THE FAILURE OF PRESUPPOSITIONALISM AS A HOLISTIC APOLOGETIC METHODOLOGY: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF ITS THEOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL DEFICIENCES

A Position Paper

Presented to

Dr. Timothy Paul Jones

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for 28700

---

by

Christian A. Meister

cmeister687@students.sbts.edu

November 21, 2025

*I affirm the honor code.

THE FAILURE OF PRESUPPOSITIONALISM AS A HOLISTIC APOLOGETIC METHODOLOGY: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF ITS THEOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL DEFICIENCES

Christian apologetics is "that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith."[1] Christian apologists utilize a wide variety of methods to justify their beliefs. Traditional methods include classicalism, evidentialism, presuppositionalism, and cultural apologetics.[2] Subsidiary methods include Reformed epistemology, verificational, cumulative-case, and ecclesial apologetics.[3] Methodological diversity does not serve as a hindrance to apologetics; each method ought to be recognized for the unique value it brings to the discipline and to the church as a whole.

---

[1] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15.

[2] The considerable diversity among apologetic approaches only testifies to the potency of the Christian's case. Christian ought to embrace, not downcast, the range of methods for defending the objective truth of God's Word and God's world. *Classicalism* is a two-step approach that first uses philosophical arguments from natural theology to establish a generic theism and second uses historical evidence to establish the truth of Christian theism. *Evidentialism* defends the truth of Christianity exclusively on the basis of the second step of classicalism, showing the reliability of the gospels and the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Presuppositionalism* displays the coherence of the Christian worldview by pinpointing the incoherence of non-Christian worldviews. *Cultural apologetics* evaluates cultural expressions and practices according to how well they explain what is true, good, and beautiful in comparison to the biblical metanarrative.

[3] These subsidiary methods can be considered as supplemental to the four primary methods because, rather than complete methodologies, they are treated as tactical concepts that inform apologetic practice. They are to be taken with serious consideration for any apologist who desires a strong case for Christian theism. *Reformed epistemology* is the philosophical concept that evidence is not necessary for justified belief in God because this belief is properly basic. *Verificational apologetics* is an approach that assumes the truth of Christian theism and seeks to verify it through evidence, internal consistency, and livability. *Cumulative case apologetics* is similar to classicalism and evidentialism, although it considers the value of the entire scope of evidence impartially. *Ecclesial apologetics* argues for the truth of Christian theism by pointing to the improbability of the church's existence and persistence throughout history.

Nevertheless, as defenders of the faith, critiquing methods with which we disagree is intended to sharpen the case for truth. With that in mind, this paper's primary focus is on presuppositionalism, which argues from the foundational claim that reality only makes sense on the Christian worldview. Known as its founder, Cornelius Van Til adopts relatively radical assertions that have been subjected to incisive critiques since the mid-twentieth century. To offer a fair and compelling critique of the root of presuppositionalism, rather than concentrate on a strict Van Tillian approach, this paper will evaluate a minimal presuppositional approach.[4] Unmistakably, presuppositionalism makes significant contributions to apologetics through its keen analyses of worldview presuppositions and frameworks. It exposes non-Christian worldviews to the inconsistencies of their own implicit or explicit beliefs. Notwithstanding its contributions, presuppositionalism will be evaluated based on its ability to function as a *distinct* apologetic methodology. How does presuppositionalism stand on its own right?

This paper argues that it fails as a *coherent* and *comprehensive* apologetic methodology due to its inconsistent epistemological claims, theological shortcomings, logical circularity, limited engagement with Christian evidences, and practical ineffectiveness. I will demonstrate this by laying out a case for presuppositionalism and then explicating the following four critiques: (1) Christian presuppositions are not necessary for rational discourse and thus epistemological common ground is not essential for evaluating evidence, contrary to the presuppositionalists' central claim, (2) the roles of general revelation and the Holy Spirit in apologetics are undermined, (3) contrasting entire worldview systems does not adequately recognize a hierarchy of Christian doctrine, nor is it practically effective, and (4) a positive, non-

[4] James Anderson champions this sort of minimal presuppositionalism in *Defending Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*.

circular case for Christian theism is not offered. This entire critique aims to assess the philosophical and theological coherence of presuppositionalism and its contemporary relevance to the practice of apologetics.[5]

Understanding the Presuppositional Method for Apologetics

Essential to any sound critique is to represent the opposing view charitably, which is what I will attempt to accomplish. Evidence-based apologetic approaches seek to justify Christian theism by developing structured reasons to believe in it and then engaging those reasons with a non-Christian through a rational exchange of ideas.[6] Presuppositionalists posit that there exists an obstacle of *antithesis* between Christians and non-Christians that prevents this kind of meaningful rational discourse from taking place. The antithesis consists of competing presuppositions about the nature of reality within worldview systems and the suppression of truth as a result of the noetic effects of the fall. Empirical facts, philosophical arguments, or other evidences, according to presuppositionalists, cannot be evaluated properly because the believer

[5] When analyzing philosophical and theological components of a particular methodology, it can become a matter of a conceptual exchange of ideas. It is crucial to keep in mind that apologetics is both an intellectual and a practical discipline. The goal is not to "win" an argument or make the most evidentially compelling case for Christian theism. Instead, the purpose is to bring unbelievers to Christ through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. If apologetics benefits only believers' academic standing or is a matter of seizing the intellectual high ground, it fails to be practiced as a *Christian* discipline. The strength of argumentation is relevant only insofar as it breaks down the unbeliever's stumbling blocks, opening the path to faith. Thus, this paper's position is that presuppositionalism does not, in general, benefit the unbeliever as much as evidential approaches.

[6] With the exception of presuppositionalism and Reformed epistemology, each of these methods is primarily distinguished by its preferred arguments and order of argumentation, and is thus categorized as an *evidential or evidence-based* approach (an *evidential approach* is a broad category for any methodology that formally employs evidence, while *evidentialism* is a specific apologetic methodology that uses only those pieces of evidence that support particular Christian claims. Hence, evidentialism falls within an evidential approach. The two remaining methods—presuppositionalism and Reformed epistemology—are often referred to as *anti-evidential* or *epistemological* approaches because they do not rely on evidence; instead, they argue from epistemology. The disagreement among evidential approaches concerns how the truth of Christianity is best demonstrated through rational evidence, whereas anti-evidential approaches focus on the nature of belief and presuppositions rather than specific lines of evidence.

and unbeliever are functioning on two different epistemological and spiritual levels. Thus, for them, this conflict must be addressed prior to evaluating the evidence for Christian theism.

