

CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS FROM A  
PRESUPPOSITIONAL FOUNDATION: AN  
INTEGRATIVE APPROACH<sup>50</sup>

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As reported in the Gospel of John, Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth. When the man was summoned to appear before the Pharisees and pressed (a second time) on a “theological” question designed to prove or disprove that Jesus was or was not “from God,” the man responded that, as to that topic, “. . . I do not know.” He quickly added, however, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” (John 9:25)<sup>51</sup>

The Apostle Paul, in the City of Athens, his “spirit provoked within him” by the idols in that city, began to “reason” with the Jews and “devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.” (Acts 17:16-17) When the philosophers of the day brought him to the center of their government and religious culture, the Areopagus, Paul used a significantly more robust “apologetic” than the (formerly) blind man, convincing at least some of the philosophers there to “hear (him) again about this,” leading at least some to become believers. (See Acts 17:18-34)

Here we have two men, personally touched by the Savior, sharing and defending their stories before the so-called “intellectuals” of the day. But in doing so, they used significantly different methods. The (formerly) blind man, a reluctant witness, to be sure, would not be drawn into the “either—or” snare of the Pharisees, but simply reported what he knew to be true. He had been touched by Jesus (the

<sup>50</sup> This article is taken from a paper I wrote as part of the requirements for a class on Apologetics I “attended” in 2011 from *Reformed Theological Seminary (Virtual)* as part of that school's Masters of Religion program. The Professor was John Frame. The paper has been modified slightly since that time.

<sup>51</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).

incarnate “Word of God”) and thus might well be considered to be demonstrating an early example of “presuppositional” apologetics.

Paul, by contrast, *sought out* the philosophers and intellectuals of the day and “reasoned” with them. His approach would be more closely aligned with today’s so-called “classical” apologetics. God chose to record both episodes in His Word, along with many others of equal variety, giving us, I believe, a clear indication that no single “method” for answering the questions of unbelievers is either a) called for in all circumstances, or b) an exclusive “biblical” mandate.

Accordingly, in this paper I will propose that the modern apologist should combine, or integrate concepts and arguments from the various apologetic theories (or “schools”) to achieve a maximally effective, personalized approach. That is, I propose to show that “classical” apologetics are not inconsistent with, and can be done from a “presuppositional” foundation. I will also show that the current leading proponents for the major apologetic methods have already laid the groundwork for this integrative approach. Along the way, I will show by example that, for me (a practicing attorney), a method that emphasizes “classical” apologetics based upon a “presuppositional” foundation seems a good “fit” and creates an environment in which I can be successful in leading unbelievers to Christ.<sup>52</sup>

### Definitions and Background

In order to properly consider the concepts and methods available to us as we develop our thinking on apologetics, we first consider applicable definitions and a brief history of the

<sup>52</sup> I am certainly not the first to propose (or recognize) the "integrative" approach to apologetics. Boa and Bowman have done so effectively, in my opinion (as evidenced by the numerous references to them here), and Frame certainly implies it in his various works, as I will show. However, somewhat *contra* Boa and Bowman, I do suggest that the integrative approach *is* a distinct methodology, or perhaps will become so over time.

issues concerning apologetic theory and methods.

### Definitions and Goals

As we consider the various approaches to apologetics, and especially as we develop our own, personal apologetic method (as I believe we must), we should keep in mind that the goal of apologetics is to “. . . present the truth to unbelievers.”<sup>53</sup> Boa and Bowman’s definition has a slightly different perspective: “Apologetics may be simply defined as the defense of the Christian faith,”<sup>54</sup> as does Craig’s: “Apologetics . . . is that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”<sup>55</sup> All these definitions, I believe, are true to the biblical apologetic mandate:

In your hearts honor 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; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:15-16)

Thus, any apologetic system that does not (among other things) advance the cause of evangelism should be carefully examined and, perhaps, discarded. (While Craig and others hold, and I

<sup>53</sup> John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994), p. 63. (Frame employs a different definition in his *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* but explains that the *AGG* and *DKG* definitions are “logically equivalent” noting that a “word may have more than one useful definition.” See his footnote 1 on page 1 in *AGG* for details.)

