

²[2] Most recently published *Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach*. Eds. Irving Hexham, Stephen Rost and John Morehead II (Kregel, 2003; ISBN#: 0-0254-2893-9); *Bearing False Witness?: An Introduction to the Christian Counter-cult*. Douglas Cowan (Praeger Publishers, 2003; ISBN#: 0-2759-7459-6); 'Reconceptualizing the Word 'Cult'', by John Trott. *Cornerstone Magazine*, Vol. 30, Issue 122; *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*. General Eds. Francis Beckwith, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen (Zondervan, 2002; ISBN#: 0-3102-3194-9), pgs. 11-13, 19-26; 'Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?', by Carl Mosser and Paul Owen. *Trinity Journal*, 19 (Fall 1998), 179-205.

³[3] I'm specifically referring to John Morehead of Watchman Fellowship who has stated that the majority of individuals in Counter-cult apologetics are unwilling to listen to the criticism of 'Cult Apologists' (e.g. Doug Cowan).

there be improvement in our methodology? The Counter-cult community would do well to heed the Reformation principal - *Semper Reformanda* (always reforming).⁴[4]

The issue of methodology is the very question Johnson raises in an article titled "Is Cornelius Van Til's Apologetic Method Christian, or Merely Theistic?"⁵[5] In this article, Johnson proposes to show that Van Til's "method" of apologetics is useless. It "offers the non-theist no way of judging between the truth claims of Christianity and other religions" (pg. 268), and not only that but, "especially if she is a committed adherent of *another faith*" (pg. 258, emphasis his). To drive the dagger in even further, Johnson claims that Van Til's method "may support the existence of 'God,'" but it does not prove the existence of the *Christian* God. In fact, Van Til's method could just as easily be used by a Muslim apologist to assert the validity of Islam? (pg. 268, emphasis his).

Johnson has taken his cue from Montgomery's article "Once Upon an A Priori".⁶[6] The second parable in Montgomery's article is utilized and expanded upon to convince the reader that the method of presuppositionalism is not convincing when applied to the area of comparative religions.⁷[7]

⁴[4] By saying this, I am not indicating I agree with all the criticisms being leveled at Counter-cult ministries. At this time, I see both positive and negative. I do believe we should interact with the criticism(s).

⁵[5] His article appeared in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 75:3 (2003), pgs. 257-268. The mere title of the article would make any Van Tillian's ears perk up!

⁶[6] This article appeared in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*. Edited by E. R. Geehan (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974; ISBN#: 0-8755-2489-3) and *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics*. Edited by John Warwick Montgomery (Thomas Nelson, 1978; ISBN#: 0-8407-5641-0).

⁷[7] It is at this point that the Van Tillian puts his head in his hands. The old saying goes "Error begets error, begets error." For those familiar with John Warwick Montgomery's critique of Van Til and the presuppositional apologetic knows he has not come to terms with this method. Therefore, the student of Montgomery might just as well get it wrong, and this particular student is a clear example. Greg Bahnsen has created categories for critics of Van Til and "his" method. Montgomery and Johnson fit under "those who, not having grasped or appreciated the force of his transcendental argument for the rational necessity of Christianity?" And because they have not understood Van Til's position, they continue to mischaracterize him and the approach.

Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis. Greg Bahnsen (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998; ISBN#: 0-8755-2098-7), pg. 672-73.

Is there a place for the presuppositional apologetic in the field of cults and world religions? Does this method betray the biblical text and what the apostles demonstrated? Or, is the presuppositional apologetic a clear presentation of a biblical apologetic? I hope to demonstrate in this paper, that the method put forth by Van Til *is* consistent with the biblical text and the apostle's defense of the faith. Therefore, this method is most useful when approaching those committed to any other religion.^{8[8]}