To flesh this out further, presuppositional apologetics begins with the claim that, whether consciously or unconsciously, everyone operates according to certain *a priori* assumptions derived from their worldview. All reasoning about the world and all interpretation of evidence rest upon prior assumptions about the nature of reality. Within these assumptions lie implicit or explicit beliefs about God, His revelation, humanity's condition, and epistemic authority—sources of knowledge. How a person discerns truth, makes inferences, and draws conclusions depends on the worldview lens through which they reason. Rational functioning cannot exist apart from underlying worldview presuppositions. When unbelievers approach Christian apologetics, they bring various presuppositions that directly conflict with the truths apologists defend, including the epistemic authority of God's Word. Since all persons have presuppositions, and presuppositions inform a person's rational thinking, it is not possible to take a neutral or "presuppositionless" stance in evaluating evidence and truth-claims. Hence, there is a conflict of presuppositions and worldview systems at the fundamental level of apologetics.

An epistemological *and spiritual* chasm exists between the believer and the unbeliever. Unbelievers remain in a state of rebellion and the suppression of truth, whereas believers embrace the truth of God's revelation and treat His Word as an authoritative epistemic source. Sin infects rational functioning and subdues knowledge. Since presuppositionalists assert that any apologetic methodology must function in accordance with this antithesis, they advocate for a defense of Christian theism based on entire worldview systems rather than disagreements over evidence. Both believers and unbelievers have an innate awareness of the fundamental truths about God, which sin then suppresses and distorts. The purpose of apologetic discourse

from the presuppositionalists' perspective is not about convincing the unbeliever of what they *do not know* or *doubt* exists, but to show them what they *already know to be true* apart from the effects of sin.[7]

The underlying antithesis requires some common ground for apologists to advance the case for Christian theism.[8] For meaningful rational discourse and accurate interpretation of evidence to be possible, non-competing epistemologies must be present. Presuppositionalists assert that the only meaningful common ground is the *Christian* worldview. They argue that assuming biblical truths is the only possible way to bridge the antithesis and interpret Christian evidences accurately. Presupposing the Christian worldview constitutes the necessary precondition for rational thought and interpretation of evidence.[9] They base this assertion on another assertion: Christian theism alone corresponds to the nature of reality, serving as the foundation for the truth of metaphysical and epistemic categories such as logic, rationality, aesthetics, morality, science, history, mathematics, and art. All non-Christian worldviews fail to

---

[7] James N. Anderson, "Presuppositional Apologetics," in *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025) 79-80.

[8] *Religiously neutral ground* and *epistemic common ground* must be distinguished. Neutrality entails that the believer and the unbeliever converse from neither believing nor unbelieving standpoints. The believer does not bring his beliefs about God's actual existence, and neither does the unbeliever bring his beliefs against God's existence. Both sides treat the evidence with unbiased, religious neutrality. However, as presuppositionalists rightly note, human beings are incapable of having discourse without presuppositions. Conversely, epistemic common ground is understood as arguing not on neutral fronts but on *equal* fronts. Presuppositionalists seek common ground so that the believer and the unbeliever can have meaningful rational discourse by starting on non-competing epistemologies. A good example of conflating these terms is found in John Frame's *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief.* Frame explains the evidence-based apologetic approaches as seeking to argue from "neutrality," but what he means by "neutrality" is actually "common ground." He writes, "They do, however, tell the unbeliever to think neutrally during the apologetic encounter, and they do seek to develop a neutral argument, one that has no distinctively biblical presuppositions." John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2015), 5. Essentially, Frame correctly defines classicalism, along with other evidence-based apologetic methods, as a set of arguments that do not presuppose God's Word. The *form* of reasoning is non-circular. While he captures the concept, his terminology is ambiguous.

[9] Frame bluntly states it outright: "In apologetic argument, as in everything else we do, we must presuppose the truth of God's Word." Frame, *Apologetics*, 8.

explain reality coherently. Non-Christian *a priori* assumptions cannot provide an adequate epistemological basis for interpreting evidence or arriving at real knowledge of God. Insofar as rationality itself is inexplicable apart from Christian theism, "any correct concept the non-Christian knows requires processes of reasoning that are dependent on a Christian conception of reality."[10] Any attempt to reason apart from presupposing Christian theism is, in principle, self-defeating, and any true aspect of a competing worldview is ultimately derived from the Christian worldview. The presupposition of the truth of God's existence and His words in Scripture forms the standard criteria by which all other sources of knowledge are measured and evaluated.[11] Both Christians and non-Christians alike must begin with the same standard of epistemological assumptions: the special revelation of the triune God as the source of all rational cognitive ability and of existence itself.

In terms of methodological practice, the primary task for presuppositionalists is to surface unbelievers' hidden assumptions about reality and to demonstrate their inconsistencies. Hence, presuppositionalists claim that apologetics is primarily an internal critique of opposing worldviews, arguing how they fail to sufficiently explain reality and ultimately depend on the Christian worldview. Apologists are commissioned to show unbelievers that they unknowingly borrow from Christian theism to justify their own beliefs. Furthermore, presuppositionalists have been wrongly, although understandably, accused of rejecting evidence in their methodology. The core understanding of presuppositionalism does not require the prohibition of evidence. Although Van Tillian presuppositionalists have occasionally avoided evidence, minimal

[10] Timothy Paul Jones, ed., *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025), 11.

[11] John M. Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 208.

presuppositionalists incorporate and encourage various forms of evidence to defend the faith.[12] They maintain that evidence can play a role in apologetics; however, whatever form of evidence is used must be *properly* viewed through the lens of the Christian worldview, since "It is only through the lens of a biblical Christian worldview that we can account for human knowledge and make sense of the world we inhabit."[13]

Areas of Agreement

To better understand how presuppositionalism can serve as a valuable tool for apologetics, it is important to highlight areas where presuppositionalists and evidence-based approaches agree conceptually. First, recognizing and understanding fundamental worldview presuppositions are essential for effectively refuting opposing worldviews. Every worldview contains presuppositions about God and the world that shape rational processes for discerning truth. Thus, a person's worldview will influence how they interpret evidence. Followers of non-Christian worldviews can benefit from the apologist exposing their worldview's inconsistencies. Presuppositional reasoning—the apologetic strategy of challenging a person with an opposing worldview to justify rationality and other metaphysical truths strictly in accordance with their worldview presuppositions—is an indispensable tool for all Christian apologists.[14]

Secondly, the triune God grounds the existence of reality and all metaphysical truths. Apologists from all methodological perspectives can agree that humanity's access to knowledge

[12] Anderson, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 82.

[13] Anderson, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 93.