<sup>54</sup> Boa, Kenneth D. and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 15.

agree, that apologetics may play other useful roles, such as shaping culture and strengthening believers,<sup>56</sup> it seems clear that the *primary* goal of the apologist is bringing unbelievers to Christ,<sup>57</sup> or “softening the soil” to allow others to do so.) Accordingly, as we consider a “practical” or personal apologetic, we should constantly examine not only its adherence to our preferred (but human and therefore fallible) methodology, but also its efficacy in winning souls for Christ.

### **A Brief History of the Issues and Debate Regarding Apologetic Methodology Taxonomy**

A history of apologetics is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>58</sup> However, an understanding of the current “debate” concerning apologetic methodology, and its recent history, is useful in clarifying our own view.

Although apologists have used a wide variety of arguments and methods since the earliest days of the Church, less attention was paid to serious study of apologetic “method” until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>59</sup> Since that time, however, the study of apologetic method has intensified, mainly as a result of the close relationship now seen between apologetics and religious epistemology.<sup>60</sup> (The rise in the study of religious epistemology

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<sup>56</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, p. 16-21.

<sup>57</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 495.

<sup>58</sup> For a history of apologetics, see, e.g., Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, pp. 29-43; Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, pp. 9-32; John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), pp. 187-297.

<sup>59</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 33.

<sup>60</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 33. Unfortunately, I will only be able to touch on epistemology proper in passing in this paper; however, I recognize that, as noted above, it is virtually impossible to separate epistemology from apologetic method. To that end, see my

was itself prompted at least in part by the writings of Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)<sup>61</sup>.

Accordingly, apologetic methodology began to be “divided” into several schools of thought. While there is not complete consensus on the division of the various methods, or *taxonomy*, of apologetics,<sup>62</sup> and observers have noted the methods may fall into as few as two<sup>63</sup> and as many as five<sup>64</sup> categories, I believe the most useful division is that put forward by Boa and Bowman. Utilizing Burt’s categories of religious epistemology, they place apologetic methods into four categories: classical apologetics, evidentialism, Reformed apologetics, and fideism.<sup>65</sup> These are correlated with Burt’s

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note at the end of the paper regarding its interplay with my proposed method.

<sup>61</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, pp. 23, 33-34.

<sup>62</sup> "Of all the other books on apologetic methodology, no two classify the various methods in exactly the same way." Craig, William Lane., Gary R. Habermas, John M. Frame, Kelly J. Clark, and Paul D. Feinbert. *Five Views on Apologetics*. Edited by Steven B. Cowan and Stanley N. Gundy. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000, p. 9. (In the remainder of this paper, this book is cited as *Five Views on Apologetics* and lists the author or editor who contributed the material cited.)

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, John J. "Is Cornelius Van Til's Apologetic Method Christian, or Merely Theistic?" *The Evangelical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2003): 257-68.

<sup>64</sup> Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, pp. 15-20. (Actually, if one considers the “cumulative case” method distinct from “evidentialism,” and if “presuppositionalism” is distinct from “reformed epistemology” with both being distinct from “fideism,” a case could be made for no less than six methods. See Appendix 1.)

<sup>65</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 34. The authors include both presuppositionalism and Reformed epistemology in the broader category of “Reformed apologetics” while treating fideism as a

epistemological categories of rationalism, empiricism, authoritarian, and intuitive, respectively.

While this taxonomy (and the underlying epistemological assumptions upon which it is based) is certainly open to debate, I find the four categories useful, especially for the purposes of my arguments here. In fact, I will focus on two approaches: classical and presuppositional. (Due to scope and space constraints, I will proceed on the premise that evidential and cumulative case apologetics, broadly considered, would “fit” within the definition of “classical” for my purposes in arguing that all apologetics should proceed from a presuppositional foundation, but that any “form” of argument that meets the foundational criteria can and should be utilized.<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, I will from time to time refer to all the “non” presuppositional methods as “traditional” apologetics, per Johnson, above.)

### The Debate

Against this backdrop, enter Cornelius Van Til (1894-1987). According to Frame, “Van Til is perhaps the most important Christian thinker since Calvin.”<sup>67</sup> Van Til’s ideas and writings (influenced by the likes of Abraham Kuyper, Louis Berkhof, and Samuel Volbeda<sup>68</sup>) developed the concept of “presuppositional”<sup>69</sup> apologetics. A full description of Van Til’s

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separate category.