Van Til believed that "Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life."^{9[9]} It was important for him to give brief expositions of Christian theology in his works on apologetics. It is also important for us, to know why and what we are defending. Adherents of cults and world religions who are committed to their tradition are more than likely in this position when we encounter them. But, this should not give the Christian apologist any worry. The presuppositional apologist stands his ground on the fact that without Christian presuppositions, everything would be rendered meaningless. In order for the adherent of another religion to bring anything substantial to the table, he first appeals (knowingly or unknowingly) to the presuppositions of Christianity. Greg Bahnsen comments:

This is a startling realization, and one that is momentous for apologetics. The unbeliever is presupposing the revealed truth of God even when he is attempting to work out and apply contrary presuppositions in order to argue against God's truth. Van Til's pungent insight was precisely; "Antitheism presupposes theism." In order to argue or reason at all, in order to have

^{8[8]} Sadly there isn't much material from the presuppositional camp on how this method works in our modern religious society. I hope this small contribution will encourage those who could do a much better job. For me, this is the start of a long project. I would recommend "Presuppositional Reasoning with False Faiths", by Greg Bahnsen

<<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa208.htm>>, and "Zen: A Trinitarian Critique", by Ralph A. Smith <<http://www.berith.org/essays/zen>>. There are lectures from Greg Bahnsen on various cults and world religions available from Covenant Media Foundation <<http://www.cmfnow.com>>.

^{9[9]} *Christian Apologetics* (2nd Edition). Cornelius Van Til, Edited by William Edgar (P&R, 2003; ISBN#: #: 0-8755-2511-3), pg. 17.

any intellectual achievements whatsoever, the unbeliever is unknowingly relying upon Christian presuppositions.¹⁰[10]

A COVENANTAL APOLOGETIC¹¹[11] - IMPLICATIONS FOR CREATURES

On the issue of comparative religions, Johnson asserts that the one essential issue, which must be addressed, is "when examining which religious belief system is true, how is one to know? How does the *outsider*, who is an adherent of neither system, decide for herself which religion she should embrace?" (emphasis his, pg. 262).¹²[12]

The problem with line of reasoning is that from the outset, Johnson is assuming the non-Christian is in some neutral¹³[13] state, facing the scales of religion(s). And so he asks the presuppositionalist to give justification as to why the "neutral" individual should choose one religion over the other religion(s).

From the very beginning of the scriptures, we understand that God is creator and we (humanity) are his creatures. God is the creator and the sustainer of *all* things. Nothing could exist and/or continue if He did not uphold it. Because we are his creatures our dependence on Him is crucial.

¹⁰[10] Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, pg. 452. When Van Til uses the word theism, he is not using it in some generic sense (a deity or deities). Therefore, those holding to positions other than the Triune God of scripture are unbelievers and/or antitheists. To quote Van Til, "Christians are interested in showing to those who believe in *no* God or in *a* god, *a* beyond, *some* ultimate or absolute, that it is *this* [Triune] God in whom they must believe lest all meaning should disappear from human words." *Christian Apologetics*, pg. 39.

¹¹[11] Some in the presuppositional camp want remove the "presuppositional" label from this method. This is due to the fact that different individuals have used the word to mean various things. And a covenantal apologetic would be more characteristic of a reformed Van Tillian apologetic. See "Presuppositionalism?", by K. Scott Oliphint

<<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/oliphint/Writings/A%20Covenantal%20Apologetic.htm>>, forthcoming chapter in *Always Reformed* (P&R, June 2004). Scott's writings and a taped lecture by Lane Tipton "Implications for Human Knowledge" online at <http://www.two-age.org/online_sermons.org>, have been most helpful with the distinctive traits in Van Til's apologetic system.

¹²[12] Actually there at least two *issues* here: epistemology and commitment or devotion.

¹³[13] Actually, Johnson states earlier in the article that he "would go even farther, and assert that part of what it means to be made in God's image is that we necessarily approach all things (including and especially, the Bible!) in just the autonomous manner Van Til decries", pg. 259. Being autonomous goes hand-in-hand with the claim of neutrality.