[14] Sean McDowell, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Evidential Apologetics Response," in *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025), 97.

is contingent on the existence and will of God.[15] Thirdly, evidence-based apologists agree with presuppositionalists that, since the triune God is the foundation for all knowledge and truth, non-Christian worldviews must borrow from Christianity and are thereby inevitably incoherent on their own.[16] Fourthly, despite presenting powerful and persuasive arguments based on human rationality, apologists stand on the same theological conviction that unbelieving minds can be enlightened only through the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:11-16). Finally, presuppositionalism correctly notes that there exists no neutral epistemological framework shared by both Christians and non-Christians upon which to debate truth claims. These commonalities demonstrate the potential of presuppositionalism to offer significant insights and effective tools for apologists to incorporate into their defenses.

Four Critiques of Presuppositionalism

While presuppositionalism has much to offer, the objective of this paper is to demonstrate that it does not function as a coherent and comprehensive apologetic methodology. It lacks coherence in that it posits inconsistent assertions. It also lacks comprehensiveness in that it focuses too narrowly on the internal implications of opposing worldviews. I will unpack four critiques that sufficiently express the deficiencies of presuppositionalism as a distinct method based on philosophical, theological, and practical concerns.

[15] Melissa Cain Travis, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Classical Apologetics Response," in *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025) 95.

[16] Judaism may be the exception, since it arguably constitutes the same foundational assumptions about the nature of reality and rationality. In which case, presuppositionalism as a whole would be discredited, for it would, therefore, not be correct that presupposing Christianity is the only acceptable epistemological grounding for exploring truth. Travis, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Classical Apologetics Response," 95.

Epistemological Common Ground

The foundation of presuppositionalism is its imperative to debate presuppositions within the context of entire worldview systems rather than facts and evidence. This is necessary due to the noetic effects of the fall and the insufficiency of unbelievers' worldview to account for true reality. In principle, the suppression of truth, the impact of sin upon rational faculties, and the incoherence of non-Christian presuppositions prevent unbelievers not only from interpreting evidence correctly but also from arriving at any true knowledge about God, themselves, or the world in which they live.[17] Minimal presuppositionalist James Anderson asserts that "we should not suppose that unbelievers can adopt a stance of dispassionate, unbiased objectivity when it comes to interpreting or evaluating the evidence for Christianity."[18] Only believers have what is sufficient to reason soundly and arrive at accurate interpretations of evidence. Only believers possess real knowledge that is justified by their worldview. Since unbelievers maintain an incoherent worldview, whatever true beliefs they do have are not justified and therefore do not qualify as knowledge.[19] Unbelievers must disregard their worldview and presuppose Christian theism in order to hold justified true beliefs. Rationality—or the ability to reason—only exists on

[17] Kelly James Clark describes the implication of presuppositionalism in the simple terms that unbelievers "cannot know anything" at all. Kelly James Clark, "Presuppositional Apologetics: A Reformed Epistemologist's Response," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 256. "In principle" is intentionally represented. Presuppositionalists, even stronger Van Tillian approaches, recognize that unbelievers do possess some knowledge. However, what they maintain is that these true beliefs are unconsciously stolen from the Christian worldview. While it is difficult to interpret what Van Til himself actually believes, it is a charitable reading of his to presume that he does believe unbelievers have true beliefs about reality. Otherwise, this radical claim would be easily defeated. What he means, instead, is that unbelievers cannot justify their knowledge apart from the true reality of Christian theism. In this sense, they do not possess real knowledge. Minimal presuppositionalists may wish to distance themselves from Van Til on this particular implication, since it can be easily rebutted. I will attempt to avoid conflating a Van Tillian approach with a minimal approach, though this is not a simple task. My objective is to faithfully explain the implications of the minimalists' perspective. As I process their view, it seems to be the implication. However, I am willing to accept a nuanced explanation of unbelievers' lack of knowledge on minimal presuppositionalism.

[18] Anderson, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 87.

[19] This follows a principled understanding of knowledge as justified true beliefs.

a Christian theistic metaphysic. Sin impacts human rational faculties to the extent that unbelievers must set aside their worldview and presuppose the Christian worldview for sound reasoning to be possible. Believers and unbelievers must rationalize on epistemological common ground, which is the Christian worldview. According to presuppositionalists, the noetic effects of the fall represent the biblical warrant for their view.

My rebuttal to this so-called "biblical" perspective on apologetic methodology is to argue that epistemological common ground is not essential for evaluating evidence. If the rebuttal is sound, the philosophical underpinning for presuppositionalism collapses. The first step is to show why Christian presuppositions are not necessary for attaining some knowledge of God, humanity, or the world, given the reality of the *imago Dei* and the revelation of the Holy Spirit. What is puzzling about minimal presuppositionalists like Anderson is that they acknowledge the *imago Dei* as the "stamp" of the triune God and the source for human cognitive faculties for attaining knowledge and discerning truth, even stating that "This ineradicable aspect of human nature provides a universal point of contact for apologetics." Yet, simultaneously, they assert that certain presuppositions are required for those cognitive faculties to function in any objective truth-bearing capacity. Anderson rightly concedes that the infection of sin does not "erase" the divine image, which includes the ability to reason.[20] While it is true that due to human sin, the *imago Dei* has been corrupted and the truth has been suppressed (Rom 1:18), on

[20] Anderson, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 85. The same applies to communication. Some may question the possibility of meaningful communication given the effects of sin and non-Christian presuppositions, just as they question the ability to reason. Winfried Corduan reassures that "I can say that it is clearly the case that Christian non-Christians do not share the same presuppositions, and that they understand language in different ways. All of our thoughts and expressions are (or should be) affected by whatever occupies the center of our lives, either Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, or some object or image created by ourselves. Nevertheless, those differences are not fatal to the possibility of communication. A Christian can share the gospel, and his interlocutor may understand the language so as to come to faith in Christ." Winfried Corduan, "Presuppositions in Presuppositionalism and Classical Theism," in *Without Excuse: Scripture, Reason, and Presuppositional Apologetics*, ed. David Haines (The Davenant Press, 2020), 137.

what biblical basis are human beings unable to ascertain *any* objective truth as a result of the consequences of sin or faulty presuppositions? Even with corruption and suppression, unbelievers can have true beliefs as a result of the inescapable reality that they too are created in the image of God.

One apologist responds to Anderson by stating that "it is also obvious that regardless of a person's presuppositions about ultimate reality and epistemological authority, they can attain various kinds of knowledge about the world through rational processes," despite the corruption of sin upon humanity, "because to reason accurately about *anything at all* is to *participate* (whether knowingly or not) in the divine *Logos*."[21] The divine image of God as a "bridge" that permits the believer and the unbeliever to reason about the evidence for God's existence. Anderson later admits that "Unbelievers can know anything whatsoever only because they are made in the image of God, live in God's world, and are exposed to God's revelation and designed to think God's thoughts after him."[22] Acknowledging the ability for humans to reason does not equate to autonomous reasoning in humans. Engrained in the very metaphysical composition of each human being is the ability to rationalize, as it flows out from God's very nature.[23] "There is no question that Christians and non-Christians share the same capacity to reason in a purely logical sense."[24]

Anderson's admission seems to undermine his own position. God as the ontological source of truth does nothing to substantiate the epistemological claim that presuppositions about

[21] Travis, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Classical Apologetics Response," 95.