<sup>66</sup> In point of fact, I could proceed from the premise that we consider, broadly, 1) presuppositionalism and 2) everything else. (I agree generally with both Cowan and Boa and Bowman that Reformed epistemology and fideism are closely related. I believe both are also closely enough akin to presuppositionalism that I can make my underlying point, though I concede that adherents to those three views would likely disagree.)

<sup>67</sup> John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, p. 44.

<sup>68</sup> Frame, *Van Til*, pp. 20-22

apologetic is well beyond the scope of this paper; however, as Clary summarizes:

Presuppositionalism . . . is based upon a revelation epistemology and Reformed argument for the veracity of the Christian worldview. It presents Christian theology as a unit, with the Scripture as its presupposed starting point. Using the bible as their authority, presuppositionalists argue for the existence of God transcendentally. . . The four basic tenets are: 1) antithesis; 2) point of contact; 3) ultimate commitment; and, 4) transcendental argument.<sup>70</sup>

I would add that another key characteristic of presuppositionalism is the rejection of “neutrality” in argument. In Van Til’s “Why I believe in God,” for example, he points out to the hypothetical unbeliever (to whom the pamphlet is directed) who believes himself to be “neutral” on the issue of God’s existence:

You went to a “neutral” school. . . They taught you to be “open-minded.” God was not brought into connection with your study of nature or history. You were trained without bias all along the line. Of course, you know better now . . . to be “without bias” is only to have a particular *kind* of bias. The idea of “neutrality” is simply a colorless suit that covers a negative attitude toward God. At least it ought to be plain that he who is not *for* the God of Christianity is *against* Him.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Frame points out in *AGG* (in footnote 16, p. 12-13) that the term “presuppositionalism” itself, a) leads to misunderstandings of Van Til’s (and Frame’s) apologetics and, b) does not adequately (or accurately) describe same. However, as Frame notes, the term has come to characterize a certain apologetic methodology with distinct characteristics (some of which I will expand upon in the body of the paper) and, therefore, I will likewise use this “standard label.” See also generally, Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of this Thought*, Chapter 10.

<sup>70</sup> Ian H. Clary, “An Introduction to Presuppositional Apologetics,” *Hope's Reason: A Journal of Apologetics* 1, no. 1 (2010), 56.

Accordingly, Van Til rejects such neutrality and emphasizes the “ultimate commitment” to Scripture as the apologetic starting point. Clary comments on this latter concept and (drawing on Frame and others) helps us clarify Van Til’s thinking. “What both the evidentialist and the non-Christian do not seem to recognize is that when it comes to issues of ultimate authority, everyone has an unproved starting point that is self-referential and taken to be self-attesting.”<sup>72</sup> (He is here responding to the criticism of Van Til’s “circularity” of reasoning).

One line from Van Til’s “My Credo” perhaps sums up his approach as well as any. “(We should) use the same principle in apologetics that we use in theology: the self-attesting, self-explanatory Christ of Scripture.”<sup>73</sup>

Van Til made other comments in the same article which likely did not endear him to traditional apologists. Here are a few examples of his “problems” with the traditional methods of apologetics:

- *This method compromises God himself by maintaining that His existence is only “possible” albeit “highly probable,” rather than ontologically and “rationally” necessary.*
- *It compromises the counsel of God by not understanding it as the only all-inclusive, ultimate “cause” of whatsoever comes to pass.*
- *It compromises the revelation of God by: a) Compromising its necessity . . . b) Compromising its clarity . . . c) Compromising its sufficiency . . . d) Compromising its authority.<sup>74</sup>*

Van Til went on to assert that the traditional apologetic theories compromise “man’s creation as the image of God . . . man’s

<sup>71</sup> Van Til, Cornelius. *Why I Believe in God*. Philadelphia: Committee on Christian Education, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, n.d.

<sup>72</sup> Clary, “An Introduction to Presuppositional Apologetics,” 62. See also Frame, *AGG*, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> “My Credo” appeared in: Geehan, E. R. *Jerusalem and Athens; Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*. [Nutley, N.J.]: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1971.

<sup>74</sup> Van Til, “My Credo.”

covenantal relationship with God . . .” and “the Grace of God.”<sup>75</sup> While Van Til provided explanations of these assertions, it seems likely that traditionalists may have had a difficult time getting past all the “compromises” of which they were accused. In any event, Van Til can rightly be said to have “rocked the world” of the apologetic theorists.