It is clear from the book of Genesis that when God created man, he was a special creation. He also provided all things the creature would need to survive, and blessed him with a helpmate.

A covenant was established between the creator and his creatures. According to Scott Oliphint "Given that all men are in covenant relationship to God, they are bound by that relationship to owe obedience unto him as their creator". The obligation of obedience comes by virtue of our being created "we were created as covenant beings. We are people who, by nature, have an obligation to worship and serve the Creator."¹⁴[14]

Man finally rejected the revelation God had given him, deciding for himself (autonomous) what was right and what was wrong. The problem lies in the fact that man sinned against God and therefore "his moral purity has been lost and his sinful character certainly does not reflect God's holiness. His intellect is corrupted by falsehood and misunderstanding; his speech no longer continually glorifies God; his relationships are often governed by selfishness rather than love"¹⁵[15] But, nowhere are we told that man ceased to be in God's image and that our dependence was diminished. While sin has distorted our relationship with God, man continues to be in covenant relationship with Him. We are still obligated to worship and serve God on his own terms.

According to the presuppositional apologetic, there are only two types of people. There are those who strive to glorify God in all they say, do and think and there are those who are rebels. Van Til puts it this way:

There are two and only two classes of men. There are those who worship and serve the creature and there are those who worship and serve the creator. There are covenant breakers and there are covenant keepers. In all of man's activity, in their philosophical and scientific enterprises as well as in their worship, men are either covenant keepers or covenant breakers.[?] It is part of the

¹⁴[14] Oliphint "Presuppositionalism", pg. 1

¹⁵[15] *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Wayne Grudem (Zondervan, 1994; ISBN#: 0-3102-8670-0), pg. 444.

task of Christian apologetics to make men self-consciously either covenant keepers or covenant breakers.¹⁶[16]

So, Johnson's assumption in his question ? that men are truly autonomous, is incorrect in light of the presuppositional apologetic and biblical theology. Those who do not rely on the revelation God has given him in nature and in scripture, to glorify him, are actively rebelling against their creator and are covenant breakers. Those who rely on God's self-revelation, worshipping and serving Him are covenant keepers.

Romans chapter 1 gives us a picture of humanity, which *directly* conflicts with Johnson's assertion of human autonomy and neutrality. We are told:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who *suppress the truth* in unrighteousness, because that which is know about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, *they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks?* (Rom. 1:18-21, emphasis mine).

Instead of being an ?outsider, who is an adherent of neither system??, the scriptures tell us that those who would claim to be an ?outsider? or neutral to religious matters are actually in active rebellion against the God who they *do* know. John Frame puts it this way ?Because God is Lord, He is not only knowable but known to all (Rom. 1:21). The ?agnostic? who says that he does not know if God exists is deceiving himself and may be seeking to deceive others. God's covenantal presence is with all His works, and therefore it is inescapable (Ps. 139)? Therefore in knowing anything, we know God. Even those without the Scriptures have this knowledge: They know God, they know their obligations to Him (Rom. 1:32), and they know the wrath that is on them because of their disobedience (Rom. 1:18).?17[17]

¹⁶[16] Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetics*, pg. 66

¹⁷[17] *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. John Frame (P&R, 1987; ISBN#: 0-8755-2262-9), pg. 18.

Man *attempts* to get away from knowing this God, by suppressing the truth in "unrighteousness." The attempts are many but, for our purpose, worshipping anyone other than the God who has clearly made himself known, is part of the unrighteous acts of humanity¹⁸[18]. It is one more mask man actively tries to hide under. Even with this active rebellion, man is constantly in contact with the God they are hiding from. Van Til likened this to a child slapping their father on the cheek. In order for the child to make contact she must be sitting upon the lap her father.

In Acts 17, we have the outworking of a covenantal apologetic. As we have seen, everyone is either a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker. A covenant-breaker is one who *actively seeks* to hide himself from God. One way man attempts to do this, is by erecting other gods (religions).