[22] Anderson, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 91.

[23] Travis, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Classical Apologetics Response," 95.

[24] Corduan, "Presuppositions in Presuppositionalism and Classical Theism," 137.

God are required to access knowledge. As an analogy, failing to comprehend the transcendent grounding of cognitive ability and rationality does not prevent someone from concluding from pure reason the basic features of mathematics. Anyone can conclude that two plus two equals four without understanding the ontological grounding of the laws of mathematics.[25] John Frame makes similar claims when he writes, "Though the unbeliever suppresses the truth, he sometimes acknowledges it in spite of himself. He lives, after all, in God's world, and he must accept that objective world if he is to continue living at all."[26] Frame and Anderson acknowledge that some truths can be learned even from a sinful, unbelieving worldview's perspective, but at the same time require presupposing Christian theism for any real knowledge to be learned. This seems to me to be an obvious contradiction. If unbelievers can attain knowledge of metaphysical reality, then Christian presuppositions are not *necessary* as presuppositionalists claim.

The solution to the noetic effects of sin, according to presuppositionalism, is simply to presuppose Christian theism. Put differently, presuppositionalists believe that the only bridge between false worldview assumptions and true metaphysical reality is to presuppose Christian theism—the true metaphysical reality. Once Christian presuppositions are adopted, then a person

[25] Travis, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Classical Apologetics Response," 96. John Feinberg sheds light on this understanding: "I think that behind this objection is a fear that the whole structure of reality might collapse if we don't presuppose the faith in our arguments, or that it at least totters until the apologist for Christianity wins the debate. None of this is the case. The debate is an epistemological one. The structure of reality remains in place whether the apologist wins or the antagonist refuses to accept the evidence. Refusal to accept the evidence only leaves one without the truth. In all too many cases, this refusal is a matter of the will, as Frame has reminded us." Paul D. Feinberg, "Presuppositional Apologetics: A Cumulative Case Apologist's Response," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 254.

[26] He references Van Til, saying that he "maintained that every unbeliever is both rationalistic and irrationalistic at the same time—irrationalistic by denying the only possible source of order and meaning in the universe, rationalistic in setting himself or herself in the place of God as the ultimate determiner of truth." Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 211-212. Apologists are likely to agree with this premise and the following point—that demonstrating the unbeliever's irrationality can be a persuasive tactic. However, presuppositionalists take this too far by claiming that truth about God is attainable only by presupposing the Christian worldview, thereby asserting that philosophical arguments will be utterly ineffective until this presupposition is made.

has the capability to interpret evidence objectively.[27] Otherwise, unbelievers hopelessly engage with truth-claims and evidence. But if sin completely compromises the ability to arrive at knowledge, how does adopting Christian presuppositions suddenly allow for cognitive faculties to function properly to ascertain objective truth? The presuppositionalists' use of Scripture to support their argument is unwarranted because *presuppositions and epistemological systems cannot overcome the effects of sin*. Presuppositions do not actually exist and are causally effete. There is no reason to think that what distinguishes properly functioning cognitive faculties in believers from improperly functioning cognitive faculties in unbelievers is that believers hold a particular set of presuppositions that unbelievers do not. The sinful spiritual orientation of unbelievers undoubtedly affects their *thinking*, whereas regenerate believers are not affected by sin in this way. However, both believers and unbelievers innately possess the ability to reason, as God's image is impressed upon their being.

Furthermore, is the Holy Spirit impotent to reveal objective truth to the unbeliever if he so chooses, despite the noetic effects of sin? Even if the presuppositionalists' point is granted—that unbelievers entirely suppress truth and sin affects human cognition by preventing them from arriving at objective truth about God—the Holy Spirit is fully capable of opening the minds of unbelievers to interpret evidence. To claim the contrary would be to adopt a radical view of sin that requires its own defense. More will be said about the Spirit in the following

[27] Another issue with this statement, tangential to the main rebuttal, concerns the potential for presuppositions to affect proper interpretations of evidence. Norman Geisler provides a noteworthy observation in his evaluation of evidentialism as a test for truth. He explains why facts and evidence cannot exist apart from an interpretation of those facts or evidence, which cannot exist in the absence of a worldview. There must always be a context that contributes meaning to it. Facts and evidence are always interpreted; they do not stand on their own. Presuppositionalism accounts for this. However, it does not account for the fact that presuppositions are not the only contributions that shape the lens through which those facts and evidence are interpreted. Humans also have experiences and emotions that factor into their interpretation. Even if the authority of Scripture is presupposed, that does not, in itself, determine how facts and evidence are viewed. Presuppositions do not exclusively constitute a worldview. See the chapter on "Evidentialism" in Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976).

critique. Summarily, the *imago Dei* and the special revelation of the Holy Spirit enable apologetic discourse without presupposing Christian theism.[28]

As one of the core agreements between apologetic methods, there is no *neutral* way to reason about God's existence or other metaphysical truth-claims. The issue is what kind of common ground, if any, is essential for apologetic discourse. Anderson asserts that "a truly faithful and fruitful Christian apologetic must engage with unbelief at the level of ultimate presuppositions."[29] Since there are good reasons to conclude that the *imago Dei* and the Holy Spirit serve as a bridge for believers and unbelievers, why think that worldview disagreements prohibit rational discourse? Why believe that assuming the Christian worldview is required for evaluating the evidence for Christian truth claims?[30]

Presuppositionalists correctly identify worldview *bias*, but it does not rise to the level of necessitating epistemological common ground. In fact, my point is that humanity's innate

[28] Presuppositionalists have displayed a willingness to step into the unbeliever's worldview for the sake of argument to point out their worldview's incoherence. Van Til writes, "The Christian apologist must place himself upon the position of his opponent, assuming the correctness of his method merely for argument's sake, in order to show him that on such a position the 'facts' are not facts and the 'laws' are not laws." Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed., ed. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2003) 129. It is reasonable to question their internal consistency on this matter. The primary disagreement with evidence-based apologists is their appeal to human reason without presupposing Christian theism as their epistemological framework, but how is the move to "step into" the unbelievers' worldview any different? Either presuppositionalists are setting aside their Christian presuppositions to evaluate the unbelievers' worldview for the sake of argument, or they are evaluating the unbelievers' worldview on the basis of their own. If the former, then presuppositionalism defeats itself. If the latter, then the unbelievers' worldview may not be inconsistent in itself, but only in light of the Christian worldview, in which case, presuppositionalism hardly accomplishes anything.