### **The Traditionalists’ Response and Misunderstandings**

Following Van Til’s appearance on the apologetic scene, the “traditionalists” began to take note and, I think it is safe to say, take exception to his writings. The debate over Van Til’s presuppositionalism (versus the “traditional” approaches) continues to this day. In a 2003 article, for example, John J. Johnson said, “In the field of Christian apologetics, the ongoing battle between the two dominant approaches, evidentialism and presuppositionalism, is well-known, at least within conservative Christian circles.”<sup>76</sup>

“Battle” seems an apt description in that, at times, unfortunately, this debate has become heated, perhaps unnecessarily so. While Van Til’s method is certainly open to legitimate criticism (as will be explored in the sections below), the “early” critics of his thought (even from within the Reformed community), perhaps in response to the types of comments set out above, responded in kind. Examples abound, but a few will suffice to make my point. The authors of *Classical Apologetics*, for example, state:

The readers may well wonder why the authors of this book so much fear an apologetic whose authors they so much love and admire. The answer is simple: the implications of presuppositionalism, in our opinion, *undermine the Christian religion implicitly*. The advocates love

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<sup>75</sup> Van Til, “My Credo.”

<sup>76</sup> John J. Johnson, “Is Cornelius Van Til’s Apologetic Method Christian, or Merely Theistic?” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2003): 257.

and promote Christianity, we gladly admit. However, their principles work against their intentions. If and when presuppositional principles are carried out consistently, *they destroy what their advocates love*. . . We are already seeing this deadly work. . . In fact, we will show that presuppositional principles, carried out consistently, *undermine the Christian religion itself*. (Emphasis added.)<sup>77</sup>

These strong words are followed by a critique of Van Til's method, which encompasses about one-third of the book.

However, as pointed out by Frame and others (see, e.g., the Clary article mentioned above), even these initial criticisms of the "original" version of presuppositionalism may have been based upon misreading and misunderstandings of Van Til's writings.<sup>78</sup> For example, Sproul, Gerstner and Lindsley state that "Presuppositionalists insist that all traditional apologetics . . . is futile, and worse than futile—false, and worse than false—blasphemous."<sup>79</sup> They, and others, also hold that presuppositionalism completely rejects all "evidential" approaches.

Geisler, likewise, first characterizes Van Til's approach as a "methodological fideism," then goes on to say that such is "completely inadequate" to establish the truth of a Christian worldview.<sup>80</sup> As shown below, these assertions are too broad a

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<sup>77</sup> R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), p. 184.

<sup>78</sup> Several authors, including followers of Van Til, have noted that Van Til's writings did lack the clarity and detail that one would hope for from the "founder" of such a movement. This will be touched upon in the following sections.

<sup>79</sup> R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics*, p. 185.

<sup>80</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 56, 59-64.

reading of Van Til, and certainly too broad a criticism of presuppositionalism in general. Never-the-less, as the mid to late twentieth century moved toward the twenty-first, the debate raged on.

### **The “New Generation” and Movement toward Common Ground**

A close reading of today’s leading proponents of the two “broad” schools (presuppositionalism and “traditional” in its various forms), I believe, leads one to the conclusion that, on each side, there is movement toward a view that presuppositionalism and traditional apologetic methods are not incompatible. I believe, also, that the same literature shows that such proponents have conceded some weaknesses, or at least the need for refinement, in their own theories, explicitly in the case of Frame and presuppositionalism and implicitly in the case of a leading “traditionalist,” William Lane Craig. Accordingly, I will set out here, briefly, why I believe this to be so and conclude with my view on the benefits of a personal, “practical” apologetic.

### **The Current Thinking within Presuppositionalism—John M. Frame**

As noted above, Frame is a presuppositionalist and follower of the Van Til school of thought. However, Frame has added three elements to the discussion which are significant here. First, Frame has addressed a number of the criticisms of Van Til, specifically, and presuppositionalism, generally, by pointing out that such criticisms were based in part on misunderstandings by such critics. Second, while a follower (and former student) of Van Til, Frame himself is also critical of certain aspects of Van Til’s methods. Finally, Frame has, I believe, laid the groundwork for an “integrative” approach to apologetics such as I will put forth in the conclusion.