As Paul stood before Athens what he saw continually disturbed his spirit. "The city was full of idols" or false gods. Calvin makes the following comment "Paul was particularly incensed at Athens because he saw that idolatry had a greater hold there than almost anywhere else. The world was full of idols at that time; the pure worship of God could be found nowhere. There were countless monstrous superstitions everywhere; but Satan had made the city of Athens worse than any other city."¹⁹[19]

¹⁸[18] Johnson asks "Were one to stop at what Paul says about our innate knowledge of God in chapter one of Romans, why shouldn't this knowledge lead to a belief in Allah, and his prophet Mohammed?" Because man attempts to suppress the clear revelation of God, it is possible that if one were to stop at Romans 1 man would believe in "Allah, and his prophet Mohammed." But, if man could look at the facts as he should, he would bow the knee before the triune God, because He is the creator. Any other god is a false God. Johnson tells us, in his apologetic, he would try to convince the unbeliever "that there may exist a "God" who created the universe" by using one of the classical proofs. Certainly Johnson is aware that anyone who believes in some kind of divine being (doesn't have to be personal, could be many gods, could be goddess, etc.) could use these proofs as well. Johnson does state that once he established the possibility of a god, he would then present particulars of Christianity to "prove that the "God" who *probably* exists is the God of the Christian Bible" (pg. 265, emphasis mine). Greg Bahnsen makes the following comment "Because the unbeliever has such an implicit system of thought directing his attack on the faith the Christian can never be satisfied to defend the hope that is in him by merely stringing together isolated evidences which offer a slight probability of the Bible's veracity. Each particular item of evidence will be evaluated (as to both its truthfulness and degree of probability) by the unbeliever's tacit assumptions; his general world-and-life view will provide the context in which the evidential claim is understood and weighed. What one presupposes as to possibility will even determine how he rates "probability." *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*. Greg L. Bahnsen (Covenant Media Foundation, 1996, ISBN#: 0-9158-1528-1), pg. 67.

¹⁹[19] Acts. John Calvin. *The Crossway Classic Commentaries*. Series Editors Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer (Crossway, 1995; ISBN#: 0-8910-7725-1), pg. 295.

The invitation to address those who discussed religious matters (among other things) was extended to Paul. As what he was proclaiming in the market-place sounded "strange", the Athenians wanted to know the meaning behind Paul's message.

Paul's speech consisted of who God is, the sinfulness of man and the gospel, which included their need to respond. Paul began his speech explaining that the God who created the heavens and the earth "He is Lord. The altar to the 'unknown God' was another way they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. Scott Oliphint puts it this way, "They know *the* God. And their altar dedicated to an unknown God was not an attempt to find God, but to hide from the one they knew."²⁰[20]

Paul understood that unbelieving man's heart is darkened (Rom 1:21) and that sinful men will create false gods²¹[21] (religions) to hide from the one who has clearly made himself known. Therefore, Paul seeks to tear down the speculations of the Athenians and he gives an account for the creator/sustainer of all that exists. Greg Bahnsen puts it this way:

The Athenians had to be challenged, not simply to add a bit more information (say, about a historical event) to their previous thinking, but to renounce their previous thoughts and undergo a thorough change of mind. They needed to be converted in their total outlook on life, man, the world, and God."²²[22]

In the address to the Athenian philosophers, Paul understood there were a variety of worldviews in conflict with one another.

²⁰[20] *The Battle Belongs to the Lord*. K. Scott Oliphint. (P&R Publishing, 2003; ISBN#: 0-8755-2561-X), pg. 158.