[29] Anderson, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 78.

[30] "If we took the idea that meaning in language is exclusively determined by a person's set of beliefs—and that these beliefs are opaque to all others—to an extreme, the Christian and non-Christian could not understand anything that the other says. Nor would it be possible for the Christian apologist to place himself heuristically into the shoes of the non-Christian. Either there is shared meaning, no matter its origin, or there is no possibility of any communication. It makes no sense to insist that the Christian and the non-Christian don't speak the same language, only to move on to confront the non-Christian with the fact that he is a sinner and can be saved by Jesus Christ." Corduan, "Presuppositions in Presuppositionalism and Classical Theism," 137-138.

ability to rationalize and the Spirit's freedom to reveal objective truth *is the common ground* between believers and unbelievers. The task of evidence-based approaches is to offer coherent explanations of arguments and evidence to persuade unbelievers *despite* opposing commitments and assumptions; they attempt to circumvent worldview biases in light of objective reality. Defending Christianity based on rational evidence, notwithstanding differing epistemologies, affords the unbeliever an opportunity to be persuaded to reject or shift their own presuppositions. Sean McDowell invites presuppositionalists to recognize that "While a faithful Christian apologetic *can* engage an unbeliever on the level of ultimate presuppositions, there is no good reason to believe that it *must*."[31] Epistemological common ground is not essential for evaluating evidence because the possibility of an unbeliever attaining objective knowledge does not depend on that individual holding a distinctly Christian epistemology, even though objective reality aligns with Christian theism. To justify this rebuttal, consider the fact that both believers and unbelievers alike exist in the same metaphysical reality with certain rational similarities. For instance, whether or not a Christian worldview is adopted, all people operate within the bounds of logic. The law of noncontradiction transcends worldview bias or epistemological differences—everyone must abide by it if they are to be rational. Since believers and unbelievers agree on some rational grounds, they do not need to maintain the same assumptions to discuss the evidence for Christian truth claims.[32]

[31] McDowell, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Evidential Apologetics Response." 98-99.

[32] Frame summarizes nonpresuppositional approaches as follows: "Let's assume that the Bible can be false, and let's judge its truth on the higher authority of our senses and logic." Frame, *Apologetics*, 9. I take this as a caricature of evidence-based apologetics. Nonpresuppositionalists are merely approaching apologetics by articulating good reasons to believe in Christian theism without assuming special revelation: they do not argue *from* Scripture that Scripture is reasonable. They do not lay Scripture aside *as if* it is not authoritative; instead, they appeal to God's revelation by using reasoning faculties that *are themselves sourced from the authority of God*.

Epistemological common ground by presupposing the Christian worldview is not necessary for apologetic discourse to be meaningful. While this may seem like a modest conclusion, it has ramifications for the presuppositionalists' methodology. Regardless of worldview biases, which all apologists grant, the fact that the unbeliever can interpret evidence using human reasoning (or that which the Spirit reveals) and make objective conclusions about God testifies to the significance of rational arguments and evidence in apologetics, thereby directly undermining presuppositionalism. Apologetic discourse is entirely possible between believers and unbelievers, notwithstanding competing presuppositions and the noetic effects of sin upon objective reasoning and interpretation of evidence. Therefore, apologetics does not necessarily begin at the level of competing epistemologies.

The Roles of General Revelation and the Holy Spirit

The first critique is sufficient for rejecting the presuppositionalists' basic framework, but there are consequential theological issues as well. As presuppositionalists make internal worldview critiques the centerpiece of their apologetic, the question is to what extent they have misrepresented the roles of general revelation and the Holy Spirit in defending Christian theism. Any apologetic approach ought to fully and faithfully represent the biblical description of general revelation and the work of the Spirit.

Both general and special revelation are divinely authoritative. Special revelation alone is sufficient for salvation, while general revelation serves as a precursor to God's disclosure of specific truths through special revelation. Theistic evidences are revealed through general

revelation.[33] In addition to providing knowledge that is intended to save and necessary to be saved, God has revealed Himself in Scripture to correct any sinful distortions of our understanding of God through nature. Special revelation reveals a fuller, clearer picture of who God is. In this sense, Scripture functions as the lens through which we may interpret general revelation.[34] This is another reason why presuppositionalists require Christian presuppositions.

Biblical truth precedes our apologetic methodology. Once the claim that apologetics hinges on competing epistemologies is dropped, as concluded in the previous critique, then the plainness of God in creation must be accounted for (Rom 1:19-20). Anderson states that "Objectively speaking, there is no ambiguity or obscurity when it comes to God's self-revelation in the natural order."[35] Thankfully, he agrees with Paul, but how do the implications align with the presuppositionalism he defends? Implied in the presuppositionalists' minimal usage of evidence is that *human perception and apprehension* of objective truths about God from His self-revelation are the primary focus, not the potency and veracity of God's revelation itself. God's general revelation is rendered relatively gratuitous—unless human beings hold certain presuppositions—for it is only when Christian presuppositions are maintained that God's revelation is meaningful. Conversely, evidence-based approaches maintain a much higher view of God's self-revelation, since they are not utterly dependent on epistemological concerns. Ironically, presuppositionalists believe that human reason has no autonomous authority, and yet

[33] "God has plainly revealed himself both in nature and in historical events. So it is quite legitimate, as we will see, to argue on the basis of evidence." Frame, *Apologetics*, 11.

[34] Strangely, Anderson adds that general and special revelation are "mutually dependent and complementary." Anderson, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 80. Presuppositionalists are quick to point out the insufficiency of general revelation and its dependency upon special revelation, but the notion of mutual dependency—that somehow special revelation is dependent on general revelation—seems inconsistent with Anderson's argument.

[35] Anderson, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 85.

they require epistemological systems developed by human reasoning to interpret God's revelation. Why maintain that the effectiveness of God's objective revelation relies on human constructions?

Moreover, apologists universally agree that the effectiveness of apologetic persuasion comes not from arguments and evidence but from the Holy Spirit's influence on the hearts of skeptics. The impact of apologetics relies on the power of the Spirit. I contend that presuppositionalists' strict vision on epistemological concerns reduces not only the evidence that God has provided in nature but also the unique power of the Holy Spirit to persuade through evidence. Even if the *imago Dei* turns out to be insufficient to account for the proper functioning of rational faculties, the presuppositionalists' view is moot so long as the role of the Holy Spirit in apologetics is adequately depicted. General revelation is a well-established biblical method by which the Spirit introduces special revelation and its salvific effects.[36] Presuppositionalists acknowledge that, while general revelation is a real and present reality, Scripture is the only acceptable lens through which it should be measured. Without presupposing the authority of Scripture, unbelievers are helplessly lost in their search for knowledge of the natural world. Applying this to apologetics, they claim that rational arguments and evidence are persuasive only when viewed through the lens of Scripture—this is the only proper usage in a biblically consistent epistemological framework.[37] By taking this stance, they undermine the *illumination*

[36] Travis, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Classical Apologetics Response," 96.