On the first issue, Frame has provided valuable responses to, e.g., Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley. His response

to the “Ligonier” book points out a number of places where the authors of *Classical Apologetics* have simply misunderstood Van Til and his writings. He responds to those misunderstandings in, for example, the areas of “autonomy, reason, and circularity,” and in the area of the “noetic effects of sin.”<sup>81</sup> On one such misunderstanding, Frame states that Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley have shown, “. . . an extraordinary ignorance of Van Til’s position. . . Mistakes like this make one wonder how seriously these authors have tried to understand Van Til.”<sup>82</sup> (Others have pointed out these misunderstandings, as well.<sup>83</sup>)

On the second issue, Frame has not only stated that Van Til’s thoughts were at times “unclear,” he has also suggested that, in some areas Van Til was unfairly critical of traditional methods. For example, in *AGG* Frame sets out a number of “questions” he has about the Van Til transcendental argument, a key feature of the presuppositional method. At one point, Frame makes a rather telling statement: “All this suggests a further reason why there is no single argument that will prove the entire biblical doctrine of God.”<sup>84</sup> Frame likewise criticizes Van Til’s opposition to the use of “positive” apologetic arguments: “Therefore, I think that Van Til’s restriction of the apologist to the exclusive use of negative arguments is unreasonable.”<sup>85</sup> Throughout *AGG*, Frame provides other refinements of Van Til’s method and presents other criticism.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Frame, *AGG*, pp. 233-237.

<sup>82</sup> Frame, *AGG*, p. 237

<sup>83</sup> Clary, "An Introduction to Presuppositional Apologetics," 60; David Clowney, "Something Less than Compelling," *The Reformed Journal* (November 1984): 23.

<sup>84</sup> Frame, *AGG*, pp. 71-73.

<sup>85</sup> Frame, *AGG*, p. 76.

<sup>86</sup> Frame also does so in his *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*. For one such example, see Frame's critique of Van Til's view

Frame has also laid out the theoretical underpinnings for an “integrative” approach to apologetics. As a leading theologian (and, to some at least, the *de facto* heir apparent to Van Til) his doing so creates an environment in which others may feel comfortable that the apologist can be true to the presuppositional position, yet utilize arguments from other “schools.” Frame sets this out most clearly, I believe, in two places: first, in *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, Frame states rather pointedly:

The more I study these matters, the more I am impressed with the richness and variety that is possible *within* a biblical, indeed presuppositional, apologetic. Van Til offers some excellent strategies, some excellent arguments. But his *are not the only ones permitted by Scripture*. We should learn, with discernment, from the whole history of apologetics, and we should prayerfully employ our God-given creativity within the bounds of Scripture. Van Til has taught us that every fact reveals God. If that is so, *there are vastly many apologetic arguments and strategies waiting to be formulated*. (Emphasis added.)<sup>87</sup>

The second place Frame explicitly endorses the use of other methods (including classic) by presuppositional apologists is in *AGG* where he speaks of “a presuppositionalism of the heart.” In discussing the various methods, and their supposed distinctions, Frame states,

There is less distance between Van Til’s apologetics and the traditional apologetics than most partisans on either side (including Van Til himself) have been willing to grant. I am not at all saddened by this implication. *This way of thinking opens to the presuppositional apologist many, and perhaps all, of those arguments generally associated with the traditional apologetics in the past*. (Emphasis added.)<sup>88</sup>

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on rationalism and irrationalism at pages 231-238.

<sup>87</sup> Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, p. 322.

<sup>88</sup> Frame, *AGG*, p. 85.

The acknowledgment (and encouragement) that the presuppositional apologist can employ traditional arguments and still be “true” to presuppositionalism, when given by John Frame, should not be underestimated.<sup>89</sup>

### William Lane Craig—“Showing” and “Knowing” Presuppositionalism?

William Lane Craig is one of the most effective apologetic “debaters” on the contemporary scene. In his live presentations, and in his book *Reasonable Faith*,<sup>90</sup> Craig utilizes the familiar “two-step” approach of “classical” apologetics, i.e., first developing an argument that the existence of God is, “at least more probable than not, and then (presenting) Christian evidences, probabilistically construed, for God’s revelation in Christ.” He states, “This is the method I have adopted in my own work.”<sup>91</sup>