²¹[21] Johnson is of the opinion, which correlates with his interpretation of Roman 1, that when Paul says "you are very religious", he is giving them "credit" for "their theistic belief?" pg. 267 Fn. 23. "This is, however far from the intent, and three points should be borne in mind. First, this forms Paul's first line of defense to the charge against him, for how can he be accused of preaching a foreign god contrary to their religions, if their religion itself incorporates worship to gods they do not know? Secondly, the translation is misleading. The emphasis in the sentence is not on the 'unknown god' but on the ignorance of the worship. Paul, in the city of 'the lovers of wisdom', focused on the ignorance they admitted about the identity of God. Thirdly, although the first paragraph of speech seems to have a positive thrust, it must be taken in the context of the rest of the speech: Paul was in effect saying, 'Yes, but?..' *New Bible Commentary* (21 Century Edition). Edited by G.J. Wenham, J.A. Motyer, D.A. Carson, R.T. France (InterVarsity Press, 1994; ISBN#: 0-8308-1442-6), pg. 1093.

²²[22] Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, pg. 252.

DEFENDING A WORLDVIEW

As stated earlier apologetics is "the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life." A life philosophy is a worldview.

According to Lane Tipton a worldview is "A fundamental paradigm which underlies and directs a person's reasoning, determines what counts as evidence, and reveals basic heart commitments."²³[23]

The presuppositional apologist is interested in comparing worldviews and holding accountable those who set forth any idea(s) opposed to the Christian worldview. Therefore, as Ronald Nash states "achieving awareness of our worldview is one of the most important things we can do to enhance self-understanding, and insight into the worldview of others is essential"²⁴[24]

In "Is Cornelius Van Til's Apologetic Method Christian, or Merely Theistic?" Johnson claims:

The supreme example of evidentialist apologetics is found in the New Testament itself, where the historical resurrection of Christ is viewed by the various writers not only as proof of his divinity but also as a validation of the New Testament's entire salvific message (pg. 257).²⁵[25]

Johnson never does present to us how the evidentialist's method would work in dialogue with a Muslim.²⁶[26] From the beginning, the Muslim will reject the historicity of the resurrection of

²³[23] Tipton, "Implications for Human Knowledge" online at <http://www.two-age.org/online_sermons.htm>.

²⁴[24] *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*. Ronald Nash (Zondervan, 1992; ISBN#: 0-3105-7771-3), pg. 16.

²⁵[25] For an alternative understanding of the apostolic use of the resurrection and how it applies to our apologetic, see "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: What Role should the Resurrection have in our Apologetic? An Answer from Presuppositional Apologetics?", by Kevin Zuber (unpublished paper presented at the 2003 ETS Conference, Atlanta GA) also "The Impropriety of Evidentially Arguing for the Resurrection?", by Greg Bahnsen <<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa003.htm>>.

²⁶[26] The purpose of Johnson's paper is to show us that the presuppositional apologetic would not be useful in a conversation with a Muslim. But, if he wants to convince the reader of the superiority of his apologetic in this field, he needs to give support for his claim. I would assert it is not the best approach in the area of cults and world religions.

Christ (including His crucifixion) and the accuracy of the biblical text itself. Not because the evidence is lacking, but because of his presuppositions (prior heart commitments).

Instead of heaping fact²⁷[27] upon fact, our goal should be to move the conversation into the area of presuppositions and worldviews. It is not until the unbeliever surrenders (i.e repents) his or her worldview will they come to faith in Christ. The scriptures tell us that the unbelieving mind is hostile to the things of God (Rom. 1), they are fools (Ps. 14:1), "darkened in their understanding" (Eph. 4:18) and held captive by "empty deception, according to the traditions of men" (Col. 2:8). The believer is being renewed in their mind (Romans 12:2), has true knowledge because they fear the Lord (Prov. 1:7), their epistemology is grounded in Christ (Col.