[37] Gary Habermas fairly recognizes the presuppositionalists' stance on the use of evidence. Still, he notes an undergirding oppositional orientation: "Yet, in spite of the acknowledged importance of Christian evidences, there appears to be extreme reluctance on the part of Frame and other Van Tillans to produce their own detailed, evidential arguments in favor of Christianity. While they often commend the biblical use of evidences (although variously nuanced), they almost always avoid providing careful accounts of their own reasons, explaining that they are not the ones to do this." Gary R. Habermas, "Presuppositional Apologetics: An Evidentialist's Response," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 239. Despite the acknowledgement of evidence in proper contexts, in practice, this acknowledgement has made little difference in producing academic responses. The presuppositionalist John Frame calls out adherents of his own methodology for

of the Holy Spirit. Christian presuppositions are not necessary "on the grounds that such evidence may be (and clearly has been) deemed compelling when wielded by an apologist participating alongside the superintending work of the Holy Spirit."[38]

Practical Implications of Attacking Entire Worldview Systems

Doing apologetics from the standpoint of entire worldview systems is epistemologically unnecessary, as we saw from the first critique. Requiring Christian presuppositions also has theological consequences, as we saw in the second critique. This third critique will examine presuppositionalism from the perspective of its methodological viability in cultural practice. Any apologetic method should be tested for how well it functions in the real world. Apologetics can make a strong case for Christian theism theoretically, while failing to bring about spiritual change in skeptical hearts. The true purpose of apologetics is to aid transformational growth towards faith in Christ. Notwithstanding the philosophical strengths and weaknesses of presuppositionalism, I contend that its focus on debating entire worldview systems is practically ineffective.[39]

---

their limited engagement with evidence: "Unfortunately, there has been very little actual analysis of evidence in the Van Tillans presuppositionalist school of apologetics." John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987), 352. Although nonpresuppositional apologists have called for them to do so, their absence has led Habermas to conclude that the pursuit of actual evidences must be far down on their list of importance. Habermas, "Presuppositional Apologetics: An Evidentialist's Response," 241.

[38] Travis, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Classical Apologetics Response," 96.

[39] Here I discuss the practical implications of this methodology. However, there is a philosophical dispute as well. McDowell calls into question the use of competing epistemological systems. An epistemological system is a framework for how we think and process the knowledge of reality. For instance, persons of different religious affiliations can similarly adopt classical foundationalism and accept that there are fundamental beliefs that justify other beliefs. Epistemological systems are therefore distinct from worldview commitments. He writes, "while Christians and non-Christians have different worldview *commitments*, it doesn't seem that the conflict always lies at the level of competing epistemological *systems*" McDowell, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Evidential Apologetics Response," 99.

Christian theism is a complex system of beliefs that includes truth-claims about who God is, the nature of humanity, the effects of sin, redemption in Jesus Christ, moral issues, the nature of Scripture, and so forth. Each of these truth-claims may vary in the evidence available to defend it.[40] Clearly, some truth-claims are more central to Christian theism than others. Christ's resurrection is incomprehensibly more valuable than beliefs about pedobaptism. By debating the coherence of the worldview as a whole, presuppositionalists lose sight of doctrinal priority. Viewing apologetics as an "all or nothing" inquiry leaves skeptics either accepting or rejecting all of Christianity in the context of one apologetic encounter, which creates a far weightier task for apologists. From the presuppositionalists' perspective, either the entire scope of Christian presuppositions will be adopted, thereby allowing for justified true beliefs about reality, or the unbeliever will remain in their noetically infected state of unobjective truth. The implications of failing to recognize a hierarchy of Christian doctrine should not be understated. "Rather than defending all doctrines equivalently, the wise apologist weighs them according to how central they are to faith."[41] An acceptable apologetic method should accurately depict the distinction between essential and non-essential doctrine, which in no sense comprises biblical epistemology,

[40] For instance, the evidence for the Exodus differs from the evidence for the resurrection. The resurrection is more central and its evidence is more accessible to investigation, yet presuppositionalists must consider Christianity as a whole as if the two were indistinguishable. Jones continues, "some presuppositional apologists may focus too little on this central event by underemphasizing the uniqueness and accessibility of the resurrection as a historical declaration and verification of Christ's claims." Timothy Paul Jones, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Ecclesial Apologetics Response," in *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025), 105.

[41] Sean McDowell, 100. Following this statement, he offers an example of the problematic nature of debating the entire scope of Christian beliefs rather than isolated parts, saying, "Should the possibility of a single error in Scripture, no matter how trivial, be considered as significant as discovering the body of Jesus? An error might make us rethink what it means to say that the Bible is inspired, but finding the body of Jesus would shatter Christianity." We are merely calling for an emphasis on what Scripture emphasizes, for the benefit of the skeptic and to accurately capture the biblical teachings. However, presuppositionalism by default does not allow for this in practice. This sort of objection is a common theme among non-presuppositional apologists. Ecclesial apologist Timothy Paul Jones shares this sentiment when he notes that "*At times, the presuppositional focus on defending Christianity as a single coherent whole seems to flatten out the relative importance of different components of a Christian view of life and the world.*" Jones, "Presuppositional Apologetics: Ecclesial Apologetics Response," 104.

lest the skeptic be misled into thinking that tertiary doctrines are relatively more profound in the system of Christian belief. Imagine the ramifications of impressing the idea that obeying the Sabbath is just as significant for the unbeliever as professing Jesus as Lord. Debating entire worldview systems mischaracterizes the biblical emphases and places a needless burden on the unbeliever to accept a wide range of Christian presuppositions.

In addition to doctrinal hierarchy, even if presuppositionalism were correct in its assessment of opposing worldviews, the realistic benefits for the unbeliever are questionable. Unbelievers (and believers) have specific doubts, challenges, or concerns that are subsequently addressed through evidence-based approaches. Presuppositionalism, however, does not allow for particular items to be discussed until the underlying presuppositions are critiqued. Imagine there is a skeptic who believes in the truthfulness of Jesus's ethical teachings and the plausibility of the resurrection, but does not understand how Jesus and the Father could both be God, only to be encountered by a presuppositionalist who must dissect this skeptic's hidden assumptions and contrast them with the entire Christian worldview. Presuppositionalists may deny that they would respond to the skeptic in that manner, but what I depicted is a trivial yet faithful sketch of the philosophical framework of the presuppositional apologetic: to do otherwise is to abandon presuppositionalism.[42] Reluctance to follow this quick sketch demonstrates the practical benefits of evidence-based approaches and the practical ineffectiveness of presuppositionalism. The hypothetical skeptic in this example is on the cusp of following Jesus; they need to hear about the evidence for Jesus's divinity, not a worldview analysis.