However, in both *Five Views* and *Reasonable Faith*, Craig puts forward the proposition, apparently unique to his writings, that there is a difference between “showing” Christianity to be true (which would encompass, e.g., apologetic debates and encounters with unbelievers) and “knowing” Christianity to be true (which he reserves for believers). This distinction Craig lays out in *Five Views*:

The methodological approach which I shall defend in this essay is that reason in the form of rational arguments and evidence play an essential role in our showing Christianity to be true, whereas reason in this form plays a contingent and secondary role in our personally knowing Christianity to be true. The proper

<sup>89</sup> Habermas states, "Overall, there is little question that Frame has moved Van Tillian apologetics closer to its traditional cousins. . . On the surface at least, this involves a fair amount of agreement between contrasting outlooks." Habermas, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 237.

<sup>90</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*.

<sup>91</sup> Craig, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 48.

ground of our knowing Christianity to be true is the inner work of the Holy Spirit in our individual selves; and in our showing Christianity to be true, it is his role to open the hearts of unbelievers to assent and respond to the reasons we present.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, Craig clearly associates “showing” with unbelievers and “knowing” with believers.

But what are we to make of this distinction? Is the “knowing” Craig describes simply his way of describing the “assurance of believers”? No, for in the next pages in *Five Views* (and similar sections of *Reasonable Faith*<sup>93</sup>) Craig goes to great lengths to describe that the “knowing” is knowing that Christianity is “true”—not that a particular individual is “saved.” Thus, the knowing is, at least in Craig’s mind, true “apologetic,” i.e., it forms the “basis” for a belief in God and the truth claims of Christianity. Craig goes so far as to say,

It seems to me that the biblical theist ought to hold that among the circumstances that *rationaly ground Christian belief* is the witness of the Holy Spirit, and that that belief is so warranted that it is an intrinsic defeater of any potential defeater . . . insofar as cogent arguments and evidence for Christian theism are available, a mature believer ought to regard these, *not as supplying the basis for his belief*, but as a welcome and provisional confirmation of his *properly basic and warranted belief in Christian theism*. (Emphasis added.)<sup>94</sup>

Thus, it is clearly part of his “system of apologetics,” not simply individual assurance.<sup>95</sup>

Is Craig saying, perhaps, that the Christian is

<sup>92</sup> Craig, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 28.

<sup>93</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, pp. 43-60, esp. 58.

<sup>94</sup> Craig, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 38.

<sup>95</sup> In furtherance of this apparent move toward something akin to presuppositionalism, note Craig's lengthy and generally positive "Excursus" on Alvin Plantinga. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-48.

“warranted” in relying upon the witness of the Holy Spirit and, *therefore*, also warranted in using such witness to form his “ultimate commitment” to the truths of Christianity? Based upon their responses to Craig’s article, Frame and Clark apparently think so! Clark begins his response by noting that, “I could have written William Craig’s essay . . .” and further states, “There is very little in Craig’s essay that I or any other Reformed epistemologist could disagree with . . .”<sup>96</sup> Clark makes the point (and one of mine!) that, while Craig places himself in the category of “classical apologetics,” he is “quite different” from others in that school (including, e.g., Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley) whom he terms “hyper-classical” apologists.<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, Frame (after “correcting” Craig’s “knowing” argument for its lack of specificity in setting the ultimate standard as God’s Word) says,

With this correction, I certainly agree with Craig that the testimony of the Spirit is a self-authenticating, immediate apprehension of the truth of the gospel, that it is not dependent on arguments, and that it ‘overwhelms’ contrary arguments. His response to the rival claims of other religions to self-authenticating experience is the same that I would make.<sup>98</sup>

In his “Closing Remarks,” Craig responds, “I am happy to say that John Frame and I do not seem to have any substantive disagreements.”<sup>99</sup>

Clearly there is some distance between Craig and Frame, the details of which are articulated in the various articles in *Five Views*, but it is equally clear that the “gap” between Frame and Craig is significantly narrower than between , e.g.,

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<sup>96</sup> Clark, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 82.

<sup>97</sup> Clark, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 82.

<sup>98</sup> Frame, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 77.

<sup>99</sup> Craig, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 314.

Sproul—Gerstner—Lindsey and Van Til.