²⁷[27] Many Christians (including Johnson) hold to the idea that facts are uninterpreted or as Van Til would call them "brute facts." This is not the case. The unbeliever first of all might not even agree with what a "fact" is and will certainly not agree on the interpretation of the "fact" presented to him by the Christian. Facts are not uninterpreted. As Van Til has stated "In other words, facts and interpretation of facts cannot be separated. It is impossible even to discuss any particular fact except in relation to some principle of interpretation. The real question about facts is, therefore, what kind of universal can give the best account of the facts. Or rather, the real question is what universal can state or give meaning to any facts? We hold that there is only one such universal, namely, the God of Christianity. Consequently, we hold that without the presupposition of the God of Christianity we cannot even interpret one fact correctly. Facts without God would be brute facts. They would have no intelligible relation to each other." As quoted from Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, pg. 38. Johnson, later states "There simply is no way to engage in a debate, much less win one, without some sort of appeal to evidence. This is true in every facet of human reasoning, so why should it be different when we are discussing religion? Why does the presuppositionalist insist on changing the rules of logic and basic common sense when it comes to matters of religions, even though she would never think of abrogating those rules in any other area of thought?" (pg. 264). There is much to be said here in response to Johnson. He simply has not done his homework. Presuppositionalists do not abrogate the use of evidences in their apologetic. Johnson states "Van Til refuses to allow objective evidence to have any place in Christian apologetics" (pg. 268). If he means by "objective evidence" brute facts, then yes he is correct. Van Til stressed that various evidences for the existence of God should not be utilized apart from a biblical worldview, he most certainly thought evidences could and should be put to use, "Evidences deals largely with the historical while apologetics deals largely with the philosophical aspect. Each has its own work to do but they should constantly be in touch with one another." Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, pg. 19. Johnson should also be aware of presuppositionalist who've addressed this issue, see *Van Til and the Use of Evidence*. Thom Nataro (P&R, 1980; ISBN#: 0-8755-2353-6), and *The Place of Evidence in Apologetics* (audio). Greg Bahnsen (Covenant Media Foundation <<http://www.cmfnow.com>>). What Johnson doesn't seem to realize is that this is God's world, not man's. Therefore, the presuppositional apologist want to "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5), which would also include how we are to reason, etc? Not sure what "basic common sense" is, except that it is "according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). This is my Father's world. He "makes up" laws of thought which men reason by.

2:3), they truly understand the creator/creature distinction and therefore understand God is Lord of *all* (Is. 45:18; Col. 1:16, 17). Therefore, as Greg Bahnsen has stated so clearly:

Two philosophies or systems of thought are in collision: one submits to the authority of God's word as a matter of presuppositional commitment and one does not. Appeals to fact will be arbitrated in terms of the conflicting presuppositions held by the two philosophies; the debate between the two perspectives will thus eventually work down the level of one's ultimate authority?. All religious debate will develop into a question of ultimate authority. In principle the two options will stand in full, stark contrast to each other.^{28[28]}

Because worldview analysis is important to the apologetic task, transcendental reasoning with unbelievers will be most useful. A transcendental argument will reveal to the unbeliever that given his/her presuppositions, they would not be able to reason correctly and make sense of their experience. This is accomplished by beginning ?with *any* item of experience or belief whatsoever and proceeds, by critical analysis, to ask what conditions (or what other beliefs) would need to be true in order for that original experience or belief to make sense, be meaningful, or be intelligible to us.^{29[29]}

A transcendental argument put forth by the presuppositional apologists will ?present the biblical God, not merely as the conclusion to an argument, but as one who makes argument possible. We should present Him as the source of all meaningful communication, since He is the author of all order, truth, beauty, goodness, logical validity, and empirical fact.^{30[30]}

If the above is correct, and I believe that it is, the apologist should be confident to confront any worldview opposed to Christian-theism. Because any worldview that *pretends* to be able ?live and move and have its being? apart from the God of Christianity will be reduced to

^{28[28]} Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, pg. 68-69.

^{29[29]} Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, pg. 502.

^{30[30]} ?Presuppositional Apologetics?, by John Frame in *Five Views on Apologetics*. General Editor Steve Cowan (Zonderan, 2000; ISBN#: 0-3102-2476-4), pg. 220.

absurdity.³¹[31] According to Van Til "The only "proof" of the Christian position is that unless its truth be presupposed there is no possibility of "proving" anything at all."³²[32] This in short is the quintessential apologetic for Christianity.