[42] I consider this in itself a criticism of presuppositionalism. In reality, presuppositionalism seems difficult to faithfully practice. Some individuals immediately reveal their source of doubt, which compels a response by the apologist to address that doubt with evidence. As soon as they have done so, they are practicing some form of evidence-based apologetics, depending on the form of evidence. If presuppositionalism cannot be consistently lived out in social contexts, it should be discontinued as a viable apologetic methodology.

Apologists aim to facilitate spiritual transformation by defending the rationality of Christian theism. The objective for any apologetic method is to persuade the unbeliever that Christian theism is true. Presuppositionalism offers a rigid method of persuasion. By focusing on the realm of competing presuppositions, it limits the apologists' ability to contextualize their defense to the needs of the unbeliever. Many ordinary Americans could not even define what a presupposition is, but they can explain their reason(s) for doubting the Christian God. Presuppositionalists, by default, tell the unbeliever to put aside their doubts for a moment and consider the entire scope of their presuppositions about reality as a whole in light of their worldview. Only after they have presupposed the Christian worldview can their doubts be addressed with particular lines of evidence. It is certainly possible that a single argument pertaining to the unbeliever's doubt would be sufficient for the Holy Spirit to remove that barrier of doubt to allow for genuine faith. By initially focusing entirely on worldview systems, presuppositionalists may miss an opportunity to present persuasive evidence to the unbeliever in an encounter where that form of persuasion is all that is necessary to plant a seed that leads to saving faith. Viewing every apologetic encounter as an "all or nothing" endeavor is not as effective at reaching unbelievers as merely offering specific reasons for believing in Christian theism.[43]

Defensive Apologetics and Logical Circularity

[43] The essence of the third critique is that something can be both true and practically ineffective. It is not enough for presuppositionalism to make true claims (and I by no means grant that all of them are true). Internal coherence is not enough to constitute a distinct and effective apologetic methodology. I have found that presuppositionalists are often more focused on theoretical aspects than on practical concerns. One can expose all of the inconsistencies in another's worldview and have done nothing to address the actual issues in a person's life.

For an apologetic method to be both comprehensive and coherent, it must offer positive reasons to believe in Christian theism and avoid logical fallacies. The primary objective for presuppositionalists is not to "prove" Christian truth claims, but to show that adherents of competing worldviews cannot coherently account for their own truth claims. They hold a defensive posture from the outset, largely not even attempting to provide positive reasons for thinking that Christian theism is true. The only *possible* attempt to do so comes after a worldview analysis. Critiquing opposing worldviews takes methodological priority over positing pro-Christian arguments and evidence. Various presuppositionalists may choose to practice their apologetics slightly differently, but this negative posture remains generally true. There is nothing wrong with taking a primarily defensive posture, per se; however, I contend that for an apologetic methodology to be considered "holistic," it must have a strong presence of positive warrant for Christian theism. That is, after all, a major aspect of justifying the Christian truth claims. "We want to do far more than show that our critics are wrong. We want to show that Christian theism is true! But especially when presuppositionalists affirm the need for evidences but then fail to produce their own treatments, they have skirted a major responsibility according to their own standard."[44] In response to Frame's case for presuppositionalism, Gary Habermas praises the arguments against non-Christian worldviews but questions the extent to which presuppositionalism "represents a complete, distinct apologetic strategy," and later concludes that it is indeed an "incomplete apologetic system." He rhetorically asks, "But where is the other, indispensable side of apologetics—the positive confirmation?"[45] We patiently await their response.

[44] Habermas, "Presuppositional Apologetics: An Evidentialist's Response," 241.

[45] In full fairness to Frame, Habermas is entirely willing to commend Frame for his distinct emphases, stating that "Frame truly differs from his mentor in his frequent and sincere references to the importance of Christian

Presuppositionalism's lack of supportive reasons for Christian theism may alone prevent it from being deemed an independent methodology. Notwithstanding this deficiency, presuppositionalists expound their internal critique of competing worldviews by intentionally viewing them through the lens of the metaphysical truthfulness of the Christian worldview. If this sounds circular, it is. They defend the Christian worldview by presupposing that the Christian worldview is true. This commits the logical fallacy of begging the question (*petitio principii*). Again, it is crucial to distinguish between what presuppositionalism contributes to apologetics and its methodology. What is logically fallacious is not its metaphysical and epistemological conclusions per se, but the way in which it requires a defense of Christian theism to be conducted. William Lane Craig rhetorically emphasizes that "It is difficult to imagine how anyone could with a straight face think to show theism to be true by reasoning, 'God exists. Therefore, God exists.' Nor is this said from the standpoint of unbelief. A Christian theist himself will deny that question-begging arguments prove anything."[46] To an unbeliever, circularity will be at best off-putting and at worst reinforce their doubts about the rationality of Christian theism.

Presuppositionalists are willing to admit that their apologetic method is logically circular. From their perspective, it *must* be circular. Frame, who presents a nuanced version of presuppositionalism, concedes his own methodological circularity but affirms that we have no

---

evidences, generally complementing the nonpresuppositionalists who engage in careful argumentation. Yet his approach still avoids developing these evidences from the perspective of his own system." Even as Frame is more willing to incorporate evidence, he seems to abandon the core understanding of minimal presuppositionalism. As opposed to a distinct apologetic methodology, Habermas proposes that presuppositionalism be viewed as a "theological outlook on apologetics." Habermas, "Presuppositional Apologetics: An Evidentialist's Response," 240-241.

[46] William Lane Craig, "Presuppositional Apologetics: A Classicalist Apologist's Response," in *Five Views on Apologetics,* ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000) 233. Furthermore, Habermas accuses Frame of committing another informal fallacy, the false analogy, by appealing to rationalism and empiricism as analogies to presuppose God and Scripture. Habermas, "Presuppositional Apologetics: An Evidentialist's Response," 242.

choice: "But are we not still forced to say, 'God exists (presupposition), therefore God exists (conclusion),' and isn't that argument clearly circular? Yes, in a way. But that is unavoidable for any system, any worldview. For God is the ultimate standard of meaning, truth, and rationality."[47] Frame is correct in two respects: every worldview has presuppositions, and God is the ultimate standard. However, the error in the presuppositionalists' arguments is the assumption that we must *presuppose* God as the standard of truth in order to demonstrate that God *is* the standard of truth (which effectively reduces to "He is because He is").