### **Conclusion and My Personal Apologetic Toward an Integrative, Practical Apologetic**

I have shown here that, as a formal discipline, the “theory” of apologetics received little attention until the twentieth century. From that time to this, a significant divergence of opinion developed as to an appropriate, Biblical, apologetic method. However, I believe that a careful reading of the contemporary theorists in this field show that the “divergence” is perhaps beginning to “converge”—converge into a more unified, integrated method of apologetics. Frame’s writing cited herein state explicitly that, even as a presuppositionalist, he accepts and values the use of traditional arguments. Craig, likewise, concedes general agreement with Frame and, while utilizing classic apologetics, holds to a type of presuppositional / fideist view of how a person “knows” that Christian truth claims are “true.”

Accordingly, I conclude that much of the apologetic theory, especially among the Reformed thinkers, should be viewed more as how we should “think” about apologetics than how we should “do” apologetics. Or, to borrow from Clark, there are the “whys” and there are the “hows” of apologetics.<sup>100</sup> Of course what we think about apologetics will certainly influence how we do apologetics, but, in my opinion, if our “thinking” is presuppositional, and our “doing” is classical, there need not necessarily be an inherent “conflict of interest.”

As a practicing attorney, for example, I often argue my clients’ cases having prepared a variety of theories, utilizing a number of arguments. However, in any such arguments, one thing remains constant—my client should win! Thus, my “presupposition” is the “truth” of my client’s case. I am then prepared for any number of objections, the mood of the judge, etc. I am prepared to provide even different theoretical underpinnings for the (otherwise) same argument, depending

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<sup>100</sup> Clark, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 263.

on the situation that arises during the course of the argument. Accordingly, I believe (with Frame) the Christian apologist should hold as his “ultimate commitment” the Word of God. We should also recognize, as did Van Til, that there is no true “neutrality” in argument or worldview, and we should not, therefore, claim such neutrality for ourselves. (Likewise, we should not accede to the claims of unbelievers that they are “neutral.”) We should admit, in fact embrace, our worldview based upon our presupposition.

However, beyond this foundation, I agree with Habermas that presuppositionalism is “. . . not a distinct apologetic method, but . . . a theological outlook on apologetics.”<sup>101</sup> Frame himself concedes as much when he says, “Perhaps presuppositionalism is more an attitude of the heart, a spiritual condition, than an easily describable empirical phenomenon.”<sup>102</sup> I would add that this should be the *only* attitude and spiritual condition the apologist can accept. All we do and say the realm of apologetics should be judged against this standard; that is, whichever argument I use, I will not lose sight of the truth of God’s Word.

Thus, we turn now from the “thinking” to the “doing” of apologetics. In this regard, in my limited apologetic “encounters” God has given me some success in using the “classic” approach, i.e., first establishing that denying the existence of God is not really reasonable, that science certainly has not disproved God, and that without a theistic worldview, nothing else makes sense. I have also found that, once an unbeliever concedes the probability of the existence of God, that person is much more likely to accept the truth claims of Christianity. This seems to be because, once a person accepts that God exists, the person must immediately, in their mind and heart at least, deal with “next” questions, such as “What does this God expect of me?”

Also, in apologetics, as in the law (and notwithstanding

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<sup>101</sup> Habermas, *Five Views on Apologetics*, p. 241.

<sup>102</sup> Frame, *AGG*, p. 87.

our rejection of “neutrality”), one should be free to employ even “*arguendo*” (for the sake of argument) tactics. “If we assume,” for example, “that God does not exist, how do we account for (e.g.) the order of the Universe, or the consistency of mathematical ‘laws,’ etc.” I do not believe doing so is being “untrue” to the presuppositional “foundation” I’ve described. I believe, to the contrary, it allows us to demonstrate the strength of that foundation. *Arguendo* can also be utilized to great advantage to demonstrate the absurdity of an opponent’s position, as well as showing that “even if” the opponent is correct in some aspect or detail, the ultimate conclusion still fails.

Furthermore, I have found that classical arguments (as Frame notes) “work,”<sup>103</sup> i.e., they have the result of causing people to accept the reality of God and the truth claims of Christianity. As I stated out the outset of this paper, and I as reinforce and clarify now, so long as we are true to our presuppositional foundation, we should not reject out of hand *any* apologetic method that produces the result of leading people to a saving faith in Christ.