NO OTHER GOD(S)

Mr. Johnson concludes his article by telling his readers the presuppositional apologetic "fails to realize that any presuppositional claim that can be made for Christianity can be made for any religion" (pg. 268).³³[33]

The presuppositional apologetic is a Trinitarian apologetic. It is the tri-unity of God, which sets Christianity apart from any other non-believing worldview and is the centerpiece our faith. As Ralph Smith has stated:

What could be more significant than a view of the Trinity which places the doctrine not only in the center of the entire theological discipline, a view of the Trinity which sets forth the triune God as the *very heart of the entire* Christian worldview? (emphasis mine)³⁴[34]

The Christian apologist is interested in proclaiming to unbelievers that, God does exist and he exists as trinity. Van Til made the point well when he stated:

³¹[31] An excellent example of a Transcendental argument used in reference to the Latter-day Saint can be found in Frank Beckwith's article "Moral Law, the Mormon Universe, and the Nature of the Right We Ought to Choose" in *The New Mormon Challenge*, pgs. 219-41. Michael Kruger makes a similar point in his article "The Sufficiency of Scripture in Apologetics." *The Masters Seminary Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring 2003), pg. 84 Fn. 39.

³²[32] "My Credo", by Cornelius Van Til in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*. Edited by E.R. Geehan (P&R, 1971), pg. 21.

³³[33] It would seem from this statement that Mr. Johnson clearly does not understand presuppositional apologetics. Making claims is one thing, giving justification for those claims is another. The presuppositionalist wants to force the unbeliever to give an account for any of his claims. His accounting must not be arbitrary or inconsistent, but in harmony with his worldview. Presuppositional apologetics at its heart is that only Christian theism (Trinitarian) can account for human intelligibility.

³⁴[34] *Paradox and Truth: Rethinking Van Til on the Trinity*. Ralph Smith (Canon Press, 2003; ISBN: 1-5912-8002-8), pg. 15.

Christianity offers the triune God, the absolute personality?as the God in whom we believe. This conception of God is the foundation of everything else that we hold dear. Unless we can believe in this sort of God, it does us no good to be told that we may believe in some other sort of God, or in anything else. For us everything depends for its meaning upon this sort of God. Accordingly we are not interested to have anyone prove to us the existence of any other sort of God but this God. Any other sort of God is no God at all?35[35]

Because it is this particular God who exists, it is this God who makes all knowledge possible and anything meaningful.36[36] The Christian apologist should never abandon his own presuppositions and therefore his worldview. While the unbeliever will come to the discussion believing himself to be autonomous and the judge of God, the Christian apologist is called to challenge his heart commitments and reveal to him that unless he presupposes the God of Christianity (triune God), he would not be able to reason properly. Van Til states it this way:

Rather the Christian offers the self-attesting Christ to the world as the only foundation upon which a man must stand in order to give any ?reasons? for anything at all. The whole notion of ?giving reasons? is completely destroyed by any ontology other than the Christian one. The Christian claims that only after accepting the biblical scheme of things will any man be able to understand and account for his own rationality.37[37]

CONCLUSION

35[35] *The Defense of the Faith*. Cornelius Van Til (P&R, 1955), pg. 28-29.

36[36] This would include the old philosophical problem of the one-and-many. Is everything *ultimately* one or is everything *ultimately* many. Can the one and the many be brought together? The Van Tillian position is that only the triune God can give a coherent answer to this problem. For further investigation on the one and the many problem and how a presuppositional apologist would address it, see *Van Til's Insights on the Trinity*. Ralph Smith <<http://trinitarianism.com/pdf/Van%20Til's%20Insights%20on%20the%20Trinity.pdf>> and ?The One and Many Problem ? The Contribution of Van Til?, by RJ Rushdoony found in *Jerusalem and Athens*. Editor E. R. Geehan, pgs. 339-348. For a critique of the Thomistic approach to the problem of the one and many, see ?Cornelius Van Til and The Reformation of Christian Apologetics?, by K. Scott Oliphint <<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/oliphint/Writings/CVT-POTCH.htm>>.