To show why circularity is unavoidable, he argues that "Every philosophy must use its own standards in proving its conclusions… everybody is guilty of circularity."[48] Two examples are provided. As a naturalist, David Hume assumed that any naturalistic explanation of the reported event of the resurrection of Jesus is automatically more likely than a miraculous explanation. Naturalism is true; therefore, the resurrection could not have happened because miracles do not occur. Rationalism holds that human reason is the ultimate authority, but rationalists must presuppose the authority of human reason to argue for it. These two philosophical views are prominent examples of circularity because they assume the conclusion they attempt to prove. The problem with Frame's argument is that there are different *types* of arguments: not all arguments necessarily presuppose the conclusion they attempt to prove. In response, Frame shares a different kind of circular argument that he considers only "broadly circular," rather than the previous ones that he calls "narrowly circular": "The Bible is the Word of God because of various evidences." Then he asserts that "the argument is still circular in a

[47] Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 217. Although he admits circularity, he believes this circularity is linear and non-vicious.

[48] Frame, *Apologetics*, 11.

sense, because the apologist chooses, evaluates, and formulates these evidences in ways controlled by Scripture."[49]I contend that not all evidence must come in this fashion. "The fallacy of arguing in a circle (*petitio principii*) only occurs when the content of the conclusion is already stated as true in the premises."[50] There is nothing logically circular about arguing that the universe must have a beginning because of the impossibility of an infinite regress of events, or that one knows by one's intuition that there are objective moral values. The evidence does not presuppose the conclusion, nor does it make circular presuppositions about the evidence, although it does make other presuppositions. The point is that these presuppositions do not *have to* make the argument logically circular. All that Frame shows is that arguments do entail presuppositions, which was evident from the start.

Circular reasoning does not make the fundamental claims of presuppositionalism false, but it does, in terms of its methodology, result in incoherence. For this type of incoherence to be circumvented, presuppositionalists must demonstrate that all methodologies necessarily commit the same type of circularity, but according to the authority of human reason. As it stands, God has provided substantial evidence through His revelation, so there is no need to resort to fallacies.[51] Apologetic methodologies that do not commit logical fallacies and are otherwise

[49] Frame, *Apologetics*, 15.

[50] Corduan, "Presuppositions in Presuppositionalism and Classical Theism," 139.

[51] Oftentimes, God's Word, not just the Christian worldview as a whole, is viewed as a circle when it attempts to rationally justify biblical teachings or the inerrancy of the Bible itself. As in, "we can't 'prove' that the Bible is the true Word of God, so we must, therefore, presuppose its truthfulness." That is a simplified version of what the presuppositionalist advocates. Feinberg puts it this way: "A similar course of action is open on the Bible. I do not have to presuppose that it is true in order to show that it is true. Evidence supports its truth. That evidence includes what the Bible has to say about itself, as well as a variety of other lines of argument. At least some important part of that evidence is open to empirical testing so that the argument is not circular. It is not necessary to presuppose the Bible's truth." Feinberg, "Presuppositional Apologetics: A Cumulative Case Apologist's Response," 253. If presuppositionalism is rejected, does that require us to think of evidence as a necessary feature for belief in the inerrancy of Scripture? Absolutely not. All that would be rejected is the view that we must resort to logical fallacies to justify Christianity—that is, presupposing Christian truths in order to justify Christian truths. God has

coherent should naturally be favored over presuppositionalism. Because of its lack of positive argumentation and circular epistemic framework, presuppositionalism is unable to persuasively build a case for the coherence and validity of the Christian worldview.

Conclusion

Four critiques have been explicated to demonstrate the internal and external shortcomings of presuppositionalism. In theory and in practice, there are significant obstacles to its viability as a holistic approach to apologetics. First, epistemological common ground in the form of presupposing Christian theism was shown to be an unnecessary precondition for meaningful rational discourse. Second, the role of presuppositions in its methodology seemed to diminish the biblical roles of general revelation and the Holy Spirit. Third, an entire-worldview defense of Christian theism loses doctrinal priority and may prevent apologists from addressing individual doubts. Fourth, logical circularity is openly embraced. These criticisms demonstrate that presuppositionalism fails as a comprehensive and coherent apologetic methodology. Nevertheless, these deficiencies do not render all strategic insights irrelevant. Presuppositionalism poses a formidable challenge to non-Christian worldviews. Its assertion that rationality is fundamentally grounded in the triune God will continue to be a significant contribution to the discipline of Christian apologetics. When properly integrated, it can function as a valuable supplementary resource for evidence-based apologetic methods, as its robust framework of worldview analysis enhances philosophical and historical arguments for Christian theism.

---

given evidence; within an apologetic methodology, it would be more efficient to utilize that evidence when appropriate. In these terms, the thesis of this paper is relatively modest: it simply argues that we need not go to the extreme by presupposing the thing that we are offering a defense for.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, James N. “Presuppositional Apologetics.” In *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*. Edited by Timothy Paul Jones, 77-94. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025.

Clark, Kelly James. “Presuppositional Apologetics: A Reformed Epistemologist’s Response.” In *Five Views on Apologetics*. Edited by Steven B. Cowan, 255-263. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Corduan, Winfried. “Presuppositions in Presuppositionalism and Classical Theism.” In *Without Excuse: Scripture, Reason, and Presuppositional Apologetics*. Edited by David Haines, 131-153. The Davenant Press, 2020.

Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

_____. “Presuppositional Apologetics: A Classicalist Apologist’s Response.” In *Five Views on Apologetics*. Edited by Steven B. Cowan, 232-235. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Frame, John M. *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*. 2nd ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2015.

_____. “Presuppositional Apologetics.” In *Five Views on Apologetics*. Edited by Steven B. Cowan, 207-231. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

_____. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. A Theology of Lordship. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987.

Feinberg, Paul D. “Presuppositional Apologetics: A Cumulative Case Apologist’s Response.” In *Five Views on Apologetics*. Edited by Steven B. Cowan, 249-254. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Geisler, Norman L. *Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976.

Habermas, Gary R. “Presuppositional Apologetics: An Evidentialist’s Response.” In *Five Views on Apologetics*. Edited by Steven B. Cowan, 236-248. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Jones, Timothy Paul, ed. *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025.

_____. “Presuppositional Apologetics: Ecclesial Apologetics Response.” In *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*. Edited by Timothy Paul Jones, 102-107. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025.

McDowell, Sean. “Presuppositional Apologetics: Evidential Apologetics Response.” In *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*. Edited by Timothy Paul Jones, 97-99. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025.

Travis, Melissa Cain. “Presuppositional Apologetics: Classical Apologetics Response.” In *Understanding Christian Apologetics: 5 Methods for Defending the Faith*. Edited by Timothy Paul Jones, 95-96. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2025.

Van Til, Cornelius. *Christian Apologetics*. 2nd ed. Edited by Scott Oliphint. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2003.