Finally, I agree with Frame that apologetics should be “person-variable.”<sup>104</sup> Just as we would not present Christ to a German speaking person by talking in English, we should not expect to use the same apologetic arguments with every person in every situation. Here, I am greatly indebted to Boa and Bowman for their work in *Faith Has Its Reasons*, especially their conclusions in “Part Six: Integrative Approaches to Apologetics.”<sup>105</sup> Perhaps their statement that best sums up my position is that: “We suggest that this practice of expanding or enriching one apologetic approach by incorporating elements of other approaches is just what apologetists should do.”<sup>106</sup> As they

<sup>103</sup> Frame, *AGG*, p. 71.

<sup>104</sup> Frame, *AGG*, p. 72.

<sup>105</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, pp. 425-524.

<sup>106</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 481.

also note, there simply is no “perfect” apologetic.<sup>107</sup> They also remind us that: “The end goal of apologetics is to persuade non-Christians to believe in Christ.”<sup>108</sup> (Their chart setting out the common questions we encounter as a person moves from unbelief to faith and the elements of the various methods that might be used to respond to same is a fine example of the efficacy of their “integrative” approach and how it can be “person variable.”<sup>109</sup>)

However, Boa and Bowman go to some lengths at various points in their book to deny that their “integrative” approach represents a “fifth” or “new” apologetic method.<sup>110</sup> They are apparently reluctant to classify their approach as a “new approach,” preferring to refer to it as a “diversity” approach or a “holistic” view of the other approaches.<sup>111</sup> I disagree. I propose that their method (and mine) is, in fact, a separate and unique approach. A “practical” apologetic, or a “classical apologetic with a presuppositional foundation” perhaps. In any event, drawing upon the best of the traditional methods, while remaining aware of and true to the presuppositional foundations of Reformed theology, is, I believe, both “new” (in theory) and appropriate.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 494.

<sup>108</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 494.

<sup>109</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 517.

<sup>110</sup> See, e.g., Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 513.

<sup>111</sup> Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 513.

<sup>112</sup> Boa and Bowman’s work supports my position in this regard: “Obviously, all four (apologetic methods) view regard Jesus and Scripture as authoritative; we are talking about the primacy of their authority in relation to apologetic argument only.” Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, p. 502. This reinforces the notion that all of the methods have (at least) a “presuppositional foundation.” I am arguing this should be recognized more explicitly and it should undergird all apologetic methods.

I suggest that the Apostle Paul himself used an “evidential” apologetic with a “presuppositional” basis in arguing for the truth of the resurrection of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Paul lists “evidences” available to his reader to verify the truth of the resurrection, most notably the “500 brothers.” In this, he was an “evidentialist.” However, as Frame notes, the “ultimate” proof that Paul relies on is the preaching of the Apostles, that is, the Word of God.<sup>113</sup> Here is a biblical example of a “traditional approach built upon a presuppositional foundation.”

### Conclusion

My approach is based upon a Reformed, presuppositional foundation<sup>114</sup> that treasures the Word of God as the ultimate authority in all we do. I reject the concept that there is true “neutrality” in life or argument. Upon that foundation, however, I will utilize a “person variable” approach, including such arguments, be they transcendental, evidential, or otherwise, that help me fulfill *both* the mandate of 1 Peter 3:15-16 *and* the “great commission” of Matthew 28:18-20.<sup>115</sup> I believe the Scriptural examples cited at the outset of this paper support such an approach. The (formerly) blind man, knowing

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<sup>113</sup> Frame, *AGG*, p. 58.

<sup>114</sup> As noted earlier, I have not dealt in any detail with epistemology here. I will only say in passing that I have considered the epistemology set out in Frame's *DKG* and I believe my approach is not only consistent with Frame's theories, but can consciously use it to great effect, especially, the "perspectival" approach he puts forward.

<sup>115</sup> In addition, perhaps if the critics, with the help of Frame, recognize their misunderstandings of Van Til *and* accept Frame's efforts toward “refinements” of presuppositionalism (as well as his acceptance of their methods), some progress toward a “common” methodology (such as I put forth below) can occur and, hence, Christian unity can be enhanced.

his audience was (or should have been) familiar with the scriptures, utilized an approach that we might now characterize as presuppositional. Paul, likewise recognizing the lack of scriptural knowledge of his audience, and their Hellenistic philosophy, engaged in what we might now consider “classical” apologetics. We should be prepared to do likewise, as God gives us opportunities and the grace to recognize them!