37[37] ?My Credo?, by Cornelius Van Til in *Jerusalem and Athens*, pg. 18.

In this paper, I have tried to very basically outline a presuppositional approach to apologetics. This approach has in mind that *everyone* is in a covenant relationship with God. You are either a covenant keeper or a covenant breaker (two classes of humanity). A covenant breaker is one who knows God, but actively, with all his might, holds down the truth. One way man attempts this is to cover up with other gods (religions). Second, the presuppositional apologist understands that unbelievers (religious or not) are not neutral. He has presuppositions that make up his worldview. It is through this worldview that the unbeliever will interpret his experience (everything about life). And lastly, the presuppositional method is a Trinitarian method.

Because it is this kind of God who exists and it is this God who gives all meaning to life, it is this God in whom the apologists will begin and end his defense.³⁸[38]

So, is there a place for presuppositional apologetics in our response to our neighbor's god? I believe so. As I understand it, the presuppositional method outlined in this paper is a biblical approach.³⁹[39] It is this "method" that challenges our unbelieving religious society to give justification for their "basic heart commitments." The Christian apologists will do an internal critique of their system of thought, revealing its failure to give an adequate defense for

³⁸[38] John Warwick Montgomery recently made the following comment about Van Til, "Sadly, the great Calvinist dogmatician Cornelius Van Til believed that his great apologetic accomplishment, over against B. B. Warfield, was to make the God who reveals Himself in Scripture the starting-point for Apologetics as well as for Dogmatics." In "Defending the Hope That Is in Us: Apologetics for the 21st Century" <http://www.jwm.christendom.co.uk/unpublished_essay.html>. I'm not sure why Montgomery singles out Warfield, but Van Til's apologetic was/is definitely revolutionary in comparison to the classical and evidential method. By the tone of Montgomery's sentence (also among his other writings), it is clear his apologetic would not start with the triune God of the Bible. Here we have a Christian criticizing another Christian for wanted to have the triune God as the starting point in every area of his life. For a critique of Montgomery and his apologetic see "A Critique of the Evidentialist Apologetical Method of John Warwick Montgomery", by Greg L. Bahnsen <<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa016.htm>>.

³⁹[39] Mr. Johnson does not prove his position in "Is Cornelius Van Til's Apologetic Method Christian, or Merely Theistic." His article is riddled with misunderstandings of the presuppositional (Van Tillian) apologetic. I don't think he quite understands the differences between classical and evidential apologetics either. Johnson makes the following comment "Evidentialism is, of course, the "traditional" approach to Christian apologetics which relies upon arguments and "evidences" (e.g. Aquinas' famous Five Ways, or William Paley's "watchmaker" analogy) to convince the non-Christian that Christianity is true" (pg. 257). I believe Johnson is mixing two different approaches to apologetics, but what is worse, he seems to think that Aquinas' "Five Ways" will convince the non-Christian that *Christianity* is true. Another statement which keeps my head shaking in amazement is "As I read Van Til and the writings of a defender like Bahnsen or Frame, I *constantly* find myself wondering: how can all of this be applied to the non-Christian?" (emphasis mine). Johnson's statement reveals much more about his research and understanding (or lack thereof), then it does the application of the presuppositional apologetic.

epistemology, metaphysics and ethics. In turn, the presuppositional apologists will offer the unbeliever the only hope for mankind (1Peter 3:15).

--*Soli Deo Gloria*

40[1] I can be reached by E-mail at <jeff@rcctr.org>. A number of individuals have influenced me in writing this paper: Lane Tipton, Ozzie Osgood, K. Scott Oliphint, Greg Bahnsen as well as other mentioned and not mentioned throughout the paper. Any misunderstanding of Van Til and his apologetic methodology is entirely my own.
